

JUDGING A HITCH

A Good judge considers everything - horses, harness, wagon, driver, performance and overall eye appeal. The majority of points are placed on the performance on the rail. The "drive" can account for 60% or more of the total points.

Each horse should be clean, have a tight braid in its mane, a well-tied tail and be properly shod. It should be sound, having no problem, such as lameness, to interfere with its performance.

Harnesses should be clean and fit the horse. A well-adjusted harness should enhance natural high headedness and encourage snappy movement. No loose pieces of harness should be seen. The are distracting and could be dangerous.

The hitch wagon should be clean, of appropriate size to create an overall well-balanced appearance with the horses. The box, or seat, should be directly above the center of team. A good set of brakes is an absolute necessity.

Drivers should be poised, sitting straight in their seat and in complete control. His or her attire should be neat, clean and practical. Assistant drivers and head-ers should follow the same guidelines.

NOW FOR THE DRIVE . . .

Each horse should be in its place. Each team should do its respective job. Look for uniformity of size, color, stride and disposition in each team. When you view a team working on the rail across from you, it should look as if it were one horse on the move.

AT THE WALK . . .

The stride should be long - one that covers the ground well, showing a willingness to work.

AT THE TROT . . .

Look for style, feet striking the ground solidly, a square gait, joints flexing so that each foot lifts clearly off the ground and fluid movement.

ON THE REVERSE . . .

You should see smooth fluid movement all the way through the turn. The horse on the outside of each team picking up its gait slightly to stay head-to-head with the one on the inside. The hitch moves diagonally across the arena giving the judge the opportunity to see them in the turn and working the opposite way around the arena. Some horses work better clockwise while other horses work better counter-clockwise.

WHEN LINING UP . . .

Each hitch comes in at a trot, following the directions of the ringmaster. Again, a smooth fluid turn. The first hitch in sets the line. That line should be straight from the first to the last in line. Each driver allows enough space for the judge to make his individual inspection. On the back, look for a nice straight back, stop and return to the original position.

EACH TEAM HAS A SPECIFIC JOB

THE LEAD TEAM (the team out in front) makes the first impression on the judge, sets the pace for the hitch, and is usually slightly smaller and more aggressive than the other two teams.

THE SWING TEAM, slightly larger than the lead team, not as large as the wheel team, has a difficult position. Lines from the lead team are going past their heads. The wheel team is close behind. The swing team helps to make a rounded turn in the corners.

THE WHEEL TEAM, the largest of the three teams, is on the tongue of the wagon. Therefore, they do the actual steering of the wagon. They are the only one of the three teams to have a breeching (the large piece of leather around their rumps.) This allows them to back the wagon.

It's a stylish set to the head and neck, snappy action from the knees in front, the hocks (rear knees), behind, all ears up, alert, smooth transition of gaits, that shows each horse is performing its role.

THE MODERN DRAFT HORSE ON THE MOVE!

Efficiency

Power

Energy

Grace

