

Discover Showjumping

Showjumping is an easy to follow ultra-friendly spectator sport which allows fans the chance to get up close and personal with their favourite riders and horses.

The action is instant as spectators immediately can spot a fence falling or follow the time on the display and cheer on the fastest competitors.

Even if there are certain subtleties beyond this simple picture, the importance of the coloured poles and the clock is there for the crowd to see creating an electric atmosphere.

Like most sports, horse enthusiasts have their own specialised vocabulary so it helps to understand a few of the basic terms especially when commentators start talking “showjump lingo!”

Any sport becomes more fun when you understand the “jargon” and learning some of the terminology will enhance your showjumping enjoyment whether following at a show or watching a competition at home on the television.

So what’s showjumping all about?

The goal of showjumping is for combinations to jump over all the fences on the course in a test of the rider’s skill and the pony’s/horse’s power, scope, speed, athleticism and carefulness.

It’s all about teamwork between horse and rider working in harmony jumping a course of fences within a set (optimum) time without knocking down any poles or refusing any of the showjumps.

It’s one of the very few sports in which male and female competitors (both horses and riders) compete in the same classes and while it may sound simple, the sport requires athleticism, precision and quick thinking from both horse and rider.



The Arena or Ring:



This is the stadium or stage where the competition (or “class”) takes place. The arena or ring is often separated from spectators by a man-made fence such as white plastic post and rails or at smaller local shows a simple rope is often used to create a temporary arena. Major international competitions offer bigger venues such as football type stadiums with grandstands. Competitions are held at both “indoor” (covered) and “outdoor” arenas and the floor, (“surface” or “ground”) off which the horses jump comes in a variety of surfaces. There are several types of “surface” ranging from grass arenas similar to a football field to purpose built arenas using a sophisticated mixture of fibre and sand developed to protect the legs and the joints of horses. You may hear the announcer talk about the “footing” and this is when he is referring to the floor covering and condition of the ground off which the horses are jumping. Common phrases when describing both grass and man-made surfaces include “the horses love this footing,” “the ground is superb,” or in more negative terms “the footing is hard or slippery.”

The Course-Designer or Course-Builder:



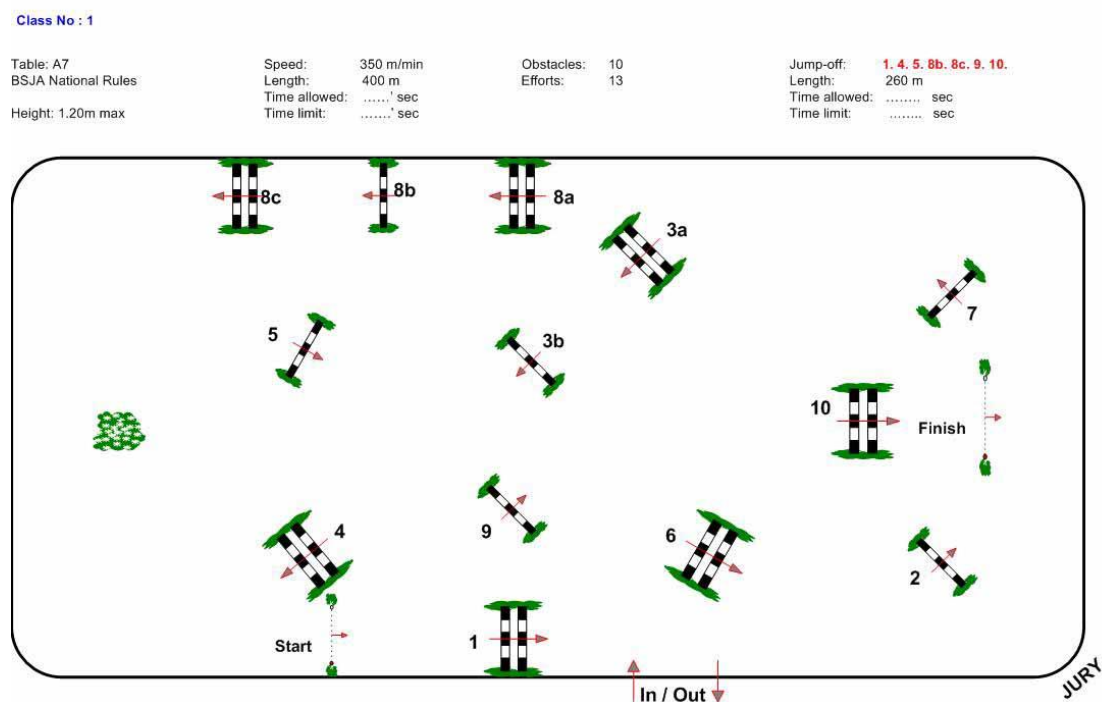
He/she is at the heart of the competition in creating the course and designing the route placing the obstacles in an order to test the skill of the horse and the rider who aim to jump “clear” within the set time. The course designer spaces the obstacles at such distances so that horses will have to show their obedience and athleticism under the control of their rider. The course builder considers the level of the competitors and the rules applicable to that

particular “class”. His goal is to adjust the level of difficulty in order to bring the best riders to the top, while allowing all competitors to complete the course safely.

A showjumping course will be made up of anywhere between, on average, 10-15 fences and the course designer displays his course plan for the riders to study the route and the time allowed.

Show jumping is becoming an increasingly “technical sport”. Fences continue to get lighter and easier to knock down. The distance between areas requiring long strides, for which the horse may stretch out its movements in the interest of speed, and short strides, for which the horse must make its movements more compact for jumping.

The Course plan:



Shows the general layout of the course including the start and finish posts, the position of the fences with their type and numbers and any compulsory passages or turning points. It also shows the length of the course, the right track to be followed, the marking system to be used, the time allowed and the time limit (if applicable). It also includes the obstacles to be used in any jump-off and the length of the course and time allowed for the jump-off.

Course plans are posted and made public in advance so the riders can learn them prior to “walking the course” and riding their round.



Walking the course:



After the course is built by the course-designer and his team it is approved by the judges. Then before the competition/class starts, riders are allowed to “walk the course”. They memorise the route, study where the fences are placed, walk the lines they will have to ride and pace the distances between fences in order to decide how many strides the horse will need to take between each jump and from which angle.

The horse or rider has no opportunity to practice over the course before the event begins. Each rider knows the length of his or her horse's stride (the rate and distance that the horse covers the ground) and walks the course accordingly calculating the number of strides between the fences determining how best to adjust their own horse's strides. When participating in the course walk, riders also take note of the "footing" or condition of the ground and any other potential problem areas when planning their route. Many riders walk the course with their mentor or coach to discuss their plan including any short cuts which may save time in the jump-off.

You will notice riders pacing the strides. They have practised pacing out a distance of 3 feet (or 90cm) in order to determine the distance between each fence when walking it. They must remember to allow for the horse's landing and take off points - allowing half a stride (i.e. 6 feet for landing and 6 feet for take off). If there are two fences, with one non-jumping stride in between, the distance between the two fences will be 24 feet (i.e. 6 feet to allow for landing over the first fence, 12 feet for the non-jumping stride, 6 feet for take off for the second fence).

Warm-up arena or collecting ring: It is the smaller ring outside the main arena where the riders can warm-up the horses before jumping the course and cool them down afterwards. At least two obstacles comprising of one vertical and one oxer, are available in the “warm-up”. Their height must not exceed the height of the obstacles in the competition arena. It's an excellent place to watch riders at close quarters as they prepare for the competition.



“Drawn” Order: At many shows the order the riders jump in the classes is determined by a draw made by the judges before the competition begins. The “drawn order” is literally the “luck of the draw” as riders “drawn” later in the class have the advantage of watching previous rounds and seeing where mistakes are being made before attempting their own.

At smaller shows riders simply chalk their own name and number on a board at the “collecting ring” where the “collecting ring” steward calls out their number as their turn comes along.

The Bell: The sounding of the “bell” is the signal for a rider to start the round. This also kick-starts a 45 second countdown allowing the combination 45 seconds to cross the start line. The timing equipment is set up at the start of the course and again at the finish-line. When the combination crosses the invisible beam sent out by the timing equipment it ignites the clock and at the finish line the beam is broken which stops the clock and records the time taken to jump the course.

There is a public display board connected to the timing equipment so that riders and spectators can see the progress of the countdown and the time of each round.

Scoring: In the majority of “classes” the horses and riders who jump the first round “clear” (without knocking any poles down or refusing a jump) within the time allowed continue to the next deciding round or tie break. This is called the “jump off.” In the “jump off”, the course is set around a “shortened, heightened course” using fewer jumps and it’s the horse and rider completing the course in the fastest time with the least amount of penalties who wins the competition. In the first round the commentator will often say they’ve jumped “clear” for a place in the ‘jump-off’ against “the clock”. If a combination takes longer around the course than the time allowed by the course designer the commentator will say “he has clocked up time faults.”

The competition is based on the number of “faults” or penalties incurred. The “faults” include knocking down poles or elements of a jump, refusing to jump an obstacle, running past obstacles, the rider falling off or the combination taking longer than the time allowed to complete the course.

A refusal is when a horse stops before (or avoids entirely) an obstacle and if you hear the word resistance it refers to when a horse refuses to move forward. Rider and horse will be eliminated if the horse resists for longer than a minute, fails to pass the starting line within one minute of the starting signal or takes more than a minute to jump an obstacle. A rider falling from his mount means automatic elimination.

The basic faults are as follows:

- *Pole knockdown = 4 faults
- *First refusal to jump a fence = 4 faults
- *Second refusal = Elimination



*Fall of horse or rider = Elimination

*Time faults = 1 fault for every second or fraction of a second over the time allowed (e.g. with a time allowed of 72 seconds, a time of 73.09 seconds would result in 2 time faults).

*Foot in water = 4 faults

Class: A “class” is another word for a competition and different “classes” are run under different rules known as “Tables” (Tables refer to the rules used for judging under the national and international rules).

The most common is Table A7 which comprises of jumping the first round within the time set but not against the clock. All clears go through to a second round timed “jump-off” where the fastest combination with the least faults wins. A table A4 is just one round against the clock where combinations are placed on faults and time. Table A is when jumping faults or the first refusal generate 4 penalty points.

A full guide to the various “Tables” can be found in the British Showjumping Member Handbook at www.britishshowjumping.co.uk under ‘Member Information’.

A schedule at a show comprises of various classes to suit a wide range of competitor. Classes have been created to cater for every level of rider jumping various heights and under restrictions to make the competition friendly for novice amateurs, young horses up to the experienced international professionals. There are also dedicated classes specifically for junior riders (16 years and under) riding ponies (148cms or smaller).

The types of classes at shows vary and can become more complex as riders progress through the levels. The various classes have a title or “name” and a common example to be seen on a schedule at a national show is as follows: British Novice: 0.90m; Discovery: 1.00m; Newcomers: 1.10m; Foxhunter: 1.20m.

You may also see “two phase” and “single phase” classes on schedules.

A two phase class is just as it says first round and jump-off combined. Riders jump round one and if they are clear they go straight into the timed jump-off against the clock without interruption or halting in between rounds. If they incur faults in the first round/section the judges usually ring the bell stopping the rider going into the jump-off phase.

In a “single phase” class faults are accumulated in both sections with all riders going through to the timed part of the course against the clock.

Other variations of “classes” also held at showjumping competitions include speed classes, accumulators, puissance (high-jump over the big red wall) or those involving multiple consecutive rounds.



The basic jumps/fences explained:

*Verticals:



An upright jump which comprises of at least two poles arranged vertically placed on “wings” (the supports either side of the fence holding plastic “cups” which keep the poles in place.)

*Oxers:



These are also known as “spreads” and consist of two verticals placed a certain length apart to add both height and width to a fence. It may be wider than it is high and be lower (“rising”) at the front. If both front and back pole are the same height a commentator will often say the oxers are “square” or “parallel.”

*Triple bar:



A rising spread with three or more elements (three verticals placed together) is called a triple-bar. The first vertical will have the lowest height while the next two verticals will gradually increase in height.

Liverpool/Water Tray:



Large tray of shallow water generally blue placed underneath a vertical or oxer jump.

***Combination:**



A “combination” is the term used to describe a group of fences that are placed in close sequence to one another, usually one or two cantering strides apart. Combinations can be made up of both verticals and oxers. A “triple” combination is three fences in sequence in a line. They are considered as one, i.e., 3A, 3B, 3C. A “double” is two fences in sequence. A combination is considered as one obstacle albeit with two or three difficulties.

If the horse refuses one fence of the combination or runs out between two elements, the pair has to jump all two or three fences again.

***Fillers:** This is not a type of fence, but a solid construction below the poles which often depicts a sponsor's name; a colourful design or flower boxes; it could also be a gate or planks.

***Numbered and flagged:** Each jump has a number indicating its position on the course. Fences are jumped with the red flag on the top right “wing” and with a white flag on the top left “wing.”

Stride: One of the main difficulties of show jumping lies in the way the riders manage the strides of their horses between the fences. One cantering stride of a horse covers approximately 12 feet. The rider can shorten or lengthen the strides in order to adjust their number between two fences so that the horse can jump the obstacle in good condition, taking off neither too close nor too far. When a commentator says “they’ve missed their stride,” the rider and horse have misjudged their take off distance or misunderstood one another. The “eye” of the rider and ability to make quick decisions are as important as the scope and athleticism of the horse.

Commentators may talk about “related distances” when describing a course. This refers to the number of strides needed to jump fences set on a related distance by the course designer. The distance between two jumps is considered to be “related” if there is room for a horse to take less than 6 strides between landing after the first fence and taking off for the second. In simple terms a rider needs to allow six feet for their horse to take off, clear and land over a fence, and another six feet for him to do the same over the second fence. This adds up to 12 feet. Add the 12 feet to the number of non-jumping strides between the fences and you will have got the total related distance. For example, four strides are 48 feet, plus 12 feet (for the two jumps), totaling 60 ft.

With a one or two stride distance, the horse must take that exact number of strides - trying to



fit in an extra stride or take one less stride (taking a stride out) will almost certainly result in a refusal or a fence down. With a longer related distance, adding or taking out a stride is possible. Part of the art of walking a course is deciding the best way to ride a related distance on the particular horse you are competing on.

Some riders seem to be born with a “natural eye” for a “distance”. They can ride nearly any horse and harmoniously sail around a course. Whether consciously or not, these riders accurately calibrate their current speed, rhythm and the ground stretching out in front of them as they approach the jumps.

Riders, coaches and commentators use the words “distance” and “take-off spot” to reference the exact geography in which a horse’s legs lift from the ground in front of a jump. A good “distance” or “take-off” is a safe measurement typically about 6 feet away from an average 3-foot jump.

Technicality:

You may hear the commentator saying “this is a technical course” or “there are several related distances” or “the time is tight.” The higher the level of competition, the more complex (“technical”) the courses become and have tighter time allowances to complete the course. Not only is the height and width (“spread”) of an obstacle increased to present a greater challenge, “technical” difficulty also increases with tighter turns and shorter or unusual distances between fences. Horses sometimes also have to jump fences from an angle rather than straight on. For example, a course designer might set up a line so that there are six and a half strides (the standard measure for a canter stride is 12 feet) between the jumps, requiring the rider to adjust the horse’s stride dramatically in order to make the distance. They will make a distance slightly longer or shorter than the standard which will require riders to adjust their horses’ normal stride. For example, if a distance is slightly longer than a normal four stride distance a rider on a forward-going, long-striding horse might decide to take four long strides, whereas a rider on a short-striding, bouncy horse might take the alternative of five short strides.

The showjumping horse or pony: Producing a horse or pony for the competition arena is the fruit of long and patient work of our breeders and producers who are the lifeblood of showjumping. The young horse begins his sporting life at around 3-4 years old with light schooling, having been “broken in” (ridden for the first time). He/she will take part in his first competitions from quite a young age and by the time he/she has turned six their talent is usually shining through indicating future potential. Stallions, geldings and mares all compete in the same classes and there are a number of classes specifically designed to produce the novice/young horse through the levels with a focus on developing them into international horses of the future.



British Breeding has come to the fore in recent years with many other nations coveting our up and coming horses alongside our performance pathway programmes.

The rider: He/she is more than just a pilot. The rider is the brain of this “athlete combination”. First of all the rider has skill and talent: an eye, and a sense of balance not to disturb the horse. He/she is the one who “moulds” the horse, requiring years of work, education, dressage, and patience. On the course, the eye of the rider and his ability to make quick decisions are as important as the skill and physical aptitude of the horse.

Prize money: The performances in a showjumping competition are most frequently rewarded by money. The winner usually receives a third of the total prize fund and the rest is distributed down the field in a 1:5 ratio.

