

River Sage Stables 2026 Ranch Riding Rules

Definitions:

1. **Youth:** Competitors 17 years of age and under as of January 1st of the show year will be classified as Youth. Youth division will be walk/trot only. Competitors in the Youth division may use two hands in a curb bit. The bit must be legal per AQHA rules.

2. **Walk Trot Division:** Any adult or youth rider is eligible for this class. Competitors may not cross enter into a loping class.

3. **Green Rancher:** Any adult or youth that is in their first or second year of showing. This division is defined by the rider NOT the horse.

4. **Non-Pro:** Competitors that have NOT received any remuneration directly or indirectly for riding, showing, training, assisting in training, giving lessons or clinics in the past three years. Payment of entree fees and/or expenses by anyone other than the Non-Pro/Amateur, their immediate family, or their corporation is considered remuneration.

- The rider has not received payment directly or indirectly for instructing another person or conducting a seminar in riding, training, driving, or showing a horse any time during the past three years.
- The rider has not had any expenses (including lodging, transportation, mileage, etc.) paid by someone other than family members. Youth members may accept assistance from someone other than a family member.

5. **Open:** Open to any professional or amateur/non-professional member in good standing regardless of past winnings.

6. **Fine Wine Division:** Must be at least 70 years old to compete in this division. Fine wine division will be walk/trot only. Organizers reserve the right to run this division in conjunction with walk/trot in regards to time if necessary, but scoring will be separate. Competitors in the Fine Wine division may use two hands in a curb bit. The bit must be legal per AQHA rules.

COMPETITION ATTIRE

Riders shall wear:

1. Protective headgear or western hats.

2. Long-sleeved shirts.
3. Western boots. Western boots shall include typical cowboy boots or lace-up ropers. All other footwear is prohibited.
4. Spurs and chaps shall be optional.
5. Clothing should be neat and clean.

Ranch Riding Requirements:

Horse Breed/Age Eligibility: Any horse of any breed may be used. Horses competing in any division must be 3 years of age or older. Mules are allowed.

Riders must wear the correct participant number as assigned by the show secretary. Failure to wear the correct number will result in disqualification for the class.

Failure to pay show fees (including stalls) will result in participant paying via cash or Venmo prior to being assigned a participant number. Continued failure to pay or pay with insufficient funds will result in suspension from the show series.

River Sage Stables Ranch Riding Series (RSS RRS) Points and Awards:

Competitors MUST attend all 3 shows to be eligible for year-end awards.

If a competitor drops out of a single class they will not be eligible for year-end awards in that class.

For all divisions, the points for year-end awards follow the horse and rider combination. A horse can only be shown one time in each class per division.

In the case of a tie for year-end awards, the last show of the year will be the tie breaker show. The competitor in the tie who has the highest score at the last show of the year, will break the tie for that class's year-end award.

Class Awards: Year-end high point awards will be offered for all classes in the Youth, Walk/trot, Green Rancher, Nonpro, Open and Fine Wine divisions. The horse and rider combinations that accumulate the most points in each class in their declared division will receive an award.

Scoring for all classes will be as follows: 10 points for 1st place, 9 points for 2nd place, etc. until 10th place receives 1 point. A no score will receive zero points.

Class Guidelines:

Ranch Rail Work Guidelines:

The working western rail class measures the ability of the horse to be a pleasure to ride and should reflect the versatility, attitude, and movement of a working horse. The horse should be well-broke, relaxed, quiet, soft, and cadenced at all gaits. The movement of the working western rail horse should simulate a horse needing to cover long distances, softly and quietly. The overall manners and responsiveness of the horse and the horse's quality of movement are the primary considerations. Maximum credit should be given to the horse that has a natural flowing stride and consistent, ground covering gaits.

Transitions should be performed when requested, with smoothness and responsiveness. The ideal working western rail horse should have a natural head carriage at each gait. The horse should be ridden on a relatively loose rein with light contact and without requiring undue restraint while being responsive to the rider and making timely transitions in a smooth and correct manner. The horse should be soft in the bridle, yield to contact and shall not be shown on a full drape of rein. Riders are encouraged to use adequate space given the extension of gaits required. This class should show the horse's ability to work at a forward, working pace while under control by the rider. The horse shall be balanced and appear willing and a pleasure to ride in a group situation.

Ranch Riding Guidelines:

Ranch Riding patterns will be designed to evaluate the horse and rider's ability to execute a set of maneuvers with precision and smoothness that should simulate that of a working ranch horse being ridden out in big country, outside the confines of an arena. A good Versatility Ranch Horse has a free-flowing stride of reasonable length in keeping with his conformation. He should be able to smoothly cover ground with little effort at a working speed while under control. Light contact should be rewarded, and the horse shall not be shown on a full drape of reins. When asked to extend, he should move out with the same flowing motion. Maximum credit should be given to the balanced, and willing horse that gives the appearance of being a pleasure to ride. The horse's head and neck should be in a relaxed natural position, his poll level with or slightly above his withers. He should not be overly flexed at the poll, in an unnatural position or be excessively nosed out, in a resistant stance. He should have a bright attentive expression with his ears alert.

a) Patterns: The pattern CAN include the following:

- Horses will be shown individually at three gaits; walk, trot and lope in each direction of the arena.

- Horse is to perform an extended trot and an extended lope in at least one direction each.
- Horses will also be asked to stop and settle, backup and reverse in the pattern. The reverse may be from a stop or at any gait. Reverse can be either direction as designated in the pattern. If the reverse is on the rail it should be performed turning away from the rail.
- Distances between transitions should be great enough to allow the horse to transition into gait, adequately display the gait and begin collection for the next transition. Suggested distances of gaits can be found in the gait descriptions below but should take into consideration arena size and space.
- Sequence of transitions should be practical and simulate those that would actually be made riding in the pasture. i.e., Why would a pasture rider go from an extended gait to a walk without first collecting?
- Both simple and flying lead changes are allowed, to be judged on quality of the maneuver.
- Multiple sharp turns and lead changes are discouraged and are better placed in the Ranch Trail.
- Management may post the pattern at any time, and it must be posted at least one hour prior to competition. The horse/rider team will be judged on the form and quality of the following elements of the pattern and for performing the patterns in the correct working order with precision. Credit will also be given for making a smooth transition between gaits at the designated marker, for keeping the correct lead and for maintaining the gait in the pattern.
- Contact with the bit should be maintained, excessively draped reins are not desirable and will be a deduction.
- Horses shall be shown individually and will consist of pattern work that may be laid out either inside an arena or outside on natural terrain.
- Markers or signs may be used to designate gait change location.
- All runs begin upon entering the pen; any infractions (such as two hands on the reins, etc.) are subject to penalty at that time.

b) Gaits

- **Walk** – is straight, square, flat-footed, relaxed. The horse moves freely with no anticipation to move to the next gait. The walk is a natural, flat-footed, four-beat gait. The horse must move straight and true at the walk. The walk must be alert, with a stride of reasonable length in keeping with the size of the horse. A suggested walking distance would be approximately 100'.

- **Extended Walk** - The extended walk is an obvious lengthening of the stride, which will naturally increase the pace. The horse moves in a natural manner (not a running walk) as if it were moving across an open pasture.
- **Trot** – The trot should be square, balanced and straight, ground covering a two-beat diagonal gait with forward movement of the feet. A suggested distance for the trot would be approximately 150' and is to be ridden with rider sitting the trot.
- **Extended Trot** – When extending the trot, the horse moves out with the same smooth way of going; this gait is level, flat, and steady. The extended trot shows lengthening of stride from the regular trot with the same cadence that will cause an increase in speed. Sitting, posting, or standing and holding the saddle horn will be acceptable riding techniques. Extended trot would be approximately 175'.
- **Lope** – The lope is a 3-beat gait that is cadenced, straight and steady. The horse should lope with a natural stride and appear relaxed and smooth. A four-beat gait is to be penalized. The head should be carried in a natural position suitable to the horse's conformation. The lope would be approximately 200'.
- **Extended Lope** – When extending the lope, the horse moves out with the same smooth way of going. The extended lope shows lengthening of stride from the regular lope with the same cadence that will cause an increase in speed. The horse holds the steady gait and increased speed while being under control. An extended lope would be approximately 200'.
- **Stop** – From both the lope and the trot, the horse should be in the correct stopping position (i.e., both hocks engaged and stopping on the hindquarters). All four feet stop moving before the next maneuver is attempted. The quality of the stop is judged; a long slide is not credit earning.
- **Reverse** – The horse turns briskly and flat with front feet on the ground and holding an inside rear pivot foot. The reverse may be performed in either direction as designated by the pattern. The reverse is not intended to be a "roll back."

c) Scoring: Each maneuver will receive a Judge's Score that will be added or subtracted from 70 and will be scored on the following basis, ranging from +1 1/2 Excellent, +1 Very Good, +1/2 Good, 0 Correct, -1/2 Needs Improvement, -1 Poor, -1 1/2 Very Poor.

Ranch Trail Guidelines: Ranch Trail consists of a course with no more than (9) and no less than (6) obstacles, 3 gaits, and a "rope handling" element that is designed to show a horse's ability and willingness to perform tasks that might be asked of him during the course of a normal day's ranch work. The horse will be judged on his performance over

the obstacles with emphasis on manners, response to the rider and quality of movement. Credit will be given to horses negotiating the obstacles smoothly, with style and without delay and for showing attentiveness to the obstacles with the capability of picking their own way through the course. Light contact should be rewarded, and the horse shall not be shown on a full drape of reins. Horses with artificial appearance over obstacles should be penalized. While on the line of travel between obstacles the horse's head and neck should be in a relaxed, natural position. His poll level with or slightly above his withers and not be overly flexed at the poll, giving an unnatural appearance, or be excessively nosed out in a resistant stance. He should have a bright attentive expression with his ears alert. Gaited Horse Provision - In the case of gaited horses, there are a variety of cadences that will not be recognized as a four-beat walk or a three-beat lope. We will refer to this as the "intermediate" gait, and it will serve as the "trot" in those portions of Trail, Ranch Riding and Reined Work where a trot is called for. Horses performing an intermediate gait will not be penalized or receive an off-pattern for failing to execute a two-beat trot. However, that gait must be consistent and cadenced throughout the maneuver. This intermediate gait will be subject to the usual break of gait penalty and the usual maneuver score variation. The extended trot should exhibit a visible lengthening of the stride in an intermediate gait.

a) Trail Course: To further promote the ranch, feel of this class it is desirable to use realistic or natural obstacles such as natural logs for walk, trot, and lope overs. Traditional painted trail poles and pots of artificial flowers are discouraged, natural limbs, brush and plants are preferred. Ranch Trail decorations should continue the ranch theme with use of natural or realistic items or elements found outside or on a ranch. In addition, it is desirable for the course to be set outside of an arena using the natural terrain of the land whenever possible.

- Horses are to be shown at three gaits: a ground-covering walk, working trot and lope
- A distance of at least 30 feet or more is mandatory between obstacles to evaluate the horse's way of go at each gait.
- A combination of two or more obstacles is permissible.
- Management may post the pattern at any time, and it must be posted at least one hour prior to competition. Printed trail patterns for riders are helpful, encouraged and may be handed out prior to competition day.

b) Trail Safety: Common sense and safety considerations should be exercised in all maneuvers. The judge will walk the course and has the right and duty to alter the course if the design is unsafe or unreasonable. If at any time during competition a trail obstacle is deemed unsafe by the judge, it shall be repaired or removed from the course. If it cannot be repaired and horses have completed the course, the score for that obstacle

shall be deducted from all previous works for that class. The judge may ask a rider to move on to the next obstacle if the horse/rider is unable to complete the maneuver in a reasonable amount of time or if the Judge deems that the rider is or will be in an unsafe situation. Appropriate penalties will apply.

d) Optional Obstacles: Management is not limited to the following obstacles but when setting courses, be mindful that the idea is not to trap a horse/rider team or eliminate it by making an obstacle too difficult or “spooky.” Only elements which would normally be encountered in an outdoor setting, and which are not used to “spook” a horse may be used. Management may offer alternative obstacles to be used by the Green Rancher/Youth/Fine Wine riders.

- **Work a gate:** Open, pass through and close the gate per the instructions provided on the trail course pattern. Management will use a gate that will not endanger horse or rider and must be a hinged swinging gate. The rein hand may be changed to work the gate without penalty.

- **Rope Handling:** There will be a designated element on the course where the judge will dedicate the score to rope handling. This must include building and throwing a loop while mounted. Rope handling may be required while in motion. Recoiling and re-fastening the rope could be included at management's discretion. This element could be in addition to the log drag (such as rope a dummy), or somehow incorporated into the log drag. For example, the same log could be roped, dragged, and scored as two separate elements.

- **Log drag -** Horse must be willing to drag a log for a short distance either in a straight line or around a set pattern. Rope should be dallyed around the saddle horn and not tied hard and fast. Rope handling and management are crucial and will be included in the evaluation.

- **Dismount unbridle and bridle -** The horse shall remain quiet while the rider dismounts, (Hobbles and legal get downs are permitted), and removes the bit completely from the horse's mouth and re-bridles. The horse should remain still and quiet as the rider remounts, leaving a loose rein. Exhibitors have the option of using a mounting block to remount. Reins and romal may be left over the horse's neck providing the reins are slack. NOTE: The horse may shift his weight during the process of dismounting and remounting.

- **Water hazard -** The horse should show willingness to cross a small ditch or shallow pond (or simulated water obstacle if it does not have a slick bottom).

- **Pick up feet –** Demonstrate horse's willingness to stand quietly and willingly allow the rider to pick up one, two, three or all four feet.

- **Ground Tying -** The horse shall remain in place while the rider dismounts and performs a normal ranch task such as moving a rail or bucket etc. The exhibitor may drop split reins to ground or leave one rein draped on the saddle horn. If rider is using

reins and romal he/she may unsnap one rein and drop to the ground or loop the romal over the saddle horn with slack in the reins without penalty. If a get down rope is used, uncoil, and drop to the ground with the romal looped over the saddle horn with slack in the reins. Hobbles may be used without penalty.

- Put on and remove a slicker - Rider approaches slicker, removes slicker from holder, puts on slicker and replaces slicker to the holder. Remove, carry, and replace item - Requires the exhibitor to carry or remove an item that is used every day on horseback such as mail from a mailbox, sack, rope, etc.

- Wooden Bridge - Horse shows willingness to walk across obstacle designed to simulate a bridge.

- Ride over obstacles on the ground – obstacles are typically logs or poles.

- Walk-overs - Walk over no more than five logs or poles. The space between logs or poles should be 26-30 inches. The formation may be straight, curved, zigzagged, or raised.

- Trot-overs - Trot over no more than five logs or poles no more than 10 inches high. The space between logs or poles should be 30 to 42 inches. The formation can also be straight, curved, zigzagged, or raised.

- Lope-overs - Lope over no more than five logs or poles no more than 10 inches high. The space between logs or poles should be 6 to 7 feet. The formation can also be straight, curved, zigzagged, or raised.

- Stationary steer - This obstacle is used to show the willingness of the horse to have a rope thrown from its back. The judge will give credit to the horse that stands quietly while the contestant makes the swing and throw at the stationary steer. Shying from the rope will be penalized. Credit will be given for good rope handling and a catch. Only one loop will be allowed. Fast and efficient loop build and put away after roping will be rewarded.

- Back, backing through an obstacle - obstacles may include poles on the ground in some form of chute, cones in a pattern such as a figure “8” or other objects like trees or natural landscape elements.

- Side pass obstacle - Any object which is safe and of any length may be used to demonstrate responsiveness of the horse to leg signals. Raised side pass obstacles should not exceed 12 inches.

- Crossing unevenly placed brush or logs – Obstacle will to be judged on willingness to cross with additional credit for picking way through. Minor ticks will not be penalized.

Tack and Equipment Guidelines The RSS RRS will follow AQHA rules and regulations on acceptable equipment/tack (With the exception that horses of all ages may be shown in a snaffle, bosal or curb bit. There is no specific age limitation on headgear). See below for link to AQHA website.

<https://www.aqha.com/equipment-rules>