

# Alleghan County 4-H Horsemaster Gymkhana Division B

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # : \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Club: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

4-H ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

4-H Age (As of 1/01/current year): \_\_\_\_\_



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## Gymkhana—Competitive Games on Horseback!

*As you enter the arena you feel the excitement. Your horse wants the same thing you do, to run the pattern smoothly with your best time. The thrill you feel when you and your horse have just finished a perfect pattern is incredible. You've just accomplished a major goal that you set for yourself, the crowd roars their approval and all your hard work has paid off!*

In the division A booklet, we helped you discover the building blocks that are necessary to compete in 4-H Gymkhana events. In this booklet we hope to guide you in the selection of your gymkhana horse, show you how to choose the proper equipment and protective gear for your horse, and build sound conditioning and training plans that will keep you and your horse in peak condition for the demands of competition.

### **Selection of your gymkhana horse:**

You don't have to go out and buy a new horse to use for Gymkhana. A good gymkhana horse is one with good conformation because good conformation includes clean movement, balance and little to no interference or injury. When checking a horse to determine if it can be used for speed events get in the saddle. Work the horse in an enclosed arena. Does the horse have speed? Is the horse willing to stop and turn when you ask it? What is its temperament like? How does the horse recover physically and emotionally from a workout?

An older, more experienced horse would be good for the beginning competitor as their skills offset each other. The experienced rider may be able to handle the younger horse, with the realization that it's going to take a lot of time and patience to get the same results.

Consider how much training the horse has had. Are you looking for a trained horse that you can enjoy and learn together with or are you looking for a horse with the potential to be a winner that you can take from start to finish? Compare the horse's training with your own and make sure you're compatible. An inexperienced rider will have a longer time reaching the top with an inexperienced horse since both will be learning together. The important thing is to have fun on your way to the finish line, so pick a horse that you can have fun with.

## **Choosing proper equipment and protective gear for your horse:**

Once you've selected the horse to work with, you'll need to make sure the saddle fits both the horse and rider. There are some differences and similarities between barrel saddles and pleasure saddles. You may notice that some barrel saddles have round skirts, little to no silver and the stirrups are built different. The horn is more slender to provide a better handhold and the fenders are made to allow more range of motion than a pleasure saddle. Most barrel saddles have a 5" cantle and are lighter weight than pleasure saddles.

Regardless of the style saddle you use, you want the saddle to fit the horse without inhibiting the movement of his shoulders and hindquarters and provide you with the support that you need to run the events.

The bit you choose should be one that the horse responds to. The bit is not your brakes for the horse, it should simply be one that helps in the turns and that the animal is responsive to. The bit should be well suited to the horse and riders skills.

Sometimes a tie-down is used on Gymkhana horses. The correct usage of the tie-down on a barrel horse would be to allow the horse to balance against it. The tie-down will help the horse focus on the pattern. If you feel you need a tie-down to control the horse, this may be a sign that your horse is not having fun running the events and the two of you aren't working as one. This may be the time to slow down and work on communication between horse and rider.

Next you'll want to give your horse proper leg protection. Barrel racing is a very demanding event for your horse. In one event you are asking your horse to go from a walk to a full out run, checking the horse and asking for a sharp turn around the barrel and charging ahead to the next barrel.

Splint boots protect the splint bone and provide some leg support. The splint boot has extra padding over the splint bone and fetlock for protection in case the horse kicks himself.

Bell boots protect the horse's hooves, especially the heel bulbs from getting clipped by the back feet and the coronet band from cross over clipping.

Skid boots protect the horse's heel from ground burns that they can get in a sliding stop.

Sport boots provide support for the horse's legs, protect the splint bone and fetlock and can be found in combination with a bell boot or without. Sport boots provide the best support and protection for the competitive horse.

Finally, it's a good idea to wrap your horse's legs in shipping boots for the trip to the show. The horse can get hurt in the trailer on the way to the show and this could ruin your whole day. Shipping boots can also help keep your horses legs warmed up before the show.

### **Horse's health and conditioning:**

There are many different types of arena footings. A few examples of these would be sand of various depths, clay and grass. You can expect to see your horse run a slower time in deep footing. On hard surfaces the patterns will run faster. If you normally work your horse on soft, deep footing and then compete on a harder surface your times can be faster if you don't overrun the barrels. Grass or muddy arenas can be more hazardous if not run with caution. Care should also be taken with more rocky ground. It's recommended to check out the arena where you'll compete and decide how you will run the patterns in that event.

The horse's greatest loss of minerals is electrolytes. As you ask your horse to work for you, you need to give him extra electrolytes. Your horse's health is a key factor in how he performs for you. Conditioning refers to the horse's physical health. If the horse's heart rate and breathing aren't in good shape then you cannot expect the horse to perform to his best ability. Just like humans taking an aerobics class, you work out for short periods of time, increasing your heart rate and then cool down. Eventually you will be able to work out longer without stressing your heart rate and cool down. Horses are similar to humans in this way. They don't automatically have athletic ability it requires gradual work to increase their endurance. As you work on the aerobic condition of your horse, you should also notice his muscle tone increasing.

A horse will become winded more quickly if he is out of condition than a horse that is in condition. The horse's temperature, heart rate and respiration's are three areas that will tell you the condition of your horse. The average adult horse temperature is 99-101.5 degrees, the average resting pulse rate is between 30-40 beats per minute and the average resting respiration rate is 8-20 breaths per minute.

Before a workout, check your horse's pulse rate and respirations. After the workout, take these statistics again and compare the results. Generally, they will all rise during the workout and should return to normal within an average of 10 minutes. If your horse's statistics return to normal within the average time, then he is probably in good athletic condition and can withstand a longer workout. This is referred to as his recovery rate. If your horse's recovery rate takes longer than the average to return to normal, then you need to work on shorter workouts until his recovery rate is within the average.

Imagine if you were the horse and were asked to run around a barrel pattern at top speed. The first time out, you will get winded before you are through the pattern and chances are you didn't run it perfectly either. The same is true with your horse. He needs to build up his lung capacity and stamina to run these patterns.

A good conditioning plan might include starting with walking and trotting your horse for at least 15-20 minute sessions three times a week. Trotting is the best gait for a workout. As your session time increases so should the amount of trotting time. After the first week, increase these sessions to 30 minutes each time. The following week consider workouts 3-5 days a week and increase the amount of time as the horse's recovery rate improves. Of course horses get bored just like people do so plan a little variety in your conditioning plan. Work on bending and flexing and add variety to the terrain. A horse that is conditioned only on the flat will not be in as good condition as a horse who's also worked with hills. Remember that sprinting up the hill doesn't build as much endurance as walking or trotting up the hill. Start with slight inclines before going to the big hills.

Finally, you and your horse are a team so you should also work on your own physical condition. Consult your doctor before starting any workout plan. It's a good idea to review your horse's conditioning plan with your vet too.

It's always fun to be able to see the changes as they occur. Keep a log of your horse's vital signs along the way and you'll be able to see the changes. A sample conditioning worksheet is included in this packet for you to use to log your horse's condition if you like. Over time you will begin to notice more and more about your horse. Notice his eyes and ears as you enter the arena gate. He's looking forward to running this pattern and is getting excited, with fun painted all over his face. Or he's really dreading going into that arena for whatever reason and he balks at the gate. If your horse doesn't want to compete, you're not going to have much fun.

### **The training plan**

The training plan is different from conditioning. When you're training your horse you should have something specific in mind. To put together an effective training plan, you need to know what your horse can and cannot do. If your horse is already trained for the events that you want to compete in, then your plan should include a review of the patterns and then fine tuning your horse's ability to run the patterns. Watch out for asking too much of the pattern work from your horse. You risk making the horse sour on the patterns and potential refusal. It's a good idea to keep variety in your horse's exercise experience. Take him out on the trails instead of riding in the arena, you'll both enjoy it.

If your horse is relatively new to gymkhana events, design your training plan to introduce the patterns slowly. Your training plan should include working on your horse's lead changes, ability to stop, turn well and response to your cues. Let's say you want to start with the pole-bending pattern. Enter the arena and stop your horse before the timer line. Let him look over the pattern from where he's standing. Then start him at a walk through the pattern. Soon you'll notice he's learning the pattern when he turns and weaves at the right times. Just like conditioning, gradually increase your expectations of your horse. Stop before he's bored with the pattern and go for a walk. The next day work on your horse's ability to maintain the canter. You can do this with running slow circles or simply go around the arena a few times.

After your horse knows the patterns, it's time to test them at a higher speed. Trot the patterns. If you're still rounding the barrels or poles smoothly then increase the speed. Work on getting your timing right, this is referred to as *rate*. Regulate your speed as you approach the barrel. By rating your horse at the approach, you can leave enough space between you and the barrel in front to allow you to come around the back side of the barrel in a smooth tight turn without tipping over the barrel. This space between you and the barrel is called the *pocket*.

Remember that you will get out of your training what you put into it. If your goal is to become a good athletic competitor then your training plan should include working your horse a minimum of three times a week, rain or shine. Your horse is your partner, take excellent care of him and he will reward you.

Finally we've presented you with important information to build a good athletic riding team. Now it's up to you to apply what you've learned here with actual experience. Attend clinics, seek professional training and commit yourself to hard work. Most important, have fun at what you're doing.



## Conditioning Worksheet

Horse's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Temperature: \_\_\_\_\_

Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_

Week one workout log: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_

Week two workout log: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_

Week three workout log: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_

Week four workout log: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_

Week five workout log: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pulse Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ Respiration Rate: \_\_\_\_\_



## Division B – Gymkhana Knowledge Test

Completion of Division A Gymkhana Knowledge Test is required before completing this test.

1. Please explain what the term **pocket** is and what it's used for.

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2. What does the term **rate** mean and what is it used for?

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3. Explain why the barrel saddle is built different than a pleasure saddle. Name two distinct differences.

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4. Explain why a tie-down is sometimes used on a gymkhana horse.

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5. What kind of bit are you using on your horse and why?

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6. Explain the protection that each type of leg gear provides the horse.

Splint boots

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Bell boots

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Skid boots

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Sport boots

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Shipping boots

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7. It's safe to say that most arena footings differ. Give two examples of different arena footings and how you would run the pattern on that footing.

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8. T/F A horse that is in good physical condition will become winded more quickly than a horse that is out of condition.

9. What is the average temperature of a healthy adult horse at rest?

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10. What is the average resting pulse rate of an adult horse?

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11. What is the average resting respiration rate of an adult horse?

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12. How do you listen for gut sounds?

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13. T/F A horse's greatest loss of minerals is electrolytes.

14. Why do you need to know your horse vital signs?

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15. How long does it take your horse to recover back to its resting pulse rate after a work out?

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16. Please outline the conditioning plan you have for your gymkhana horse.

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17. Please explain why a horse might balk at the arena gate.

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**18.** Please outline the training plan you have for your gymkhana horse.

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**19.** What are the benefits of good confirmation in a barrel horse?

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**20.** How would you select a good barrel horse?

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## Division B Mounted Skills Test

In addition to performing all the requirements for Division A, the rider should be able to demonstrate the following.

- Yes / No      Can the rider run a pattern without breaking gait?
- Yes / No      Does the rider know their correct leads?
- Yes / No      Can the rider perform a figure 8 with simple or flying lead changes at the canter?
- Yes / No      Can the rider maintain a balanced seat throughout the pattern?

References: 4H State Rules and Guidelines, The Horse Industry Handbook, 4H Horse and Horsemanship book. Many other references by industry experts are available at your local tack store.

