Western Pleasure class is designed for you to exhibit how well your horse performs the gaits: walk, jog and lope. The class procedure is fairly easy, you are instructed to walk, jog or lope along the arena rail with a group of others. This class is frequently one that those inexperienced with showing will enter. However, excellence requires a horse to be broke, willing and responsive with defined ways of movement. As with any competitive event, success requires preparation, practice and self-evaluation. This 4-H member guide provides questions for you to answer about how you prepare for and perform the western pleasure class. Hopefully, you will have the chance to discuss your answers with others and identify some of the common and various ways others prepare themselves and their horse for horse shows. You will likely find that a rulebook will be needed, so ask your leader or parent for a copy before you work through the questions.

**Do you know the rules?**

As with any class, there are requirements for certain types of tack and attire. Which of the following pieces of tack are allowed in the Western Pleasure class:

a. Closed or roping reins  
b. Mechanical hackamores  
c. Tie downs  
d. Snaffle bits

**Thoughts and discussion:** Can you describe each of the pieces of equipment listed above? Is your definition of snaffle bit the same as described in the rule book of the show? Are there conditions that none of the answers above would be allowed, i.e. certain age of a horse? What are other types of equipment that are allowed, i.e. bits? How about attire (your clothing)? What is allowed or required, i.e. hats, boots?

**First Step: Functionally Correct**

It is important that a Western Pleasure horse be functionally correct. This means that it takes the gaits when asked, maintains the gaits asked and moves from one gait from another when asked. How would you rate your horse on functional correctness?

a. My horse usually resists me when I ask for certain gaits to the point he becomes ill or ignores my cues  
b. I usually have to really cue my horse hard to take or keep a certain gait  
c. My horse takes gaits and keeps the gaits I ask for, but sometimes he resists by pulling the reins, moving his head up or down too much, mouthing the bit or other noticeable ways  
d. All in all, my horse is pretty good at picking up the gaits and keeping the gaits without much cueing by me

**Thoughts and discussion:** Do you know which lead you are on when loping? What practice routines could be done to help a horse be more functionally correct? How do you cue for different gaits?
How Broke?

A Western Pleasure Horse should move through the gaits and at desired speeds without observable cueing from the rider. Your horse should appear willing, alert and broke. Does your horse frequently exhibit undesirable traits which suggest unwillingness or resistance?

1. My horse moves too fast, and won’t slow down when I cue
2. My horse moves too slow, and wants to break gait
3. My horse wants to buck, kick or switch its tail when I ask it to move at certain gaits around other horses
4. My horse hates it when I use rein cues and shows it by backing its ears, holding its head high, mouthing the bit or ...
5. I have to keep a tight rein so my horse will go the speed and direction I want him to move

Thoughts and discussion: Does your horse act one way during practices and another at shows? How does your horse behave in large groups of horses?

Movement Quality

Judges look for functionally correct, willing horses that appear broke. Beyond that, horses are judged on how well they move in comparison to what is desired in the class. There are many different terms used to describe quality of movement. The terms may be hard to understand and hard to identify. Several of the terms used to describe movement quality in Western Pleasure are defined below. Ask others to help explain any of the terms that are confusing. Think of how your horse moves and rate him within each of the terms as:

1. Consistent: Moves at a constant, desirable rate of speed and strides without obvious cues from the rider. (Think: moves the same way all the time)
2. Cadenced: Each foot moves distinctly and in rhythm within each stride so the number of strides within a set distance or time is consistent. Cadence should be flowing, of natural stride length, and reasonably slow as long as the gait is distinct. (Think: members of a marching band moving in step)
3. Distinct: The movement of each foot is clearly observable and in proper rhythm for the stride. An indistinct horse may appear to drag his feet or his feet may move out of rhythm making the normal beats per stride hard to distinguish
4. Rhythmic: The rate that each foot moves within strides is consistent and cadenced. (Think: like the beat of a song)
5. Balanced: Moves with collection so that the weight of the front and hind quarters are centered under the rider as the horse moves

Collect: Stride length, drive (impulsion from the hindquarters) and head carriage combine to allow for a balanced, flowing stride that feels smooth to the rider. Hind legs should reach well under the horse while maintaining a distinct and cadenced gait

Frame: The appearance of the horse’s body while moving. When in-frame the horse is moving with collection while carrying his head and neck in a relaxed manner. The poll (top of the head) is level with or slightly above the withers. The nose is slightly in front of the position of the ears in relation to the ground (the face is positioned in front of a vertical line to the ground). When moving in frame, the top-line (poll to the tail) of the horse appears to remain level instead of having a lot of up and down movement in the head, neck or hips.

Thoughts and discussion: Can you describe how the legs move in sequence with one another at a walk, trot and lope? How many “beats” does each stride have? What other terms can you think of to describe movement quality? What happens to movement quality when a horse moves without any drive or impulsion from the hindquarters? Is it harder for a horse to move slow and have movement quality or harder to have movement quality while traveling fast?