

A Horse Trials Guide for Spectators

Background and History

Also known as the “equine triathlon”, a horse trials is a unique competition consisting of three phases: dressage, cross country and stadium jumping. Originally performed exclusively by members of the cavalry, the sport was originally known as a “military test”; it made its debut at the Stockholm Olympics in 1912 and remained the domain of experienced cavalry soldiers until World War II.

With the decline of the standing cavalry in the early 1950’s, eventing became more popular among civilian riders. The United States Combined Training Association (now known as the US Eventing Association, or the USEA) was founded in 1959 to guide this rapidly growing sport. The USEA now has over 14,000 members and offers over 260 horse trials across the country each year.

Event competitions occur at a number of progressive levels, tailored to different combinations of horses and riders. At each level, the same essential challenge is faced: a single horse and rider pair must master and perform in three distinct and demanding equestrian disciplines. None of the three phases can be ignored. The winner is the team with the lowest overall number of penalties after completing all three phases.

The UNH Horse Trials offers competition at the Beginner Novice (fences to 2’7”), Novice (fences to 2’11”), Training (fences to 3’3”) and Preliminary (fences to 3’7”) levels. Occasionally, we offer “hybrid” divisions such as Preliminary/Training; in these classes, competitors perform the dressage and show jumping tests of the higher level and the cross country test of the lower level. The UNH Equine Program hosts three events per year, held generally on the first weekend of May, the third weekend of July and the last weekend of September.

Phase One: Dressage

The purpose of this phase is to test the horse's level of suppleness, strength, obedience and acceptance of the rider's signals. The horse and rider ride a prescribed series of movements called a dressage test; these become increasingly complex as competitors move up the levels. The whole time the horse and rider are in the ring, they are being judged. The horse and rider should look as though they are working as one, not two separate entities. Each movement is given a score from one to ten. The total points earned are then subtracted from the total points possible and a penalty score is calculated.

Phase Two: Stadium Jumping

The next phase of the horse trials is Stadium Jumping. Fences are brightly colored and set in cups, so a light brush or knock with a leg or hoof will cause the fence to fall. This is a test of the horse's confidence, obedience and athleticism; they must also complete the set course within a

specific time or else receive penalties. Horse and rider are also penalized for knockdowns, refusals and falls.

Phase Three: Cross Country

Cross country is the heart of the sport of eventing and is what separates it from other horse sports. This phase is a test of stamina, endurance and bravery of both horse and rider. Horses must be properly trained and conditioned to complete the course safely and within the time allowed. Riders must learn to judge the horse's speed, balance and time on course. Fences on cross country are designed to mimic natural obstacles encountered when covering terrain and include drops, banks, ditches, water hazards, logs, and stone walls. There must be an element of trust between rider and horse. Penalties are given for refusals, falls, and exceeding the optimum time.

Schedule of Events Spring/Fall:

Saturday: Dressage begins at 8 AM in the Spinney Lane Dressage Rings

Sunday: Show Jumping begins at 8 AM in the Mast Road Parking lot; Cross Country begins at 8:20 AM off of Spinney Lane. Competitors go straight from Show Jumping to cross country warm up.

Schedule of Events Summer:

Sunday: Dressage begins at about 7:30 AM in the Spinney Lane Dressage Rings; Show Jumping begins at about 10:00 in the Mast Road Parking lot and Cross Country begins at about 1:00 off of Spinney Lane. Competitors have a break between each phase.

Parking/Admissions:

Parking and admissions are free. Parking is limited and passenger cars must share lots with trailers. We ask that passenger vehicles park in single spaces where trailers cannot fit. Parking is available in the paved Mast Road lot and along Mast Road in posted areas only.

Food is available for purchase on site.