

Development of the judging scale

In the following article the proposed development of the judging scale will be reviewed; the main changes and the ideas and goal behind them.

The main goal in Icelandic horse breeding is to create an accessible and easy type of riding horse for the diverse group of people that use and enjoy the Icelandic horse. The way to do that is to reward a certain type of conformation with an emphasis on a strong topline; which is created by correctly formed neck, a back that has good carrying ability and that the horse is well-balanced; correctly proportioned and up-hill. With regards to the riding ability it is important to reward balance and self-carriage and that the horse can move under rider in correct body function with ease. Then it is important to put more emphasis on cooperation and mental balance in the assessment of spirit. All these attributes, among others, create a better riding horse, regardless of its roles.

The main objectives of the work on the new judging scale were:

- Review the breeding goals within each trait and define the traits in more detail, this applies specially to walk, canter and slow tölt
- Make the scale more accessible and better to work with, for judges, breeders and riders
- Implement new knowledge about the relationship between conformation and riding ability. In the new scale there is more emphasis on attributes in the conformation that promote natural gaiting ability
- Riding ability: Increased emphasis on suppleness, balance, self-carriage and correct body function
- Increased emphasis on the quality of the gaits in all speed ranges (tölt, trot and canter/gallop) and elasticity in slow tempo when the scores of 9.0 or higher are given
- Implement different demands according to the age of the horse
- Increase emphasis on cooperation and mental balance in the assessment of spirit
- Add to the riding ability part certain tasks/tests that increase the informational value of the show; improve the assessment of balance and self-carriage and give us more information about the quality of the gaits

In the following text the main changes within each trait of riding ability will be reviewed:

Tölt

As has been said the goal is to put more emphasis on balance and self-carriage. Good tests or tasks to measure those attributes are to see the horse on loose rein and to see speed variations. Therefore, the idea is that when scores of 9.0 or higher are given for tölt, the horse needs to show speed changes (that is a clear acceleration and/or slowing down) and that the horse maintains good balance when the rider clearly loosens the reins. These tasks, when well performed by the horse, can also raise the scores at lower levels. Regarding the task of loosening the rein, then the idea is that the rider should loosen the rein for at least 3 seconds and that should be enough as the assessment of self-carriage. The rider can do that in any speed in tölt and only once in the show.

Thresholds in tölt – like you know the situation is now in such a way that there can be a one-point difference between the score for tölt and slow tölt; that is, a horse can get 9.0 for tölt with 8.0 for slow tölt. In the new scale the idea is to put more emphasis on the quality of the slow tölt when scores of 9.0 or higher are given, so that the difference can only be half a point (0.5). When giving scores up to 8.5 for tölt, the difference can still be one point and also generally when the horse is four years old (different demands according to age). So, for example, when the horse is five years or older, in order to achieve 9.0 for tölt, the score for slow tölt needs to be at least 8.5.

Slow tölt

To assess certain aspects of the slow tölt, such as balance, elasticity, natural leg action and purity of the beat, it is very enlightening to see the slow tölt shown from walk. For the higher scores (9.0 or higher) the horse therefore needs to be able to go into clear-beated and well-balanced slow tölt from walk without much preparation. The gait transition walk-slow tölt does not need to take place in front of the judging house (it is good to see in in the beginning of the 150 section of the track) as the gait transition itself is not being assessed, but the quality of the slow tölt when it is shown from the walk.

Trot

In order to get increased information about the trot when scores of 9.0 or higher are given, the idea is to see the horse in more than one speed; that is in slow or slow medium tempo and also faster tempo. Today, there is a working rule that when giving the scores of 9.5 or 10, then the horse needs to be shown in medium tempo as well as fast tempo. Now the idea is to state this clearly in the judging scale and make this demand when scores of 9.0 or higher are given. The aim is that horses that receive scores of 9.0 or higher have in fact an improving effect on the trot in the population. Then it is important that these horses possess clear beat, correct body function and elasticity in the slow speeds (slow tempo or slow medium tempo). Well balanced speed changes can also raise the score for trot anywhere in the scale.

Pace

In the scale for pace it is new that less demand is put on four years old horses with regards to the length of the sprint. Full length of the sprint is 150 meters but 75 meters for four years old horses. Then more emphasis is put on correct body function in the new scale as well as balance. An easy transition from gallop to pace, a light rein contact during the sprint as well as a supple and balanced deceleration are tasks that can raise the score for pace as they show the security and balance of the pace. In the same way the score shall be lowered by at least 0.5 if there is considerable lack of balance in the beginning of the sprint, the horse needs a lot of assistance to maintain the gait or if the horse changes to disunited gallop when slowing down.

For scores of 8.5 or higher the horse should be clearly ridden in gallop before the transition to pace (this is already a working rule but is now stated in the new scale).

Gallop

In the new scale gallop and canter have been defined as two separate traits (see the article about the weighing of the traits). When this is done there will be no thresholds between the

canter and gallop as has been the case. So, the gallop will be scored without considering the quality of the canter, as has been done in the past.

The gallop should be shown at the highest tempo where the horse is able to run in balance. The acceleration from canter to gallop should be shown and a full sprint length is 150 meters (75 meters for four-year-old horses – here also less demand is put on the length of the sprint for the youngest horses like is the case in pace). Well balanced acceleration as well as slowing down in good balance are tasks that can have positive influence on the score of the gait, if well performed by the horse.

Canter

With regards to canter, the breeding goal has been reviewed and made much clearer in the new scale. In the new scale it is better defined what types of canter should be rewarded with scores of 9.0 or higher, where for example suspension and suppleness can weigh each other up. For higher marks in canter (9.0 or higher) the horse must be able to change to a well-balanced canter from walk or a medium tempo tölt/trot. Tasks that increase the information about the gait and confirm the quality can help raise the score if they are well performed by the horse. Such tasks are showing the canter to both hands as well as loosening the rein to show balance and carrying ability.

Walk

Here the breeding goal has also been reviewed and made much clearer in the new scale. (The judging scale like it is now is rather poorly defined when it comes to walk and canter). In the new scale more emphasis is put on correct body function; that the horse is moving through the body and possess good stride length, put less emphasis on over-stepping; that is that the hind leg reaches far over the foot step of the front leg. As for the younger horses less demand is put on the stability of the show (that is if young horses lose their concentration for a while in the walk) and that the judges should assess the best parts of the show.

Spirit

As has been said, more emphasis is put on cooperation and mental balance when assessing this trait. When scoring this trait, the judges assess how the show is going; the forward thinking (willingness) of the horse, how it responds to the rider's aids (cooperation) and how relaxed the horse is (level of tension, from calm to very tense). The goal is to give breeders more information about these attributes in the future so they can better realize what type of horse is being judged. But these are also the attributes that is realistic to assess by watching the horse. Many aspects of the character of the horse is not realistic to score in this system. This is, therefore, a more delimited trait than the name spirit implies, and it is proposed to name this trait *rideability* instead.