

# SMOKY MOUNTAIN TRAIL CHALLENGE

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The Smoky Mountain Challenge is a judged event designed to show the willingness, training, and athletic ability of a trail horse in the confines of the arena. The trail challenge tests the horse's ability to cope with situations encountered while being ridden through a pattern of obstacles generally found while riding in the Great Smoky Mountains. The horse/rider or horse/handler team is judged on the correctness, efficiency and accuracy with which the obstacles are negotiated, and the attitude and mannerisms exhibited by the horse. Speed is not important. Judging emphasis is on identifying the well broke, responsive and well-mannered horse which can correctly navigate and perform on the course.

When riding in the Smokies, you want to take in the scenic views and breath-taking vistas while safely guiding and navigating the many obstacles found on the trail. An equine will receive credit for showing attentiveness to negotiating the obstacles and/or path. A horse will be rewarded with a higher maneuver score for performing gaits correctly with quality of movement and an alert attitude. While on the line of travel between obstacles, the horse shall be balanced, carrying his head in a relaxed, NATURAL position. For example, stock type breeds should carry the head in a relaxed, natural position, with the poll level with of slightly above the withers. Gaited breeds carry the head and neck above the withers. An equine should approach each obstacle in a consistent forward motion, acknowledge the obstacle and remain calm and confident with a willing attitude.

## **QUALIFICATIONS:**

The Smoky Mountain Trail Challenge is open to ALL equine breeds (horses, mules and donkeys) that have WON a structured, sanctioned trail competition. The format and design of this competition follows the guidelines, rules and purpose outlined below. Trail groups or organizations that sponsor trail competitions, regardless of affiliation, are encouraged to nominate riders that have successfully competed in organized competitions. Wild-card applications will be accepted from riders that have not competed in trail competitions but are competent horseman and woman with a high probability of successfully completing the course within the time constraint. Additional wild card applications may be taken. A maximum of 75 horses will be accepted.

## **CLASS LEVELS:**

Level 1-Tenderfoot. Introductory course limited to leadline and in-hand divisions. The course will be performed at the walk only.

Level 2 –Pathfinder. Course layout and obstacles for entry level horses and/or riders/handlers. This level is reserved for individuals with limited riding and showing experience, who wish to learn more about showing in Mountain Trail Challenges. The rider and horse are expected to be familiar with one another, exhibit trust when negotiating obstacles and are conditioned to complete the trail course. Will include some jog, trot, running walk, gait, or intermediate gait up to and between obstacles, forward ground covering is encouraged. Obstacles require a degree of

training and handling, knowledge of the maneuvers or techniques needed to complete the obstacle. Helmets are recommended for riders. The course will be at the flat-footed walk, trot or running walk.

**Level 3-Trail Boss.** More intricate course layout and obstacles for designed to for horses and riders ready to hit the trail. This is considered a partnership where horse and rider have well established trust, can negotiate difficult obstacles, and are conditioned to travel a longer course. Obstacles require a higher degree of training and handling, knowledge of the maneuvers or techniques needed to complete the obstacle. The rider and horse are expected to be familiar with one another, exhibit trust when negotiating obstacles and are conditioned to complete the trail course. Will include some jog, trot, running walk, gait, lope/canter or intermediate gait up to and between obstacles, forward ground covering is encouraged; 180, 270 or 360 degree turns on certain obstacles. Open division will include working some obstacles at the lope/canter or gait (Level 3 course). Helmets are recommended for riders.

### **CLASS DIVISIONS:**

Lead Line: Lead-line is defined as anybody requiring a lead line from an adult by their side (e.g., a child under 10 and/or equestrian with disabilities). Riders are not eligible to compete in other divisions.

In-Hand: In-hand class is for horses born after 2020. Horses may be started under saddle but have less than 30 days of riding and/or have not been shown in a riding class. Horses may only show in the In-hand division only.

Novice Horse: Novice horse division is for horses three to five years old (born between 2017-2019). Horse must be able to walk, trot, lope/canter or gait in an arena setting. Horses may be ridden in a snaffle bit with either one or two hands. Horses in this class may only enter the Pathfinder classes. Youth, Amateur and Open riders may compete in this class. This division competes on Level 2 courses.

Youth Division: Youth is defined as participants under 18 years old based on age as of January 1st; minimum age to compete will be 8 years old. All youth must wear helmets while showing in riding classes. A youth cannot exhibit a stallion. This division competes on Level 2-3 courses.

Amateur Division: Amateur is defined as participants 18 and older. An exhibitor/competitor who has not received remuneration for training, instructions, giving lessons, judging or any other equine activity where they received payment for expertise in any riding or showing equine field in the past 5 years. This division competes on Level 2-3 courses.

Open Division: Open division is open to Level 3-Trail Boss exhibitors including Trainers and Equine Professionals. This division competes in Level 3 courses which may include obstacles worked at the canter/lope or gait.

### **CLASS TYPES:**

In-Hand: This is defined as a class where the rider leads the horse from the ground (see "Leading").

Riding: Riders are mounted, and horses are ridden across the obstacles.

A horse and rider combination may only show in one level. An exhibitor may ride a different horse in another level if he or she chooses. A rider may show as many horses as they chose with a maximum of two horses per level. All In-hand Tenderfoot horses must be either yearlings or two-year-old may not compete in any ridden class. In-Hand Pathfinder is for horses older than 2 years of age and intended for exhibitors that no longer ride over obstacles. **Horses entered in an In-Hand class will be ineligible to enter any other trail division/class.** Likewise, horses **RIDDEN** in a trail class will not be allowed to enter an in-hand class. Youth and Amateur exhibitors showing in Trail Boss class may show at the Trail Boss in the Open division. Novice Horse class is an Open Division only.

**Table 1:** Shows which levels can show in which division for ridden competitions. In-hand will be for yearlings and two-year-old horses and for Pathfinder Division.

Divisions	Levels			
	Tenderfoot	Pathfinder	Trail Boss	Novice Horse
<b>Leadline</b> (ridden only)	<b>X</b>			
<b>In-Hand</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
<b>Youth</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>Amateur</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>Open</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

**COMPETITION SCHEDULE:**

Each class will be held on Friday and Saturday (Go rounds 1 and 2, respectively). Prizes will be award to the top 3 in each class in each go-round. The Finals will be held Sunday. To qualify for the finals, exhibitors must compete in both go rounds. Top 5 contestants, based on the cumulative score from both go-rounds, will qualify for the Short Go/Finals. Scores from the previous two Go-Rounds do not carry over. Finals will be scored as outlined for rounds 1 and 2. In case of a tie in the Finals, the cumulative score from rounds one and two will serve as the tie breaker.

In-Hand classes will be held prior to the mounted classes.

Paid Practice Round: Thursday, February 22, 2024

Go Round 1: Friday February 23, 2024

Go Round 2: Saturday February 24, 2024

Short Go/Finals: Sunday February 25, 2024

**WORKING ORDER/ORDER of GO**

Working orders will be randomly drawn the day before. There will be an order of go posted for ALL classes. You must be ready when you are called. It is not the responsibility of the Southern

Equine Expo staff to find you. If you are not ready when your number is called, you will miss the opportunity to show in that class. If you miss your class, you forfeit all fees.

In-hand classes will precede the mounted classes.

### **AWARDS:**

Championship buckles will be awarded to high point Youth, Amateur, and Open exhibitors in each level. Payback will be given according to the National Snaffle Bit Association schedule. Champions must compete in both go rounds of the Trail Challenge.

### **ATTIRE**

The Smoky Mountain Trail Challenge is part of the Southern Equine Expo. People from different backgrounds will be in the audience watching parts of the competition. Exhibitors are representing the Southern Equine Expo to the public. Exhibitors wearing inappropriate attire will be asked to change or cover up. Failure to do so will result in disqualification and forfeit of fees. Inappropriate attire includes, but not limited to, tank tops/tee shirts, clothing with offensive language or symbols. Show attire is not required but attire should be presentable, clean, and free from torn or frayed items. Long-sleeved shirts with a collar are required. Western tack warrants western attire and English tack warrants English attire. Boots with a closed toe and heel are required. Peak Equine Productions, LLC. DBA Southern Equine Expo and the FACILITY strongly advise ALL RIDER/PARTICIPANTS to wear ASTM-approved helmets. Youth are required to wear ASTM-approved helmets.

### **EQUIPMENT**

While reruns are determined by the Judge, reruns may be allowed in instances of trail equipment failure. When exhibitor equipment failure causes a delay or a run to be discontinued, the judge may disqualify the entry.

In any approved class, the judge shall have the authority to require the removal or alteration of any piece of equipment or accoutrement which is unsafe, or in his/her opinion, would tend to give a horse an unfair advantage or which he/she believes to be inhumane.

Halters and lead ropes will be rope, leather, or synthetic. Lead ropes shall be sufficient length to safely maneuver through the obstacles, 12' – 14' is recommended. Chains and correction halters that tighten are not allowed,

Halters, cavessons, bosals, bosalitas, or nosebands are allowed to be worn under a bridle. They must allow for two fingers to fit between the equipment and the horse's jaw.

A horse may be ridden bitless or bridleless with no penalty. Halters, mechanical hackamores, or other styles of bitless headstalls that apply compressive pressure are not allowed.

In reference to mouthpieces, nothing may protrude below the mouthpiece (bar). Solid and broken mouthpieces must be between 5/16" to 3/4" (8 mm to 20 mm) in diameter, measured 1" (25 mm) from the cheek and may have a port no higher than 1 1/2" (40 mm). They may be inlaid; synthetic wrapped, including rubber or plastic or incased, but must be smooth. On broken mouthpieces only, connecting rings of 1 1/4" (32 mm) or less in diameter or connecting flat bar of 3/8" to 3/4" (10 mm to 20 mm) measured top to bottom with a maximum length of 2" (50 mm), which lie flat in the horse's mouth, are acceptable.

Snaffle bit rings may be no larger than 4" (100 mm) in diameter. Any bit having a fixed rein requires use of a curb chain. Smooth round, oval or egg-shaped, slow twist, corkscrew, single twisted wire, double twisted wire mouthpieces and straight bar or solid mouthpieces are allowed.

Curb straps may be leather, synthetic, or smooth flat chain.

Examples of English Bits English style snaffle bits may be used for any discipline for a Junior Horse. English style bits may not be used for any discipline other than English for Senior Horse.

No rider will be allowed to ride double or bareback. No horse may be shown twice in the same class. Gag bits, of any style, are not allowed. Standing and running martingales are not allowed. Draw reins are not allowed. Tie-downs are not allowed.

Splint boots are recommended and allowed in the Trail Challenge.

### **SCORING SMOKY MOUNTAIN TRAIL**

The standard of excellence in a mountain trail competition is having the horse display a bright expression and focus. It's satisfying to the rider and to the judges to watch a horse pick its way through a tough rock obstacle with boldness and confidence. Recognizing this is essential to accurate and fair judging.

Scoring is based on the partnership's ability to navigate the course. It is recognized that each breed may have a different headset, speed of forward motion or gait. However, all competitors must move in a safe manner with a willing attitude. The entry, navigating through, and the exit each obstacle will be evaluated.

The rider has the option of eliminating an obstacle and taking a score of "0" for the missed obstacle and will not be eligible to place above horses attempting each obstacle. A judge may ask a horse to pass on an obstacle after three refusals or for safety concerns.

#### *Trail Credits:*

Credit is given to horses negotiating the obstacles with style and acknowledges the obstacle and maintains forward motion in an alert and willing manners. Degree of difficulty will be rewarded providing correctness is not sacrificed.

Equines should receive credit for showing attentiveness to obstacles and capability of navigating their way through the course when the obstacles warrant it, and willingly respond to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles.

Quality of movement and cadence should be part of the maneuver score for the obstacle.

#### **Scoring Obstacles:**

Obstacles will be scored for 0-10 with 7 being correct or average.

Each maneuver will receive a score which include penalties. Horses enter the obstacle with a score of 7 and credits or minuses will be added to the average score. Each obstacle will be scored on the following basis:

Excellent	=10
Very Good	=9

Good	=8
Average	=7
Below Average	=6
Poor	=5
Very poor	=4
Major Penalties	=1-4

Judges may use ½ points increments to help avoid ties. Penalties will be subtracted from the score. The lowest a horse can score on an obstacle which it completes is 1. Horses that omit an obstacle or does not attempt an obstacle due to 3 refusals will receive a 0 score for that obstacle but is eligible to place. However, exhibitors that avoid an obstacle must not place above any horse that attempts each obstacle.

*Minor Deductions* (minus ½ to 1 point per occurrence)

- -1/2 Point – tick, slight change of pace
- -1 point – Horse does not enter an obstacle straight one-horse length, willing and/or breaks forward motion with a pause longer than 3 seconds. (“stop” is a break of forward motion longer than 3 seconds on entry only), Does not enter the obstacle centered, hops in or out (a hop is two front feet walk in or out and then lightly jumps out), each refusal, 1 point for each delayed stride or gait when asked.
- -1– Horse and rider lose forward motion, horse steps on or moves an obstacle, skipping space, stepping on an obstacle or failing to step into required space,
- 1 step on dismount or ground-tie (except shifting to balance), Deviates from center of obstacle and or course pattern.
- 1/2 – 1/16 to 1/8 of center from straight, tics upon exiting the obstacle
- -1 to 1 ½ point – Hurries or rushes, not straight one-horse length, not centered
- -1 Break of gait at the walk or jog for two strides or less
- -2 riding with two hands on a curb or leverage bit per occurrence.

*Major Deductions:*

3 Point Deductions:

- Wrong lead or break of gait at lope
- Break of gait at the walk or trot for more than 2 strides
- Two or three steps on mount or dismount on ground tie.
- Stepping out of the confines of an obstacle with 1 foot
- Major disturbing an obstacle

5 Point Deductions:

- Spurring in front of the cinch
- Blatant disobedience
- Use of free hand to instill fear
- Stepping outside the confines of, jumping off or out of obstacle with more than one foot, once the foot has entered obstacle or falls off obstacle
- Dropping slicker or object, letting go of gate
- Cumulative refusal,
- Balk or evade obstacle

- Four more steps on dismount or ground-tie,
- Holding onto saddle, except to mount and dismount and for large step downs or large drops or large step ups or jump ups,

After three refusals the horse and rider must move on; this will result in a 0 for the obstacle

Off pattern Breaking pattern; leaving working area before pattern is complete, 3<sup>rd</sup> refusal; repeated blatant disobedience, and failure to dally and remain dallied. Exhibitors cannot place above others who completed the pattern correctly

*Disqualifications (DQ):* lameness, abuse, illegal equipment, disrespect or misconduct, improper attire, fall of horse and rider Fall of horse or ride, or abuse or aggressive schooling. Entries that do not attempt to complete the course or volunteers to quit the course. This does not include omitted obstacles.

Faults scored according to severity which occur on the line of travel between obstacles:

- Head carried too high.
- Head carried too low and/or clearly behind the vertical excessively and consistently while the horse is in motion., or otherwise showing the appearance of intimidation, opening mouth excessively.

Judge must place the class in its entirety. The judge should avoid ties. One-half points are permissible. Specific maneuvers will be designated by the judge to be tie breakers in a class. The tie breaker maneuver will be determined prior to the class and will be noted on the score sheets. Every horse in the class is awarded one point for each horse they beat, plus one point. (Example: In a ten horse, the first-place horse gets ten points and the tenth-place horse gets 1 point). Disqualified horses will count as entries but will not receive points.

**Horsemanship Score:** The horsemanship score is reflective of the rider's ability, preparation and presentation. An overall horsemanship score ranging from 0 to +5 is reflective from the time the rider enters the arena until exiting the working area. The rider receiving the maximum horsemanship score will have that WOW factor which is representative of a smooth pattern, efficient and subtle cues, clean-working equipment and attire, good turnout of horse, and leaves the judge positive impression on the judge.

#### **TIME LIMIT:**

Riders will have a maximum of **Five (5) minutes** to complete the course. Show management reserves the right to shorten or lengthen the time limit depending on the degree of difficulty and scope of the course.

#### **OBSTACLES:**

*Obstacles may include any of the following:*

- Cross Buck For expos the cross buck can be made by using 4 cavaletti's and ten, 10' jump poles.
- Teeter Totter (14' long x 42" wide)
- Balance Beam (14' long x 18" wide x 12" high)

- Turn Around Box (42" x 42" x 12" high)
- Raised Logs placed on 2 parallel logs or cavaletti's to elevate no more than 16" off the ground.
- Rock Obstacle
- Maze
- Logs
- Small Bridge (3' x 12')
- Raised Back Through
- Back Through Not Raised 30" wide, pattern may vary
- Water Box (4' wide x 8' long x 6" tall)
- Cake Box
- Side Pass Ladder
- Octagon Box
- Pinwheel
- Trench
- High Balance Beam 10' to 14' long X 18" wide X 12" to 16" high
- Stair steps
- Switchback
- Dismount and Mount on Rock, Shown in as part of water obstacle
- Ground Tie or Hobble
- Rolling Bridge
- "Steer head" roping
- Drag, hide or log
- Trot poles, minimum 36-inch spacing

## **OBSTACLE GUIDELINES**

No penalty is given for a hesitation on entry to acknowledge the obstacle, not to exceed 3-seconds. Reins may be adjusted in a smooth manner as needed to maneuver through an obstacle.

Leading: Horse is to follow willingly, not lagging or crowding. Horse must be led by a lead rope or unclipped reins.

Mounting: A mounting block will be provided and may be used with no penalty. Rider must always check cinch before mounting; stirrup does not need to be laid over the saddle. Horse is to stand quietly and not move out when mounted. A smooth mount does not unbalance the horse.

Dismounting: A mounting block will be provided and may be used with no penalty. Horse is to stand quietly and not move off. Style of dismount by the rider is a smooth dismount that does not unbalance the horse. Reins should remain in hand.

Hoof Check: Horse is to stand quietly.

Water Crossing: The Horse should walk through the water quietly in a continued forward movement. Break of gait -1 for drinking if they stop.



Uphill: Rider should be positioned appropriately to maintain the center of balance. Rider and horse are to negotiate slope in a safe manner. Rider may use a hand to support himself on the mane or saddle.

Downhill: Rider should be positioned appropriately to maintain center of balance. Rider and horse are to negotiate a slope in a safe manner. Rider may use a hand to support himself on the mane or saddle.

Step over: Step over without striking the obstacle. Horses are not penalized for hopping over very tall obstacles as long as the action is done in a calm manner. If a rider declares to the judge that it is safer for them to jump the obstacle, no penalty will be given. However, when choosing to jump, it needs to be done in a safe manner for both horse and rider.

Bridge: The Horse should step up, walk across, and step off quietly.

Gate: Trail Challenge Management will decide whether gate should be a push/pull or left/right hand gate.

Drag: Rider may hold rope or dally once. There is to be no tying hard and fast. At no time should the rider or horse get tangled in the rope. The horse should stand quietly during preparation and then pull or drag in control.

Stationary Obstacles: These are such things as slickers, balloons, map, trash, etc. Horse may acknowledge obstacles, and rider is to maintain control.

#### **RELEASE OF LIABILITY:**

Peak Equine Productions, LLC., DBA Southern Equine Expo, its sponsors, and facility will not be responsible for any accident that may occur to, or be caused by any horse participating in any competition, clinic or event, or for any article of any kind of nature that may be lost or destroyed or in any way damaged. Peak Equine Productions will not be responsible for any financial arrangements not completed between event management, exhibitors, owners or judges.

#### **REFERENCES:**

- 2017 International Mountain Trail Challenge Association Official Handbook Of Rules And Regulations. ([www.imtca.org/imtca-handbook](http://www.imtca.org/imtca-handbook)) Silver Creek, WA
- 2018 AQHA Official Handbook of Rules and Regulations. American Quarter Horse Association, Amarillo, TX
- 2018 Official Handbook, American Stock Horse Association. [www.americanstockhorse.org](http://www.americanstockhorse.org)
- Mountain Trail Judges Guidelines version 1.2, Oregon Horse Center, Eugene, OR