

CONFORMATION CLINIC

Evaluate and place these 4-year-old geldings in your order of preference. Then see how your choices compare with our expert judge's.

Margo Ball



Margo holds judges' cards with the American Paint Horse Association, the American Quarter Horse Association, the National Reining Horse Association, the National Snaffle Bit Association, the Palomino Horse Breeders of America, Inc., and the National Reined Cow Horse Association. In addition

to being a four-time AQHA World Show judge, she's officiated at the All American Quarter Horse Congress, and the IBHA, PHBA, and APHA world championship shows.

From her Ball's Quarter Horses in Fort Collins, Colorado, Margo's breeding operation stands world champion Quarter Horse TNT Fluid Fred. Margo specializes in training horses for halter, Western pleasure, and Western riding, and has trained and shown multiple champions.

"WHETHER I'M JUDGING A HALTER OR PERFORMANCE class, the qualities I look for in a horse are balance, correct structure, eye appeal, and adequate muscling. (The latter is especially important in halter.)

"Essentially, balance is when a horse's body parts appear to go together well. From a detailed perspective, though, balance includes a long neck (from poll to point of withers) that ties into the shoulders high; long and sloping shoulders, pasterns, hips, and croup; and an underline (from just behind the elbow to the flank) that's twice as long as the topline (from point of withers to loins). I underscore topline structure, as horses with strong toplines tend to also be the most athletic individuals.

"Structurally, I want a horse's front legs to be properly aligned from forearm to hoof, and his hocks to be placed well beneath his body with adequate set (angle). Both are important for soundness.

"Eye appeal is indicated by an attractive head and an overall pleasing appearance. Well-defined muscling will enhance a horse's eye-appeal and strength."



First: Gelding C

I liked this horse's pleasant-looking eye; he has a good expression, though he's a little long through the bridge of his nose, and his head is not as chiseled as I'd like to see. He has well-set ears and a kind eye. He's extremely clean through the throatlatch, which makes it easier to get a nice headset, and horses with a clean throatlatch are oftentimes more flexible. He has a good, clean neck all the way through. He has a relatively strong topline—the wither is just level or slightly higher than the hip. I believe he's a touch long in the back, but he's very strong over the loin, which helps compensate for his longer back. Of the three, his shoulder and hip are the most balanced. His front legs look clean and free of blemishes, and he has good bone and good angulation to his pasterns. He has well-set hocks, though I would like to see him stronger through the stifle—that would help give him more drive from behind.



And he has a nice tail set. Overall, I'd place him first as the more balanced of the three.

Second: Gelding A

I like this horse's very kind expression and well-set ears, but he's thick through his muzzle, and could have a more chiseled head. His neck ties in much lower at the bottom of his shoulder than Horse C. Often, that'll make a horse a little heavier in front, but on the plus side, it'll give him a naturally lower headset for Western pleasure or trail. He's not as strong over his topline as Horse C. His hip is actually higher than his wither, which will, again, make him heavier on his front end. His front legs look good and clean with good angles to his pasterns.

The area where I'd find the most fault would be that his hocks set out behind him, and appear to have a little too much set to the angle. Again, that'd make it tough for him to be collected and to keep his hind leg underneath him. I suspect that he drags his toes slightly at the jog, and he won't be as clean or crisp in



his diagonal gait. And, at the lope, it'll be harder for him to drive from behind with impulsion if his hocks are out behind.

Third: Gelding B

This horse is also thick through the muzzle and his head lacks refinement. While his neck is clean, it ties into a very straight shoulder, which will make it harder for him to lift his front end.

His hip is higher than his wither, and his wither is not very prominent. He's also not as balanced as I'd like to see. The angle of the photo seems to show that his hip is quite a bit higher than his wither, and he's a little flat over the croup, so he'll have a shorter stride and lack drive or impulsion from the rear.

He's also shallow through his stifle, which contributes to a lack of drive. Again, it's difficult to tell from this photo, but his hocks appear higher than his knees, and his front legs appear to be set underneath him. He has good angles to his pasterns and nicely shaped hooves.



If you're interested in submitting a photo of your horse to be evaluated in our *Conformation Clinic*, see "Join In" on page 32.