

RIDING & SHOWING THE PERUVIAN PASO PERFORMANCE HORSE

TIPS, THOUGHTS & SUGGESTIONS
BY SHAWNA VALENZUELA



Author riding two-time U.S. National Champion of Champions Performance Mare, RDS Orquidia Negra. Photo by Debbie Pye.

These days, many people have become confused when it comes to the Performance/Pleasure Division. How exactly is it judged? What does a judge look for? How should you present your horse? Hopefully, I will be able to answer many of these questions and offer tips on how to better present your horse to the judge in competition. The following article outlines things I look for in a Performance class as a judge, as well as the things I do as a rider to give my best performance when competing under other judges.



A good example of relaxed back-up. The horse is comfortable because the rider's weight is balanced and light on the horse with the center of balance a little forward to free up the horse's back. The horse can round its back and therefore backs lightly. Note the lightness on the reins; the horse is not being pulled or forced back.

The first area is the grooming and presentation of both you and your horse. Standard Performance classes are to be judged 60% on performance, brio, suitability and manners. 20% is to be judged on gait and smoothness and 20% is to be judged on condition. I firmly believe that grooming counts as part of condition. It is about presentation. It is about the condition your horse is presented in; which to me translates as being in good physical shape, not grotesquely too fat or too thin, not huffing and puffing after a few laps and definitely not dirty and un-groomed.

Show horses should be presented as just that, "Show Horses". I do not like to see hairy ears, fetlocks or muzzles in the show ring. If you do not want to clip your horse due to insects and such, it may be worth it to invest in some good protective fly repellents and sheets. In today's show ring we must present ourselves as well as, or better than any other breed. Never would you go to an Arabian or a Saddlebred horse show and see un-groomed, un-shaven horses. If we are to command the respect and admiration of other breeds, we need to present our horses as well as they do.

I want to see ears, muzzles and fetlocks trimmed. Excess facial hairs under the jowls and chin also have to go. The horse must be

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Here we see the proper bending of horse in a circle. The horse is turning left and the body is in a left arc with head facing in. The reins are light and the horse is relaxed.



Here's an improper turn to left. The rider is improperly holding reins and the horse is in process of turning left but its nose is facing right or outward causing it to drop its shoulder and hop around the turn.



Here's a perfect example of a horse going through a serpentine one-handed. The horse is relaxed yet responsive, the body is soft and the reins have light contact without being pulled.

bathed, his coat groomed and his mane and tail brushed out and free of straw and shavings. A little sweat is unavoidable as horses must be warmed up prior to their classes but I do not want to see heavily lathered horses entering the class. This screams to the judge, "I'm not fully trained and my rider has to make me tired to make me behave!" Nose and eye boogies should be removed with a damp cloth and a light oiling on the muzzle and around the eyes and ears is nice to see. Note I said a "light" oiling, not an oil slick!

The horse must be correctly tacked. The baticola should be sitting in the center of the hindquarters, not hanging off to the side of the tail. The retrancas should not be flopping around due to improper tack adjustment. The saddle should be correctly placed on the horse. All tack should be clean! I can't emphasize to you enough how irritating it is to have to stop an entire class so that tack adjustments can be made that should have (and could have) been made prior to entering the show arena. Accidents and emergencies happen. That is an understandable and an acceptable reason to stop a class and adjust what needs to be fixed.

The rider should be properly attired for that particular class as well. Ponchos should be neatly tucked under your seat. No Batman imitations please! Clothes should be clean and ironed. If you're wearing a jacket, it should be form fitting and neatly pressed. Shirts should be long sleeved and don't forget to wear a belt. Clean boots, hat and a scarf will round out the picture. Please ladies, if you have long hair, put it in a chignon or braid it. If you don't, your hair will fly around and/or cover up your number. Trust us, we don't care if it's long, lush and shiny; it's very difficult for the judge and ring steward to search for your number through it.

Now let's talk a little bit about the class itself. I want to see Pleasure/Performance horses that are just that. Keep in mind that it is still a horse show and not a trail ride or a trick exhibition. The tendency of judges these days to totally disregard the show rules and standards, and base the entire class on a bunch of tricks and maneuvers is unfair and incorrect. The class is to be judged based on the percentages outlined above and overall performance. Horses should exhibit that they are willing, well mannered, well gaited and suitable to their rider.

The horse should perform collected and relaxed. I want flat walk, no jiggling or prancing around – a walk like you would want while riding out on the trail. Backing without rearing is always nice as is backing without an open mouth. The line should be straight. If after five steps, you are facing the opposite direction, assume you

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did it wrong! I want to see your horse performing in his best – relaxed and collected gait. Trust me, no points are going to be given for highest headset, fastest speed or most hyper performance!

I think bosalillos and gamarillas are acceptable in 4 and 5 year old horses that are fairly new in the bit. I'd prefer not to see them on horses over the age of seven in a Pleasure/Performance class. By age seven, your horse should be fully trained and not need anything added to the bit to perform. Use it if you must, but if another horse the same age performs as well as yours without it, it will be given the higher placing.

Now on to serpentes... You don't have to worry with me as a judge that these will become an object of your



This is a very good example of a horse going through the cones two-handed. The rider's hands are close together, the horse is not being pulled around. The horse is relaxed and body is bent in the direction it's turning.

most fiendish nightmares. I'm looking to see that the horse bends around the turns, maintains a steady, easy gait and goes through the cones willingly. I usually space them a horse's length apart. Believe me, I know that a horse's body does not readily bend in two directions at once! Furthermore, contrary to what some judge's think, it is not even a mandatory requirement for the class. I never base my final decision in a performance class on the maneuvers alone but rather a combination of all the required percentages.

Let's say that we have a horse in the class that's performing heads and shoulders above everyone else. Say that horse has performed perfectly in every way but going through the last round of serpentes

he happens to knock down a cone. As long as it wasn't by refusal or bad manners on his part, I won't knock him down enough for it to cost him the class. If however, there are two horses so close in performance that I can't make a decision, I might boil down my final placing on the performance given through a maneuver, be it a serpentine, a back up, etc. But I have found that it's rare for two horses to be so close in performance as to need to base a final decision on a single maneuver.

As for how I prefer to see the reins held, a one-handed performance over a two-handed one is preferred, if all else is equal. However, I would much rather see a correct performance of the horse using two hands than using one hand in a lesser quality performance. A horse should only be shown one-handed in performance if it will perform collected, relaxed and flexible with one hand. A one-handed rider turning a horse in a circle with the horse's head facing the outside of the circle, is not that by any means. The same with the serpentes; the horse must bend his body in the direction he is traveling. I will mark you down far worse for using one hand and having the horse bend his body against the curve, than if you ride two-handed and bend him in the proper direction.

I also dislike one-handed riding with the reins placed in the hand, palm up, with the rider's thumbs facing towards the front of the horse ("rienda pareja" as seen in the Enfrenadura and Marinera classes); ninety-five percent of the riders who use it, do it so incorrectly that it is unsightly and sloppy looking. I would prefer to see this form of riding only in Enfrenadura or Marinera classes. Common mistakes are seen in turning and the horse bends against the curve or the horse drops its shoulder and turns without bending. It is unsightly, improper and unbalanced looking when done incorrectly and does not show that your horse is performing the maneuvers willingly and with ease. If you are going to exhibit your horse this way, make sure it is properly trained in this fashion. If you can do it correctly by then all means, go for it, but do so knowing you aren't going to receive "extra points" for this style of riding from me. As much as I dislike seeing this type of reining when improperly performed, it is the traditional method in both the

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