

Best-in-Class (BC) Protocol

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the BC judging is to recognize an equine from each distance ride that represents the absolute best in each specific distance. Assuming the BC Veterinarian believes there are equines worthy, the horse with the highest BC score is recognized as the most capable of continuing down the trail even though the contest has concluded.

The judging is performed by the Head Veterinarian (HV), unless specifically delegated to another veterinarian. There may be various reasons to delegate; e.g., if a family member of the HV is competing in the event, (the HV is required to delegate the responsibility to another ride veterinarian for the distance in which the family member is competing, in order to prevent any suspicion of a potential conflict of interest, unless no other options are available). The HV may also delegate responsibility to another ride veterinarian for educational and experience purposes but should mentor and be available to assist as needed. If in the assessment of the veterinarian responsible for conducting the evaluation, no horses are deemed to be physically able to carry on, the veterinarian responsible for BC judging may elect not to award a BC designation. The veterinarian performing the BC evaluations has the discretion to excuse any horse from BC judging that s/he finds to be over-stressed. Typically, a horse with an Equine Score below 3 in any category would be excused and ineligible to receive the BC designation.

ELIGIBILITY

Participation in BC judging is entirely voluntary. However, only the top ten finishers are eligible to be evaluated as Best-in-Class equine, regardless of whether an Adult or Youth competitor rode the equine. If there are fewer than ten finishers, all equines may be judged but, if there is only one starter in a particular distance, no BC is awarded.

Rides may offer an additional BC award available only for Youth participants, provided two or more individuals in the Youth Division start that distance. The Youth BC does not take into consideration the length of time ridden (defined as Recorded Ride Time in the General Rules) or the weight carried by the equine. The Youth BC only utilizes the Equine Scores covered in this protocol. Judging for Youth BC is entirely voluntary, and it applies to all Youth participants in that distance, not just the top ten Youth riders. Note: Unaccompanied Youth are considered Adult competitors, and their equines are not eligible for Youth BC equine judging or the Youth BC equine designation.

RIDER RESPONSIBILITY

It is the rider's responsibility to:

1. Complete the ride with the equine and equipment (tack) used on the ride,
2. All tack must cross the finish line – either being carried by equine or rider.
 - o Others are not allowed to assist until such time as the equine and rider have crossed the finish line. For example, the rider may remove the headstall and carry it across the finish line, while leaving the saddle on the equine.
 - o If showing for BC, tack must remain in the vetting area until such time as the rider, with tack, is weighed.
 - o In the event a rider makes a substantial change in tack during the course of the event (e.g., changes the saddle being used on the equine), the lighter of the used pieces of equipment shall be used in the weighing process.
3. Declare their desire to stand for BC judging.
4. Recognize that each distance may have a different BC exam schedule. (Each schedule is determined prior to the start of the ride and communicated to participants in advance of the ride. Additionally, the BC exam format is also determined prior to the start of the ride and is to be consistent for all equines being judged.)

Appendix I

5. Know the BC schedule for the distance ridden.
6. Present themselves and their equipment for weigh-in prior to exiting the vetting area (removing tack from the vetting area prior to weigh-in is deemed as voluntarily removing the equine from the BC judging process).
7. Present themselves and their equine in a timely manner for required exams. (Failure to appear at the prescribed times are deemed as voluntarily removing the equine from the BC judging process.)
8. Be aware of, and follow the obligations of presentation, as described by the veterinarian performing the BC exams. The format of the BC evaluation is to be consistent for all equines being judged. The BC presentation examinations typically include:
 - A cardiac recovery index examination (CRI), which is conducted within 10 minutes of the rider's finish time. The CRI may be performed by any ride vet or at the discretion of the veterinarian conducting BC judging.
 - For rides of 25-45 miles, finish time is determined when the equine's heart rate (pulse) meets criteria.
 - For rides of 50-100 miles, the finish time is determined when the rider and equine, as well as all equipment (tack) used during the ride, cross the finish line.
 - A completion examination must be conducted within 60 minutes of the rider's finish time. A completion examination may be performed by any ride vet or at the discretion of the veterinarian conducting BC judging, and with the rider's request, the completion exam may be coupled with the 10-minute CRI.
 - A post-completion BC examination (BC exam). This examination is 60 minutes after the rider's finish time unless announced otherwise. (This BC exam may be scheduled differently, e.g., for the following day, but the schedule shall be determined and announced to participants prior to the start of the ride.)

CRITERIA

The criteria used to evaluate the BC equine include factors that are objective and subjective. These gauges are used to assess the horse's welfare after the competition has concluded. The participant who grasps how each measure provides insight into the horse's overall well-being will compete with these factors in mind and have a better understanding of his/her equine and the overall goal of distance riding in general.

Several measures are indicators of the amount of work the horse was asked to perform:

- Length of time on the course – the time from start to finish, and
- Weight carried – includes weight of tack and rider combined.

The BC Veterinarian's subjective professional determination of the horse's status after completing an event is also measured:

1. Recovery – A cardiac recovery index (CRI) is the measurement of the horse's pulse while standing and after trotting and is an indicator of cardiac recovery. The CRI includes:
 - Taking and recording the equine's pulse while standing and then,
 - Trotting the equine in hand for 125 feet out-and-back (for a total of 250 feet) or a consistent distance set by the BC Veterinarian and used for all horses judged,
 - Allowing the equine to rest approximately one minute from the start of trotting, and then,
 - Retaking and recording the equine's pulse.
2. Hydration – evaluation of mucous membranes, capillary refill, gut sounds in all four quadrants, skin tenting or rebound, and jugular refill.
3. Lesions – the exhibition of pain is of consequence. Swellings and/or heat in joints, tendons, ligaments, and backs are considered, as are cuts, scrapes, and galls from tack, interference marks, and collisions with trail debris which all may be indicators of pain. However, if lesions or interference marks are noted on the pre-ride examination and show no signs of worsening during the competition, they should not be considered during BC judging.
4. Soundness – judgment of a horse's gait. Some gait impairments may lead to exclusion from BC judging, or, if significant, elimination from the competition.
5. Quality of Movement – judgment of the amount of impulsion or "spring" left in the horse's gait, as well as their willingness to trot in hand. (Equines should be schooled to trot in hand. The need to haze a horse into a trot will be considered negatively on the quality of movement score.)

SCORING

Examinations of an equine for BC judging should be consistent for all equines being assessed and should address the same factors used for routine veterinary examinations conducted during the entirety of the event.

The BC judging is recorded on the BC judging form and is available for review by the rider upon completion and after announcing the BC equine and/or Youth BC equine. An example of a completed BC judging form follows and indicates the factors that are considered during the examination process. In the case of Youth BC, weight, and length of time to complete the ride are not included in the scoring.

SAMPLE BC JUDGING FORM

Participant Information		Ride Information		
RIDE NAME:	Trout Lake 100	VET:	Kate Woodard, DVM	
DISTANCE:	25	DATE:	06/06/2026	
Rider Name:	Abby Road	Rider #:	29	
Horse Name:	Old Blue		Hours	Minutes
Rider Weight in lbs. (with tack):	195.6	Rider's Finish Time:	3	12
Finish Placing:	1	Winning Finish Time:	3	12
Equine Scores ¹		Time Difference ²		
Recovery (1-10 points)	8	Ride Time, Rider	192	in minutes
Hydration (1-10 points)	10	Ride Time, Winner	192	in minutes
Lesions (1-10 points)	10	Difference	0	in minutes
Soundness (1-10 points)	8	Maximum	200	points
Quality of Movement (1-10 points)	7	Less difference	0	
Subtotal	43			
A Total Equine Score (Subtotal x 10)	430	C Total Time Difference Score	200	
Weight ³		Total Best-in-Class Score⁴	(A+B+C) =	678.8
Weight of Heaviest Rider	298			
Weight of this rider	195.6			
Difference /2	51.2			
Maximum	100			
Less Difference /2	-51.2			
B Total Weight Score	48.8			

¹ A score of 1 indicates that the equine is stressed or there is a potential issue in the area of judgement, while a score of 10 indicates the equine has not been challenged by the competition in the particular area of judgement.

²The equine with the fastest time receives the most points in this category and equines completing the course in a slower time receive fewer points, per the category formula.

³ The equine carrying the heaviest rider receives the most points in this category and equines carrying less weight receive fewer points, per the category formula.

⁴ Total of points from the Equine Score, Weight Score, and Time Difference Score