Refined Horse Versatility Competition Rules

Introduction

The United States Refined Horsemanship Association (USRHA) promotes rewarding, safe and lasting partnerships with horses through Refined Horse Versatility (RHV) competitions. These shows are designed to create a horse that is the Ultimate Partner...refined and versatile. This is achieved through working a horse in refinement*, with correct biomechanics, to promote physical longevity and by providing meaningful opportunities, which build partnership. In this manner, the horse will become a willing partner keen to satisfy the desires of the rider.

Refined Horse Versatility Foundation and Recognized competitions will be offered.

- **Foundation shows** are entry level local events providing a venue for show organizers, judges and competitors (riders/handlers) to become familiar with Refined Horse Versatility (RHV) competition. At these shows, competitors may cross enter between divisions and sections (e.g., Sport Horse Working Hunter and Stock Horse Western.) This allows competitors to explore different paths in order to determine athletic aptitude.

- **Recognized shows** are national level events featuring a national achievement point system and awards.

*Refinement: performance of horse and rider embodying lightness, softness, harmony and confidence practiced with respect to the horse’s physical and mental/emotional well-being.

Foundation Show Rules

Refined Horse Versatility Divisions/Sections/Classes/Phases/Levels

Divisions and Sections

Competition is offered in the following divisions: Sport Horses, Stock Horses and Soft-Gaited Horses. These divisions may be divided into sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divisions</th>
<th>Sections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport Horse</td>
<td>Dressage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Hunter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soft-gaited Horse</td>
<td>Dressage</td>
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<td>Western</td>
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<td>Western Dressage</td>
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<td>Stock Horse</td>
<td>Dressage</td>
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<td>Western</td>
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<td>Western Dressage</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Shows may offer classes in one or all divisions. Exhibitors should check show listing on USRHA website calendar pages for divisions and classes offered.

- Competitors may cross enter between divisions and sections (e.g., Sport Horse Working Hunter and Stock Horse Western.)

**Refined Horse Versatility Classes**

Classes are structured to encourage the progressive development of the horse. Classes offered begin with In-Hand Obstacle and move through the levels of Refined Versatility.

- These levels are: Suitability, Elementary, Novice, Preliminary, Intermediate, Advanced and Masters*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refined Horse Versatility Classes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Elementary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Hand Versatility</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refined Versatility</td>
<td>Suitability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<td>Novice</td>
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<td>Preliminary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<td>Advanced</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Masters*</td>
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Suitability-Advanced levels are the levels for building the fundamental skills, which are required of a Refined Horse. Masters level is a specialty level for those horses and riders prepared to compete at the highest level of skill in each division. This level will only be offered at Recognized shows.

- Competitors may enter classes in more than one adjacent Versatility level (e.g. Elementary Refined Versatility and Novice In-Hand Versatility) at the discretion of show management. If cross entering is permitted, it is suggested that each obstacle course have modifications.
- Within each division (Sport Horse, Stock Horse and Soft-Gaited Horse) offered at competitions, the same type of classes will be offered. For example, if a show offers Sport Horse and Stock Horse divisions, corresponding class types will be offered.
- Show management is permitted to combine or split classes as entries warrant.

## Example of Divisions, Sections and Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Class Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport Horse</td>
<td>Dressage</td>
<td>In-Hand Versatility, Refined Versatility: Suitability - Masters*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Hunter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock Horse</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>In-Hand Versatility, Refined Versatility: Suitability–Masters*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western Dressage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft Gaited</td>
<td>Dressage</td>
<td>In-Hand Versatility, Refined Versatility: Suitability–Masters*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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**In-Hand Obstacle Class**

Handlers will show their horses in-hand over 6-9 obstacles at a walk and trot. In-Hand Obstacle classes are open to yearlings and up. Horse will be led from the left unless otherwise specified. Handlers may be asked lead their horse from the left or right side. Handlers may use a suitable leather, nylon or rope halter. No stud chains. Handlers may carry a crop or dressage whip of no more than 47.2” (120 cm). Obstacles will be the same as in the Obstacle Phase of Refined Versatility with the exception of actual mounting. Leading up to mounting block as if to mount will be included. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

**Elementary**

Elementary level is a basic test of in-hand skills progressing beyond the Elementary level. It will be judged on the display of harmonious teamwork, handler’s thoughtful and accurate of presentation of obstacles and overall smoothness of working obstacle course. Rein back on a straight line is required.

**Novice**

Novice level is a test of in-hand skills progressing beyond the Elementary level. It will be judged on the display of more technical, accurate aspects of horsemanship. Emphasis is placed on handler’s ability to direct horse through a series of obstacles that highlight the horse’s willingness, readiness and handiness. Handler may be asked to lead from the right side of horse. The following skills are expected: turn on the
forehand, turn on the haunches, side pass and rein back on a straight line or bending line.

**Refined Horse Versatility Class**

**Refined Versatility** classes consist of two phases.

- **Refined Riding Phase**
  The Refined Riding Phase is a ridden test appropriate to horse’s current state of development. It is designed to showcase refinement in communication between horse and rider and the physical (gymnastic) development of the horse. This culminates in a display of a high degree of collection at the upper levels. It is the development of collection that allows the horse to perform movements of significant difficulty with ease while expressing confidence and joy.
    - Depending on the division, section and level, the Refined Riding Phase may be an under saddle rail class, a dressage test from a nationally recognized equestrian association [United States Dressage Federation (USDF), United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) or National Walking Horse Association (NWHA), Western Dressage Association of America, (WDAA)] or a Prix Caprilli test.

- **Obstacle Phase**
  The Obstacle Phase showcases the teamwork of a horse and rider. Emphasis is placed on rider’s ability to direct horse through a series of obstacles designed to highlight horse’s willingness, readiness and handiness.

**Suitability**

**Suitability** is the introductory level for the developing versatility horse. These classes are designed for horses in the initial stages of refined development. An emphasis will be placed on horse working in a biomechanically correct manner. Horse should exhibit a forward, stretching frame with a subtle softening of the jaw and poll. Horses ridden behind the vertical, short in the neck and stiff in the jaw will be penalized accordingly. This is a two-phase class comprised of a Refined Riding Phase (similar to an under saddle class on the flat) and an Obstacle Phase, which is an obstacle course.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - riders will collectively present their horses at the specified gaits. Judging will be based on general way of going, smoothness of transitions, manners and calmness. Riders will be asked to individually rein back. Two classes will be offered.
  - **Class 1** will exhibit at a walk, trot or gait and rein back.
  - **Class 2** will exhibit at a walk, trot or gait canter and rein back.

- **Obstacle Phase** - riders will present their horses individually on a simple course of 6-9 obstacles ridden at the specified gaits. Judging will be based on display of accuracy, competitor’s thoughtful presentation of obstacles to horse and overall smoothness of course.
  - See "Appendix" section for obstacle types.

**Elementary**

**Elementary** level is a basic test of horsemanship comprising two phases. Refined Riding Phase will be performed in a dressage arena.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - USDF Intro Test A, Prix Caprilli Test 1, WDAA Intro Test 1 or NWHA Intro Test A.
- Obstacle Phase - simple course of 6-9 obstacles ridden at walk and trot/gait. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

**Novice**

*Novice* level is a test of skills progressing beyond the Elementary level. Refined Riding Phase will be performed in a dressage arena.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - USEF Training Test 1, Prix Caprilli Test 2, WDAA Basic Test 1 or NWHA Training Test 1.
- **Obstacle Phase** - simple course of 6-9 obstacles will be ridden at walk and trot/gait. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

**Preliminary**

*Preliminary* level is a test of advancing skill and refinement. Refined Riding Phase will be performed in a dressage arena.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - USEF First Test 1, Prix Caprilli Test 3, WDAA Level 1 Test 1 or NWHA First Test 1
- **Obstacle Phase** - course of 9-12 obstacles will be ridden at walk, trot and canter. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

The following levels are offered at Recognized shows only.

**Intermediate**

*Intermediate* level is a test of advancing skill and refinement. Refined Riding Phase will be performed in a dressage arena.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - USEF Second Level Test 1, WDAA Level 2 Test 1 or NWHA Second Level Test 1.
- **Obstacle Phase** - course of 9-12 obstacles will be ridden at walk, trot and canter. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

**Advanced**

*Advanced* level is a test of advancing skill and refinement. Refined Riding Phase will be performed in a dressage arena.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - USEF Third Level Test 1, WDAA Level 3 Test 1 or NWHA Third Level Test 1.
- **Obstacle Phase** - course of 9-12 obstacles will be ridden at walk, trot and canter. See “Appendix” section for obstacle types.

**Masters**

Masters level is a specialty level for those horses and riders prepared to compete at the highest level of skill in each division.

**OBSTACLE PHASE**
The ideal is a horse that negotiates an obstacle promptly, accurately and smoothly. In addition, the horse should show interest, refinement and biomechanical correctness appropriate for that Versatility level. Emphasis is placed on the correctness of the foundation and a harmonious refined partnership.

**Fundamental qualities that a rider should seek to build in the horse:**

**Refinement** – Refinement is the performance of horse and rider embodying lightness, softness, harmony and relaxation practiced with respect to the horse’s physical and mental/emotional well-being.

**Try** – the horse’s desire to fulfil the rider’s intention. This requires that the horse trusts the rider to support and provide fair adequate direction. Try is especially important in challenging moments. A horse who chooses to balk, bolt, rear and buck or display other defensive behaviors is not exhibiting ‘try.’ Direction from rider is essential to building try or discouraging it. For example, in a moment when the horse is unsure or scared of an obstacle, rider needs to encourage the horse to think ‘forward’ to the obstacle and release aids in that moment. This will build try. For rider to apply aids until the horse becomes backward thinking and more resistant is counterproductive to building try.

**Confidence** – Confidence is an attitude of self assurance.

**Calmness** – Calmness is a state of being in which the horse views life in a positive, relaxed and confident manner.

**General**

In-Hand Obstacle Class – Horses will be led from the left unless otherwise specified.

Refined Versatility Obstacle Phase – In addition to obstacles performed under saddle, some obstacles in this class may be worked in-hand. When working an obstacle in-hand, horse will be led from the left unless otherwise specified.

**Obstacle Course Inspection**

Competitors may inspect the obstacle course(s) on foot, prior to the start of Versatility classes and/or at other select time(s). Course walk time will be posted by show management.

**Approved Obstacles**

See “Appendix”.

**SCORING**

Scoring will reward riders who support their horses in moments when the horse is afraid, unsure of the situation or lacking in understanding, over riders who make or force their horses in attempting to work an obstacle. It is the intent of the judging to encourage refined and supportive riding/handling by the competitor. Working an obstacle in a way that is detrimental to the horse’s well-being (either emotionally or physically) is discouraged and will be scored accordingly.
Scoring will be based on a scale of 0-10 with 10 as the high mark and 0 as the low mark. Individual movement/obstacle marks will be combined and divided by the total possible points to achieve a percentage score.

**Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>fairly good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>insufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>fairly bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>very bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>not executed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In-Hand Versatility Obstacle Class**

Obstacles are marked individually and collective marks are provided at the end of the test. Individual and collective mark scores will be combined and divided by the total possible points to achieve a percentage score.

**Refined Versatility – Suitability Level**

Total points from the *Refined Riding Phase* and the *Obstacle Phase* scores will be combined and averaged for the final placement in the competition.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - riders will be given a separate score for work on the rail and rein back. Coefficient marks are given in two categories.
  - Rideability: horses will be scored on confidence, willingness, responsiveness, softness and comprehension of aids.
  - Rider: riders will be scored on clarity and effective application of aids, supportive manner and harmony with horse.
- **Obstacle Phase** - obstacles are marked individually and collective marks are provided at the end of the test.
  - Individual and collective mark scores will be combined and divided by the total possible points to achieve a percentage score.
Refined Versatility – Elementary Level and above
Total points from the **Refined Riding Phase** and the **Obstacle Phase** scores will be combined and averaged for final placing in the competition.

- **Refined Riding Phase** - the scoring will primarily follow the guidelines set forth in the USEF rules for dressage. Exceptions will be noted.
- **Obstacle Phase** - the obstacles and specific requirements are marked individually and collective mark scores are provided at the end of the test.
  - Individual and collective mark scores will be combined and divided by the total possible points to achieve a percentage score.

Obstacle Phase Collective Marks
- **Rider/Handler** – leading intention, clarity and effective application of aids, supportive manner
- **Refinement** – confidence, willingness, responsiveness, softness, comprehension of aids
- **Harmonious acceptance of aids** – relaxation of mouth, body and tail; softness, use of ears; facial expression
- **Presentation** – overall smoothness of working through obstacles and transitions between obstacles, turn-out

Faults
Faults affect score for each obstacle depending on the number of occurrences and severity.

- Using voice is considered a fault whether talking or clicking once or repeatedly.
- Changing sides from which the horse is being led/directed when not indicated by course instructions (e.g., left to right or right to left). Exception: it is permissible to step to either side of the horse to lower stirrups only prior to mounting.
- Touching horse (e.g., to direct movement).
- Horse hits an element of an obstacle (e.g. a pole) or steps out of the boundary of the obstacle with 1-3 feet.

Score of “0”
- In working an obstacle, if all four of horse’s feet leave the boundary(ies) of the obstacle, competitor must move on to the next obstacle and receive a score of “0” for failure to complete the obstacle.
- If competitor fails to execute path of course as written (turns the wrong way on course or within an obstacle).
- If competitor works an obstacle out of order. Example: if obstacle ‘B’ is worked before obstacle ‘A’, score of ‘0’ will be given for obstacle ‘B’. If after completing obstacle ‘A’, the competitor reworks obstacle ‘B’ no additional score will be given. Scoring in this way reward horsemanship over pattern learning.
- All mounting will take place from a fixed object. If rider elects to mount from the ground after attempting to mount from the fixed obstacle, a score of ‘0’ will be given.
**Refusals – Obstacle Phase**
A refusal is considered to have occurred when the horse loses momentum in the direction the obstacle is to be worked. At this point, competitor will be given 60 seconds to engage in working within the intent of the obstacle. If at the end of this time, horse has not done so, time will be called and the judge will ask competitor to move on to the next obstacle. Horses will not be eliminated for refusals. At any time, for safety concerns, judge may ask competitor to move to the next obstacle. In either case, horse will receive a “0” score for that obstacle.

Obstacles must be presented to horse in an attempt to build ‘try’. However, a horse will not be eliminated for failing to work an obstacle before being asked to move on by the judge. See “Additional Notes on Obstacle Scoring” for definition of ‘try.’

**Elimination**
Horse and rider combinations shall be eliminated from the competition under the following circumstances:
- Rider not being able to safely mount horse is grounds for elimination.
- If the rider has to dismount for any reason, (e.g., adjust tack) other than at the direction of the course. If deemed safe by judge, rider may continue on course. However, score will not count in class placings.
- In Sport Horse Working Hunter, three unsuccessful attempts to clear a jump(s). These attempts are ‘in total’ and not at each jump.
- Failure to present/perform an obstacle.
- Unsafe and dangerous behavior on the part of the horse or rider.
- Use of illegal equipment.
- Unauthorized assistance. Example: Exhibitor is unsure of direction while on course and is given verbal or physical direction by spectator, judge or ring steward/scribe.
- Cruelty.
- Marked lameness using American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP).
- Fall of horse, defined as horse’s shoulder touching the ground.
- Fall of rider, defined as the point at which mounted rider is dislodged from saddle AND touches the ground with any body part.
**Entering the Arena and Saluting**
In all classes, exhibitor should wait for judge to indicate that she/he is ready before beginning competitive round. This indication may be a verbal or in the sound of a bell, etc. Competitors have forty-five seconds to enter the arena after judge has made indication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-Hand Versatility Obstacle Class</th>
<th>Suitability Versatility - Obstacle Phase</th>
<th>Refined Versatility Class – Obstacle Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handler should salute the judge at the entrance of the competitive area prior to starting on course.</td>
<td>Course layout may require riders to enter the competitive arena mounted or unmounted. Regardless, rider should salute the judge at the entrance of the competitive arena prior to starting on course.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salute constitutes handler nodding head.</td>
<td>If entering course mounted, salute should be similar to that of a dressage salute.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A final halt and salute should be made after the last obstacle.</td>
<td>If entering the course unmounted, salute constitutes exhibitor nodding head.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A final halt and salute should be made after the last obstacle.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mounting and Dismounting**
- All mounting will take place from a fixed object. If rider elects to mount from the ground after attempting to mount from the fixed obstacle, a score of ‘0’ will be awarded.
- All mounting and dismounting will be done from left side of horse unless otherwise indicated.
- It is extremely important that a rider works to have horse’s focus before mounting and dismounting. It is dangerous to get on or off a horse that is not focused on rider.
- Horse should stand quietly to allow rider to mount, pick up stirrups and reins. Gathering the reins should NOT be the signal to go.
- Reins should be off the horse’s head anytime the horse is being led. For English saddles, stirrups may be lowered at competitor’s discretion prior to mounting. It is only permissible to step to either side of horse to lower stirrups; otherwise horse must be led/directed per course instructions.
**Judges**

Judges are selected by their credentials and commitment to refined horsemanship. The Judge's decisions are final and must be accepted in a sportsmanlike manner. Poor sportsmanship may cause disqualification.

**Attire**

Foundation show - Neat, clean and tidy schooling attire is acceptable. When mounted, riders are required to wear approved ASTM/SEI helmets in ALL divisions at ALL times, unless helmet waiver is provided by show management. Riding boots with heel are mandatory when riding. No Saddle seat attire in any division.

At the Foundation level, individual show rules vary concerning attire. Contact show management for acceptable attire.

Conservative attire is encouraged. Tack and attire should draw attention to and honor the horse, rather than drawing attention to the rider.

**Saddlery and Tack**

USDF rules apply for all Sport Horse dressage tests and Prix Caprilli. NWHA dressage rules apply to Soft-gaited division. WDAA for Stock Horse division.

Additional note on approved bridles: Approved bitless leather bridles, e.g. Dr. Cook Bitless Bridle, will be allowed in all divisions.

Riding in halters is not permitted. No martingales of any sort, standing or running, are not allowed. Boots and bandages are not permitted in any judged class. For barefoot horses, hoof boots are permitted in all divisions.

No Saddle seat tack in any division.
APPENDIX

Examples of Approved Obstacles

1. Mounting block: mount from a block or other fixed object.
2. Narrow corridor: ride through a narrow corridor.
3. Bridge: walk over a bridge or onto a bridge, stop and stand with a loose rein before walking off.
4. Surfaces: walk over a foreign surface (e.g. mats, brush, etc).
5. Backing: back straight and/or through/around objects, e.g. poles, cones, barrels, etc.
7. Halt: stop at a precise point.
8. Placement of horse’s feet: place front hooves in a particular place, e.g. over a pole, in the center of a circle, etc.
9. Box: turning around in a small box.
10. Weaving: weave through cones, barrels, etc.
11. Circle: ride in and around a round enclosure at walk, trot/gait or canter.
12. Walk over or trot over: walk/trot over poles, cavelletti or natural objects.
13. Carry object: pick up and carry an object from one location to another.
15. Side pass: may include side-pass over a pole.
16. Gate: open/close a gate.
17. Rain slicker: put on a rain slicker or coat.

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