

Montana 4-H / Open Ranch Horse

RULES for Competitions

1. Project Overview

The Montana 4-H Working Ranch Horse Project is a heritage based, activity rich program designed to pass on to today's youth traditional practices of safe livestock handling from horseback. This is not a rodeo project, but instead a practical and exciting opportunity for youth to use horses for handling, sorting and moving cattle. This project also teaches mounted roping skills as a humane and useful livestock handling tool as well as branding techniques, housing and care of cattle and horses. Like all 4-H projects, Working Ranch Horse members will develop the qualities of leadership and responsibility that come with being engaged in 4-H. In today's world, managing cattle from horseback is a disappearing tradition. Ranches are increasingly automated, using four-wheelers and other machines instead of horses. Many of the skills once learned for necessity are being lost. The 4-H Working Ranch Horse Program is designed to teach and preserve the age-old skills and traditions.

2. General Event Rules

- a. The intent of the competitions is to display your ability to perform ranch work type tasks while working horseback and showing **CONTROL** and **SAFETY** at all times. For example: Control is shown in horsemanship through responsiveness to rider cues. In cow work the intent is to work the cow in a calm manner as you would on a ranch (only as much pressure as needed to gain control of the cow). A trail class is an opportunity to display the ability for a person to work safely around and on-top a horse. Any time safety and/or control are compromised points will be deducted.
- b. All shows will commence despite weather and ground conditions that exist the day of the show as an example of actual working conditions. The judging will take into account those existing conditions and any other site specific conditions.
- c. Conduct – Conduct by exhibitors and spectators and all persons present at events shall be orderly, responsible, sportsmanlike and humane in the treatment of horses and cattle. Any violations of these will be subject to disciplinary procedures or removal from event.
- d. Attire - Attire shall be western boots, western pants, long sleeve button or snap shirt and a western hat or helmet. Spurs, chaps or chinks are optional.
- e. Equipment –
 - i. Saddles - Horses shall be shown in a western stock saddle with a horn. Silver equipment will not count over good, clean working equipment. Regarding saddle horns; mule hide, latigo, elk hide, basic leather or rubber are suggestions for horn coverings. Leather gives better when dallied than rubber

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

and is suggested more for younger members learning how to rope. Rubber bites harder on the rope and gives a better grip when dragging cows.

- ii. Bits – Working Ranch Horse will follow the Montana State Horse Project Bit Rules.
 - Romal, roping or split reins are legal. Martingales and tie-downs are not allowed.
 - Horses five-years old and older shall be shown in a curb or shank bit.
 - Horses four-years old and younger may be shown in a snaffle or any bit within bit guidelines.
 - Chain curb straps are permissible, but must meet the approval of the judge, be at least ½” inch in width, and lie flat against the jaw of the horse. Absolutely no rigid material will be permitted under the jaws, regardless of how padded or covered.
 - A snaffle bit or hackamore shall be used with two hands on the reins.
 - A curb or shank bit shall be ridden with one hand on split reins or with a Romal.
 - iii. Neither the Host County nor 4-H Center for Youth Development is liable for any accident, damage or loss of personal property, livestock, or person including travel to and from the show.
 - iv. Travel to and from the show is the responsibility of the exhibitor. Exhibitors are strongly encouraged to obtain their own accident insurance for both themselves and their horses.
- f. Horse Ownership and Entry
- i. For 4-H Ranch Horse Level Classes
 - Horse must be a 4-H Project Horse for the current 4-H year.
 - A project horse is any horse registered with the county extension office with documentation on file and enrolled in any established county horse project.
 - The same horse must be used for all classes at one competition for the 4-H Ranch Horse Level classes.
 - ii. For Ranch Horse Versatility Classes
 - Members can use any horse for versatility classes as long as horse meets class qualifications.
 - To compete for overall versatility awards same horse must be ridden in all qualifying classes at one event
 - Only horses aged 5 and under can enter colt division.
 - iii. Stallions may not be shown in any classes at the State Working Ranch Horse finals.

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- iv. The 4-H name and emblem are copyrighted, so 4-H classes are limited to Montana 4-H Horse Project members and must have Extension Service approval. Entries are to be signed by the member's extension agent indicating that the member is a bona fide 4-H member and the named 4-H member's horse(s) are a part of the 4-H member's project work for the current year and they have been assessed into the current level.

3. Divisions

- a. The working ranch horse project is set up in 4 levels. The levels are intended to be progressive in skills and knowledge. A member should be assessed to determine proper placement in a level based on skills and with keeping safety in mind.
- b. Members shall enter only 1 level per year and per competition.
- c. Members shall progress forward in levels. You may remain in the same level for up to 3 years but may not drop back to a lower level at any point.
- d. A curriculum based competition (see section #4) will offer levels 1 through 4 and should be entered in accordance with member enrollment and assessment.
- e. Additional classes may be offered in divisions as follows:
 - i. Junior (Ages 10 & Under)
 - ii. Intermediate (Ages 11-13)
 - iii. Senior (Ages 14 & Over)
 - iv. Novice (1st year of competing)
 - v. Green Horse (Horse aged 5 or under and enrolled in colt to maturity or green horse project)
 - vi. Open (open to adult or youth, 4-H membership not required)

4. Competition Types

- a. Curriculum Based 4-H Working Ranch Horse Competition
 - i. The Ranch Horse curriculum book provides completion rules for a comprehensive event including individual competitions in the following categories:
 - Knowledge
 - Heading
 - Heeling
 - Ranch Sorting
 - Ranch Riding / Working Cow Horse Pattern
- b. Versatility Ranch Horse Competition (Optional Classes to enhance events)

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- i. The curriculum book states that counties may add or delete tests based on skills, preferences or resources. Other competitions such as Ranch Horse Halter, Ranch Trail, Ranch Pleasure or a Versatility class could be used.
- ii. Classes in accordance with AQHA versatility and Stock Horse of Texas classes may be used. These include: Pleasure, Halter, Reining, Working Cow Horse, Trail and Cutting.
- iii. Classes could be in divisions such as open, colt, age based, novice.

5. 4-H Division - Individual Class Descriptions / Rules

a. 4-H Knowledge of Working Ranch Horse Content

- i. Written exam worth 100 points **OR** Oral interview with Judge
- ii. Questions are to be taken from Working Ranch Horse and 4-H Horsemanship manuals for Levels 1 – 4. Questions may also be from Horse Science books for Levels 3 & 4.
- iii. Each competitor must complete their own test with no help from others.
- iv. Write exhibitor number on top of written exams.
- v. Answer questions to the best of your ability and submit to score table upon completion.

b. 4-H Roping – Heading and Heeling – 100 points are possible for each roping event

- i. **Level 1** – Skills of rope handling and throwing loops at a stationary dummy while standing on the ground are evaluated. Competitors are allowed a maximum of 5 loops within a 2-minute time limit. Each participant will only use one rope during each competition and must re-coil and build a new loop for each throw. A different rope may be used for heading and for heeling.
- ii. **Level 2** - Skills of rope handling, control and position, throwing loops at a stationary dummy and dallying while mounted on your horse are evaluated. Competitors are allowed a maximum of 5 loops within a 2-minute time limit. Each participant will only use one rope during each competition and must re-coil and build a new loop for each throw. A different rope may be used for heading and for heeling.
- iii. **Levels 3 & 4** – Purpose is to show the ability of the horse and rider’s skills of handling and roping cattle as if they were doctoring sick or injured cattle. Cattle should be handled as slowly and calmly as possible. Skills of horse handling and position, rope handling ability and catches are evaluated in score.
 - **Level 3 Heading** - Competitors will attempt to make 3 catches in a 90 second time limit while horseback. Number of loops is unlimited. A breakaway honda shall be used. Competitors may rope at any animals in pen in any order. Additional points may be given if competitor calls

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

out animal to be roped and successfully catches named animal. No deductions shall be given for not calling animal prior to throw.

- **Level 3 Heeling** - Competitors will attempt to make 3 catches in a 90 second time limit while horseback. Number of loops is unlimited. It is optional to use breakaway honda or regular honda. Animals shall not be dallied on and held tight with regular rope. Competitors may rope at any animals in pen in any order.
- **Level 4 Heading** –
 - a. **Option A** - Competitors will attempt to make 3 catches in a 90 second time limit while horseback. Number of loops is unlimited. A breakaway honda shall be used. Competitors must rope numbered animals in order. For example, the announcer calls #3, competitor ropes animal #3 first, then #4, then #5.
 - b. **Option B** – Competitor will rope an animal with regular rope, dally and face. 90 second time limit. Competitor may or may not be asked to rope designated animal as determined by show committee. Decision may depend on pen size and cattle.
- **Level 4 Heeling** – An adult header who is very capable of handling roped cattle will rope an animal and bring it from the herd. The heeler then will rope to catch the heels. Time will start when header brings animal from herd. Time limit of 90 seconds or 3 loop limit may be used at discretion of show committee. Time will end when a heel catch is completed and the ropers have dallied and stretched the animal.
- c. **4-H Sorting** – Event consisting of a rider with objective of sorting 3 head of cattle from one pen into another in a designated sequence. There is a time element and score element to competition.
 - i. Recommended set up is two conjoined 50'-60' diameter round pens with 12'-16' opening between pens.
 - ii. 90 second time limit
 - iii. No less than 5 and no more than 10 consecutively numbered cattle in the herd.
 - iv. Cattle will be bunched in one pen at start of run. Time starts when rider enters cattle pen. Cattle number to begin sort on will be called as rider enters pen. (If #5 is called, contestant will sort cow #5 first, followed by #6 and then #7.)
 - v. A gate person will be designated by show management. The following instructions will be provided to the gate person prior to start of event.
 - Rider shall control gate as would be done in every day ranch work.
 - Gate person must make every attempt to treat all contestants equally.
 - Gate person should be the same individual for every run in a level class.

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- Communication between the contestant and gate person is permissible to communicate sorting strategy and for rider to notify gate person of intents. For example to push an animal past but not through the gate to create an opening for another animal to present to gate.
 - Gate person will hold sorted cattle in second pen.
 - While contestant is sorting - gate person will not allow extra animals to drift through gate. In every day ranch work sorter is expected to work at identifying and separating designated animal without worry of extra animals drifting towards gate.
 - When contestant is bringing designated animal to gate to sort through it is the contestant's job to push only the correct animal to and through the gate and to get extra cattle past or back from gate opening. It is not gate person's role to turn back incorrect cattle being pushed at gate. Gate person in every day ranch work would be expected to hold entire group if too many cattle are coming at gate and not to let the whole bunch pass, even if correct animal is in the mix.
- vi. This event is scored and timed. 75 possible points are available for cattle sorted by fastest time. 25 possible points are scored by the judge on cattle handling, horsemanship and herdsmanship ability. See scoring section for more detail.
- vii. A lap timer shall be used to document time for each animal sorted. If time limit expires and only 1 or 2 cattle have been sorted, competitor will receive lap time for 1 head or 2 head. If three head are sorted time stops when 3rd animal crosses line.
- viii. If animal crosses gate line out of sequence a no time will be given. However a score will still be assigned for cattle handling and horsemanship.
- ix. **Options for sorting Level 3&4 – to be at show management discretion**
- Riders will be given start number and will then sort as many cattle as possible in number order within 90 second time limit. Fastest time on greatest number of cattle receives top points (75). Example 8 cattle sorted in 78 seconds – 1st place, 8 cattle sorted in 89 seconds – 2nd place, 6 cattle sorted in 42 seconds – 3rd place, 3 cattle sorted in 90 seconds – 4th place. Rank first based on number of cattle sorted and then by time.
- d. **4-H Pattern – Ranch Riding or Working Cow Horse**
- i. The pattern classes will demonstrate the horse and rider combination to perform basic maneuvers in the level 1 class and advance to cattle work and more advanced maneuvers by the time level 4 is reached.
 - ii. Pattern will measure the ability of the horse to be a pleasure to ride while being used as a means of conveyance from performing one ranch task to

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

another. The horse should reflect the versatility, attitude and movement of a working ranch horse riding outside the confines of an arena. The horse should be well-trained, relaxed, quiet, soft and cadenced at all gaits. The ideal ranch horse will travel with forward movement and demonstrate an obvious lengthening of stride at extended gaits. The overall manners and responsiveness of the ranch riding horse to make timely transitions in a smooth and correct manner.

- iii. **Level 1** – Patterns may include gaits of walk, trot, lope and back as well as introductory maneuvers like pivots. In the case of a “Horsemanship Level 1” rider being entered in “Ranch Horse Level 1” – for the sake of safety the rider may trot the lope portions of the pattern and will be judged according to ability. The show committee will make best effort to ensure judge is informed of any rider that is only of walk/trot ability prior to start of class. There will be no cattle work in Level 1.
- iv. **Level 2** – Pattern class will consist of simple ranch riding pattern and will demonstrate gaits, transitions and basic maneuvers. At show committee’s discretion a cattle work portion may be included. If so, at the completion of pattern exhibitor will call for cow to be turned into arena. The contestant will drive the cow to a prescribed point in the arena and hold the animal for a sufficient amount of time to demonstrate proficiency of horse to contain cow. There will be a 1 ½ minute time limit started when cow enters arena.
- v. **Level 3** – This class combines reining ability and cow sense of the horse. It will start with a basic reining pattern and then exhibitor will call for cow. Upon receiving cow, contestant shall hold the cow on the end of the arena to demonstrate ability of horse to control cow. Boxing of cow will be credited as showing more advanced control. Then exhibitor shall drive cow to a pen or exit gate. There will be a 2 minute time limit started when cow enters arena.
- vi. **Level 4** – This will be a working cow horse class. At conclusion of reining pattern, exhibitor will call for cow. Contestant shall box cow on end of arena to demonstrate ability of the horse to control the cow. After making at least 1 turn each way while boxing, the contestant shall take the cow down the fence making at least one turn each way on the fence. To be considered turns the contestant must be close enough to cow to be the cause of the turn. After turning cow each way the contestant will stop horse to signify completion of run. Time limit of 2 ½ minutes started when cow enters arena.

6. Open Division – Ranch Horse Versatility Class Descriptions / Rules

- a. Ranch Horse Pleasure

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- i. The Ranch Horse Pleasure Class measures the ability of the horse to be a pleasure to ride while being used as a means of conveyance from one ranch task to another. The horse should be well-broke, relaxed, quiet, soft, and cadenced at all gaits. The horse should be ridden on a relatively loose rein with light contact and without requiring undue restraint. The horse should be responsive to the rider and make timely transitions in a smooth and correct manner. The horse should be soft in the bridle and yield to contact. The ideal stock horse should have a natural, levelheaded carriage at each gait.
 - ii. The competitors may be asked to ride in a rail class or individual in a circuit of the ring to demonstrate a variety of gaits and transitions.
- b. Ranch Horse Reining
- i. This Ranch Horse Reining Class measures the ability of the stock horse to perform basic handling maneuvers. Each pattern is a combination of maneuvers and these maneuvers include stops, spins, rollbacks, circles, back up, hesitate, lead changes and run downs.
- c. Working Cow Horse
- i. The ideal stock horse must also be a cow horse and this Class demonstrates and measures the horse's ability to do cow work. The working cow classes have varying requirements depending upon the division:
 - ii. Seniors or Open Division complete a traditional working cow horse pattern consisting of boxing, taking the cow down the fence and executing at least one turn in each direction, and then circling the cow in each direction. Riders have the option of roping instead of circling the cow.
 - iii. Intermediate divisions demonstrate their ability to control a cow by boxing on one end, driving the cow to the opposite end and boxing on the opposite end.
 - iv. Colt and Junior divisions demonstrate ability to track cow down arena and move cow out gate.
- d. Ranch Horse Trail (Versatility Trail)
- i. The Ranch Horse Trail Class, as the name implies, tests the horse's ability to cope with situations encountered in everyday

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

riding. The horse is ridden through a pattern of obstacles which should nearly approximate those found during the course of everyday work. The horse/rider team is judged on the correctness, efficiency, and pattern accuracy with which the obstacles are negotiated and the attitude and mannerisms exhibited by the horse. Judging emphasis is on identifying the well-broke, responsive, well-mannered horse which can correctly navigate and negotiate the course.

- ii. The trail class will include no less than 6 and no more than 9 obstacles. It is mandatory that the horse be asked to walk, trot and lope during the course. These gaits can be part of obstacle score or be scored with the approaching obstacle. Trot must be at least 35 feet. Lope must be lead specific and at least 50 feet.
- iii. Care must be exercised to avoid setting up any obstacles that may be hazardous to the horse or rider. All courses and obstacles are to be constructed with safety in mind so as to reduce risk for accidents.
- iv. Each single-performance event can be time consuming, especially with large classes, so it is imperative that time restrictions are placed on this class. The show committee, shall select a course that has a continuous, positive flow that can be negotiated in four minutes or less. A time limit may be set and course may be run as timed competition with bonus score given for lowest time.
- v. Mandatory Obstacles
 - Ride over obstacles on the ground – usually logs or poles. Walk, trot, or lope may be used, but only one gait is required. Walk-overs shall be spaced 24-30 inches. Trot-overs shall be spaced 36-42 inches. Lope overs shall be 6 – 7 feet. Formation can be straight, curved, zigzagged or raised. There shall be no more than 5 logs in a series.
 - Opening, passing through, and closing gate: Use a gate that will not endanger horse or rider and requires minimum side passing.
 - Ride over wooden bridge: Bridge should be sturdy, safe and negotiated at a walk only. Heavy plywood lying flat on the ground is an acceptable simulation of a bridge. Suggested minimum width shall be 36 inches wide and at least 6 feet long
 - Backing obstacle: Backing obstacles are to be spaced at a minimum of 30 inches and up to 40 inches. Back through and around at least three markers or back through L, V, U, straight or similarly shaped course.
 - Side pass obstacle: Any object which is safe and of any length may be used to demonstrate responsiveness of the horse to leg signals. Raised side pass obstacles should not exceed 12 inches.
- vi. Optional Obstacles

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- Rope drag: Drag may be a from point to point or complete figure eight.
 - A jump obstacle whose center height is not less than 12" high or more than 24" high. Holding the saddle horn is permissible for this obstacle.
 - Carry object from one part of the arena to another.
 - Remove and replace materials from mailbox.
 - Trot through cones spaced a minimum of 6 feet apart.
 - Cross natural ditches or ride up embankments.
 - Swing rope or throw rope at dummy steer head.
 - Step in and out of obstacle.
 - Put on slicker or coat.
 - Stand to mount with mounting block.
 - Walk through water obstacle.
 - Open gate on foot.
 - Pick up feet.
 - Walk through brush.
 - Lead at the trot.
 - Other obstacles may be used at discretion of show committee.
- vii. The safety of obstacles is of paramount importance and shall always be kept in consideration by the show committee. If a parent or competitor feels an obstacle is a hazard the question of inclusion of the obstacle must be brought to the show committee for review prior to the beginning of the class.
- viii. Disallowed Obstacles
- Rocking or teetering bridges
 - Loose – flapping tarps
 - Obstacles that a horse may get a foot caught in

7. Scoring

- a. Each event will be scored individually. Scores will be tabulated by the office to calculate cumulative scores.
- b. Judges decision is final.
- c. Horses are judged on performance only.
- d. A contestant is judged from the time the contestant enters the arena until the run is finished.
- e. The Scoring System is designed to be positive, straightforward, and always encourage growth and improvement in both horse and rider. The scoring system is designed to give credit for the work done.
- f. For **Pleasure, Trail, Reining, Ranch Riding and Working Cow Horse** Classes:
 - i. Each horse/rider team is scored between 0-100 points and automatically begins the run with a score of 70 points. The horse/rider team is scored on the quality

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

of each maneuver (e.g., -1½ Extremely Poor, -1 Very Poor, -½ Poor, 0 Correct, +½ Good, +1 Very Good, and +1½ Excellent). Pluses and minuses are a reflection of the smoothness, finesse, attitude, quickness, and authority of the horse/rider team when performing the various maneuvers. Penalties may be accrued for incorrect maneuver execution.

- ii. To rein a horse is not only to guide him, but also to control his every movement. The best reined horse should be willingly guided or controlled with little or no apparent resistance and dictated to completely. Any movement on his own must be considered a lack of control. All deviations from the exact written pattern must be considered a lack of, or temporary loss of, control and therefore a fault that must be marked down according to severity of deviation. The horse/rider team's overall performance should be credited for smoothness, finesse, attitude, quickness and authority of performing various maneuvers, while using controlled speed which raises the difficulty level and makes the horse/rider team more exciting and pleasing to watch.
- g. For **4-H Knowledge** Test:
 - i. Score is based on correct answers out of 100 possible points. Tests will be evaluated against a standard answer key.
- h. For **4-H Sorting** Competition:
 - i. The judge will award from 1 to 25 points on the horsemanship, cattle handling and herdsmanship of the rider.
 - ii. A lap timer will be used for each of the 3 animals to be sorted. Time is noted for each animal as it passes through the gate by indication of the judge's flag. The fastest time in the class on 3 animals will be awarded 75 points. The second fastest time will receive 70 points and on down in 5 point increments. 3 animals sorted places before 2 animals and before 1 sorted. (If there are more than 15 competitors in class or at discretion of show management point spread of increments smaller than 5 between placings may be used.)
- i. For **4-H Roping** Competition:
 - i. Levels 1 & 2 (Heading and Heeling)
 - 30 points - Handling and control of rope
 - 5 points - Position
 - 50 points – Catches (Each catch is worth 10 points)
 - 15 points – 3 points for each catch using a declared alternative loop
 - 100 Total Points Possible
 - ii. Levels 3 & 4 Heading and Level 3 Heeling
 - 20 points – Horse handling and position
 - 20 points – Rope handling
 - 45 points – Catches

Montana 4-H Ranch Horse Competition Rules

- a. 15 points for clean head catch or 2 feet
- b. 10 points for deep body catch or 1 foot
- 15 points – 5 points for each catch using a declared alternative loop
- iii. Level 4 Heeling
 - 30 points – Horse handling and position
 - 30 points – Rope handling
 - 40 points – Catches
 - a. 25 points for 2 feet
 - b. 15 points for 1 foot
 - c. 15 points for using a declared alternative loop

8. Patterns

- a. Patterns will be posted a minimum of 1 hour prior to the start of the show and will be available from the show office.
- b. Patterns for use are available on the Montana State 4-H Website.
www.Montana4H.org