

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

ROADSTER RESPONSE

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

First off, let's start with the fact that the sport we participate in includes a partnership between animal and human. Either or both can have a bad day, an ailment, a wrong move. That is a risk we all take when participating or even spectating at a horse show.

With that said, everyone from trainers to exhibitors and show officials to spectators have the utmost responsibility to ensure the safest experience possible, particularly when you're talking about 1,000 pounds of speed and power that love to go fast. It's just as important for the miniature speedsters to be shown safely as drivers have been lost there as well.

There were two unfortunate accidents at Lexington Junior League on back-to-back nights and in the big picture all involved are safe and recovering from their respective injuries. Alicia Schuckert, co-trainer with Matt Schuckert at their Debonaire Stables, sustained the worst injury as she went in the ring to help her driver Denise Johnson, who had come out of the bike in the turn. As she was checking on Johnson, she looked up and saw the horse coming around at them and instinctively threw up her arms to keep the horse off of Johnson. She was hit, leaving a large cut down her arm.

"I just reacted," said Schuckert. "I was checking on Denise and looked up and just reacted on instinct."

In doing so, Schuckert kept a bad situation from getting worse.

Unbelievably, the next night in the same turn, with a different horse, Matt Schuckert came out of the road bike when he had an issue with his blood sugar. This incident resulted in his horse reversing and going the other way head on into Uncle Beav and Melissa Moore, breaking a shaft on her bike.

When the horse was caught and order was restored. Moore re-hooked her horse with Schuckert's bike, which

was fine, and finished the class to win it with Uncle Beav.

"Matt called me after the class and said, 'You aren't going to believe this,'" said Alicia Schuckert.

There has been much conversation since those two nights and we thought this would be a good time to Continue The Conversation and use this as a learning experience.

American Road Horse and Pony Association (ARHPA) President and former UPHA President James Nichols has fielded many questions and heard many comments on the Lexington incidents.

"It's unfortunate to have any incident, but especially with the great momentum this division has been experiencing," said Nichols. "I can tell you we are working on some proposed rules that will make it black and white for judges to be able to excuse an exhibitor if safety is an issue, just as a judge would a junior exhibitor horse that wasn't safe in an under saddle Saddlebred class. It's a tough call to make, but judges are going to have to start doing it IF there is an issue. Accidents happen but at all shows it's up to the officials to make sure their class is being run safely.

"The part of the rule everyone has been talking about is staying on the rail except to pass and there have been those that have countered with, 'What if my horse is faster than the others and I have to keep passing?' I have responded with,

"It's not a race, it's a show. And another old saying that is good to live by is, 'It's not how fast you go, it's how you go fast.' If your horse does have that kind of speed, that's good, but, you have to set your momentum to the speed of the class you're in and the footing in that ring."

"I'll take Lexington for instance. While it is a big open ring with plenty of space, it has square turns and the footing doesn't give like it does in 95% of the rings we show in. You have to know what your ring conditions are and respond accordingly."

These incidents are a rarity, but when they do occur it's scary for all involved. And they usually happen so quick. The next few seconds following an incident have a lot to do with the eventual outcome, but does anyone have on paper (or in the cloud) what are the basic rules to follow when a horse is loose, whether it be a driving or riding class?

What to do in case of an in-ring incident has also been a part of the discussion since those two reminders at Lexington hit us. It has been suggested that association leaders come up with suggested procedures for trainers, officials, and participants to follow in case of an in-ring incident. Right now, show announcers are put in the spot of directing the happenings when an incident does occur and some have suggested part of their repertoire when

RD104 Gait Requirements

1. The principal gait assignment for Roadsters is the trot. They shall be asked to trot at three different speeds; the jog-trot, the Road Gait, and then at full speed. At all speeds they should work in form; that is their chins set and their legs working beneath them, going collectedly. At the trot a horse whose action features folding of the knees, flexing of hocks, with straight true action of front legs and with hocks carried close together and with motions coordinated, is executing a balanced trot. Long sprawling action in front, dragging or trailing hind legs and straddle gaited action behind makes a balanced trot impossible.
2. Animation, brilliance, and competition ring presence should characterize the Roadster in working at a jog-trot or Road Gait.
3. When asked to drive on, the horse must show speed and go in form.
4. Labored way of going, pacey gaited or mixey gaited horses that pace and rack the turns or break and run on the turns shall be penalized.
5. Judges must emphasize that Roadsters are to be shown at three distinct speeds. Exhibitors executing gaits not called for must be penalized.

SUBCHAPTER RD-2 SHOWING PROCEDURES

RD105 General

1. Roadsters must enter the ring clockwise at a jog-trot then show at the Road Gait; turn counter clockwise at the jog-trot, show at the Road Gait and then trot at speed. Judges must emphasize that Roadsters are to be shown at three distinct speeds.
2. In Roadster horse and pony performance classes when the judge calls for the line up, exhibitors must continue in a counter-clockwise direction to bring their entries to the line up. Judge(s) shall penalize entries that do not comply.
3. It is very important to emphasize that Roadster horses must trot solidly down the straight away as well as around the turns. Horses **must** be shown on the rail at all times except when passing and should go to the far end of every corner without side reining; should be light mouthed, capable of being taken up at any time, and stand well when being judged in the center of the ring. **Any horse not in compliance, that is determined by the judge (s) to be a safety risk must be excused.**
4. Any driver, rider, horse or pony in the Roadster division exhibiting inappropriate or dangerous behavior or whose actions would in any way threaten the safety of any other exhibitor, their entries, or the safety of class officials will be ordered from the ring. (See GR1033.11 and .12)
5. Performance at all three gaits must be judged. In the event of a workout, entries chosen must be worked both ways of the ring, as in the original routine.

calling a roadster class into the ring and on the reverse is to remind exhibitors of their proper placement in the bike.

Adding to the chaos during an incident, it never helps when the audience keeps screaming or people enter the ring to “help” that have no business being out there. The screaming and arm waving are detriments. And then there’s always the instant applause just as a frightening event has been brought under control. The audience, which is mostly us, can play a big part in getting the situation safely under control in a timely manner if IT’S under control.

“People entering the ring need to know what they’re doing,” said Nichols. “We don’t need heroes or people in the way.”

Besides those professionals who were of great help in getting the situation safely under control at Lexington, there was reportedly one gentleman out there with his camera filming it all. A sign of the times for sure!

Melissa Moore, an avid roadster exhibitor who also serves on the roadster committee has long been a spokesperson for the safety of the division. “I’d also like to emphasize how important the jog is,” said Moore. “People hit the ring hell bent to make a great first pass but they’re supposed to enter at the jog. The entire purpose of the jog is to come in safely and get positioned and in a good spot to be able to show your speed gaits. No one should be passing at the jog. It’s also so important to pay attention to the ringmaster and cut the turn short when horses are still entering the ring. Too many people blow past them and they should be at the jog. It’s the same way on the reverse, the jog is to get safely turned around and get positioned. There should be three distinct gaits that direction.”

“Another area that’s so important is judges have to recognize the specs in the different divisions. Speed is the last spec

in a ladies class and next to last in the amateur division. It’s not even first in the open division.”

Jimmy Robertson, a longtime exhibitor of road horses and ponies also weighed in with another tidbit that needs to be reinforced to all drivers.

“Something that’s just as important as sliding to the inside of your seat is locking your outside leg,” said Robertson. “Even with a slower road pony you can come out of that bike but if you have your outside leg locked, you’re not going to slide. It fixes everything.

“I remember at a clinic Raymond Shively was giving about showing wagon horses he emphasized getting over and locking that leg.”

These words of wisdom have come from three professionals who have worn their share of silks and devoted many hours to committees for the betterment of the roadster division. They, like many other enthusiasts, want nothing but the best for the division that can give so many great thrills to exhibitors.

RD110 Roadster Horse to Bike

1. **OPEN OR OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP.** To be shown first at a jog-trot and road gait, then reversed and shown at a jog-trot, road gait, and then at speed. To be judged on performance, speed, quality, and manners.
2. **AMATEUR OR AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP.** To be shown first at a jog-trot and road gait, then reversed and shown at a jog-trot, road gait, and then at speed. To be judged on manners, performance, speed, and quality.
3. **AMATEUR/YOUTH NOVICE/LIMIT DRIVER:** To be shown first at a jog-trot and road gait, then reversed and show at a jog-trot, road gait and then at speed. To be judged, on manner, performance, speed and quality. Classes containing more than 10 entries will be split. See RD109.5
4. **LADIES OR LADIES CHAMPIONSHIP.** To be shown first at a jog-trot and road gait, then reversed and shown at a jog-trot, road gait, and then at speed. To be judged on manners, performance, quality, and speed. Suitable for and driven by a Lady.
5. **YOUTH AMATEUR.** Manners for the horse will be emphasized as a major requirement to ensure safety. Judges must immediately excuse any horse that acts as if he may be more horse than the driver can handle. Protective headgear is required. See GR801.4, .7 and .8. Age of the exhibitor will be 15-21. Classes containing more than 10 entries will be split. Headers will be allowed for these classes. To be shown first at a

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As the division continues to grow that means total newcomers and drivers with some experience with another breed will be in those tight turns with grizzly veterans, and it needs to be a great experience for all. With continuing education and following the practices of those guidelines, road horses and ponies will continue to be highlight classes of every horse show.

{Editor’s Note: Found in this article are some sections from the Roadster Division in the USEF Rule Book that pertain to this conversation.}