

The Top Ten “Epic Fails” (To Needlessly Lose Points)

In Horse Management at Rallies

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Why do we judge Horse Management at Rallies any way? We do this for different reasons. Judging HM at Rallies allows us to:

- 1) Provide a series of Standards and Expectations that are clearly defined and amplified in the HM Handbook and the United States Pony Clubs Standards of Proficiency to give rally participants standardized and consistent (as much as humanly possible) guidelines for horse care.
- 2) Provide a method of evaluating the scope and quality of the Adult Assistant Horse Management Judge Education program of the Regions.
- 3) Provide a manner of evaluating the scope and quality of the Pony Club Members’ Horse Management Education program of the individual Clubs within the Region.
- 4) Provide a quality curriculum (and method of evaluating its effectiveness) in Horse Care which separates USPC from every other youth equestrian organization, bar none.

*Remember, the object of HM Judging at rallies is **not** for the Assistant Horse Management Judges to find things wrong so that the Chief HMJ can assess penalty points. It **is** to use a rally as an opportunity to note how thoroughly competitors **do** take care of their mounts and equipment and how efficiently they use their time to do so. The more effective the HM Education Program is at the Club level, the easier it is for rally participants to function at rallies with few or no penalty points and to effectively and efficiently use the time parameters given to complete the work to be done. Teamwork is always emphasized!*

As you will see, most of these sound basic Horse and Stable Management practices that are taught and evaluated at rallies are discussed in the “USPC D Manual of Horsemanship (2012)”, the current edition of the “USPC Horse Management Handbook”, and the Rulebooks for the various USPC Competition Disciplines. They are not advanced level skills.

Here is a countdown of the ten most common ways teams and individuals needlessly lose points in HM Judging at Rallies.

- 10) Not knowing the rules or guidelines for Horse Management and/or the Competition at a rally.

Please read and review the HM Handbook and the Discipline Rule Book prior to the Rally. Competitors and Adult Volunteers should be familiar with the rules and regulations. Team Captains and Adult Volunteers should know how to use these books to reference what it is they may be unfamiliar with or unsure about before lodging an inquiry or a protest, or answering a question of a member. See the current edition of the "USPC Horse Management Handbook" and the Rulebook for the particular Discipline of the rally.

- 9) Missing items at the "First Set Up and Safety" and "Required Equipment Check" Inspections.

These are simple checklists which are explained in the HM Handbook and amplified in the back of the book. The Handbook explains how much of these items are needed and why they are needed. In addition to the HM Handbook, the USPC Manuals Volumes I (D Manual) and II (C1-C2 Manual) contain further information and explanations that will assist Clubs in preparing Horse Management lessons about Stable Equipment, Stall set up, Halter Fit, Feeding, and so on. See the current edition of the "USPC Horse Management Handbook" including Amplifications pages at the back of the book.

- 8) Items not labeled.

We label just about every piece of Rally Equipment and team members' personal items, except the salt blocks*! The reason is simple, so if it's lost, we can find the owner and return it. Personal equipment (brushes and so on) should have the owner's name - last name or first name and last initial. Team Equipment may have the Club name on it. Nearly all of the labeling should be done before arriving at the rally. Items which require a rally number (stall cards, feed charts, halters, and the like) may be done prior to the Set Up and Safety Check, which is the first check at a rally. See the current edition of the "USPC Horse Management Handbook" including Amplifications pages at the back of the book.

- 7) Tack Rooms and Barn Aisles left untidy.

It is easily understood that competitors at a rally can get very busy at times, especially when more than one team member is getting ready to ride or are out riding. However, keeping things in some sort of order is good management. Fold shirts and other barn clothing items and place them neatly on a tack box, or better yet, put them in a bag and store them out of sight until they are needed again. Do not leave food items out for the flies to nibble on while you are gone, and put all trash in the trash container, which should be emptied each night. Keep grooming items in the grooming kits and in their place in the tack room when not in use. USPC D Manual p. 270

Stable aisles should be kept raked clean of hay and bedding. Extra items, like grooming kits or individual brushes, are not to be left in the aisles. Stalls should be kept picked out, allowing for no more than a couple of piles of manure before picking them out again. USPC D Manual pp. 191-192

6) Losing points on infractions that were covered at HM Briefings.

At least one member of the Team (Team Captain) should take a pen or pencil and piece of paper with them to all Briefings to take notes. The CHMJ will cover items of importance for the rally or for the next day's competition. These notes should be posted on the notice board in the Tack Room where all can review. It is silly to lose points for forgetting to do something that all were given a "heads up" about at Briefings.

5) Leaving halters attached to lead ropes that are tied to the stall or trailer, dangling on (or close to) the ground.

This can be a particularly dangerous bad habit. It is not uncommon for riders to return to their trailer or stable area and stand the mount very close to the spot where they will untack and put on the halter. When a horse or pony stands so close to a halter that is still attached to the stall or trailer, it is very easy for the mount to put a foot inside the halter. This, of course, is probably going to result in the mount panicking and he -or the handler - could end up with a serious injury as a consequence. The simple solution is to remove the halter from the rope and hang it on the stall, or to untie the rope and hang both the halter and the rope at the front of the stall or on an appropriate place at the trailer, if for a one day rally.

4) Improper leading the mount in the stable or jogging procedure at Horse Inspection.

These two skills are taught in the USPC D Manual, proper leading on pp. 150-153, and appropriate jogging procedure on pp. 153-155. They are to be used for the safety of both the handler and the mount. It is when we become careless that accidents are more likely to happen.

3) Not removing sweat (dried or otherwise) and dirt from the mount.

Again, the USPC D Manual provides a guide for appropriate grooming of the mount on pp. 182-187 and pp. 307-309. Attention to certain parts of grooming, such as removing dirt and sweat from areas where tack will touch and between the hind legs is important to teach a rider at any level because it addresses the comfort and overall well being of the mount.

2) Stall doors, Tack Room doors, Trailer doors left open when unattended or unoccupied.

Stall doors are to be closed and latched when mounts are out of the stall. This is so that anyone passing by knows that the horse is under the supervision of a person and has not let himself out for an impromptu self guided tour of the rally facility! Additionally, swinging stall doors may be blown by a breeze and hit your horse when he isn't expecting it. This can cause a spook or injury to the mount and/or the handler! HM Handbook p. 20.

Tack Rooms (and trailer doors) are also to be closed and latched when there are no team members in the area. This is to keep any possible wandering loose horses, which happens from time to time, from entering and wreaking havoc on a team's tack, equipment, and possibly their mounts' feed.

1) Improper tying of mount.

Proper tying, and also where to and where NOT to tie the mount is of critical importance! Again, the D Manual pp. 155-159, teaches the importance of and how to tie a quick release knot, how to use a “safety string”, or to use a tie with a special break away snap. It also reminds us that a safe object to tie to is a vertical post set solidly in the ground. We are NEVER to tie to a horizontal board, such as on a fence or stall wall, and never tie to the metal bars or stall grates of a stall! A mount, especially if spooked or frightened, can pull with enough force to yank the bars or metal panel off the wall. Imagine how much serious injury he could sustain if he were to run panicked through the rally grounds with heavy sharp metal banging against his body and legs! Best practices also tell us to use a quick release knot perhaps with a loop of baling twine (not packaging twine, it is too thin and too easily broken), or some kind of a break-away snap, such as a special trailer tie or cross tie. Additionally, when tying to horse trailers, use a “safety string” and ALWAYS tie to a trailer that is properly hitched to the towing vehicle!

These lightheartedly named “Top Ten HM Epic Fails” are no secrets and I would encourage all Clubs to use this as a plan for a Club level Horse Management lesson for members. Use the described scenarios to set up hands on application of the principles to teach Ds, perhaps to be conducted by C level members. These could be done one at a time for a shorter overall lesson with a more thorough exploration of the “hows and whys” of each topic.