

Here is a VERY brief description of what judges look for in a halter class. Judges take many things into consideration, but here are the basics.

When judging horses for a halter class, the conformation of the horse is what is being evaluated. Conformation = the shape and structure of the horse or, the way the horse is ‘put together’. 5 basic criteria used when evaluating conformation are 1) balance, 2) Structure, 3) Muscle, 4) Quality and 5) tracking (way of going/movement). Of these, the most important is BALANCE.

When looking at balance, just a few things we consider are: we want to see a horse that has a long, sloping shoulder and hip with a short back. In addition, the back should be strong (fairly level from withers to hip, not ‘sway-backed’). The horse should be the same height at the withers as it is at the top of the hips. The horse should have a long, lean neck that comes high out of the chest and attaches far back into the withers.

When we talk about structure, we are most specifically referring to feet and legs. When viewed from the front and rear, a horse should have straight legs, with hooves pointing forward (not toed in or toed out). Structure plays a big role in soundness and movement. When viewed from the side the horse shouldn’t be over or back at the knee or have too much angle to the hock.

Stock horses should be heavier muscled than fine horses (like Arabians). The horse should be wide through the chest and wide from stifle to stifle. The forearm and gaskin muscles should be noticeably larger than the rest of the leg.

Quality is difficult to describe, but basically, a horse should look like the breed it is. A mare should be feminine (should look like a female). All horses should have attractive heads, with large eyes that are set wide apart and short distance between eyes and muzzle (a short face, almost triangular shaped head). The leg joints and bones shouldn’t be bulky or coarse. Instead we want them ‘refined’. In addition, the horse should be well conditioned (not too fat or too thin).

When the horse moves or ‘tracks out’, it should have a long, smooth stride and should move in a straight line without ‘winging’ or ‘paddling’ with the front legs. A horse that toes out will ‘wing out’ when tracking, especially at the trot. A horse that toes in will ‘paddle’ while tracking.

These are just a few of the many, very basic things judges look for, regardless of the breed of the horse. A Quarter Horse should have the same balance, with a long, sloping shoulder and hip and short back as the Arabian or as the Miniature Horse, or the Thoroughbred. They might look a little different, but balance is balance. Every breed should have the same, straight leg structure. Each breed has its own standards, or additional, more specific things that are evaluated. For example, Quarter horses should be heavier muscled than Arabians and Arabians should have a refined head, dished face and more arch (swan like shape) to their neck. So, how does a judge evaluate a class that has many different breeds in it? Well, the truth is, it’s not because some judges like some breeds better (although some judges are more familiar with certain breeds than others). Judges are taught how to judge horses against the standards of their breed. So, in a class of mixed breed horses, the horse that best represents the standards of the breed should win the class. The key to remember is this: there is no perfect horse. All horses have flaws and all horses have good things about them. The important thing is to recognize the positive traits of your horse and understand its weaknesses.