



# 2017 INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN TRAIL CHALLENGE ASSOCIATION

## OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF RULES AND REGULATIONS



## 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 is not liable for accidents or damage of any kind incurred in connection with the contents of this book.

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## 1. ADDRESS OF IMTCA

The IMTCA's primary business address is:

IMTCA, Inc.  
131 Crater View Drive  
Silver Creek, WA 98585  
Telephone: 360-269-6156 or 541-993-4251  
Website: [www.IMTCA.org](http://www.IMTCA.org)  
Email: [IMTCAassoc@gmail.com](mailto:IMTCAassoc@gmail.com)

The Officers of the IMTCA are:

Mark H. Bolender, President  
Lee Bolender Vice President  
**Lisa Jenkins, Secretary**  
**Jean Falb, Treasurer**  
**Cathy Halverson, Membership**  
**Diana Jones, Membership**  
**Lino Matteo Tosoni, International Representative**

**International Affiliate Associations**

**IMTCA Australia**

**IMTCA Canada**

**IMTCA Germany**

**IMTCA Italy**

**NOTE: Revisions from 2014 edition are shown in Red**

## 2. WHAT IS THE IMTCA?

The International Mountain Trail Challenge Association or IMTCA is an organization that promotes the ideal trail horse where a rider of any skill level can enjoy riding in a safe manner. IMTCA will oversee standards of judging rules, obstacle and course standards, registration of horses, licensing of horses for competition, member services, updating rules and services as identified, and promote great horsemanship.

## 3. MISSION STATEMENT

The IMTCA is dedicated to the sport of Mountain Trail and Extreme Mountain Trail. The IMTCA's mission is to promote and encourage the development of, and public interest in these sports. These sports exemplify the joy of excellent horsemanship and trail riding, and the organization strives to maintain that connection by focusing on developing and maintaining suitable

standards of performance and judging, and in providing a fun-filled, family-oriented atmosphere at challenges and events.

The specific objectives of the IMTCA are to 1) promote and encourage development of, and public interest in the sport of Mountain Trail and Extreme Mountain Trail; 2) encourage excellent horsemanship and trail riding through the promotion of public IMTCA horse Challenges; 3) develop suitable and proper standards of performance and judging intended to govern all IMTCA horse contests sponsored and approved by the IMTCA; 4) encourage the development of better trail horses, and; 5) develop and disseminate informational material deemed desirable to provide contestants and spectators a better understanding of a proper performance of the Mountain Trail horse.

#### **4. DEFINING THE SPORT OF MOUNTAIN TRAIL AND EXTREME MOUNTAIN TRAIL**

Mountain Trail and Extreme Mountain Trail both showcase the perfect Mountain Trail horse. Perfection is epitomized by a horse that is bold, confident 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.

Mountain Trail and Extreme Mountain Trail are related sports. Both sports are judged events designed to show the confidence, boldness and athletic ability of all breeds and all disciplines of equines while being challenged by trail obstacles. 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.

Mountain Trail requires navigating obstacles at a flat footed walking pace. Extreme Mountain Trail requires navigating more obstacles at a faster pace. Extreme Mountain Trail is not a race, but the combination of loping, cantering, trotting, jogging and/or gaiting makes this sport move along at a faster pace than Mountain Trail.

The IMTCA Judging System is recognized as the leading format for judging an equine event that combines technical and stylistic elements coupled with consideration of "degree of difficulty."

Mountain Trail and Extreme Trail have flourished and expanded over the years in the USA, Canada and Europe. Challenges and events are now held in all of these locations.

The IMTCA Executive Committee will be aligned with other worldwide equine associations to accomplish common goals and to continue to expand the sport of Mountain Trail and Extreme Trail into the international arena.

## 5. HISTORY OF THE IMTCA

The sport of Mountain Trail started in 2001 at the Oregon Horse Center. Mark and Lee Bolender recognized the beauty of this new sport and have since promoted it across the world by 1) helping to design and build Mountain Trail courses across the USA, Canada and Europe, 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 sports of Mountain Trail and Extreme Mountain Trail, and 5) helping to establish formal judging guidelines.

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 and Extreme 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. Clinic 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 and Extreme 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.

## **6. WHAT TO EXPECT AT A CHALLENGE**

A competitive event for Mountain Trail and Extreme 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. Attire and tack required for participating must be neat, clean and in good working order.

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 Challenges can be a lot of fun and improve the relationship of the horse and rider by introducing them to new experiences.

The horse and rider will encounter various obstacles during a Trail Challenge. 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.

## 7. JUDGING RULES

Each obstacle is judged on how the partnership between horse and rider works together. This working team should negotiate each obstacle with calmness and patience, moving safely through the obstacle. Horses should show awareness, be attentive, and not spook, shy or spin. The Horse should not stumble, tick or clip an obstacle.

The partnership should demonstrate the ability to pick its way through the obstacle course when obstacles warrant it, and the horse should willingly respond to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles. It is important the horse exhibits good manners, responds to the rider, and demonstrates quality of movement. Horses should be relaxed and not display resistance. 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.

The judge has the right to ask the rider to pass an obstacle if he/she feels it will be unsafe. Control of the Horse must be maintained throughout the event.

Stallions may compete in adult classes. No youth shall exhibit a stallion in any 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 April is considered 1-year old on January first).**

## 8. REGISTRATION

Each rider must complete an official Registration / Release Form. The Registration fee and fees will be determined by the Trail Challenge host. Sign up time, starting, and finishing times, and extra activities will be posted on [www.IMTCA.org](http://www.IMTCA.org). There may be additional rules posted on the Event site.

Once a rider has completed the official Registration / Release Form and paid the appropriate fee or fees to compete, he or she will receive a rider packet with name, tag/number, maps, score card **if required**, and any other pertinent information about the event.

## 9. OBSTACLES

There are generally six to sixteen obstacles in any given Trail Challenge. This will vary depending on the terrain of the event's property. In some cases, there may be one obstacle incorporating several obstacles that flow together. Some obstacles should test if the partnership between horse and rider has a strong trust between the two. For example, if the obstacle is to rope a steer head, the object is not to judge the ability to rope the steer, but the patience the partnership gives to one another in completing the task at hand.

Natural settings and obstacles are preferred; however, man-made obstacles can be used and also can be permanent fixtures on a designed trail course. However, be cautious and avoid injury. For example, obstacles can cut a horse or can be slippery. And proper equipment is important. For example, consideration should be taken when jumping logs in a western saddle.

The course pattern should be posted at least one hour before the event's starting time. Riders should complete obstacles in the order they are laid out in the course.

Obstacles should have three different levels of difficulty. All riders are encouraged to attend a pre-ride meeting and all judges must be present at the meeting to identify themselves to participants and answer any questions riders might have before beginning the course.

Judges will be available to answer any questions or demonstrate each obstacle. This is considered an educational experience, each partnership should have the opportunity to understand what is being asked of them.

Each obstacle will receive an obstacle score. Riders are limited to three refusals at each obstacle. Judges have the right to ask the rider to move on to the next obstacle. Riders are encouraged to attempt an obstacle, as no attempt will equal a score of -18.

## **10. SUGGESTED OBSTACLES**

The course layout is at the discretion of the Trail Challenge management. **Obstacles shall be constructed of safe materials. Safety for various levels of partnerships should be taken into consideration, and the course should test the horse and rider's skills.** When possible, the course will utilize the topography of the property with regard to obstacles and layout.

## 11. OBSTACLES NEEDED FOR A MOUNTAIN TRAIL CHALLENGE / CLINIC / EXPO

Note: Choose at least 6 of the required obstacles, **additional obstacle may be chosen from either the required or optional obstacles sections.**

Go to [IMTCA.org](http://IMTCA.org) for more obstacles.

### Section 11.1 Required Obstacles

#### 1) Cross Buck

Two 18'-16" logs, 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.



**2) Teeter Totter (14' long x 42" wide)**



**3) Balance Beam (14' long x 18" wide x 12" high)**



#### 4) Turn Around Box (42" x 42" x 12" high)



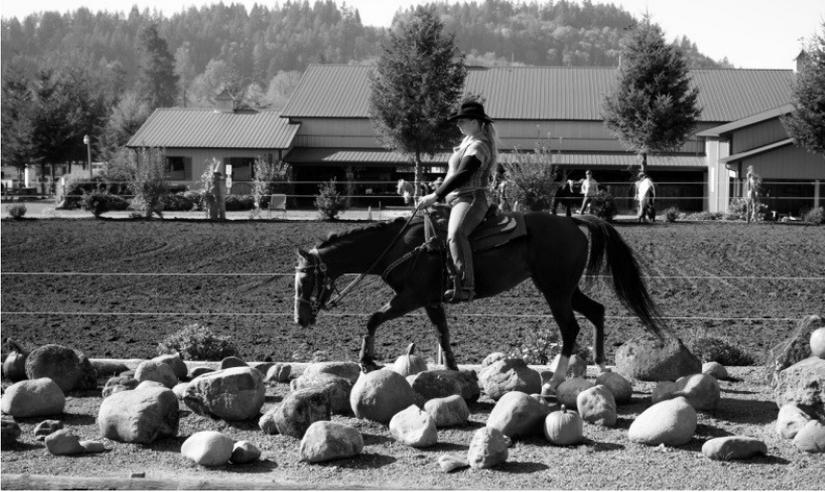
#### 5) Raised Logs

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



## 6) Rock Obstacle

You will need about 50 medium sized rocks. Each rock should be 12” to 18” in size. Rocks or 50 black nursery pot liners. (Most nurseries have them.)



## 7) Scramble

Twenty, 10’ poles that are placed on the ground to look like pickup sticks that the horse learns to walk through.



## 8) Maze

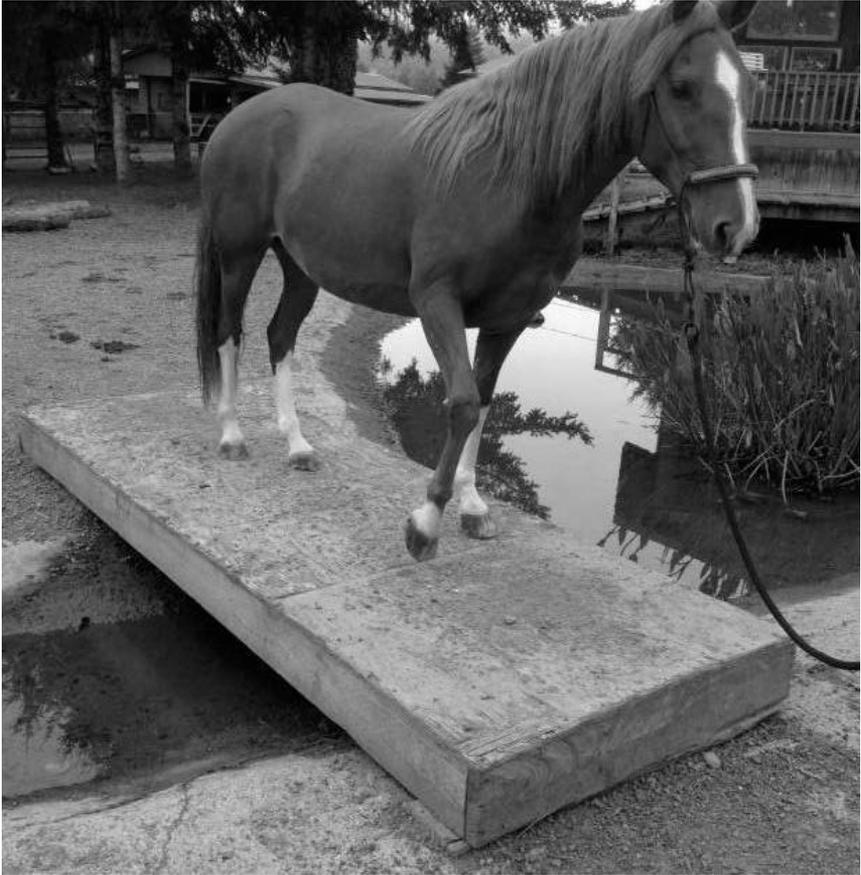


## 9) Logs

You will need 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.



**10) Small Bridge (3' x 12')**



**11) Raised Back Through, Shown with a Rope Gate**  
**Raised back through rails shall be 4' high by 40" wide, minimum 8' length**



**12) Back Through Not Raised**  
**30" wide, pattern may vary**



**13) Water Box (4' wide x 8' long x 6" tall)**



**14) Cake Box**  
**Two examples shown**



## **Additional Required Obstacles**

Side Pass

Ladder

Octagon Box

Four sided box

Pinwheel

Texas Two Step

Reverse Texas Two Step

Trench

**Section 11.2 Optional Obstacles**

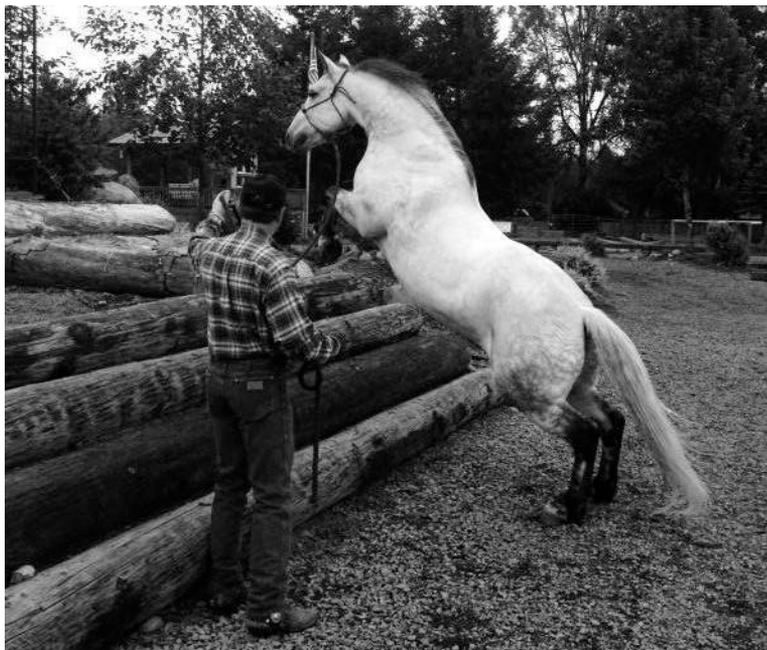
**15) Trestle Bridge**



**16) Arched Bridge**



## 17) 4' Jump Up



## 18) Small Puddle



**19) Step into large pond**



**20) High Balance Beam**

**10' to 14' long X 18" wide X 12" to 16" high**



**21) Suspension Bridge, 48" wide**



## 22) Stair steps



## 23) Switchback



24) Dismount and Mount on Rock, Shown in as part of water obstacle



25) Send around rock in pond



**Additional Optional Obstacles**

Ground Tie or Hobble

Rolling Bridge

“Steer head” roping

Drag, hide or log

Trot poles, minimum 36-inch spacing

## 12. OBSTACLE GUIDELINES

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

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

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

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

**Hoof Check:** Horse is to stand quietly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 13. JUDGES

Judges for judging the Trail Challenge Course must be a knowledgeable horseman or horsewoman, and certified by the IMTCA. Under the Trail Challenge Program, a judge must have the ability to evaluate horsemanship skills such as a rider's skill in controlling and maintaining the horse. **Additionally, the judge should be familiar with the natural movement of different breeds of equines.** Holding any special judging card from any other organization is not required, but these credentials should be taken into consideration.

The number of judges needed depends on the course, the number of obstacles, and the availability in the area for qualified judges. Depending on the course, usually one to four judges are 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.

A rider 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.

### 14. JUDGING MOUNTAIN TRAIL AND TRAIL CHALLENGE

#### **Attire and Tack**

Attire should be presentable, clean, and free from torn or frayed items. Boots with a closed toe and heel are required. Splint boots are recommended and allowed in the Trail Challenge.

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

#### **Equipment**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

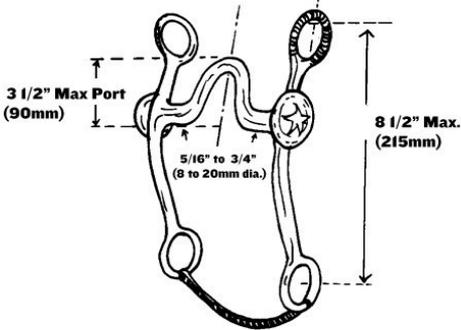
## Examples of Western Bits and Curb Straps

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

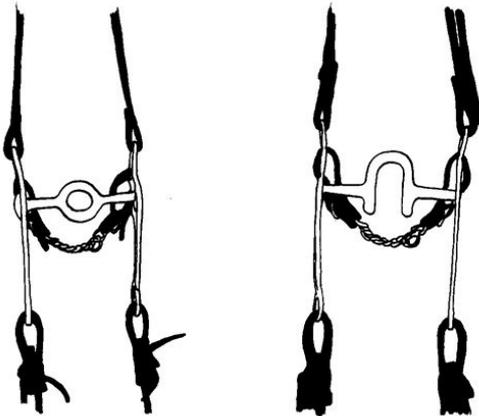
### ACCEPTABLE CHAIN CURB STRAPS



### WESTERN BITS



### LEGAL BIT



DONUT BIT

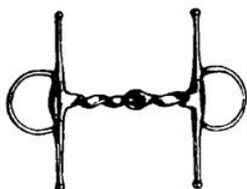
PRONG BIT

### ILLEGAL BIT

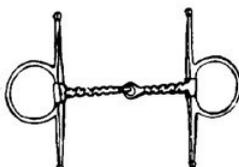
## Examples of English Bits

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

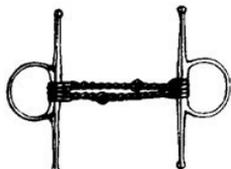
### ACCEPTABLE ENGLISH BITS FOR ALL AGES



**SLOW TWIST**



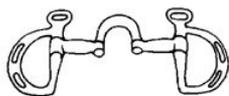
**CORKSCREW**



**DOUBLE TWISTED  
WIRE**



**SINGLE TWISTED  
WIRE**

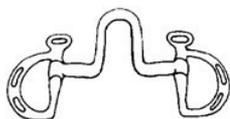


**CORRECTION BIT**

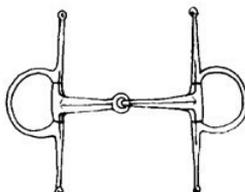


**SNAFFLE BIT WITH  
CONNECTING FLAT BAR**

### UNACCEPTABLE ENGLISH BITS



**ESCESSIVE PORT**



**TRIANGULAR MOUTH**

## Special Item Rules

No rider will be allowed to ride double or bareback.

No horse may be shown twice in the same class.

Gag bits, of any style, are not allowed.

Standing and running martingales are not allowed.

Draw reins are not allowed.

Tie-downs are not allowed.

## 15. DEFINITIONS, INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The following Levels and Divisions will be recognized by the Trail Challenge management. Within each Division there are 3 Levels:

### Levels

**Level 1** –This is considered a new Partnership. The rider and Horse may not have established trust or are unsure about each team member’s ability to negotiate simple obstacles. Obstacles should be easy to explain to the team: basic maneuver or technique needed to complete the obstacle. **The course will be at the 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 jog, trot, running walk, gait, or intermediate gait up to and between obstacles, forward ground covering is encouraged;** 180, 270 or 360 degree on certain obstacles.

**Level 3** –This is considered a Partnership where Horse and rider have established trust, can negotiate difficult obstacles and are conditioned to travel a longer Course. **May include some** canter, lope, or gait up to and between obstacles; 180, 270 or 360 degree on certain obstacles.

### Divisions

1. 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**).
2. Novice Division: This is defined as limited exposure to mastering Mountain Trail obstacles. No more than 3 blue ribbons in a qualifying Trail Challenge or in the first 2 years of riding
3. 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.  
Helmets

are necessary when required by state and/or local ordinance; all youth must wear helmets while showing under IMTCA. A youth cannot exhibit a stallion.

4. Adult Division: This is defined as participants 18 and older.

5. Open Division: This is defined as trainers and all riders.

### Participation Segments

In addition, there are 3 Participation Segments:

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

2. Junior Horse: This is defined as a horse 5 years and under **as determined using the standard January 1st age progression. (A horse born April is considered 1-year old on January first).**

3. Senior Horse: This is defined as a horse 6 years and older **as determined using the standard January 1st age progression. (A horse born April is considered 1-year old on January first)**

**The matrix of involvement is as follows:**

	<u>In-Hand</u>	<u>Riding</u>
1. Lead-Line		X
2. <b>Novice Division</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
3. Youth Division (6-17)		
Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X
4. Adult Division (18 and over)		
Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X
5. Open Division		
Level 1	X	X
Level 2	X	X
Level 3	X	X

Additional classes may be offered at the discretion of IMTCA management  
Correct attire is optional, equipment rules still apply

6. Timed and Judged  
50% Time/50% Technique

7. Ride one-Lead one  
Horse being led shall not be loose.



Charles Hilton Photography

8. Rider with Dog

9. Team Class, two or more riders per team

10. Gamblers Choice

## 16. EQUESTRIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Allowances for riders with permanent physical or mental disabilities are permissible. A rider with a temporary or permanent disability must advise the senior judge during the riders' meeting.

A test reader may be allowed with prior show management approval for equestrians with disabilities.

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, Trail Challenge coordinator, and senior judge and/or Train Challenge management as to whether this person can compete. Final say will be based on the **property owner** and senior judge, and that decision will be final without recourse of any nature.

## 17. TRAIL CHALLENGE ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for **Challenge series awards**, the person competing must be a current member in good standing of the IMTCA. **Membership is January 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>.**

## 18. GENERAL SCOPE OF SCORING

**The judge has the right to ask the rider to pass an obstacle if he/she feels it will be unsafe. Control of the Horse must be maintained throughout the event.**

Scoring is based on the partnership's ability to navigate the course. 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.

Each partnership starts with a 70 and earns points throughout the course. Each judge has 5 points for horsemanship. First through tenth place ribbons are given in each class in each division. Additional awards will be at the discretion of the event coordinator. 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. The original score sheets are to be sent into IMTA immediately following the event.

Riders are encouraged to attempt an obstacle. A no attempt will result in a penalty of -18. If tried but unable to compete, -9.

The Challenges are judged on how the Partnership works together. This working unit should negotiate obstacles with calmness and patience, moving safely through each obstacle.

Horses should be aware, attentive and not spook, shy or spin as well as not be unaware and clip, stumble or tick obstacles. The partnership should demonstrate the capability of picking its way through the course when obstacles warrant it and should willingly respond to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles.

Emphasis is on manners, response to the rider and quality of movement. Horses should be relaxed and not display resistance. When completing the course, the horse should not be overly exhausted. Credit will



## 19. JUDGING RULES

### 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

It helps to see what a judge might look for to assess how near perfection you and your horse have become. Good and tight unity between horse and rider is key and the judges can see this. They have designed the competition obstacles so that decision making can be done on the fly and only a great partnership can make it look easy.

But what's most telling about how horse and rider negotiate the obstacles is how unified they are. A practiced eye can tell right away whether a good partnership exists. When the horse and rider make it look effortless, simple, vigorous and fun with boldness and confidence – it's a pleasure to watch, a crowd pleaser and a sure winner.

### 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.

1. Entry into the obstacle 2 points ► if correct a 0 is given
2. Navigating through the obstacle 5 points if correct a 0 is given
3. Exit from the obstacle 2 points ► if correct a 0 is given
4. Wow ► If the horse and rider navigated the obstacle such that a judge's only words were "wow" then an extra 3 points can be added +1 point for entry, +1 point for body, +1 point for exit.
5. Horsemanship ► see below

Half-points are recommended where it is needed to differentiate between riders for placing. Some obstacles, as determined by the Head Judge, may be valued at twice the points ("times two")

## **1. 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. After 3 seconds it will be counted as a refusal and lack of forward motion.

Plus ½ to 1 point ► A horse walks up to the obstacle straight drops its head and acknowledges an obstacle in a bold confident willing manner and enters the obstacle without breaking gait.

## **2. Navigating**

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

Plus ½ to 1 ► The horse navigates the obstacle in a safe confident bold willing manner which is pleasure to watch.

## **3. Exit**

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

Plus ½ to 1 ► The horse drops its head and acknowledges the exit and walks out in a collected manner.

Pluses in a timed event ► willing, bold, confident and moving in a safe manner.

If 1, 2 and 3 are all smooth, safe and enjoyable to watch then the judge has the option of granting an extra point for entry, body of obstacle and exit which brings the total possible points to 12 which = a plus 3 (the very best). You can't plus an obstacle more than 3 and you can't have more than 9 deducted.

## **4. Horsemanship.**

Horsemanship will be on overall presentation of proper working equipment, correct use of hands, proper use of a riding crop or other tools, appropriate behavior between obstacles, appropriate behavior while waiting at a hold, legal equipment, talking only in an appropriate manner to a judge, proper attire and dress, foot wear, which is clean and neat for a trail ride. Proper equipment for English or Western. **A rider may sit, stand, two-point, or post at the trot no matter what discipline with no penalty.** It must be recognized that horsemanship scoring may be somewhat subjective but proper use of equipment is not so one is encouraged to know the rules for use of equipment. **Reins may be adjusted in a smooth manner as needed to maneuver through the**

**obstacle.** The judges will voice what behavior they will find inappropriate before the Challenge starts when the judges address the participants. If one shows good horsemanship as outlined above then the competitor will receive an automatic 5 points from the judge for the obstacles that they judged.

Each judge will give a horsemanship score of 0-5 for the obstacles they are as asked to judge. If there are 16 obstacles and four judges then the total possible horsemanship score for obstacles will 20 points. This will be added to the 70 base score.

## 20. SCORING

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 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. All penalties apply to each obstacle.

### Deductions

#### Entry Deductions

-1/2 Point ► Tic, slight change of pace

-1 point ► Horse does not enter an obstacle straight one horse length, willing and/or breaks forward motion with a pause longer than 3 seconds. (“stop” is a break of forward motion longer than 3 seconds on entry only.) Does not enter the obstacle centered, hops in or out (a hop is two front feet walk in or out and then lightly jumps out, **a hop will not result in a deduction if due to the horses size in relation to the obstacle**), each refusal. 1 point for each delayed stride or gait when asked.

-1 ½ point ► slight stumble

-2 point ► Horse refuses twice (the horse backs up twice) and/or horse has two refusals and is not straight 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 if using a starting base of 70.**

► Jumps into an obstacle

#### Navigating Deductions

- ½ point for each tic of an obstacle

-1 to 1 ½ point ► Horse and rider lose forward motion, Horse steps on or moves an obstacle, Incorrect or break of gait, Skipping space or failing to step into required space, 1 step on dismount or ground-tie (except shifting to balance), Deviates from center of obstacle and or course pattern.

-2 to 2 ½ point ► Horse stumbles, rushing, incorrect or break of gait at walk or jog for 2 strides or more, Out of lead or break of gait at lope, Knockdown, Jumping out the obstacle exit, Steps out of obstacle with one foot, once the foot had entered obstacle, Missing one element of obstacle on line of travel with one foot, Steps on dismount or ground-tie.

-3 ► Horse is not listening to the rider or judge's discretion, letting go of the gate, scared horse during log pull.

-5 ► All the above and or the rider's and horse's safety is at risk or steps out of the obstacle with two or more feet, or falls off, Dropping slicker or object, cumulative refusal, balk or evade, Letting go of gate, Stepping outside the confines of, Jumping off or out of obstacle with more than one foot, once the foot has entered obstacle, blatant disobedience, 4 or more steps on dismount or ground-tie, Holding onto saddle, except to mount and dismount and for large step downs or large drops or large step ups or jump ups, excessive whipping or spurring, horse rears up and or bucking.

### **Exit Deductions**

-1/2 ► 1/16 to 1/8 off center from straight, ties

-1 to 1½ point ► Hurries or rushes, not straight one horse length, not centered

-2 point ► Not straight and all of the above and not safe, jumps out

### **Disqualification on course**

May be dismissed at Judge's discretion.

► Fall of horse or rider

► Abuse or aggressive schooling

► Equipment Failure

Rider cannot receive a greater deduction than 9 for any given obstacle where the rider tries. An obstacle avoided will receive a deduction of 18

### **Horsemanship Deductions**

Use of hand to instill fear or praise; Using excessive hand action to jerk on the bit; Excessive use of spurs; Excessive use of a riding crop; Over correction of the horse; Dirty tack; Excessive dirt on the horse; Use of 2 hands other than riding with a snaffle or English; Equipment failure; Entering or exiting obstacle from incorrect side or direction; Working obstacle the incorrect direction; Riding outside boundary marker of arena or Course hold area;

Failure to ever show correct gait between obstacles as designated; Failure to follow the correct line of travel between obstacles; Head consistently carried too low or over flexed; Excessive emotions of anger or praise; talking in any way inappropriately to a judge.

## **Time**

In the open money classes an optimum time will be given for the class. If your time is over this you will have a 2 point deduct for every 5 seconds you are over the optimum time given. This will ensure that we maintain a good working forward motion such as seen in a working ranch horse and mountain trail horse where a job is to be done or a trail ride is to be ridden.

## **Timed and Judged**

In the Timed and Judged Money Class, 50% of the score will be given to best time, and 50% given to score.

## **Gamblers Choice**

The rules are different. You have 2 minutes to show your skills. 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 show starts. You must be across the finish line when the 2 minutes are up or the score does not count.





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