

2023



**International Mountain  
Trail Challenge  
Association**

Official Handbook  
of Rules and Regulations

IMTCA 131, Craterview Drive, Silver Creek, WA 98585 USA

## WARNING

Horses, horseback riding, and horse training can be hazardous to life and property. The advice and guidance given in this handbook is intended to be used in a safe manner and only under professional supervision. Under no circumstance should someone unfamiliar with horses attempt to train or ride them. The IMTCA, and IMTCA Officers, are not liable for accidents or damage of any kind incurred in connection with the contents of this book.

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## **Forward**

In 2009 Mark and Lee Bolender saw that a fun concept called Mountain Trail could be turned into a new equine sport discipline with some guidelines and changes. Mark and Lee have since promoted it across the globe by: 1) helping to design and build Mountain Trail courses across the USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia; 2) writing for magazines and having the first book published promoting the new sport; 3) teaching clinics and training horses across the world; 4) bringing interns and apprentices from around the world to learn and promote the sport of Mountain Trail; 5) helping to establish formal judging guidelines; 6) Starting the “IMTCA” International Mountain Trail Challenge Association which promotes the Sport of Mountain Trail.

There have been a number of training courses built over the years, but Bolender Horse Park in Washington State was the first facility built specifically for year-round, full-time training in Mountain Trail.

Unlike many disciplines, every breed of equine can participate in Mountain Trail. Riders range from Olympic competitors to those who are just starting with their first horse; from youth riders to those in their 80’s – all are having fun. You can see riders in every type of saddle – dressage, jumping, roping, equitation, reining, and endurance. Participants come from every walk of life, yet when everyone comes together, they are one in their passion to learn and in their love for the horse.

We look at how this discipline is growing across the globe and how IMTCA will be a driving force to bring unity to judging and conformity to certain obstacles that are commonly used in the Challenges. We have been holding clinics and judging Challenges for the past several years and we continue to see growth and excitement.

We are so eager to see many more Mountain Trail courses being built around the globe. All have a different feel but each one is good for both the horse and the rider’s mind. Every Mountain Trail course we build is considered “functional art” that is both beautiful and has a practical application.

When we design and build a course, we bring a background of Architectural Landscaping, construction, teaching, training and clinical experience. Not only do we want the course to be visually pleasing, but we want it to be safe and have multiple levels of difficulty. We do not want the beginner to be intimidated but we also want the top-level event rider to be challenged. This is why each course is designed for three levels of Challenge. The wear and tear on a course is tremendous so each must be designed to withstand hard use for years to come. Every obstacle must be assessed for safety and durability. For instance, each incline must contain a certain ratio of dirt to gravel; dirt or gravel alone will not hold up and must be mixed. Many considerations go into designing a course such as visual appeal, flow patterns for training, and maximum observability for clinics and Challenges.

We ask questions like, “Where do the spectators sit and what can they see?” or “Where do participants wait before they go into a class to participate?” or “Where do the participants of a clinic wait?” or “Will the site hold all of the participants?” or “Where will the judges sit?” These are just a few of the concerns that must be addressed when designing a Mountain Trail course. Each course also is designed to blend into its surroundings, like part of the natural landscape. Whether it’s built of rocks in Scotland, palm trees in Florida or desert vegetation in New Mexico, it must feel like part of the land.

Mountain Trail Challenges are fun social events where good horsemanship is practiced. Horses are challenged to navigate through obstacles and riders are challenged to trust their horses in the process. Hence, a true partnership between horse and rider is realized, and every person participating or watching enjoys their journey.

We hope you will enjoy the journey with us.  
Mark and Lee Bolender

## **1. Address of the IMTCA**

The IMTCA's primary business address is:

IMTCA, LLC

131 Crater View Drive

Silver Creek, WA 98585

Website: [www.IMTCA.org](http://www.IMTCA.org)

Email: [IMTCA.info@gmail.com](mailto:IMTCA.info@gmail.com)

The Officers of the IMTCA are:

Mark H. Bolender, President

Lee Bolender, Vice President

Current Officers are listed on the IMTCA Website

Secretary

Treasurer

Membership

Head Judge

International Representative

International Affiliate Associations

IMTCA Australia

IMTCA Canada

IMTCA Germany

IMTCA Italy

IMTCA France

IMTCA Denmark

## **2. What is the IMTCA?**

The International Mountain Trail Challenge Association, known as the IMTCA, is an Association that promotes the ideal trail horse where a rider of any skill level can enjoy riding in a safe manner. The IMTCA will oversee standards of judging, Challenge rules, obstacle and course standards, membership, and promote safe horsemanship.

## **3. Mission Statement for International Mountain Trail Challenge Association (IMTCA)**

**Who We Are:** The International Mountain Trail Challenge Association (IMTCA) is the international association dedicated to the equine sport of Mountain Trail.

**Vision:** The IMTCA's vision is to promote the joy and challenge of skilled mountain trail riding around the world.

**Mission:** The IMTCA's mission is unifying mountain trail riders internationally by developing and maintaining suitable standards of performance and judging, fostering horsemanship and camaraderie, and providing a fun-filled and family-oriented atmosphere of competition at Challenges, shows, and events. In an effort to broaden opportunity for both rider and equine, the IMTCA also provides formalized obstacle configurations, rules, and judging criteria. The IMTCA promotes excellence by defining criteria for identifying highly skilled performance around the world in Mountain Trail.

## **4. Defining the Sport of Mountain Trail**

Mountain Trail perfection is epitomized by a horse that is bold, confident, displays a bright expression, focus, and moves forward in a natural gait that is safe and also covers ground as if it were on a long day's trail ride. The horse and rider should be able to willingly assess and enthusiastically navigate new obstacles with finesse and in a safe manner. It is a judged event designed to show the confidence, boldness and athletic ability of all breeds and all disciplines of equines while being challenged by trail obstacles.

## **5. What to Expect at a Challenge**

A competitive event for Mountain Trail is known as a "Challenge". A Challenge tests a horse and rider's ability to navigate both natural and man-made obstacles in a safe manner and with technical skills that demonstrate great horsemanship. Each Challenge has three levels of difficulty that are designed to challenge but not intimidate riders.

The overall purpose of a Trail Challenge is to promote good horsemanship skills and provide an educational venue for equestrians. A Trail Challenge tests a horse and rider on their ability to work as a team and navigate obstacles which they might experience on a trail. A Trail Challenge can be a lot of fun and improve the relationship of the horse and rider by introducing them to new experiences.

In IMTCA Challenges, contestants are required to navigate a course with at least 6 approved obstacles and no more than 16 as set forth in this handbook. Sometimes they will encounter difficult trail situations which will better prepare the horse and rider in the real world. Through education and experience, riding becomes more pleasurable, while safety and fun are encouraged.

## **6. IMTCA Membership and Eligibility**

To be eligible for Challenge Series or Year End awards, the person competing must be a current member in good standing of the IMTCA during the Challenges.

Challenge classes for IMTCA World Year End Awards will be designated by the IMTCA President and Vice President. All Sanctioned IMTCA Series will offer the classes designated. Challenge classes for additional IMTCA Awards may be designated by IMTCA Challenge Hosts.

### **6.1. Challenge Registration**

Each rider must complete an official Registration/Release Form. The Challenge Host will determine registration fees, sign up times, starting, and finishing times.

At Challenge check-in, after a competitor has completed the official Registration/Release Form and paid the appropriate fee or fees to compete, he or she will receive a competitor packet with name, tag/number, and any other pertinent information about the event.

### **6.2 Height Measurement**

Height measurement cards will be required for all horses that compete in a Size Division Challenge class. The official IMTCA measurement shall be witnessed and signed off by a certified judge at, or prior to, the first Challenge attended of the calendar year. The measurement card will be good for one calendar year.

Official IMTCA sanctioned measuring device will be used. The official measuring stick will be requested and supplied through Bolender Horse Park. One official IMTCA sanctioned measuring stick will be offered free to all certified facilities. Additional official measuring sticks may be purchased.

### **6.3. IMTCA Awards and Points**

All classes score sheets are to be posted at the end of the event.

For Challenge Series and Year End Awards, points will be given as follows:

Placing                      Points based on Number of Entries in the Class

First place (1st)	5 points/5 or more entries 4 points/4 entries 3 points/3 entries 2 points/2 entries 1 point/1 entry
Second place (2nd)	4 points/5 or more entries 3 points/4 entries 2 points/3 entries 1 point/2 entries
Third place (3rd)	3 points/5 or more entries 2 points/4 entries 1 point/3 entries
Fourth place (4th)	2 points/5 or more entries 1 point/4 entries
Fifth place (5th)	1 point/5 or more entries

The Challenge Host may offer additional placings though no points will be earned.

## **7. Definitions, Involvement, and Participation**

The following Definitions, Levels, and Divisions are recognized by the International Mountain Trail Challenge Association:

**Partnership** is a handler/rider/horse team. A handler/rider may compete with different horses in different levels. Example, a handler/rider may have a new partnership eligible for Level 1, and a finished partnership at Level 3.

**Trainers** train horses and/or riders for remuneration, either monetary or in kind. Trainers shall compete only in Open Classes.

**Age determination:**

A rider/handlers age for the calendar year is based on their age on January first.

A horses age for the calendar year is determined using the standard January 1st age progression. Example: A horse born in April is considered 1-year old on January first.

### **7.1. Levels (Partnership)**

Each handler/rider/horse partnership may compete in two levels at a Challenge. Examples: Novice and Level 1. Levels 1 and 2. Levels 2 and 3. Partnerships must compete in the same two levels when competing in-hand and riding.

**Level 1** –This is considered a new Partnership. Obstacles should be easy to explain to the team: basic maneuvers or techniques are needed to complete the obstacle. The course will be at a flat-footed walk.

**Level 2** –This is considered an established Partnership. The rider and horse are familiar with one another, exhibit trust when negotiating obstacles and are conditioned to ride a longer Course. May include some intermediate gait of jog, trot, running walk, or gaiting; 180, 270 or 360 degrees on certain obstacles.

**Level 3** –This is considered an advanced Partnership where horse and rider have established trust, can negotiate difficult obstacles and are conditioned to travel a longer Course. May include intermediate gait, and canter or lope; 180, 270 or 360 degrees on certain obstacles.

### **7.2. Divisions (Handler/Rider)**

**Lead Line:** This is defined as anybody requiring a lead line from an adult by their side (e.g., a child or equestrian with disabilities). The rider shall be a minimum of 6-years old. A Lead Line Rider may not compete in classes without a Leader. The Leader shall be a minimum of 18-years old. Helmets are required for all riders competing in Lead Line.

**Youth Division:** This is defined as participants under 18 years old based on age as of January 1st; minimum age to compete will be 6 years old. Youth classes may be separated into multiple age groups. Example: 6 – 13 and 14 – 17. Helmets are required, all youth must wear helmets, in hand and riding, at IMTCA sanctioned events. A youth may compete with any size horse.

**Novice:** This is defined as a handler/rider participant that has not competed in any trail obstacle, organized trail, or cowboy race competitions for a minimum of 10-years. Novice participants may only compete in Novice and Level 1. A handler/rider may compete as a Novice for one calendar year, (January through December).

**Adult Division:** This is defined as participants 18 and older based on age as of January 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Open Division:** This is defined as all handler/riders. Open may compete with any size horse. Novice may not show in Open Division.

**Size Division:**

**Mini:** This is defined as a horse 11-hands (44-inches) **and under**.

**Pony:** This is defined as a horse **over** 11-hands (44-inches) **up to** 14.2 hands (58-inches).

**Horse:** This is defined as a horse **over** 14.2 hands (58-inches).

### 7.3. Participation Segments:

**In-Hand:** This is defined as a class where the handler leads the horse from the ground.

**Junior Horse:** This is defined as a horse 5 years and under as determined using the standard January 1st age progression. This is an Open Class.

The minimum age of a horse to compete in hand is 6-months, and under saddle is 2 years, or Affiliate's Country standard, as determined using the standard January 1st age progression. (A horse born in April is considered 1-year old on January first).

**Senior Horse:** This is defined as a horse 6 years and older as determined using the standard January 1st age progression. This is an Open Class.

There is no maximum age for a horse competing either in hand or under saddle.

### 7.4. Matrix of Levels, Divisions, and Participation:

Division	In-Hand	Riding
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<b>Lead Line Division:</b> May compete with any size horse		X
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<b>Novice Division:</b> May compete with any size horse	X	X
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**Adult Division (18 and over):** May compete with any size horse

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

**Youth Division (6-17):** May compete with any size horse

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

**Open Division:** May compete with any size horse

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

**Size Division:** May be offered in any Division at Challenge Host discretion.

#### Mini

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

#### Pony

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

#### Horse

Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

Additional classes maybe offered at the discretion of the IMTCA Challenge Host management. Equipment rules, required riding boots, and helmets for youth still apply.

Timed and Judged

Rider with Dog.

Team Class, two or more riders per team.

Gamblers Choice.

Ride one-Lead one, this is a Level 1 or Level 2 class only.

There will be no at Liberty Classes offered at IMTCA Sanctioned Shows.

## **8. Equestrians with Disabilities**

Allowances for riders with permanent physical or mental disabilities are permissible at the discretion of the Senior Judge and show management. A rider with a temporary or permanent disability should advise the Senior Judge and show management prior to the riders meeting.

A pattern reader may be allowed with prior show management approval for equestrians with disabilities at all IMTCA sanctioned events including Regionals and Nationals. There will be no deduction of points for an approved equestrian with disabilities pattern reader.

This rule does not apply to person(s) with a temporary cast, etc. which is not considered a disability and will be up to the property owner, senior judge and/or Trail Challenge management as to whether this person can compete. Final say will be based on the Trail Challenge Management and Senior Judge, and that decision will be final without recourse of any nature.

## **9. Judging a Trail Challenge**

### **9.1. Overview**

IMTCA has participants from around the globe and representing a broad range of disciplines and breeds. From the casual recreational rider to the highest level of world competitors. This results in some Rulebook differences between other disciplines and specific breeds. We have made a great effort to create a balance to encourage participation from all. To ensure fairness for all, the IMTCA Rulebook is unique as it incorporates aspects of many other disciplines and associations yet has its own requirements while competing in IMTCA sanctioned events. IMTCA Competitions are Judged using the IMTCA Rulebook.

Each obstacle is judged on how the partnership between horse and handler/rider works together. The partnership should demonstrate the ability to pick its way through the obstacle course when obstacles warrant it. The horse should willingly respond to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles. It is important the horse exhibits good manners, calmness and patience, while responding to the rider. Horses should be relaxed and not display resistance, be attentive, and not spook, shy or spin. The horse should not stumble, tick or clip an obstacle and demonstrate quality of movement. Credit will be given to partnerships negotiating the obstacle with both style and appropriate rate of progress, providing correctness is not sacrificed. Merits are secondary to safety. It is recognized that each breed may have a different head set, speed of forward motion or gait. However, all competitors must move in a safe manner with a willing attitude.

A riders meeting must be held before each Trail Challenge starts (1) to introduce the judge or judges, (2) to give a description of the course, (3) to describe how the Course will be judged, and

(4) to answer any questions riders might have before beginning the course. It is recommended all participants attend the riders meeting.

## **9.2 Judges**

IMTCA sanctioned events require the use of a judge certified by the IMTCA under the Trail Challenge Judges Program. Judges must be a knowledgeable horseman or horsewoman, and will be certified annually prior to judging an event. A judge must have the ability to evaluate horsemanship skills in controlling and maintaining the horse. Additionally, the judge should be familiar with the natural movement of different breeds of equines as well as various riding disciplines. Holding any special judging card from any other organization is not required.

Judges shall dress professionally. Wear a blazer or vest and a clean, nice hat or visor. Shirts, blouses, jeans, and slacks are pressed; boots must be polished. Visors are not acceptable for Regionals or Nationals. Baseball-style caps are not acceptable.

The number of judges needed will depend on the course layout and the number of obstacles. Depending on the course, between one to four judges may be needed. Most courses tend to dictate the need for more than one judge due to time constraints and topography. The designation of a senior judge will apply to the appropriate judge if there is more than one judge.

## **9.3 Judging Rules**

### **9.3.1. Attire and Tack**

Tack and attire will be presentable, clean, and free from torn or frayed items. Tack and attire with decorations is allowed if it does not interfere with safe function. Tack and attire with decorations will be neither penalized nor be promoted. Shorts are not allowed. Tank tops are not allowed at Regional and National events. Riding boots with a closed toe and heel are required at all times when handling or riding. Splint boots are recommended and allowed. Youth and Lead Line must wear helmets, in hand and riding, at IMTCA sanctioned events.

### **9.3.2 Equipment**

Halters and lead ropes will be rope, leather, or synthetic. Rope halters may be knotted.

Lead chains, and correction halters with chain, metal over the noseband or poll, or that are capable of compression are not allowed.

Lead ropes shall be sufficient length to safely maneuver through the obstacles, 12' to 14' is recommended.

Whips or crops of any style are not allowed In-hand or bridleless.

Halters, cavessons, bosals, bosalitas, or nosebands are allowed to be worn under a bridle. Equipment must allow for two fingers to fit between the equipment and the nasal plate. Reference <http://dressage-news.com/2017/10/17/denmark-to-impose-limit-on-noseband-looseness-in-competition/>

Fly masks, ear protectors, nose nets are acceptable. Equipment tightness rules apply.

Weighted reins, rein chains, or slobber straps are allowed on any style headstall/bit. A horse may be ridden bridleless with no penalty (Only for Open Classes Level 2 or Level 3) When riding bridleless, the neck strap may be natural or synthetic material. Chain, prong, or spike neck straps are not allowed.

A horse may be ridden bitless with no penalty.

Bitless headstalls that apply compressive pressure and mechanical hackamores are not allowed. When a curb strap is used, it may be natural, synthetic, or smooth flat chain. Curb straps will be adjusted to allow a minimum of two fingers flat between the chin and the strap. When a back cinch is used, a gap of no more than a hand laid flat between the horse and cinch is allowed.

When an obstacle includes a hoof check, a hoof pick is part of the required equipment. The hoof pick shall be taken out and shown to the judge.

Standing, German, and running martingales are not allowed.

Draw reins are not allowed.

Tie-downs are not allowed.

War Bridles are not allowed.

### **9.3.3 Special Item Rules**

No rider will be allowed to ride double or bareback at any time.

No horse may be shown twice in the same class.

Use of treats while on course is not allowed.

A youth cannot exhibit a stallion in any class.

Stallions may only be exhibited by an adult.

### **Pattern Reader**

A Pattern reader is allowed for any age rider/handler for Novice and Level 1, and rider/handlers 70-years old and over in all Levels. The pattern reader, supplied by the rider/handler, may be used to call the next obstacle. The pattern reader may only say what the next obstacle is, they are not allowed to give detailed instructions for the obstacle. The pattern reader may not walk next to the participant, if the course is large, they may change locations if needed. It is optional to use an electronic device similar to hand held radios with ear piece for the participant. If an electronic device is used, a designated Challenge Official shall accompany the pattern reader as the method to ensure detailed instructions are not given. If a pattern reader is used, there will be a 1-point penalty deducted for Horsemanship. Pattern readers are not allowed at Regional or National events. Equestrians with Disabilities will receive no deductions and are allowed pattern readers at Regional and National events per section 8.

## **9.4 Judging Rules and Scoring**

### **9.4.1. Objectives**

The epitome of perfection in 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.

Overall Appearance: vigorous and fun with boldness and confidence – it's a pleasure to watch, a crowd pleaser and a sure winner.

### **9.4.2 Scoring**

#### **General Scope of Scoring**

Scoring is based on the partnership's ability to navigate the course. Each partnership starts with a 70 and earns points throughout the course. Each judge may award up to 5 points for horsemanship. First through fifth place ribbons are given in each class in each division offered at a Challenge. Additional awards will be at the discretion of the Challenge Host. The Partnership with the highest overall value is named 1st. All scored classes score sheets are to be posted at the end of the event.

Leading while competing In-hand or Riding: The horse is to be willing, not lagging or crowding. Horse must be led by a lead rope, or get down rope tied either around the horses' neck or attached to a bosal. Horses may not be led using bridle reins.

When leading, the center may vary based on if the equine is sent over and obstacle, or if the handler leads in front of, or next to, the equine. The obstacle is still split in thirds to visualize center.

--An equine sent over the obstacle should be centered.

--An equine following the handler over the obstacle should be centered.

--If the handler is side by side on the obstacle with the equine, center is between them.

The handler may either send or lead the horse through the obstacle unless specified on the course pattern.

The handler may be on either side or in front of the horse. Changing sides during the pattern is acceptable with no break of gait. Stopping to change sides will be penalized as a break of gait.

There will be no penalty if the handler steps out of or off an obstacle while in-hand.

There will be no penalty for a hesitation on entry to acknowledge the obstacle, not to exceed 3-seconds.

Hoof Check: The horse is to stand quietly during a hoof check. The horse may be held by the rider/handler, hobbled, or ground tied at the rider/handler's discretion.

Water crossing: The horse should move forward through the water willingly in a continual forward movement.

Step over: Steptover without striking the obstacle. Horses are not penalized for hopping over taller obstacles if done in a controlled calm manner.

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

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

The judge has the right to ask the handler/rider to by-pass an obstacle if the judge feels it will be unsafe. Control of the horse must be maintained throughout the event.

**Mounting and Dismounting:** 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 when mounted and dismounted. A smooth mount and dismount does not unbalance the horse. Reins shall be held at all times. While mounting and dismounting, the rider may hold saddle in a manner that results in a smooth balanced movement. Holding the cantle is allowed.

Reruns are at the Judge's discretion and are not required.

Reruns may be allowed in instances of equipment failure. When equipment failure causes a delay or a run to be discontinued, the judge may disqualify the entry.

A handler/rider cannot receive a greater deduction than -9 for any given obstacle when the handler/rider attempts the obstacle.

A horse that receives a -9 for any obstacle for a complete refusal may NOT place higher than a horse with a score for each obstacle.

**Off course:** Missed or added obstacle will receive a deduction of -18 for each obstacle missed or added:

A missed obstacle will receive the deduction for each occurrence.

Added obstacles will receive the deduction for each occurrence from the total score.

Entering the obstacle from the wrong direction. Entry -2, possible to get partial body, exit -2 if not correct direction. Maximum -9 as the obstacle was attempted

**Tie Breaker:** The senior judge will designate an obstacle as the "tie breaker obstacle". A second and third "tie breaker obstacle" will be chosen and used only if the first tie breaker obstacle does not break the participants' tied score. These will be designated before the competition commences. The participants will not know which obstacles are designated tie breakers.

## 9.5. Points for Each Obstacle

We start with a score of 70 points and add or take away. The point system we developed allows the spectators and competitors to understand how the judging takes place. It's also great fun for everyone to score along and see how the competitors are doing as they go. The same criteria are applied to each obstacle whether a bridge, gate, trench, water, logs, rocks etc. The judges will make assessments for the following basic standard maneuvers: each obstacle has a value of 9. This gives a foundation for scoring and or a deduction if an obstacle is not attempted or faults.

**Entry** into the obstacle is worth 2 points. If correct a 0 is given.

**Navigating** through the obstacle is worth 5 points. If correct a 0 is given.

**Exit** from the obstacle is worth 2 points. If correct a 0 is given.

**Wow** If the horse and rider navigated the obstacle such that a judge's only words were "Wow" then up to an extra 3 points can be added +1 point for entry, +1 point for body, +1 point for exit.

Half-points are recommended when needed to differentiate between riders for placing. You can't plus an obstacle more than 3 and you can't have more than 9 deducted when the obstacle was attempted.

If a horse steps out or off an obstacle resulting in -5 body, it's acceptable for the team to reenter the obstacle and achieve the exit points. They cannot regain the body points.

### **Entry**

Two points are given (which = 0) if the horse enters the obstacle straight, acknowledges the obstacle and maintains forward motion in an alert and willing manner. A horse has up to 3 seconds to examine the obstacle before entry with no penalty. After 3 seconds it will be counted as a refusal and lack of forward motion.

Wow Plus 1/2 to 1 point: A horse walks up to the obstacle straight is attentive and acknowledges an obstacle in a bold, confident, willing manner, and enters the obstacle without breaking gait.

### **Navigating**

Five points are given (which = 0) if the horse picks its way through in a willing, confident, bold and safe manner without stumbles, clicks, or breaks in gate.

Wow Plus 1/2 to 1: The horse navigates the obstacle in a safe, confident, bold, and willing manner which is a pleasure to watch.

### **Exit**

Two points are given (which = 0) if the horse exits at the same speed that it entered and is straight and on course.

Wow Plus 1/2 to 1: The horse is attentive and acknowledges the exit, walking out in a collected manner.

## **9.6. Deductions**

All deductions apply to each obstacle.

### **Entry Deductions**

#### **-1/2 to -1 Point:**

Tick.

Slight change of pace.

Slightly off center.

Horse crooked, not straight with two or three feet.

#### **-1 point:**

Horse crooked, does not enter an obstacle straight, all four feet.

Is not 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, a hop will not result in a deduction if due to the horse's size in relation to the obstacle).

Each refusal up to two attempts.

#### **-1 1/2 points:**

Slight stumble.

#### **-2 points:**

Jumps into an obstacle.

Refuses twice (the horse backs up and/or sidesteps away twice) and/or will not enter obstacle.

After three refusals the horse and rider must move on; this will result in a -9 for the obstacle. A horse receiving a -9 for refusal cannot place above any horse that receives a score for each obstacle or a horse that went off course. This will be noted with the score circled on the scoresheet designating it was a refusal.

### **Navigating Deductions**

#### **- 1/2 point:**

For each tick of an obstacle.

#### **-1 point:**

Break of gait for drinking during a water obstacle if they stop.

Each delayed stride or gait when asked during transition.

One foot off or out of the obstacle but does not touch ground.

#### **-1 to 1 1/2 points:**

Horse and rider lose forward motion.

Horse steps on or moves an obstacle.

Incorrect or break of gait less than 2-strides

Skipping space or failing to step into required space.

Moving one step during mount/dismount, during hoof check, ground tie, or hobble (except shifting to balance).

Deviates from center of obstacle or course pattern.

#### **-2 to 2 1/2 points:**

Horse stumbles.

Rushing.

Incorrect or break of gait for 2-strides or more.

In-hand stopping to change sides.

Knocking down an obstacle.

Steps off or out of obstacle with one foot, and touches the ground, once the foot had entered obstacle.

Missing one element of obstacle on line of travel with one foot.

Moving two or three steps on mount/dismount, during hoof check, ground tie, or hobble.

**-3 points:**

Horse is not listening to the rider.

**-4 points:**

Reactive/scared horse during obstacle.

**-5 points:**

Steps out of the obstacle with two or more feet, or falls off.

Stepping outside the confines of obstacle, jumping off or out of obstacle with more than one foot, once the foot has entered obstacle.

Dropping slicker or object.

Cumulative refusal, balk or evade.

Letting go of gate.

Four or more steps on dismount, during hoof check, ground-tie or hobble.

Horse rears up and or bucking.

Never achieves the gait specified.

Two feet in and back up out of the obstacle because you've already "entered" the obstacle.

**Level 3 Open Class only:** If leads and/or lead change is specified on the pattern, flying lead change is required.

**-3 points:** Incorrect lead.

**-2 points:** Simple lead change of two strides or less.

**-3 points:** Simple lead change three strides or more.

**Level 3 all other classes:** If leads and/or lead change is specified on the pattern, simple lead change is allowed.

**-3 points:** Incorrect lead.

**-2 points:** If more than two strides during simple change.

**Exit Deductions**

**-1/2 to -1 Point:**

Tick.

Slight change of pace.

Slightly off center.

Horse crooked, not straight with two or three feet.

**-1 to -1 1/2 points:**

Hurries or rushes.

Horse crooked, does not exit an obstacle straight, all four feet.

Not centered.

**-2 points:**

Jump out during exit.  
Not safe.  
Not in designated exit area.

## **9.7 Horsemanship**

The judges may explain what behavior they will find inappropriate during the riders meeting. If one shows good horsemanship, the competitor will receive 5 points which will be added to the score. If there are multiple judges, a maximum of 5 horsemanship points will be given or deducted per class. When multiple judges, deductions will be combined with a maximum of 5 points taken. It must be recognized that horsemanship scoring may be somewhat subjective but proper use of equipment is not. Competitors are encouraged to know the rules for use of equipment.

### **Horsemanship will be on overall presentation, including, but not limited to:**

Neat and clean, proper working equipment.  
Correct use of hands.  
Appropriate behavior between obstacles.  
Appropriate behavior while waiting at a hold.  
Only using allowed equipment.  
Talking only in an appropriate manner to a judge, scribe, or ring steward.  
Proper attire and foot wear, which is clean and neat for a trail ride.  
A rider may sit, stand, two-point, or post at the trot no matter what discipline, with no penalty.  
Reins may be held with one hand or two hands.  
Hands may be changed, and reins may be adjusted in a smooth manner as needed to maneuver through the obstacle.  
Reins may cross over and/or be bridged.  
Uphill and downhill: Rider should be positioned appropriately to maintain the center of balance.  
Rider and horse are to negotiate hills in a safe manner. Rider may use a hand to support themselves using the mane or saddle.

### **9.7.1. Horsemanship Deductions**

Horsemanship deductions may be in addition to obstacle deductions. The number of points deducted will be based on the severity of the fault versus the actual fault. Horsemanship point deductions between 1 and 5 points may be taken for the following actions including, but not limited to:

Use of hand to instill fear or excessive praise.  
Using excessive hand action to jerk on the bit.  
Excessive use of spurs.  
Excessive use of a riding crop.  
Hitting or striking the horse.  
Over correction of the horse.  
Dirty tack.  
Excessive dirt on the horse.  
Equipment failure.  
Not having required equipment for an obstacle, example, hoof pick for hoof check.  
Entering or exiting obstacle from incorrect side or direction.  
Working obstacle from the incorrect direction.  
Riding outside boundary marker of arena or Course.  
Incorrectly adjusted back cinch, more than hand laid flat between horse and cinch.

Incorrectly tied rope halter.  
Failure to ever show correct gait between obstacles as designated.  
Failure to follow the correct line of travel between obstacles.  
Excessive emotions of anger or praise.  
Talking in any way inappropriately to a judge, scribe, or official.  
Receiving course direction by anybody other than an approved pattern reader as allowed in Sections 8 and 9.3.3

### **9.8. Disqualification on course**

A rider/handler may be dismissed at the Judge's discretion for actions including, but not limited to:

Rider and horse safety is at risk  
Fall of horse or rider.  
Unsafe horse or rider.  
Abuse or aggressive schooling.  
Equipment Failure.  
Unsafe equipment.  
Improper/not allowed equipment.  
Lame/ill horse.  
Talking inappropriately to the Judge, Scribe, or Ring Stewart.  
Receiving course directions by anybody other than an approved pattern reader as allowed in Sections 8 and 9.3.3.

### **10. Additional Classes (Optional at Show Management discretion)**

Obstacle scoring will be judged in accordance with IMTCA Rules except for Gamblers Choice. The Challenge Host may offer multiple Levels for each class.

#### **Rider with Dog**

The score will be based on 75% Rider/25% dog. The course may include the dog in front, next to, or behind the rider. There may be obstacles the dog is placed in a hold position while the rider and horse navigate the obstacle. Equipment and collars allowed for use on dogs will be at the show managements discretion. This is due to differing Countries and Regions laws. If a Rider with Dog class is offered, the entry form will have information regarding what equipment is and is not allowed. An out of control dog shall result in disqualification

#### **Team Class**

Two or more riders per team. The course is divided into sections based on number of team members.

#### **Ride one-Lead one**

This is a Level 1 or Level 2 class only. The horse being led shall be on a lead rope and will not be loose. If either horse is not in the gait specified per the pattern it will be scored as a break of gait accordingly. Obstacles may include the horse's side by side or the horse being led following behind

#### **Timed and Judged**

In the Timed and Judged, the score will be a combination of obstacle score and time. Each obstacle will be judged and the total duration of travel will be timed. The total travel time will be

deducted from the total obstacle score resulting in the final class score. Do not sacrifice the correctness or the solidarity of the Partnership for speed. However, the partnership should also work in a timely manner. Obstacles consisting of steps or stairs, and obstacles with wooden surfaces shall be navigated at the walk only.

### **Gamblers Choice**

The rules are different. There will be a start and a finish line. You have 2 minutes to show your skills by safely navigating the obstacles is all that counts. However, if a horse steps out with just one foot, the obstacle does not count for a score. Each obstacle has a value which is given when class starts. You must be across the finish line before the 2 minutes are up or the last obstacle score does not count. Obstacles consisting of steps or stairs, and obstacles with wooden surfaces shall be navigated at the walk only.

## **11. Obstacles**

The course layout is at the discretion of Trail Challenge show management. When possible, the course will utilize the topography of the property with regard to obstacles and layout. While the course should test the horse and rider's skills, safety is a primary consideration. Obstacles shall be constructed of safe materials using approved IMTCA guidelines. See the IMTCA webpage for additional obstacle information, the complete updated list of required and optional obstacles and pictures of examples.

Obstacles consisting of steps or stairs, and obstacles with wooden surfaces shall be navigated at the walk only for all classes.

When designing an obstacle course which will incorporate 360-degree turns as part of the degree of difficulty, the following parameters will be met:

Minis may perform a 360-degree turn on any obstacle that is a minimum of 18" wide.

Ponies may perform a 360-degree turn on any obstacle that is a minimum of 36" wide

Horses may perform a 360-degree turn on any obstacle that is a minimum of 40" wide

### **11.1. Obstacles Needed for A Mountain Trail Challenge Sanctioned Event**

For an IMTCA sanctioned event, at least 6 of the required obstacles will be used, additional obstacles may be chosen from either the required or optional obstacles sections. A sanctioned Trail Challenge will use between 6 and 16 obstacles.

### **11.2. Required Obstacles**

Cross Buck: Two 14'-16' logs or man-made 14"-16" boards, 8 feet apart with eight 8'-6" logs every 30" apart. Every other one will be placed atop the large log. Every 30" place a small notch in the log to hold the 8' small log. For expos the cross buck can be made by using 4 cavaletti's and ten, 10' jump poles.

Teeter Totter: 14' long x 42" - 48" wide.

Balance Beam: 14' long x 18" wide x 12" high.

45-degree Balance Beam: 14' – 20' long x 18" wide x 12" high.

Turn Around Box: 42" x 42" x 12" high.

Raised Logs: Logs placed on 2 parallel logs or cavaletti's to elevate no more than 16" off the ground.

Rock Obstacle: About 50 medium sized rocks. Each rock should be 12” to 18” in size. If rocks are not available, about 50 black nursery pot liners may be used as an option. (Most nurseries have them.)

Scramble: Approximately twenty, 10’ poles that are placed on the ground to look like pickup sticks that the horse maneuvers their way through. Horses are not penalized for ticking poles with this obstacle. This obstacle is to show the horse is able to work through tightly grouped downed trees or branches calmly.

Maze: see drawing plan

Logs: At least six logs, 12” to 16” in diameter and 10’ in length. For expos you can use large black pipe that is easy to move.

Small Bridge: 3’ x12’.

Raised back through: rails shall be 4’ high by 48” wide, minimum 8’ length.

Back Through: Not Raised: 30” wide, pattern may vary.

Water Box: 4’ wide x 8’ long x 6” tall.

Cake Box.: see drawing plan

Side Pass: log, length varies

Fan: 4” or 6” pole. (1) 16’ long & (3) 8’ long, place in a half circle similar to half a wagon wheel.

Octagon Box: see drawing plan

Turn Around Box, large: 5’x5’x12” high

Pinwheel: (8) 4” or 6” poles, 8’ long. Placed in a circle similar to wagon wheel spokes. May have a small octagon box or turn around box in the center.

Texas Two Step: 24’x4’ height varies

Reverse Texas Two Step.

Trench: minimum width 4’; length & depth varies

Hoof Check.

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

### **11.3. Optional Obstacles**

Trestle Bridge.

Arched Bridge.

Jump Up: height varies, no higher than 4’

Small puddle.

Step into large pond.

High Balance Beam: 14’ - 32’ long, 16”- 18” wide up to 16” high.

Suspension Bridge: 48” wide; length varies

Stair steps.

Switchback.

Dismount and Mount: a mounting block will be provided and may be used with no penalty.

Ground Tie or Hobble.

Rolling Bridge: 16'6 x 43"

“Steer head” roping.

Drag, hide or log.

Trot poles: minimum 36-inch spacing.

Snake: 10-15 chunks 30” wide, position in the shape of a snake

Curtain: 4'wide length varies

Top Hat: 16' x 22”; height varies

Trailhead: consists of 4 balance beams of varying widths; ( 1) 42” turn around box and (1) 60” turn around box

Ladder: see drawing plan

Compass: see drawing plan

Cross Logs: At least six logs, 12” to 16” in diameter and 10' in length, see image for layout. For expos you can use large black pipe that is easy to move.

Send around Rock

Turtle: see drawing plan

Images for all built trail obstacles named in this section can be seen at:

<https://www.bolenderhorsepark.com/imtca-trail-obstacles/>