

Policy Statement

[Menu](#)

- [Previous Rule](#)
- [Next Rule](#)

“THE WELFARE OF THE AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE”

AQHA is the world's largest breed registry and equine recreational organization, with more than 5 million American Quarter Horses registered worldwide and AQHA membership in excess of 300,000. AQHA international headquarters in Amarillo, Texas, issues and maintains the pedigrees and registration records of all American Quarter Horses, and oversees various programs and incentives - including races, shows, recreational activities and supporting sponsorships - that promote America's oldest distinct breed of horse. AQHA provides beneficial services for its members that enhance and encourage American Quarter Horse ownership and participation, and strives to generate growth of AQHA membership via the marketing, promotion, advertising and publicity of the American Quarter Horse. Furthermore, AQHA actively protects the welfare and integrity of American Quarter Horses, as evidenced by the following Statement of Position:

AQHA STATEMENT OF POSITION

American Quarter Horse Association's mission is to record and preserve pedigrees of American Quarter Horses, while maintaining the integrity of the breed. Further, AQHA encourages American Quarter Horse ownership and participation. AQHA actively protects the American Quarter Horse by establishing and strictly enforcing rules that govern every AQHA-approved event in order to reflect the natural ability of the animal. To that end, AQHA is committed to the following beliefs:

- Every American Quarter Horse, all other horses and all animals, shall, at all times, be treated humanely and with dignity, respect and compassion.
- Stringent rules established and enforced by AQHA demand that American Quarter Horse breeders, owners, trainers and exhibitors are continually responsible for the well-being and humane treatment of any American Quarter Horse entrusted to their care.
- Above all, the American Quarter Horse's welfare is paramount to other considerations, and the continual development of procedures that ensure humane treatment of the breed and of all other horses and all animals involved with AQHA events, and fair competition supersede all other concerns.

AQHA'S DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY

AQHA does not assume responsibility for safety of participants at the shows or other events it sanctions. As between AQHA and Show Management, responsibility for participant safety remains solely with Show Management. Show Management applies for AQHA approval on a voluntary basis, agreeing to conduct the show according to AQHA rules, which are designed to promote fair competition. Assumption of responsibility for safety by show management is required by AQHA as an express condition to grant the designation “AQHA-approved show.” AQHA's limited objective is to require, by rule enforcement, a “level playing field” of competition in order that performance of exhibitor and horse can be judged uniformly by competent judges; horses are identified by registration certificate; and horses perform or are exhibited free of prohibited substances that could affect their performance. Safety is a concern of everyone, but AQHA does not assume responsibility for it. AQHA's limited purpose for sanctioning a show is to promote fair

competition.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

The AQHA Executive Committee is the forum within AQHA that, initially or ultimately, hears or reviews evidence of alleged violations of rules and regulations by members and/or participants in AQHA-approved events. A member may be disciplined, suspended, fined and/or expelled from the AQHA, and any non-member participant may be denied any or all AQHA privileges.

AQHA rules pertaining to prohibition of drugs, surgical alteration or any inhumane treatment of the horse provide for absolute responsibility for a horse's condition by an exhibitor, trainer, participant and/or the owner, thereby making the exhibitor, participant and/or the owner eligible for possible disciplinary action upon proof of the presence of such prohibited drug by laboratory analysis, existence of surgical alteration or any inhumane treatment of the horse.

ENHANCEMENT OF PENALTY

AQHA reserves the right to independently direct disciplinary action or sanction against individuals coming under the jurisdiction by participation in AQHA-approved shows, contests, race meets or other events. The AQHA Executive Committee may enhance or initiate suspension, fine and/or otherwise penalize offenders of AQHA rules and regulations, and/or those of other jurisdictions; and include owners or lessees who have placed the care and custody of their horses to such offenders.

SPECIFIC AQHA RULES AND POLICIES TO PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF THE AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE

Racing

AQHA expresses concern for the health and welfare of the racing athlete through rules and through financial support of worthy industry initiatives. These include support of a racing surface research project, support of the industry's Racing Medication and Testing Consortium and national movements through Racing Commissioners International for uniform medication rules.

AQHA has adopted the following rules limiting the participation of two-year-olds as referenced in rule [301\(e\)](#).

To further increase incentives for racing older horses, AQHA implemented the Bank of America Quarter Horse Racing Challenge, a regional racing program with bonus awards. The Challenge's goal is to increase racing opportunities for older horses. In the Challenge, 83 percent of the purse monies of the races offered are for older horses.

AQHA and the AQHA Racing Council will continue to seek ways and opportunities to ensure the welfare of the racing American Quarter Horse. The AQHA Racing Committee ensures that rules and policies regarding the welfare of racing American Quarter Horses are continually revised and updated as directed by the AQHA Statement of Position.

Shows

Shows sanctioned as approved events by AQHA are regulated by some of the most strict rules enforced

within the equine industry, designed to ensure that the safety and welfare of American Quarter Horses competing in approved events are not jeopardized. A number of rules from the AQHA Official Handbook of Rules and Regulations are a testament to the fulfillment of these aims and purposes.

Prohibited Conduct, rule [441](#), states an overview of AQHA's stance on unsportsmanlike conduct and/or inhumane treatment of a horse.

Policy on Controlled Substances and Tail Alteration: AQHA's policies concerning the administration of controlled substances (drugs) are well-documented as being among the most stringent in the equine industry. AQHA began drug testing at AQHA-approved shows in 1973 and was among the first, if not the first, equine breed association to do so. AQHA performs random testing throughout the year. Rule [441\(j\)](#) outlines AQHA's policy concerning the administration of controlled substances. Additionally, AQHA has funded research in an effort to determine techniques for evaluation of altered tails in horses, the results of that were presented to equine veterinarians from the United States in October 1992 at a seminar at Colorado State University entitled, "Techniques for Evaluation of Normal and Altered Tail Function in the Equine Utilizing Physical Examinations and Electrodiagnostics." Some of these same techniques are still utilized by AQHA in random testing at the three World Championship Shows.

AQHA spends more than \$1 million annually to test for evidence of drugs and/or tail alteration in horses competing in AQHA-approved events. Beginning in 1993, American Quarter Horses competing in non AQHA-approved events may also be subject to testing for drugs and evidence of tail alteration.

The AQHA Executive Committee has taken action - including investigation, prosecution, suspension of privileges and/or fines being levied - on all cases where substantial evidence existed of violations of AQHA's drug and tail alteration rules. Since 1980, 350 people have been fined, suspended or placed on probation for violations of AQHA's drug and tail alteration rules. And in 2005, AQHA shows in the United States began collecting a \$3 per horse drug testing fee to enhance AQHA's ability to enforce its controlled substance policy.

Humane Treatment

The welfare of American Quarter Horses exhibited in AQHA approved show events are safeguarded under comprehensive rules [104\(a\)](#) and [401](#), that provide for their well-being.

The AQHA Executive Committee has taken action - including investigation, prosecution, suspension of privileges and/or fines being levied - on all cases where substantial evidence existed of violations of AQHA's animal welfare rules. Since 1980, 52 people have been fined, suspended or placed on probation for cruel and inhumane treatment of American Quarter Horses.

Bits and Equipment

To enhance the humane standards by that American Quarter Horses are subjected to when competing in AQHA-approved arena performance events, uniform guidelines regarding bits and equipment are listed in rules [442](#), [443](#) and [444](#).

In western classes, horses 5 years old and younger may be shown in a snaffle bit, hackamore, curb bit, half-breed or spade bit. Horses 6 years old and older may only be shown in a curb bit, half-breed or spade bit. Chin straps are required and must meet the approval of the judge, must be at least one-half inch in width, and must lie flat against the jaw of the horse.

Prohibited equipment in western classes include jerklines, tiedowns with bare metal in contact with the horse's head, and tack collars. Prohibited equipment in English classes include draw reins and roweled spurs.

Standing or running martingales are also prohibited except in working hunter, jumping and equitation over fences.

Lameness and Movement

American Quarter Horses are easily identified by their unique conformation, that allows the breed to be versatile in a variety of athletic endeavors. With these thoughts in mind, lameness is of paramount importance. The evaluation of lameness is a major factor in judging American Quarter Horses competing in arena performance events and is subsequently stressed in AQHA's Judges Workshops, conducted several times throughout the year and designed to educate AQHA's approved judges.

Rule [446](#) demonstrates AQHA's emphasis on lameness and movement.

Lameness and movement are further emphasized in the judging of both western pleasure and hunter under saddle classes at AQHA approved shows. The judging criterion for western pleasure is based primarily on rule [465B\(a\)](#).

The judging of AQHA's hunter under saddle class likewise places a premium on movement, as evidenced by rule [466B\(a\)](#).

In both western pleasure and hunter under saddle, the condition and conformation of the horse also is considered. At the discretion of the judge, a horse may be penalized or eliminated from a class “if the horse appears sullen, dull, lethargic, emaciated, drawn or overly tired.”

Cattle Classes

In AQHA classes that involve the use of cattle, AQHA strives to safeguard the welfare of the cattle, as well as the welfare of both the horses and riders competing in the class. All AQHA-approved shows are encouraged to have a veterinarian on call, and are encouraged to provide proper equipment and medication should accidental injury occur. In both cutting and team penning, an optimum number of cattle are prescribed for the class, and the cattle may not be worked more than once within a go-round. Cattle used in the working cow horse class may only be used once within a go-round. Cattle used in roping events may not be used in other classes. In all heading and heeling classes, cattle shall be protected by horn wraps.

Additional rules in the AQHA Official Handbook outline specific guidelines within each class regarding proper care and handling of cattle. At the judge's discretion, contestants may be penalized or disqualified.

Speed Events

During the course of a speed event, including barrel racing, pole bending and the stake race, contestants may utilize a riding crop to enhance the horse's natural ability to race. However, in all speed events, the judge, at his discretion, “may disqualify a contestant for excessive use of a bat, crop, whip or rope in front of the cinch.”

AQHA and its Show & Professional Horsemen's Committee will continue to seek ways and opportunities to ensure the welfare of the American Quarter Horses exhibited in AQHA-approved events. The AQHA Show Committee strives to ensure that rules and policies regarding the welfare of American Quarter Horses exhibited in AQHA-approved events are continually revised and updated as directed by the AQHA Statement of Position.

EQUINE RESEARCH

AQHA's Equine Research Committee was established as a means of funding equine research at colleges and universities in an effort to better diagnose, manage and prevent diseases not only in American Quarter Horses, but in all horses. The Equine Research Committee annually allocates more than \$300,000 in support of a diverse range of research projects related to the health, welfare and utility of the horse, and of importance to the horse owner and horse industry. Funding decisions are based on the project's scientific merit, clinical application and or potential benefit to the horse and horse industry. Breakthroughs include the prevention, treatment and management of colic; metabolic pathways, genetic inheritance modes, diagnostics and preventive measures for various genetic diseases; pathology and prevention of equine pulmonary disorders; reproductive pathology and disease prevention; as well as other advancements for a wide range of diseases have been accomplished via AQHA's Equine Research Committee.

Research findings are published by AQHA in The American Quarter Horse Journal so that AQHA members, owners, breeders, trainers and other participants in the industry may make knowledgeable decisions regarding the health and welfare of all horses.

EDUCATION

Since beginning publication of The American Quarter Horse Journal in 1948, AQHA has made an ongoing commitment to educate owners about the health, safety, nutritional, sanitation and shelter needs of American Quarter Horses. The American Quarter Horse Journal and America's Horse, AQHA's official member publication, provide comprehensive editorial coverage designed to educate and inform horse owners on proper feeding, health care and training matters concerning American Quarter Horses.

AQHA also has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in producing brochures and other educational materials on such topics as tips on purchasing a horse and equine health. AQHA has produced dozens of educational films and videotapes, in cooperation with horse industry experts, that cover humane, correct training techniques for AQHA-approved events. Through more than 30 years on network and online television AQHA has featured horse health care segments on many episodes in cooperation with expert veterinarians.

AQHA, through its affiliation with trusted manufacturers and Corporate Partners provides greater accessibility of quality health, nutrition, handling and tack products to its members

SUMMARY

The American Quarter Horse Association works to ensure not only the integrity and welfare of American Quarter Horses, but also the integrity and welfare of the entire horse industry. AQHA continually revises its policies concerning animal welfare via the Public Policy Committee and an in-house Task Force on Animal Welfare. Through these avenues, as well as industry leadership, advisory groups and councils, the American Quarter Horse Association is able to expand upon its proven efforts to safeguard the welfare of American Quarter Horses, as outlined by the AQHA Statement of Position.