

Extreme Challenges

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How to prepare your horse for these popular events

The new wave of extreme challenge timed and judged events are rapidly gaining in popularity across the nation since the introduction of the first Extreme Cowboy Race back in 2005. Ryan Dohrn of *HorseCity.com*, along with Craig Cameron of Bluffdale, TX, created the Extreme Cowboy Races to challenge typical reality TV shows with an infusion of horseback riding thrills.

Since this introduction, there has been an array of challenge and extreme events of all sorts pop up everywhere from Trail Challenge to Cowboy Trail Challenge, Ranch Horse Extreme and Pony Express Race events.

At this time, there is no national organization under which these types of events are governed. Therefore, it makes it a little hard to describe each one in terms of concrete rules. Each organization comes up with their own set of rules and it would be best to contact the event management to get a full run down on the what the rules are.

These extreme equestrian events do offer a unique and exciting opportunity to test your horsemanship and athletic abilities and compete for valuable prizes. The events are timed races with obstacles designed to not only push horse and rider out of their traditional comfort zone, but also test the communication and horsemanship skills of each team. Judges will award points on a scale of 1-10 for the horse and rider's performance through each obstacle based on the following criteria: horsemanship, cadence, control, horse's attitude, and overall performance. Horses and riders will be required to complete each obstacle within a given time in order to receive points. If an obstacle not completed within a given timeframe, the contestant will be

flagged and must move on to the next obstacle. The times will be translated into points, with the highest overall score winning the event.

In the Northwest, the most popular extreme challenges are the Trail Horse or Mountain Horse events. Familiar faces in these events are Mitch and JoLinn Hoover who own and operate the MJ Rising H Ranch in Richland, OR. After managing the Pine Valley Ranch for 25 years, they bought their own ranch. After this move, they decided to go to the 2nd annual mountain trail championships in Eugene, just for fun. "We ended up doing pretty well, then people started coming to us for help and it's grown from there. We have phased into training horses and coaching people for extreme ranch-versatility and trail competition. These mountain-trail events are something anybody can do because they can set up all kinds of obstacles at home for practice. Trail and recreational riders have become a big part of these events. Classes are made available for every level of horse and rider, so there's something for everyone," says JoLinn.

So how can you prepare for these events? Get basic training for you and your horse. If the horse is one you already own, ask someone knowledgeable with extreme challenge events to help you. An experienced horseman can determine if the horse is safe for this type of work because some obstacles can be tough. Learn showmanship skills and how to handle your horse in different situations in a real ranch and trail setting. Perform any maneuvers with your horse that you normally use in ranch or trail work, but be more precise and pay more attention to the details. Learn to be a partner with your horse, so you know what to expect from each other and how to handle different situations. Often what separates the top six riders in each division is a little tiny showmanship thing that you won't know about unless you have some help. The acquisition of knowledge is of utmost importance in achieving a positive experience for you and your horse if you plan to enter these types of events.

In any performance class or event, you and your horse should also be in good condition. Some of the outdoor challenges or races can be up to seven miles long. In addition, in these competitions you might see a dressage rider on a 17-hand Warm Blood visiting with a rider in western attire, packing a rope and riding a 14.1-hand Quarter Horse bred to work cows.