



Evaluating Your Gypsy Vanner

By Heather Caudill

What to expect at the Evaluations:

You have filled out your forms, paid your fees, and now have arrived with your horse at the evaluations. The conformation evaluation is first. When you enter the arena where the evaluators are you will be directed to present your horse at the top of the triangle that is marked out in the arena. Once your horse is standing quietly the evaluators will ask you to part your horses' lips so that they can see the horses bite. After inspecting the bite the evaluators will then take the time needed to see every part of your horses' body. As the evaluators move around your horse they will move and feel the forelock, mane, and tail in order to see the parts of the body that they cover and to check for the amount and quality of hair they produce. You will also notice the evaluators feeling along the neck and back and down the legs. The feather covers many parts of the horses' legs and to assess the conformation in the lower areas of the legs the evaluators must touch, feel, and move the feather around. The horse will

also be asked to pick up their legs so that the evaluators can see the size and shape of their hooves.

Now that the evaluators have looked over the conformation of your horse they will ask you to move your horse at both the walk and trot around the outside of the triangle. You will be asked to start to the left at the top of the triangle and walk each side of the triangle in a clock wise rotation. This is to allow the evaluators to see the horse moving from behind as they go away. Next is to see the movement from the side as they go across the bottom of the triangle. Last is to see the horse from the front as they are moving towards the evaluators. Once this is performed at a walk then you will be asked to do the same pattern around the triangle at a trot. If for any reason the evaluators feel that they need to see the horse go at the walk or trot a second time they will ask for the pattern to be performed again.

Throughout the evaluation you will

be guided by the evaluators for any particular things they may need you to do with your horse. If they need you to move your horse forward or backwards they will let you know. If you are unable to handle your horse for the evaluation you can have another person of your choosing present to handle your horse. During the conformation evaluation if you have any questions you may ask them at any time.

There are three performance evaluations offered including English under saddle, Western under saddle, and Driving. Each of these patterns can be downloaded from the GVHS website at www.vannners.org. The patterns for each performance evaluation are self-explanatory. Before you begin any of the patterns feel free to ask any questions you may have. After you have performed the pattern if the evaluators would like to see a movement repeated they will ask at that time. You will not be counted down for going off pattern and may stop and be refreshed on the pattern during your evaluation if needed.

The English pattern has walk, trot, and canter. The Western pattern has walk, jog, and lope. The Driving pattern has walk and trot. The Horse will receive scores for each of these gaits during the evaluations. Other scores are acquired through behavior, impulsion, acceptance of the bit, submission, confidence, transitions, and willingness to work. Comments will accompany the scores in each section of the pattern.



Leading up to the evaluation you want to make sure your horse is at their optimal health. Keep up with and maintain a proper worming schedule as well as vaccination routine for your horse and adequate hoof care. Your horse does not have to be “fitted” in order to attend an evaluation but your horse should be of healthy weight and body condition. Certain factors should be considered as you are deciding when to take your horse to an evaluation. If your horse is underweight due to nursing a foal that might not be the best time to present your horse. You should take the time to assess your horses overall health and body condition prior to the evaluation. If needed ask your veterinarian or another professional in the equine industry to help with this assessment to insure your horse is healthy. A horse that is very over weight may have a difficult

These comments will reflect whether the horse performed each section to the best of its ability or if there is room for improvement in their scores. On the evaluation form an evaluator may request that the horse be re-evaluated. Even if an evaluator does not make that request the owner may have their horse re-evaluated at any time in any of the Evaluations offered.

Preparing for the Evaluations:

Locations and dates for evaluations are posted on the GVHS website giving owners the needed time to prepare for the evaluations of choice. Once you have picked your location and which evaluations your horse will participate in, you then need to prepare your horse. The evaluations are not competitions but there are basic requirements in order for your horse to be safely inspected by the evaluators. At a competition a horse is placed based on the competition it has that day and in that class. At an evaluation each horse is obtaining a final score which determines whether they are 3 star, 4 star, or 5 star status. This score is the score that stays with the horse year after year and is a representation of the horses quality.

Many people worry about the grooming requirements for evaluations. There are no specific grooming requirements in order to bring your horse to an evaluation. To show respect to the evaluators it is proper etiquette to have a clean horse. Having the horse free of excess dirt on the body, manure and shavings in the tail and feather, and oil



or ointments is basic grooming that is needed. The evaluators will not only be touching your horse but will also pick up and look at the hooves so remember to pick out your horses hooves prior to entering the arena for evaluation. Clipping is optional for any horse at any age. If you do clip your horse make sure to not clip the forelock, mane, tail, or feather. During the conformation evaluation your horses forelock, mane, and tail need to be down so that the evaluators can see and feel the quality of hair. For the English, Western or driving evaluations you may braid your horses forelock or mane.

time in properly showing their range of movement. The same can be said for an underweight horse that might be lethargic or depleted and unable to show their true potential. You want your horse to obtain the best score it can get and the health of your horse is the most important step in achieving that.

Horses are presented at all ages for the conformation evaluation. Many young horses might not have a lot of handling or training when you decide you would like to have them evaluated. You can help prepare your horse regardless of



how much handling or training they have had. Your horse needs to accept a person touching their head, body, and legs. They need to allow someone to pick up their legs and touch their hooves. Many horses don't like people to walk behind them or touch their tails. This is something they have to accept during evaluation. Work with your horse on standing quietly in areas that may be distracting, especially if this is the first time they will go somewhere new. You need to be able to stand on both sides of your horse or in front of them. During the movement pattern around the triangle at the walk or the trot your horse needs to be moving beside you. You do not want to be running out in front of your horse dragging it around the triangle or having it chase you either. If your horse is very forward and you cannot keep up with your horse you may need to find another handler that can for safety reasons as well as to allow your horse to show off its abilities. There is no set size of triangle for the evaluations and will depend on the arena dimensions. The sides of the triangle should range from 40-60 feet with each side the same length. During the pattern you will be traveling clockwise around the triangle, therefore your horse needs to be able to turn to the right away from you as you are moving.

For the performance evaluations the horse needs to be at least 3 years of age to participate. The patterns for each performance evaluation explain the movements required to be performed. When signing up for these evaluations

look over the patterns and make sure that your horse has the proper training to perform the necessary movements.

Equipment and Attire for Evaluations

In the conformation evaluation the horse should be presented in a properly fitting halter with either a regular lead rope or a chain lead. Stallions age 3 years and older are permitted to wear a bridle with a snaffle bit during the evaluation. Full stallion rigging is not permitted for evaluations. Any other equipment besides the halter or bridle is not permitted during the conformation evaluations. A whip may be held by the handler and used to encourage the horse to move forward if necessary during the movement portion of the evaluation. You may also have an additional person to run behind your horse if needed to encourage them to move forward during that time as well. In the English under saddle evaluation a hunt seat, dressage, or all-purpose English saddle may be used. An English bridle is required and may have a regular cavesson, flash, or dropped noseband. In the Western under saddle evaluation a western saddle must be used with any skirt style of choice. Western bridles with or without cavessons are acceptable. Carrying a whip or riding with spurs is allowed in either English or Western evaluations. No side pulls, draw reins, tie downs, or martingales are permitted while in an evaluation. For the driving evaluation a cart of appropriate size to the horse should be used along with proper fitting harness. Drivers should

be prepared to properly utilize their driving whip.

Attire for handlers, riders, or drivers should be appropriate to the discipline. In the conformation evaluation you need to wear safe and comfortable shoes to be able to run. Your clothes should have a clean and professional appearance. Slacks or Jeans are acceptable to wear along with a button down shirt or polo. Dress for function and safety. Wearing flip flops and spaghetti strap tank tops are not appropriate attire. If you are wearing jewelry make sure it will not interfere with the handling of your horse. You may wear gloves for any of the evaluations including the conformation evaluation.

The Evaluation program was designed to help the GVHS in preserving the breed and is a useful program for its members. One purpose of the evaluations is to assess your horses strengths and weaknesses in order to help make educated breeding decisions to maintain the breed standard. The second purpose for evaluations is inspecting new horses entering the registry to insure that the horses are of the breed standard quality to be entered into the stud book. Many other breed registries have used inspections and/or evaluations for years with great success in preserving their breed type. Additional information pertaining to the Evaluations can be found on the GVHS website.

