

Horse of the Americas Halter Class Judging Criteria



The Horse of the Americas is descended from horses brought to the New World by the Spanish during their colonization of the Americas. As such, these horses are an ancient breed which does not conform to many of the standards used later by registries preserving western horse breeds based on short sprinter-type conformation. Bred for beauty and endurance, the Colonial Spanish Horse quickly adapted to the challenging environments of the American frontier; the heat of the Southwest, the wetlands of the Southeast and the near arctic winters of the High Plains and Northwest. These radically different climatic conditions forged different physical adaptations that must be taken into consideration in the judging of Colonial Spanish Horses, a much more physically variable breed than the more homozygous modern western horse breeds.

There are basically three physical types of Colonial Spanish Horse: **1) the light or Southwestern type, 2) the median or Andalusian type and 3) the heavy or Northern type.** However, even though these three types (and the combinations resulting from crossing these types) may appear quite different from one another, they have many physical characteristics in common. A physical description of the Colonial Spanish Horse, including similarities and differences in the types follows:

HEAD: Three possible head profiles: concave, straight and convex. In general, the Northerns have a broader jaw and blunter muzzle than the Southwesterns. The head of the Southwestern type is often narrow and more triangular shaped when viewed from the front.

EARS: The ear are medium to short, alert, often deeply hooked, also called "fox ears". Many have darker coat color on the rims of the ears than the horse's base coat ("rimmed"). The inner ear hair has natural protection in the form of thick, wooly hair, usually lighter in color than the base coat. Southwesterns have much less inner ear hair than Northerns. Neither inner or outer ear hair is trimmed in the Colonial Spanish Horse. However, horses with ears trimmed for other equine events which may require it are not to be penalized.

EYES: Colonial Spanish Horses include horses with the most unique eye colorations of any breed in the

world. Their eyes may be dark, tan, golden, grey, hazel, green, navy, blue and parti-colored, any of which may also be sclera. Some of the purest have blue or "glass" eyes or parti-colored eyes; these unique colors are not penalized at halter or in judged performance classes. The Colonial Spanish Horse has a medium to large, wide-set eye with a prominent arch. The eye is alert; the horse shows interest in all activity around it. Some have heavy bone protruding over the eyes.

MUZZLE: The muzzle is refined and small, they mouth shallow, and the lips firm. Many wear a 4 " wide bit. Some have "moustaches". Many of the most primitively marked will show a lighter muzzle or "mealy nose". Parrot mouth is rarely seen in the Colonial Spanish Horse but since it may cause grazing problems and inefficient chewing and is highly inheritable, such animals should be seriously penalized at halter, especially if they are breeding stock. The nostril is crescent-shaped and will close tightly. An unusual note is that the Colonial Spanish Horse produces a strange, rattling type of snort when the animal confronts a questionable situation or object. This sound has been Referred to as having "rollers in the nose" and is unlike the snort of most other types of horses. This sound is part of the horse's herd behavior and is used to alert other herd members to possible danger. Because the Spanish Mustang is a more natural breed than the "man-made" ones, its herd behaviors, such as this one, are often more pronounced.

NECK: The neck is strong and moderate in length, about the same length as from the withers to the croup, and not heavily muscled. The throatlatch is deep with a strong, gracefully curved bottom line. The hollow between the jaws is very well defined. The Northern type will carry more crest than the Southwestern with the Andalusian type generally having the most graceful necks of the three physiological types. All show shorter and more powerful necks in proportion to the rest of their body than those modern breeds which are of Thoroughbred descent. While excessive crest is not desired, a strong crest is often noted and not to be penalized.

The forelock and mane are not to be trimmed, pulled or clipped in any way unless the exhibitor is forced to trim for other equine events which may require it (such as open shows, or drill team competitions). The mane and tail may be very long and is often quite dense, especially in the Andalusian and Northern types. A double mane or a mane parting to fall on alternate sides is common, and exhibitors are not required to "train" a mane to fall on one side of the neck for showing at halter. Some Colonial Spanish Horses have a scanty mane and tail, especially some appaloosas and duns. Although the long mane is generally considered very desirable in the Colonial Spanish Horse, the thin mane and "rat tail" of these horses are not to be penalized at halter.

SHOULDER: The shoulder is long, sloping and laid back with smooth muscling. The forward point of the shoulder is prominent. The Colonial Spanish Horse is often heavier on the forequarters than the hindquarters.

CHEST: The chest of the Colonial Spanish Horse is medium to narrow. The Southwestern is narrower than the other types, but in all types, there is a well-defined inverted "V" between the front legs. The chest is well muscled, but not bulgy, and never broad and flat.

BARREL: The barrel is slightly tapering. The Colonial Spanish Horse has well-sprung ribs; in all types, when looking at the horse from the front, the barrel should be plainly visible on both sides. The heart girth is deep (as opposed to wide) with good heart and lung space in front of a full abdomen. The Colonial Spanish Horse should be short-coupled. The underline is longer than the top line with a more rounded underline on the Andalusian and Northern types. The flank space behind the ribs is short.

LEGS: The legs are strong and of medium bone with long, smooth muscling which carries down well into the knees and hocks. They are uniquely flexible, with "stretchy" but strong tendons which are well defined from the bone. The joints also allow great flexibility of motion and are rather large. The length of the cannon is short to medium with round and dense bone, but never heavy in appearance.

An outward rotation of the fetlock joint may be seen similar to, but less obvious than the "termino" of the Paso and Peruvian. This is seen most often at the trot or in the gait of the gaited variety. Called "winging" or "padding" in breeds in which it is undesirable, such action is not a fault in the Colonial Spanish Horse unless the horse interferes and/ or clips. This action adds to the smoothness of the gait.

The hind legs should be strong with hocks well defined, but without excessive flesh. Tendons and suspensory ligaments are well defined. The rear legs may also be set slightly under the body, allowing the forward reach of the hind stride to land just beneath the rider's stirrup. The hind legs are straight to slightly turned out. Judge should not place straight legs over serviceably sound legs which do not cause interference. Any leg deviation which causes interference is to be heavily penalized.

The pasterns are of medium length and sloping under a strong fetlock. In most Colonial Spanish Horses, the hind pasterns may be somewhat shorter and straighter than the front, but all are long and angular enough to give a springy, smooth ride. The angle should be approximately the same as the shoulder and hoof wall.

HOOF: The hooves are small, but adequate for the horse's size and body weight. Most wear "00" or "0" shoes. Most have hooves which are more egg-shaped than round with a distinct point at the toe, especially on the hind feet. The hoof is hard and dense. Many horses never require shoeing. The circumference is smaller at the coronary band than at the ground surface. Hoof color may be black, grey, white, or striped (laminated). Hoof black or hoof polish is not required or encouraged.

BACK: Well-defined, withers are not too pronounced but blend nicely into the neck and back. The back is short, strong and well-proportioned, stout but never flat.

HINDQUARTERS: The croup is short and sloping with a slightly low tail set; the hips are well-rounded. The Southwesterns are narrower between the hips than the Andalusian or Northern types, but none have bulgy, excessively heavy hip muscling or much width between the hip bones. The tail is set medium low to low. The tail is usually long and may be very long and heavy.

GAIT: The heritage of the Colonial Spanish Horse includes virtually all so-called "saddle gaits" including varieties of the pace and broken pace, the trot and the broken trot, the running walk, and the fox trot. Since most gaited Colonial Spanish Horses have some of the outward rotation of the fetlock joint called "termino", they are often referred to as having "paso gaits", similar to, but not as animated as, the gaits of the Peruvian Paso and Paso Fino. Colonial Spanish Horses do not show excessive termino, however; it is certainly not as pronounced as in Pasos. All gaits are acceptable in this breed, and no particular gait is preferred over another so long as the horse does not interfere and shows good endurance and ground-covering ability. The gaits of the Colonial Spanish Horse are not choppy, show good smoothness, and are comfortable for the rider, even in those horses which are not gaited, performing only the walk, trot, and canter.

Ground-covering ability is an important characteristic of the Colonial Spanish Horse, and extreme collection is not desired in the halter class. The exhibitor should move out to show the horses' ability to cover ground and smoothness of gait.

TEMPERAMENT: The Colonial Spanish Horse is bold, yet calm, alert, curious, proud, and trainable. This horse is expected to perform with fire, but to perform without foolishness.

GENERAL COMMENTS: Emphasis in judging the Colonial Spanish Horse as halter should be first on soundness and stamina, then on ground-covering ability. The judge should place the horses as he or she believes the animals would perform on a full day's ride over challenging terrain--and then consider that horse's potential readiness to do the same day after day. Modern breed conformation criteria which may potentially cause soundness problems in long distance riding such as feet too small for the horse's body weight, heavy, bunchy muscling or excessive fat should be penalized. Endurance qualities are more important to the Colonial Spanish Horse than sprinting ability, but many are reasonably fast over short distances and still have good stamina.

Note: Colonial Spanish Horse characteristics in this criteria were taken primarily from descriptions produced by **the now-defunct Spanish Mustang Coalition, and from sources of the Spanish Mustang Registry, the American Indian Horse Registry, the Southwest Spanish Mustang Association, the Kiger Mustang Association, the Spanish Barb Breeders Association** and other classic historic literature describing the Colonial Spanish Horse.