

Oregon 4-H Ranch Horse Contest Guide

The Oregon 4-H Ranch Horse competition consists of the following six classes:

- Ranch Horse Showmanship
- Working Ranch Horse
- Ranch Horse Trail
- Cow Working
- Ranch Horse Roping
- Identification, knowledge, and skills tests

Exhibitors compete in all events as individuals. Events are designed to promote skills a person might need on a working ranch. Counties may choose to offer some or all classes, but only the events listed above will be allowed without permission from state staff/faculty with horse responsibility.

Members and horses must meet all requirements listed under “Project Animal” and “Possession” in the *4-H Horse Contest Guide* (PNW 574). In addition, members must attend at least two clinics working with cattle before they can enter the Cow Working class.



© Oregon State University

Contents

Safety first	1
General competition features	2
Ranch Horse Showmanship	2-3
Working Ranch Horse	3
Sample patterns	4, 5, 6
Score sheet	7
Ranch Horse Trail	8
Sample patterns	9, 10, 11
Cow Working	12
Sample patterns	14, 15
Score sheet	16
Roping	17
Score sheet	18
Identification and Skills Test	19

Safety first

In the Ranch Horse program (as in all areas of the 4-H horse program), safety is a serious concern. Counties that are just starting Ranch Horse may choose to have all participants begin at the novice level the first year and then add a level each year. For example, have new participants in roping begin with roping a dummy, move up to roping a simulator, and only rope a cow in later years.

It is important that:

- 4-H members learn proper techniques before attempting some of the Ranch Horse tests
- 4-H members' horses are completely comfortable with cows and ropes before competing

Not all current 4-H volunteer horse leaders are familiar with the skills needed in Ranch Horse classes. Therefore, we expect each county to call on experienced people in their communities to make sure each event and maneuver is as safe as possible.



General competition features

Clothing and equipment

4-H members should be neat and clean. Dress is Western-style boots, a long-sleeve shirt that buttons or snaps in front, and jeans. A properly adjusted ASTM/SEI helmet is required any time a rider is mounted. Chinks or batwing chaps are allowed in Cow Working, Trail, and Roping classes. An exhibitor's hair must be worn in nets, braids, or some other style that presents a neat appearance and a clear view of the show number.

Equipment should be Western style, safe, clean, and properly adjusted. Saddles should be properly fitted with a rear cinch (attached to the front cinch). Rules require that saddles have horns and that the horn be wrapped for roping classes or any time dallying is required. A rope may be properly attached to the saddle. A breast collar is required in Roping and Trail, and it is recommended for Cow Working and Working Ranch Horse.

All tack and equipment must be used properly and humanely. Gag bits and protective leg gear are allowed in all classes except showmanship. Bridles must have throatlatches.

Judging

The Danish Merit system of judging is used in all classes. Exhibitors receive score sheets with constructive comments after every event.

Each class has a maximum total of 100 points.

Divisions

Age divisions for 4-H Ranch Horse are the same as for the 4-H Horse Project:

- Junior — grades 4 to 6
- Intermediate — grades 7 to 9
- Senior — grades 10 to 12

A county program may want to include a novice division. Neither novice nor junior exhibitors will be eligible for state competition.

Awards

County programs may give awards in addition to the blue, red, and white recognition of the Danish Merit system. Different age divisions should not compete against each other.

State competition

Intermediate and Senior 4-H members may be eligible for state competition. Since a ranch horse must be an all-around horse, members qualifying for a state competition must compete in **all six Ranch Horse events** and must use the same horse in the **five horse events**.

Members are chosen for the 4-H Ranch Horse state competition based on the average score of their best five out of six events. For example, if an exhibitor received 85 points in Ranch Horse Showmanship, 82 in Working Ranch Horse, 90 in Ranch Horse Trail, 72 in Cow Working, 95 in Roping, and 83 on the tests, his or her top five scores (85, 82, 90, 95, 83) would be totaled (435), then divided by 5 for an average of 87. (See the state fair book for the current year's required average to qualify.)

Medallions ribbons may be awarded to the top 10 percent of competitors in each event. Up to 5 percent in each event may receive a medallion.

Ranch Horse Showmanship

Whatever your riding discipline, ground work is an essential building block. Most horse behavior problems that occur when riding can be traced back to problems with the horse on the ground. Training a horse properly in ground work helps you gain your horse's respect. It increases both your control over the horse and its confidence in you. Ground work helps build a rapport between you and your horse that will carry over into riding classes.

In Ranch Horse Showmanship, members show their skill at handling their horse safely and effectively from the ground. They show pride in their animal by how well it is groomed and cared for. They show pride in themselves by how neatly dressed, poised, confident, courteous, and knowledgeable they are.

Clothing

Chaps and spurs are not allowed in showmanship. A hat is required.

Equipment

4-H members must have a safe halter and lead rope for their horse. Chains may be used

as described in the *4-H Horse Contest Guide* (PNW 574).

A safe halter should:

- Be made of rope, nylon web, or leather
- Fit correctly
- Be acceptable for tying to a solid object
- Be in good repair

A safe lead rope should be:

- Made of cotton or nylon
- At least ½ inch in diameter
- At least 6 feet long
- In good repair
- Easy to remove from the halter
- Acceptable for tying to a solid object

Basis of judging

The class is judged on how well the tests are performed, as well as on the handler's attitude. A well-groomed animal is important as is cleanliness of tack. The horse should be well-mannered and willing.

The standard showmanship scoresheet is used for this class.

These tests are required for all performances:

1. Lead from the near side at a walk and trot
2. Back
3. Balance/set up the horse

Possible tests:

1. Leading from off side at a walk and trot
2. Turn on the haunches
3. Turn on the forehand
4. Yield from pressure
5. Answer questions about the 4-H Ranch Horse project

Working Ranch Horse

In this event, 4-H members demonstrate horsemanship skills that may be used on a working ranch. The class is a pattern that may include, but is not limited to, walk, trot, lope, lead changes, rollbacks, and turns on the haunches. Members demonstrate their skills individually—there is no rail work. They should demonstrate horsemanship skills at natural gaits and controlled speed when specified.

Clothing

Neither chinks nor chaps are allowed.

Equipment

Use equipment correctly and humanely. Use one hand on a curb and two hands on a snaffle bit. Tie-downs, martingales, nosebands, and other training devices are discouraged. Members riding without training devices will score higher than equal rides that use them. While a single or roping rein is allowed, split or romal reins are best for this class.

Basis of judging

This class is judged on the rider's control of the horse and the horse's suitability as a ranch horse. The horse should respond to a light rein and show little resistance. Speeds should be distinct, and the horse should be under total control at all speeds. The pattern should be ridden as diagrammed and deviations marked down.

See sample patterns on pages 4, 5, and 6 and the score sheet on page 7.

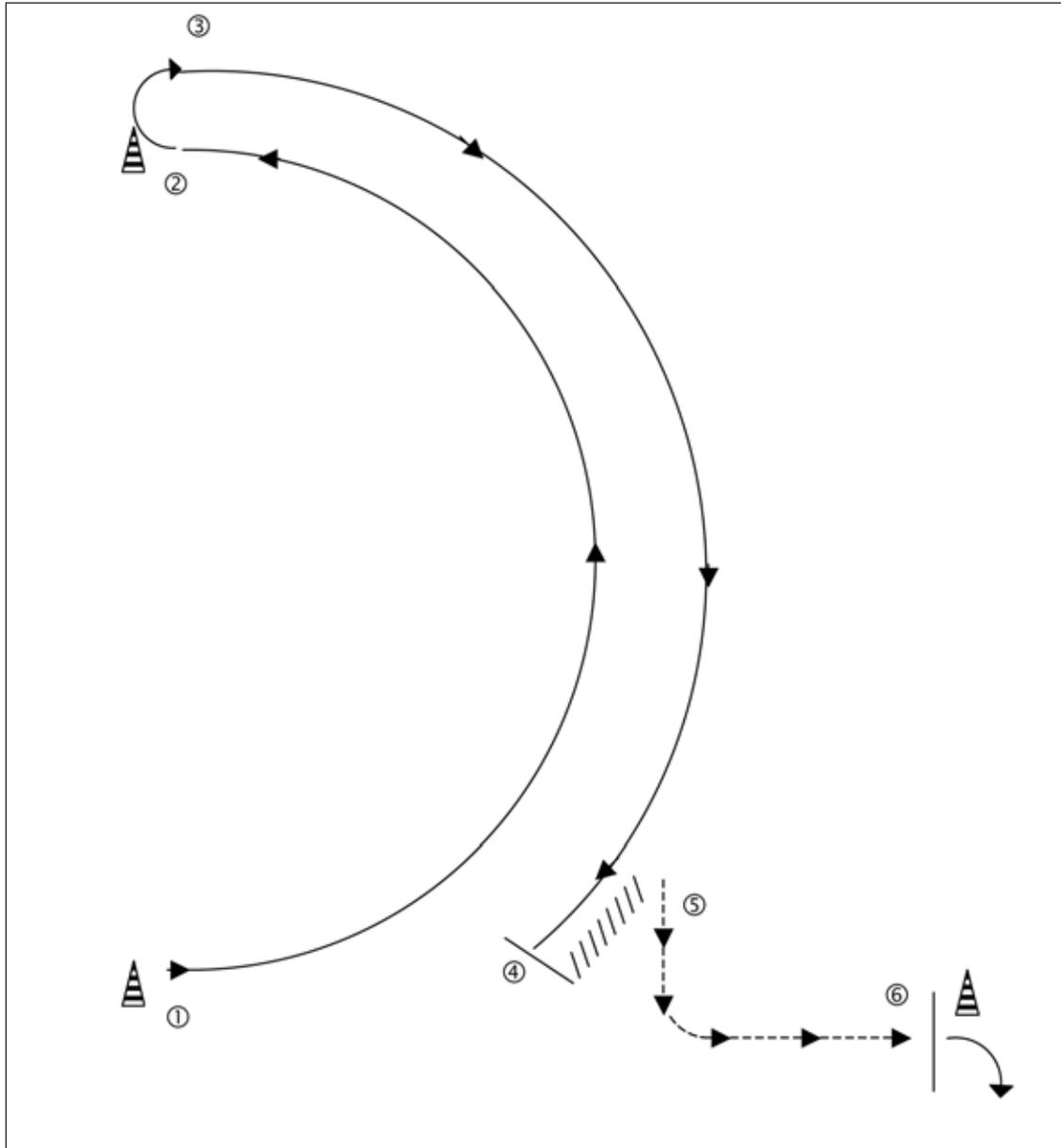
Possible tests:

- Walk, trot, lope both directions at various speeds
- Back up
- Turn on the haunches
- Rollback (Juniors are not required to perform rollbacks.)
- Balanced stop
- Interrupted, simple, or flying lead changes (Juniors are not required to perform flying changes.)
- Circles, serpentines, straight lines

Sample pattern

WORKING RANCH HORSE

Any Age



1. Left lead lope with energy
2. Roll back right at cone
3. Lope right lead with energy
4. Halt, back at least two lengths with energy
5. Jog out of back to cone
6. Halt, do a 90° right haunch turn and exit

Legend

Jog - - - - -> - - - - -> - - - - ->

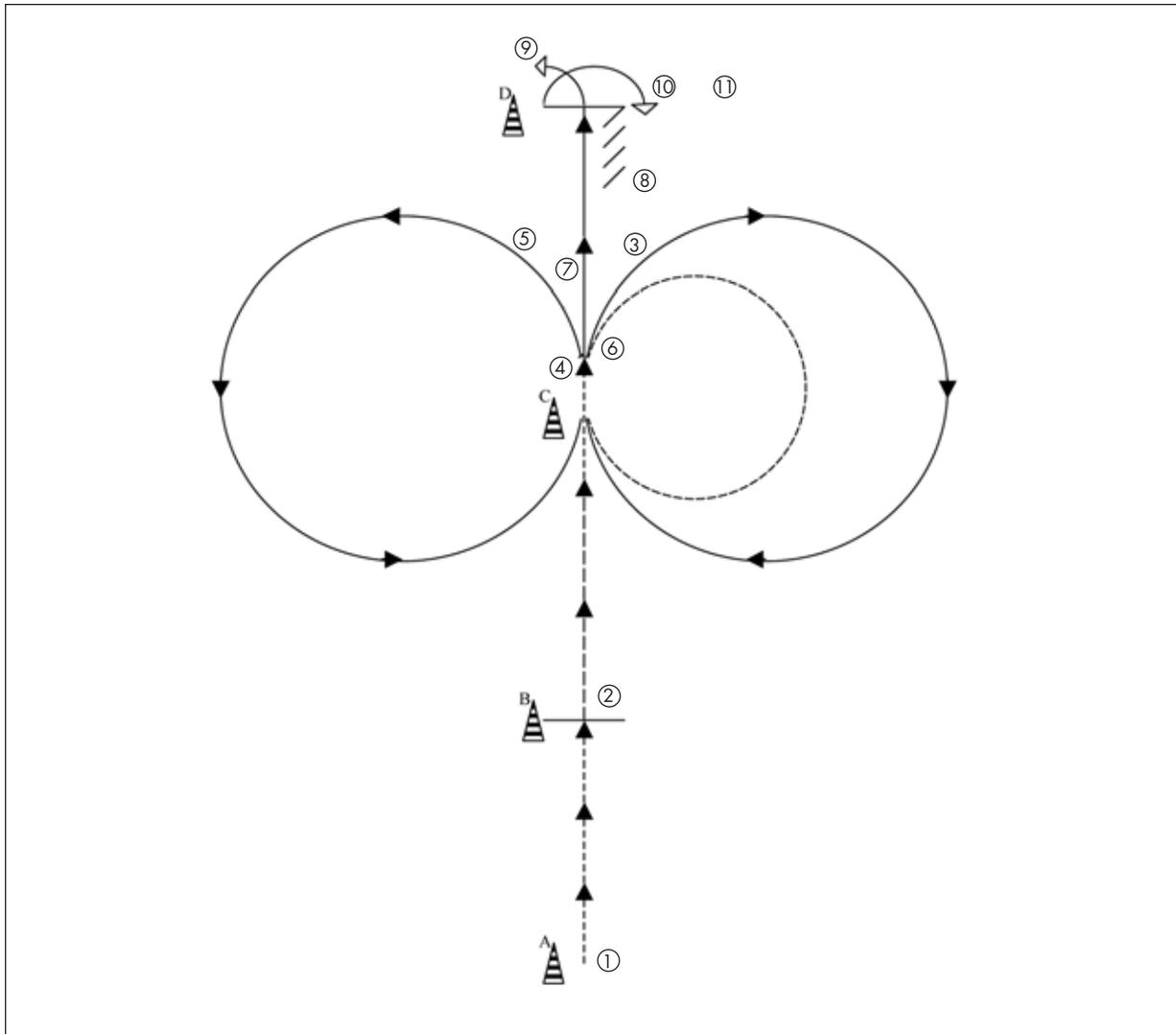
Lope - - - - -> - - - - -> - - - - ->

Back \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ /

Sample pattern

WORKING RANCH HORSE

Senior



1. Jog from cone A to cone B
2. Extended trot from cone B to cone C, then stop
3. Lope a large circle to the right
4. At cone C, simple or flying (preferred) lead change
5. Lope an equal-size circle to the left
6. At cone C, jog a circle to the right
7. At cone C, lope straight on the left lead to cone D, stop
8. Back 4 steps with energy and close
9. Do a 90° left haunch turn
10. Do a 180° right haunch turn
11. Wait to be excused, jog to exit

Legend

Jog - - - - ->

Extended Trot - - - - ->

Lope ———>

Back \ / \ / \ / \ /

Ranch Horse Trail

In this event, 4-H members demonstrate skills necessary to ride the trail looking for lost cattle or moving herds, including overnight stays. Riders are asked to negotiate tight spaces and perform tests of skills that may be needed on the trail or ranch. Ideally, this class would be held in a real outdoor trail setting, with brush, rocks, uneven ground, trees, etc. When held inside, the use of natural obstacles is encouraged whenever possible.

There should be a minimum of 6 obstacles and a maximum of 10. Obstacles should be more spread out than in a regular trail class, so the horse can demonstrate various gaits between them.

Clothing

Chinks or batwing chaps are allowed.

Equipment

Use equipment correctly and humanely. Tie-downs, martingales, nosebands, and other training devices are discouraged. Since dallying and dragging are likely to be part of this class, a single or roping rein or romal reins is suggested, unless a snaffle bit is used. Members riding without training devices will score higher than equal rides that use them. A breast collar is required.

Basis of judging

The horse should approach each obstacle calmly and willingly. Credit should be given to a horse with ground-covering gaits between obstacles. Riders and horses should negotiate obstacles effectively and safely.

Time is not a criterion for judging. This is not a speed event. However, if the exhibitor cannot complete the tasks in a reasonable time, he or she may receive zero points for the unfinished obstacle(s).

The standard trail scoresheet is used for this class. See sample patterns on pages 9, 10, and 11.

Possible tests:

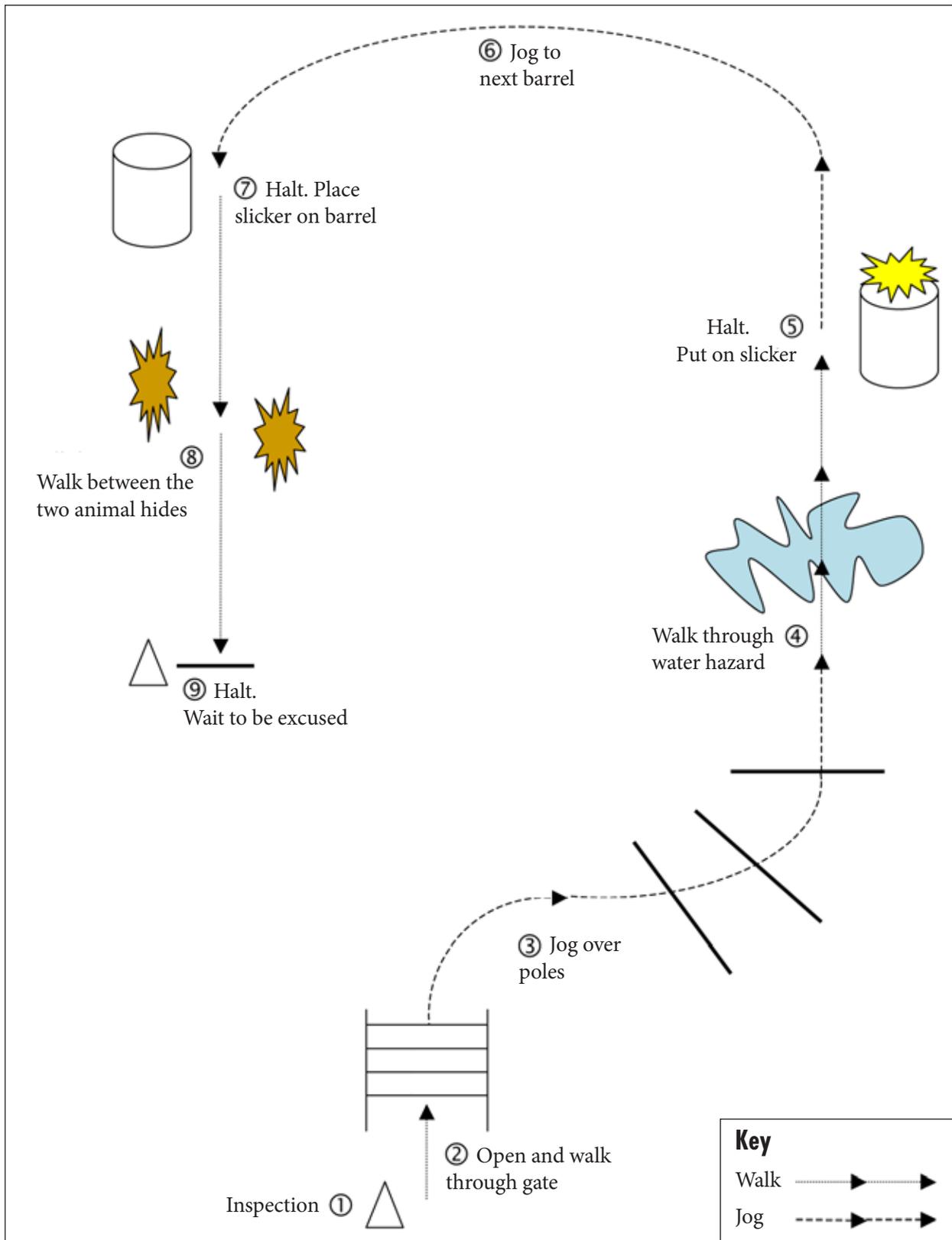
- Walk, trot, or lope at various speeds
- Back up over/near/through various obstacles (mounted or unmounted)
- Turn on the haunches
- Walk/jog over/near/through various obstacles
- Carry various items, including weighted bags, buckets, coats, or others
- Open and close a gate (mounted or unmounted)
- Walk past or near unusual items, including live animals, hides, tents, signs
- Answer 4-H Ranch Horse project questions
- Mount and dismount
- Drag hides, trees, logs, or similar items
- Negotiate challenging terrain
- Negotiate a water hazard
- Clean out hoof
- Put on a slicker
- Cross a bridge
- Hobble or ground tie your horse

All obstacles must meet safety criteria listed in the *4-H Horse Contest Guide*, PNW 574.

Sample pattern

RANCH HORSE TRAIL

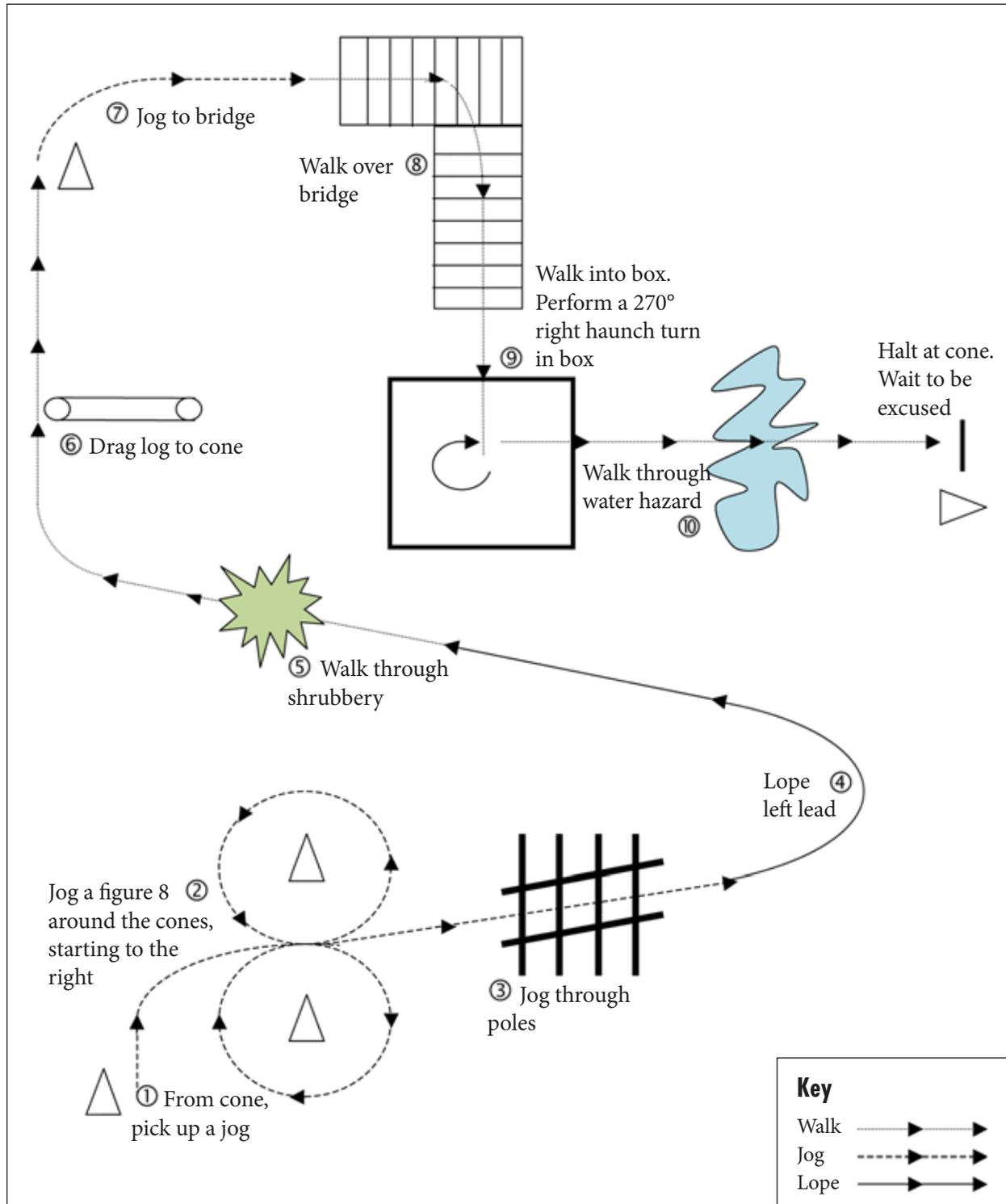
Novice/Junior



Sample pattern

RANCH HORSE TRAIL

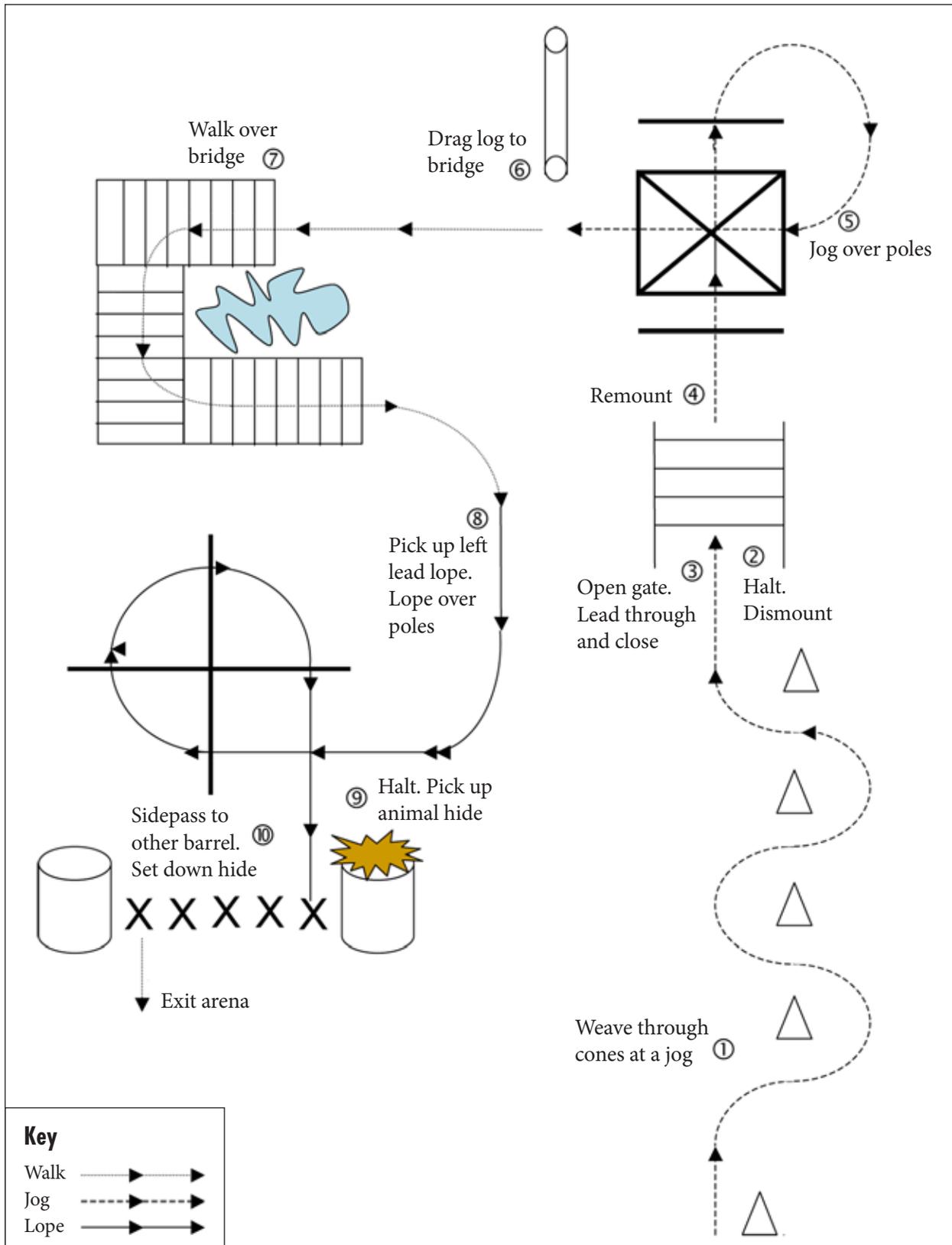
Intermediate



Sample pattern

RANCH HORSE TRAIL

Senior



Cow Working

In this event, youth demonstrate their ability to sort, hold, and/or move cattle effectively as if working them on a ranch. Contest procedures may vary.

Clothing

Batwing chaps and chinks are allowed.

Equipment

Equipment should be used correctly and humanely. Use one hand on a curb and two hands on a snaffle. Ropes, if carried, should be attached to the saddle securely. Spurs and/or romal cannot be used in front of the cinch. Contestants may hold on to the horn.

Setting up the contest

Facilities

Cattle may be worked or sorted out of a pen or arenas of various sizes; however, cow working is best exhibited in a small to mid-size arena. If your arena is large, pattern design must consider this challenge. Non-competing “holders” may be necessary to keep the herd from scattering.

Cow work requires more than the competition area. You must have one or two pens in which to store, separate, or house extra herds depending on how you’re using the cattle. If you’re numbering or marking, you need a chute.

You must have enough experienced volunteers to open and shut gates, move and load cattle, and number or mark herds.

Cattle

Depending on the course or pattern used and the number of entries, you may need 12 to 24 cattle. Weanling to yearling calves (500 to 800 pounds) usually work well. It’s best not to use full-grown cows. They may work, but remember that they can take a horse down.

Cattle should not have horns (muley) or only very short horns (2 inches or less). Roping steers would not be the best choice.

Be sure you know who your provider is and that he or she is bringing safe animals.

You should not use the same herd for every exhibitor. Depending on how they behave, change

cattle after every 5 or 6 contestants. Be sure changes are at constant intervals.

The best cattle to use have previous horse experience. If they are inexperienced (“fresh”), consider “settling” them. This means getting them used to horses and riders before turning them over to the exhibitors. Ask experienced non-exhibitors to do this.

Basis of judging

Contestants are judged on how willingly and quietly their horse can work the cow(s). They should show proper position and understanding of the flight zone and point of balance, and maintain control of the cow.

Time will not be used as a criterion for judging. However, if members cannot complete the prescribed tasks or pattern in the allotted time, they may be marked down on completeness of pattern.

Time limits help provide a stopping point for inexperienced exhibitors and keep the show moving. However, we DO NOT want to promote pushing cattle in a rush or too hard. So, be sure time limits are reasonable for the expected pattern or maneuvers.

See sample patterns on pages 14 and 15 and the score sheet on page 16.

Possible tests

When designing cow working patterns, consider:

- Experience level of the contestants
- Facilities you have available
- Number of cattle you have

You can design patterns for contestants to work single cows or herds of cows. Following are three possible scenarios and two sample patterns, but these are simply examples. There is an endless variety of ways to demonstrate cow working.

A. 4-H'er enters a marked herd (6 to 8 cattle), pulls out 1 or 2 designated cattle and moves past or around a marker, holds them, and then returns them to the herd.

This scenario requires herd holders. However, it also allows for varying degrees of skill level by inviting less experienced participants to get any animal(s) rather than specifically marked ones, or by lengthening the time they have to complete their tasks, or by reducing the number of cattle.

B. Sort and move cattle from one pen to another.

Again, the herd would be marked, and participants would be asked to move specific cattle through an opening to a second pen or arena. Or, they may be asked to move them in order through a hole or gate. Depending on the size of the pen, this could also require a herd holder, and may also be adapted for various skill levels.

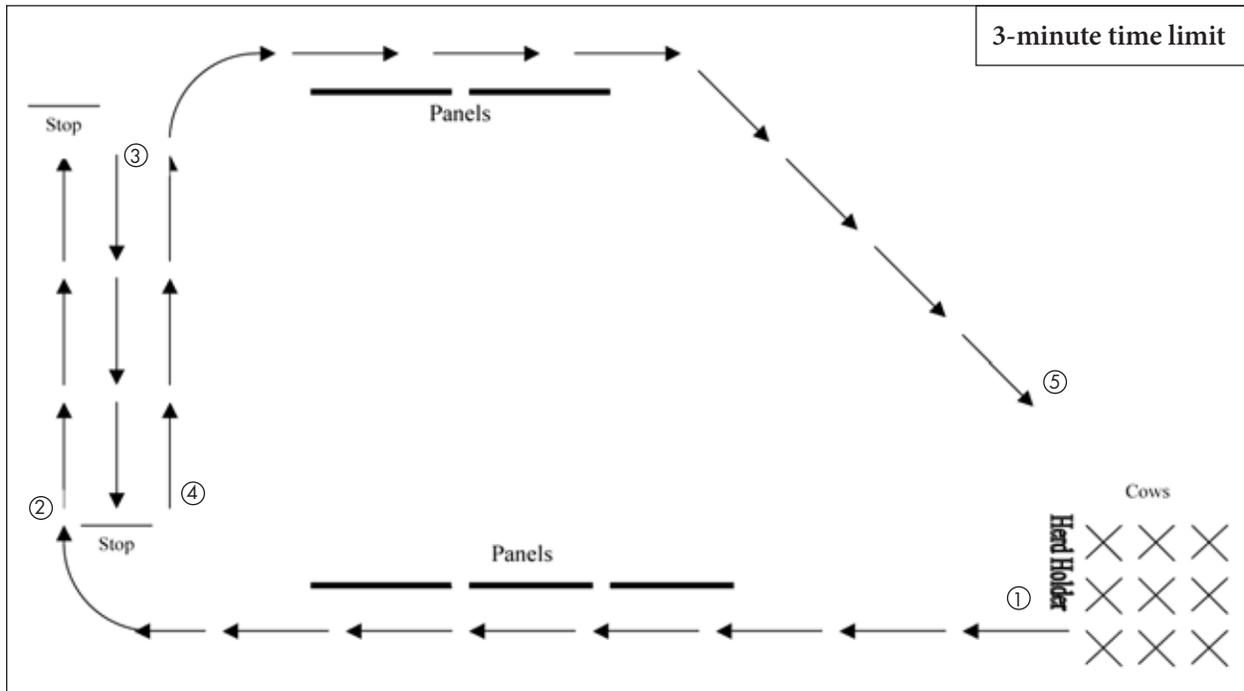
C. Move cattle out of a pen into a larger area where they are held in designated areas and moved between or around cones or other obstacles, following a prescribed pattern.

For this test, the 4-H'er takes all the cattle, so a herd holder would not be necessary.

Sample pattern

COW WORKING

Any age

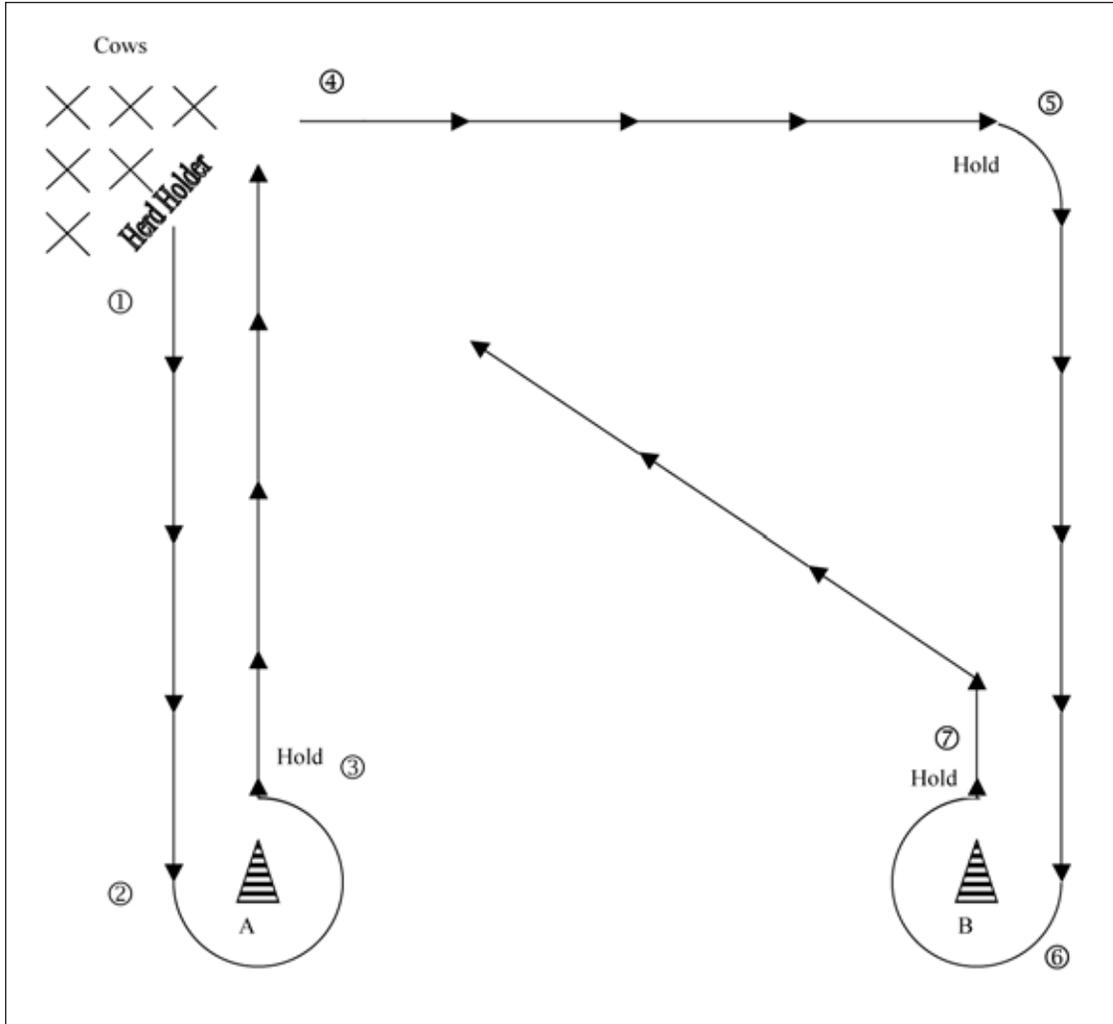


1. Pull your cow/calf out of the herd and move down alley
2. Push about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way down next wall and stop/hold (just a few seconds)
3. Push back towards where you came from and stop/hold (just a few seconds)
4. Push toward opposite side again and down alley
5. Release cow/calf to herd

Sample pattern

COW WORKING

Intermediate and Senior



1. Take first calf out
2. Go down and around cone A
3. Hold; and return calf to herd
4. Take second calf out
5. Go to corner and hold
6. Then go around cone B
7. Hold; and return calf to herd

Roping

Contestants need to start at the beginning level with roping a dummy. They can work their way up to roping a simulator and then an actual cow.

Clothing

Chinks or batwing chaps are allowed.

Required equipment

- Rope, fitted for the use and the individual
- Breakaway honda
- Wrapped saddle horn
- Saddle, double rigged, with front and back cinch
- Roping rein or single piece reins
- Breast collar

Basis of judging

As with other 4-H endeavors, roping's goals are long-term: to be safe and consistent with every throw. In "real-life" ranch roping, catching may be the only consideration. However, in 4-H Roping, catching is only a part of the score.

Whether roping a simulator from the ground or roping a calf from horseback, emphasis is placed on positioning of the horse/roper to the "calf," safe building, dallying, and throwing the loop. Of equal importance is treating the cattle humanely with as little disturbance as possible. Catching will be the last consideration.

Here is what judges will specifically look for in each section of the roping score sheet (see the score sheet on page 18):

Build a loop

- Member is comfortable handling rope
- Member can quickly and fluidly build a loop
- Loop is correctly sized
- Member is able to handle extra coils

Correct amount of spoke

- Member is knowledgeable about how to measure spoke
- Member can quickly and fluidly adjust coils and loop

Correct position

- Coils and loop are correctly held on approach
- Member approaches dummy or calf correctly

Swing and form

- Swing is relaxed and stable (no wobbling)
- Arm is in correct position
- Release and follow-through are timed correctly

Success of catch

- Cleanness of catch
- Slack is pulled correctly
- Proper use of dallying or breakaway honda

Possible tests:

- Rope a calf head or bale of hay/straw.
- Rope a simulator. This can be a pull dummy that participants can follow, rope, catch, and dally with. Contests will need an experienced person to "run" the dummy.
- Rope a cow. When roping cattle, the pen size depends on size of cattle, number of cattle in the pen, skill of participants, and available facilities. Cattle must **not** be able to escape. An arena approximately 75 x 60 feet may be a good beginning size.

Use breakaway hondas. Remember, when roping cattle, breakaway hondas are recommended for the exhibitor's safety and the benefit of cattle.

Identification and Skills Test

In this class, contestants demonstrate their knowledge of tack, equipment, and supplies that might be used on a ranch. They also show their skill at various ranch tasks.

The class consists of 10 items to identify, 10 questions to answer, and 2 tasks to perform.

- Items to identify must come from the equipment list in the *Oregon 4-H Ranch Horse Manual* (4-H 1313) or any pieces of tack described in the *4-H Horse Project* (PNW 587; Oregon series number 4-H 130).
- Questions may come from the *Oregon 4-H Ranch Horse Manual*, the *4-H Horse Project*, or

the *4-H Beef Resource Handbook* (Ohio State University Extension Service, 4-H 117R; Oregon series number 4-H 1410).

- Tasks could include such things as tying knots, branding, ear tagging, pulling a shoe, applying hobbles, or giving a shot. Many of these could be simulated.

Scoring

10 identification items, 3 points each	_____	30 points
10 questions, 3 points each	_____	30 points
2 Skill tasks, 20 points each	_____	40 points
TOTAL	_____	100 points

Roberta Lundeberg, Extension 4-H youth development state program coordinator; Dana Martin, Extension small farms agent, Deschutes County; Candi Bothum, Extension 4-H program coordinator, Deschutes County; and Amy Derby, 4-H youth development agent, Wheeler County; all of Oregon State University.

© 2010 Oregon State University. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties. Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials without discrimination based on age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Published October 2010.
