

MAEL Judges Clinic Show – 9/27/26

Judges Comments

First, here are some comments that the judge offered at various times that will be helpful to all:

- In a flat, usually it is w-t-c, etc. but sometimes the judge will throw it around. Always think ahead and be prepared – if you think the canter might come, be prepared, look around, etc. Your excess rein should always be on the right side of the neck, never on the left.
- Turnout is a key part of a score. Everyone here looked great, had clean boots and well-fitting jacket.
- If it is something you can control, take care of that first. Such as turnout. Look presentable coming into the ring.
- Note that if the horse is not cooperating, the judge wants to see you trying. If the lead is wrong and you try to correct it, that counts.
- Some of you broke at the canter and that sends you to the bottom of the list when that happens. A change of lead if there is an incorrect lead is not a break, it is done on purpose and is corrected immediately. A break is a break in stride, whether corrected quickly or not. NOTE: Once you have a break in stride, your score drops and cannot be any higher than a 55.
- Remember that the judge can't see everything at all times. Sometimes a rider is on the wrong lead or diagonal and a spectator saw it but then wonders why the judge didn't score that rider lower, it likely means the judge simply did not see it. That's just the way it goes, you have to hope and pray that if you have a mistake that you correct quickly that the judge didn't see it!
- When jumping – release, release, release! If you can't do an automatic release you can at least do a crest release to give the horse the freedom to stretch. If you keep your hands in your lap you are catching the horse in the mouth and that is a punishment to them.
- Crops – never use the crop on the horse's shoulder! If you must use it, use it behind your leg, and ONLY if you have used your other aids (legs) and the horse isn't responding or if they are misbehaving. If the judge can hear you smack the horse with your stick, that's an easy way to lose lots of points. If you use it, it should be subtle and quick.
- You should not be sitting on the back of your saddle, you should be sitting on your 3 points on the twist (narrow point) of the saddle.

- Heels down are the first thing most judges notice about the equitation of a rider, and they are the basis of most of what happens with your body when in the saddle. Your body position should be – a straight vertical line from your shoulder to your hip to your heel, this will bring your legs under you and with your heels down, this covers much of what you need to have a secure position. Your foot should only be about 1/3 through the stirrup – under the ball of your foot. Several riders had their feet as far into the stirrup as your foot would allow – this is not only a safety concern but also is impossible to get your heels down. So work on your heels first, put the stirrup at the ball of your foot and you will have much more security and balance with your legs.

What was not said out loud but we wanted to share with you as helpful advice:

- Many of you had really nice turnout – hair where it is supposed to be, clean boots, well-fitting attire, but not everyone was correct. Here are a few things that we saw that could use some help before the next show:
 - Hair should not be coming out from under your helmet. If you have tall boots, your hair should be in a hair net up under your hard hat with no wispy's coming out. At no time should there be a chunk of hair coming out the back of your helmet – even if it is contained in a hair net, there should be no “bumps” and definitely no dressage bows.
 - If you are a girl wearing jodphurs and garters, hair can be in two braids down the back with bows but be careful that the braids and bows don't cover up your back number. Or if your hair is shorter or if you prefer not to do the braids, you can use a hairnet with hair under the helmet.
 - If you are wearing jodphurs, you should be using garter straps (the leather straps under your knees) and the boot straps (that go under your boots to prevent your jods from slipping up as you ride).
 - Your show coats should be well-fitted. We saw a few coats that were way too big or a good bit too small.
 - Always wear gloves for equitation.
- Fingers should be closed over the reins, open fingers is a safety issue and some judges will take points off.

The comments below were offered by the judge directly to each rider and are listed by division and then by the rider's back number.

2'6" Equitation

Flat #1

220 – broke at the canter, that sent you to the bottom of the list. Keep your leg on and keep the stride going. You had uneven hands, keep hands even.

237 - ++ (two plus signs) – when I see something I like, I give plus signs. I liked the overall picture, but you also broke so that sent you to the bottom. Heels could be further down. Great leg but heels were a bit flat.

238 – Leg is forward. You should always align your body in a straight line down - shoulder, hip, heel. If you can see your toes, your leg is too far forward. Sometimes the horse and/or the tack puts you into that position but you need to adjust. Don't allow yourself to get into the back of your saddle, you should be sitting on your three points on the narrow part at the front of the saddle.

225 – Good flat from my perspective. Your horse was under you. When trying to keep your horse on the rail you were pulling on our outside rein and causing a counterbend. Also your hands were in your lap. Your arms should be following horse's movement instead of stiff, maybe he'll fight you less.

215 – Your heels could be lower and you have piano hands. Sitting trot a little too slow at times. We know it is easier to slow them down for the sitting trot but you can't go too slow.

219 - +++ (3 plus signs) liked everything he saw

Flat #2

Glad to see that everyone took his notes from the previous class and tried to work on things.

238 – you kept trying and that counts a lot. One time you picked up the correct lead and lost it and you fixed it.

237 – Great match with this horse. Saw you cantering past at one point in a half seat - you should be sitting in the tack for equitation. Jumping you can be in half seat but in the flat class, sit on the 3 points of your seat.

Jumping

225 – Great ride 1st round, really made a difference on you he rode the horse more softly than earlier and the horse responded. Started with the wrong lead. Use your ring, you cut corners and with a stronger horse you can use your ring to slow him down, ride out to rail instead of cutting turns. Medal – circled before halt, don't do that, it could be taken as a refusal. If you couldn't get him to halt at X, instead of circling back to the x, just halt as soon as you can without a little circle.

220 – 1st round – first few fences were beautiful, landed after 3 and cut corner and got a refusal. Use the ring, go all the way to the rail before making turn, get nice approach to next jump. You were counterbending him and he just couldn't do it. Same thing later in the course. Use straight lines to the fences. Medal – good ride but in the back when he bucked

a little, you yanked on his mouth. Don't do that, it is punishing the pony. Great halt, if he wasn't ready to stop, you pushed him toward the wall and he halted.

237 – 1st jump was deep and he jumped up into the air then to fence 2 he was squiggly, then had a refusal. When there is a refusal, usually the problem started way before the jump. Rest of jumps were really good and then he broke before last jump and had a refusal. You pulled back and that's a no-no. If he gets strong, close your leg and go with him instead of pulling back and catching him in the mouth before or over the fence. Medal – went pretty well, some steering issues almost running into the standard, always look for your next jump in the middle of your last jump. Also circled before halt, don't do that.

219 – Off course – oops! It's one of the things we can always control is knowing our course. Medal – pretty good, he got forward into jump 3 causing you to go too deep. Keep same pace and the distances will be better. Good halt. Heels got a little forward after the last jump. Not all of this would count against your score.

238 – on Rizzo – if the horse breaks, don't keep circling. You only get one circle. The second circle counts as a refusal. If she's not cantering, just keep going anyway. Even try it at a trot just to get over, your score is already lowered anyway so you may as well do whatever you need to do to get over that difficult jump. Medal – rode beautifully, leg in perfect position which is an improvement over the flats. This horse suited you better than the first one. Disappointed in a wrong lead that could have been avoided. Last jump, not really in sync with the horse and he jumped and you weren't ready so you caught him in the mouth.

2'3" Equitation

Flat #1

230 – Rode great, was way higher in the list but you broke and had a wrong lead so that brings you to the bottom. Just be sure to keep your leg on the horse so they don't break.

226 – Heels! Work on bringing heels down. Also need to bend elbows – at one point arms were completely straight. Foot is also too far through stirrup but heels going down will help with that.

240 – Leg is too far forward, should be back under you to provide support. You also have piano hands.

208 – Heels were too far up and foot too far into stirrup. Heels down should correct this.

217 – Good ride, heels, same as above.

223 – Good job, ++ - only note, keep fingers closed. That's not just a looks thing, it is a safety issue.

232 – just a bunch of plus signs, nice job!

Flat #2

208 – You broke and then picked up the wrong lead. Horse is being a bit strong and you're doing a good job with him but take an extra second to ask for the correct lead.

230 – wrong lead again. You rode beautifully but a wrong lead puts you at the bottom. You must have broken (didn't see it) and you were suddenly on the wrong lead. Ask for the correct lead and if you don't get it, fix it quickly, the judge may not even have seen the wrong lead.

217 – too slow at times. Needs to be a working gait. Keep a correct rhythm at the trot.

240 – horse is a bit nervous, you are handling it fine, but you are sitting on the back of the saddle. You should be riding on the twist of the saddle (narrow part).

226 – Uneven hands. Everything else looked pretty good.

232 – Great job, the one thing was when you picked up the trot in the first direction, I saw you looking for your diagonal and that isn't great. You should be able to feel your diagonal at this level. If you do feel you need to look, you don't need to use your whole head to look down, you can do it a bit more discreetly.

Jumping

230 – Great ride, bring your upper body back a bit, you ride a bit too forward. Remember to line up shoulder, hip, heel. You broke again. You need to keep your leg on him. Breaks are big faults and you could have gotten much better placings if you had kept him going.

208 – Trotted the course – why? Yes the horse was forward but at this level you shouldn't be trotting the course. From a training perspective if the horse isn't behaving, good call, but from a judging perspective, they can't give a good score for a trotted course. You had no release and that's a punishment for the horse. Even if the horse is forward, you need to release go let them stretch. Even try a crest release if you need to, but you must let him have his head and he will continue to stay up instead of relaxing.

226 – You had a refusal and then another. Once the horse refuses the first time, try trotting the jump to get them over it. You've already had a refusal so points won't be great anyway, so try that to get him over it and maybe he will actually pick back up after he gets over that jump. You also jumped the first jump in the line after your refusal on the second jump, should have just taken the second jump and not the first one twice.

223 – Great ride, ++ for equitation, good position. Had a very late change on course. Should not go through a corner on the wrong lead. If you try to fix the lead and he doesn't do it, try a simple change if you need to, but your lead should be changed ASAP and not a few strides in and especially not wrong lead around a corner. Try not to cut corners, use your whole ring. Equitation is about a polished round, not janky corners.

232 – You were left behind after the second jump. He took off a bit long. If you are in a half seat being left behind likely won't happen. You were a bit stiff, your upper body needs to be more reflexed. You also had no release over the jumps. Start with not being so stiff and that will probably help with the release.

2' Equitation – Group A

Flat #1

201 -Would like to see more weight down your leg, need to have more weight pushing down on the stirrup. Watch for your leads.

239 – Had a wrong lead, and fingers were open. Keep in mind that doesn't mean that you always had open fingers the whole class, but you definitely when you went past the judge.

206 – Good position and equitation, your horse was a little quick at times so try to regulate your speed. Also had a wrong lead.

212 – Your leg was too far forward, should be under you. Hands bouncing quite a bit, keep them still.

204 – Good job overall, though your hands were a little too low.

207 - ++ (two plus signs) - no notes other than good job

Flat #2

212 - Your horse is not cooperating, you're doing a good job. Try to use your leg to steer a little bit more than your hands. Try to not mess with his face too much.

206 - Horse is quick at times, you can slow down your posting to help them regulate their trot. You also had a wrong lead.

239 - + - good equitation – then had a wrong lead so that put you down a bit on the list.

204 – Very good, but your leg slides forward at times, bring your leg under you to provide a base of support. Leg in front of you doesn't help at all.

207 – Good job – no notes! ++

201 – Huge difference from previous class. Leg was in correct position and doing what it is supposed to be doing. Sometimes there are small things to tweak with riding and it makes a huge difference. All of it starts with the leg, the rest will fall into place.

Jumping

201 – All of the jumps were good but you cut her corners a lot and leaned to the side. Now it is time to polish the ride. Nice, smooth turns and straight to the jumps, sitting up straight. Heels improved in second flat class but went back up during jumping so that's something to work on. Take your time, use your wide turns to slow and steady your horse.

204 – Heels were up. That's the first thing a judge notices. You also looked down for your leads. It's kind of OK at this level but you will want to start learning to feel for your leads and not leaning to look. If you do need to look, just look with eyes, not your whole head – discreetly.

206 – You were looking down for the leads, see above for same comments. Started off on the wrong lead, that takes points off. No need to rush, come in, walk, pick up canter, correct leads at that time before you head to your jump. There was a wrong lead after the second jump and then a cross-canter that continued. No attempt was made to fix it so that counts more heavily against you than if you have a wrong lead and try to fix it.

239 – Jumps looked great, good job. Looked down for leads, see comments above.

207 - Most jumps were good but you sped up to #5 and that caused the rest of the jumps to be deep. If you had kept the same pace you started with it would have been so much better. Pick the rhythm and stick with it. Very nice, balanced position but it might help to bring shoulders back just a tad.

2' Equitation Group B

Flat #1

203 – You were on the wrong lead for a whole time around and didn't try to correct it.

211 – You started off on the wrong diagonal, usually I would give you a bit of grace to correct it but it took you a long time. You also had a break at the canter.

214 – Your hands were a bit too low and bouncing at times. Pick up your hands a little bit and try to keep a more steady contact with your horse.

241 – Good job, one + - but your leg was a little forward. Remember shoulder – hip – heel.

210 – Your heels were ok, could be a bit lower, but you had a good lower leg. Suggesting to try putting your stirrups up one hole.

202 – Great job, only note is to stay in the middle of your pony. You tended to lean to the inside a bit.

218 – Great job, your leg is very secure and in the correct position. Your heel could come down more and at one point your foot slid through the stirrup too far but if your heels are down correctly it will resolve that issue.

Flat #2

203 – You are riding on the back of the saddle. You had a wrong lead in the second direction. I think it is because you thought you needed to canter immediately and just asked for a canter without asking for the lead. Take your time, don't rush, and ask for what you want from the horse.

214 – you overcorrected on your hands, before they were too low and now too high. There should be a straight line from your elbow to the bit.

210 - + - good job, didn't see anything bad

202 – At the canter, your upper body tends to get too far back (behind the vertical). That has a purpose in dressage but in equitation, shoulder, hip, heel.

211 - ++ good job!

241 – you have beautiful position, upper body is very elegant. Would like to see leg a bit further back. Some improvement from first class but could be a bit more.

218 – Good riding, you have a secure and correct base which always puts someone to the top of the list. Just be careful that your elbows aren't flapping out to the side at times.

Jumping

241 - All good jumps, no issues with the jumps. Cut corner from 4 to 5. Make sure you land and ride straight to the rail before you turn. Leg was very steady but still a bit too forward. Slide back just a little bit and you'll be there.

202 – All of the jumps were good. Broke from 4 to 5. Once you break, you can't get anything higher than a 55. Otherwise could have been in the 70's. Everything was there, you rode and jumped well, the break knocked you down. We are not talking about a change of lead, this is a break in stride. Same comments in the medal – had a break and cut corners. Also could release more over the jumps.

218 – One of the jumps was a little deep but everything else was great. Happy to see that you used the whole ring! I praised you in flat classes for your leg but in O/F there was a lot of leg flapping with tons of kicking the pony. Use your legs. You have spurs on. Squeeze. You are at a level where you can polish your riding. Use your spur with a squeeze. On medal trip that your legs come away from the pony and then come back. That should never happen. Great halt, good job. Foot slid into the stirrup too far but that probably came from the extra kicking that was not necessary.

210 – Broke in the courtesy circle. Remember that you are being judged as soon as you come into the ring. A break in the circle still counts and you can never get a score over 55 once you have a break. Use your legs to keep your horse going. First two jumps were really deep but after that were fine.

18” Equitation

Flat #1

231 – I’d like to see some more weight down your leg, it was swinging a little bit and some more weight in your heels could correct that. You broke at the canter and also had the wrong lead.

246 – Would like to see some more weight down your leg, leg seemed to be dangling. You have no contact with your horse’s mouth. Rulebook says you need to have contact. Loopy reins are for pleasure but not for equitation.

234 - ++ (two plus signs) - you rode beautifully but then you broke so that took points away.

205 – Your heels were flat, they should go down. Your leg was slightly forward. Your fingers were open. That’s a safety issue.

242 - ++ - good job!

229 - ++ - good job!

233 - +++ - really good riding, good position. Would like to see your heels a bit lower.

Flat #2

231 – improvement from previous class, good job. Still would like to see more weight down into your leg. Broke at the canter so that brought points down.

246 – You were on the wrong diagonal and also broke at the canter but appreciated that you worked on some of the comments from the first class.

233 – Had some issues and then looked down a lot.

205 – Your fingers were open and hands too high at times. Your upper body is a bit too straight. You should tip a few degrees forward.

227 – You have a really good leg, your fingers were open at times, keep them closed. If you think your horse keeps going into the middle, try to stay away from it if that is an issue.

242 – Work on your sitting trot, too bouncy. Try to be softer with your aids. If you have a horse that is forward thinking, you can send them into the canter in an explosive way the way you were asking for transitions. Ask more softly.

234 – Good job, you rode great. ++

229 - +++ - great job

Jumping

234 – Good position/equitation – trotted fences, wasn't a bad idea. Most of your jumps were pretty good but one you got a little deep, no big deal. Medal – good ride but would like to see you release more over the fences.

227 – Steering issues, first refusal was due to steering. After that you got him over most of the jumps. Had another refusal and a wrong lead. Leaning to the inside. Horse wanted to cut corners and you went with him and leaned instead of straightening him out/correcting it. Liked seeing how you accomplished a lot more than the previous times.

205 – You were still too straight with your upper body. Your heels were up. Going to fence #3 you really really cut the corner so you came to the jump badly and then had to go back to the inside to find your jump. The issues started from cutting the corner. Ride deep before and after jumps.

Crossrails

Flat #1

236 – You were a little quick, slow down a little. You can slow your posting to help the horse slow down. Keep your heels down and you were looking down at times.

245 – Heels – work on bringing them down. Your lower leg was loose and dangling, should have a bit more contact with the horse's side to keep it steady.

213 – Make sure you aren't leaning to one side or the other but at times it looked like your leg as a little too straight on one side. Bringing stirrups up a hole could correct that as well.

224 – You did a good job. Work on putting your heels down. At one point you were following too closely, need to watch spacing between the horse in front of you for safety purposes.

228 – fantastic job

209 – great job – really liked your leg position, you were very soft with your horse

216 – Good job – try to sit back a little more, know the pony was pulling you forward at times and you did the best you could but when you can, try to sit up with your legs under you.

Flat #2

245 – picked up the wrong lead and hands bounced a little bit but did well otherwise.

236 – work on your sitting trot, we know that some horses are bouncier than others but work on it. Don't look down, you were looking at something and it was obvious and that detracts from your overall appearance. Don't bring the judge's attention to something being wrong and he may otherwise not see it.

209 – You were too slow at the trot, it needs to be a working gait. Canter was good but you broke, came across the middle, and things started to fall apart. You put gloves on after the first class and that's good. Equitation requires gloves.

216 – You started with your upper body forward like in the last class but by the second direction you fixed it. Had you higher on the list at the trot but the canter brought you down because your back was moving way too much.

224 – pretty good riding, a note is that your horse kept jiggling – you need to be in control so you can try and make sure they don't do that. Your heels look very good but your lower leg is a bit forward. Bring your leg back under you and still keep heels down.

213 – Your leg was slightly forward also. Otherwise very good.

228 – great job !

Jumping

213 – jumps were good, you cut your corner pretty badly before the first jump so the horse had to jump sideways which brought you into your second jump crooked. Cross-cantered all the way around.

228 – both of your jumps were great, but the mistake was starting on the wrong lead. If you had the correct lead you would have ended up much higher.

245 – Put your horse in front of your leg. You were behind him for the first jump so that's one reason he didn't go over it. The second jump was already set up for failure because of the first one. Close your leg and send him forward. You did this eventually with the first jump but he may already have had your number by the second jump.

216 – Good job, don't let your hands move up and down as you post. Hands should stay still. Trotting the first jump