



What is the purpose of the Mare Performance Test?

THE PURPOSE OF THE MARE PERFORMANCE TEST (MPT) IS TO EVALUATE THE MARE'S INNATE ATHLETIC aptitudes in three categories: Gaits (scored individually and then averaged), Rideability, and Free Jumping (scored for technique and scope and averaged). It is designed for young horses and is not meant to be a test that reflects many years of training. This test gives us an impression of the mare's performance strengths and weaknesses. If she will be eventually used as a broodmare, it helps the breeder to appropriately match her to a complementary stallion. In Germany, a system of evaluation of breeding values for their stallions exists based in part on the MPT values of each stallion's daughters. The AHS has recently put in motion some of the steps required to use this system here in the U.S. in the future. The compilation of data from our MPTs will be essential in establishing this system here. ▶

MPT FAQ

The Mare Performance Test

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



BORTOBEAT PHOTO

As a matter of interest, in the history of the American Hanoverian Society, only one Anglo-Arab and one Arabian have successfully used the MPT in order to advance a level in the breeding program.

Left to right: The Anglo-Arab mare, Anastasia x (Son of a Buck xx-Valaida ox/Valandi ox), scored an overall 7.5 on her MPT. She is owned by Gwen Hegdal, Oreg. The Arabian mare, Naris Beauty ox (Newmars Nari ox-Shaarlene ox/Azrene ox), completed the MPT with scores of 8 for technique and ability. She is owned by Alison Corey, Conn. Both were upgraded to the Studbook.

📌 What is gained by doing the MPT?

Every mare that takes the test will have her papers stamped to indicate that she has been performance tested. A permanent record will be on file in the AHS Central Office. If she is the daughter of a Main Studbook mare and is herself in the Main Studbook with an overall score of 7.0 or better, she can become an Elite Mare Candidate upon successful completion of the MPT. This means an overall score of 7.0 or higher (i.e. at least 21 points) or an 8 in one of the three sections scored, with the other two sections scoring 6 (i.e. 20 points). To complete the process and to obtain the title of Elite Mare, she must produce an AHS registered foal within three years. The Elite Mare title given in America is similar to the States Premium designation used in Germany.

A Pre-Studbook Thoroughbred, Arab or Anglo-Arab mare can move up one level to the Studbook with the successful completion of the MPT with a score of 7 (or an 8 and two 6s). They cannot, however, obtain Elite Mare status as the EM title is reserved for eligible Hanoverian Main Studbook mares only. As a matter of interest, in the history of the American Hanoverian Society, only 34 Thoroughbred mares, one Arabian and one Anglo-Arab have successfully used the MPT in order to advance a level in the breeding program.

📌 Which mares are eligible to take the MPT?

Any mare registered with the AHS, and any non-Hanoverian mare that is entered into one of our studbooks can take the MPT. All

Prior to free jumping, mares are allowed to loosen up and warm up in the arena. During this time, the judges will take note of her trot at liberty, as this, for most mares, will be her best trot.

Right: *Wrave (Wallstreet Kid-EM Georgey Girl/Garibaldi II) scored 8 for technique and scope/ability and was high scoring mare of the 2002 Hilltop Farm test. Bred by Pat Limage, Va., and owned by Kathleen and Barb Poniatowski, Md.*

eligible mares are encouraged to do the MPT. The AHS encourages all owners and breeders to test their mares to determine strengths and weaknesses in order to further evaluate the future performance use of the animal, the future breeding choices for the mare, and to begin a process of keeping statistical data on their sires.

📌 How does my mare benefit from the designation of Elite Mare?

Your mare benefits from the honor of being identified as one of the best broodmares in the country. This is not a performance award, but rather a breeding award, and that is why the mares must prove that they are reproductively sound by having an AHS registered foal within three years of becoming an Elite Mare Candidate. There is also the benefit of obtaining reduced stud fees from some stallion owners for Elite Mares.

📌 How will the test be run? What should I expect?

The mares will be free jumped first. If your mare has not previously been inspected, she will be inspected during her free jumping time. She will be allowed to loosen up and warm up in the arena. During this time, the judges will take note of her trot at liberty, as this, for most mares, will be her best trot.

You will be asked how much free jumping the mare has done and if she needs to have all the rails down to the ground to start. The rest

of the evaluation goes very much like a normal training session (*please see "How do I begin to train my mare to free jump?" on page 33*). If the mare likes this job, is clever and willing, then she might be tested up to 4'-4'6" h by 3'-3'6" w. This would be the exceptional mare. There is no hard and fast rule as to how high the mare must jump, but the mare should be able to jump the larger oxer set at approximately 3'6" h by 3' w. The judges will give their scores for technique and scope.

If the mare is uninspected, then you will be asked to present the mare in-hand for conformation scores. You will be asked to walk her straight away from the judges and back for the correctness score. You might be asked to trot her in-hand if she only cantered in her free jumping warm up, or if the judges feel that she has a better trot than she showed at liberty. The mare will be asked to walk in a large circle in a group with the other mares being inspected at the site.

The under saddle portion of the MPT is usually separated from the free jumping by the inspection of the non-Hanoverian mares. This is to give both you and your mare a break. The mares will be evaluated in groups of two or three mares at a time. The test is run "manege" style, meaning that there is a leader and the rest follow behind each other by three to four horse lengths. You should follow the person



in front of you, even if they make a mistake. It is very important that this distance between the horses be kept the same during the entire test, even if you have to cut across the arena or go deep into the corners. Certain exercises will have to be repeated if the mares spread too far apart.

A sample test could be as follows: You'll be asked to pick up a rising trot, complete a 20 meter circle at one end followed by a lengthening down the long side, then change across the diagonal and do the same on the other rein. In a 20 meter circle you'll be asked to prepare for canter and then canter in the circle, then go straight on with lengthening down one long side, change leads through the trot across on the diagonal, and do the same on the other rein. When the judges have scores for trot and canter for each mare, you will be asked for a free walk on a long rein down the long sides, and perhaps across the arena. After this part, the judges should have scores for all three gaits. The short rideability part comes next. You'll be asked to pick up a rising trot and ride a three loop serpentine the width of the arena, probably twice, then develop canter at one end and canter across the diagonal with a change of lead through the trot at X and do the same on the other rein. You will then walk and at the end demonstrate a halt with immobility. This 'test' can change dramatically from site to site depending upon how well the group can stay together, and if all the mares are behaving well. ▶

What should I wear? What saddlery is allowed?

The proper attire for presenting the mare for free jumping and inspection is a conservative polo shirt and khaki pants with running shoes. For the under saddle portion, the rider should wear a white polo shirt or ratcatcher with conservative colored jacket (optional at 85 degrees and higher), light colored breeches and riding boots. Chaps and half chaps are discouraged. Saddlery must include a snaffle bridle for free jumping (minus the reins), for presentation and for the under saddle portion. The saddle must be of English style (no western, racing or steeplechase saddles). Protective boots and bandages are allowed for the free jumping portion only.

In free jumping the mare will receive two scores, one for the technique and one for the scope or ability.

Right: EM Pirouette (Pik Solo-Glueckskind/Gigant) scored an overall 7.5 on her MPT, including an 8 for ability and 7 for technique for her jumping. Bred by Mary Jill Fisher, Calif., and owned by Caroline Hegarty, Calif.



SHERI SCOTT PHOTO

What do the scores mean?

The MPT is scored in whole numbers only and the rounding up of scores is not permitted. A score of 4 is ‘insufficient’ and is rarely given; a 5 is ‘sufficient’ but is a low ‘passing’ score; a 6 is ‘satisfactory’ and is an average score; a 7 is ‘fairly good’ and is an above average score; an 8 is ‘good’ and is a substantially above average score; a 9 is ‘very good’ and is nearly exceptional; a 10 is ‘superior’ and is quite exceptional.

In free jumping the mare will receive two scores, one for the technique and one for scope or ability. The first score evaluates the mare’s ability to use (or control the individual parts of) her entire body to negotiate a jump. She must have some arch to her back, a bascule, be able to pick up her front and back legs so that the forearm is parallel to the ground and so that the hind legs do not trail behind and pull rails. Tucking the knees up into the chin and kicking up behind can only earn the mare more technique score. The next score is for scope. Scope assesses the ability to jump a big fence or to get to the bottom of a fence and show the power to jump up and over. The higher the score here, the more likely the mare could be a jumper. These two scores are averaged to give one jumping score. Demonstration of the ability to jump a higher and wider fence is required for a score of 8 or higher in this category.

In the under saddle portion of the test, the mare will receive a score for walk, trot and canter, and these three scores will be added together and divided by three for the gait score. She will also receive a separate score for rideability. This rideability score is a reflection of the mare’s willingness to accept the rider’s aids, her suppleness, her generosity, her ability to make the movements seem easy, and her natural balance, lightness and freedom. Just because the mare appears to be ‘on the bit’, or is more probably only flexed at the poll, doesn’t mean that she is soft in the jaw and swinging through the back. A mare that scores high here is a mare that everyone would love to have the chance to ride, and conversely, the mare that scores low here, is the one people would prefer not to ride

How do you construct a free jumping chute?

Free jumping is best done in an indoor arena with mirrors covered. The chute should be set against a long wall. This long side wall of the arena must be imposing enough in height that

the mare would never be tempted to jump over it. The side of the chute near the center of the arena needs to be imposing enough (maybe 4’) to discourage the mare from ‘escaping’. For the side of the chute, you can use one or two rails in between the standards and leave a small blank space on the landing side of each oxer so a person can slip in to adjust the height or to do fence repair.

There are two types of jumping chutes: closed and open. The closed chute has an ‘end’ or ‘wall’ at one end so the mares must stop after the last jump. The open chute allows the mares to run out of the chute. This gives the trainer the option of allowing her to return to the beginning of the chute by herself, or to be caught and led in. Letting her return to the beginning of the chute by herself allows her to keep going at a good canter stride after the larger oxer. It is very important that if you opt for a closed chute, the ‘end’ of the chute not be closer than 45 feet after the larger oxer, otherwise the mares will possibly back off the last jump, break to a trot right after it or refuse to jump into what appears to them to be a trap.

It is best to err on the generous side and make the ‘end’ farther than closer to the last jump. The closed chute must also have a ‘gate’. This is to allow the mare a place to exit. It is usually just a single pole between two standards near the ‘end’. A bucket of grain available here can help catch the mares and avoid having them use up too much energy in an effort to avoid being caught.

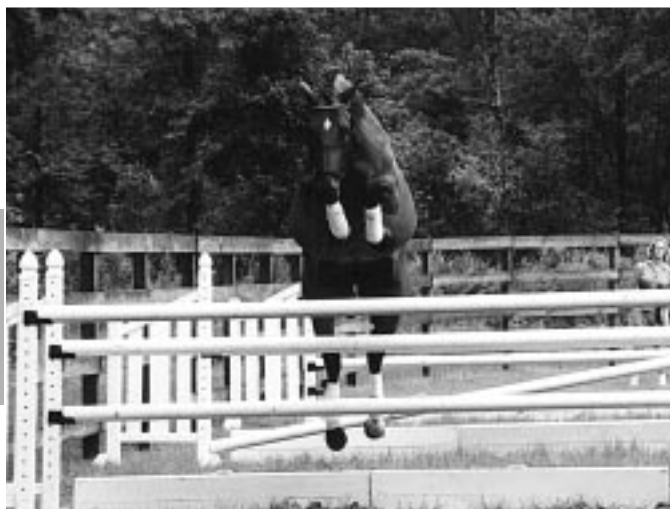
The start of the open chute needs to be built a bit closer to the short end, so the mare running free can use the short turn to collect herself before the first ‘X’. This open chute will not need as many materials as the closed chute, but of course both will need a side barrier to keep the mares inside the chute. For both, you will need lots of jump cups. Be sure to store any extra jump cups on top of the arena kick wall or in a bucket, but not at the base of the standards. This is for obvious safety reasons. You will need materials for the side chute, and three jumps, — one ‘X’, a small oxer and a larger oxer. You will need enough poles to construct the jumps and a few extra for breakage. Please use normal poles - no telephone poles.

If your arena wall is slanted, you will need to add a triangular piece of cardboard or wood to the jump standards that are against the wall so the mare will not try to squeeze between the standard and the wall. Special standards can also be constructed ▶

to hang vertically from the kick wall. The first jump is just a simple 'X', followed by 22'6" (6.8m) to a small oxer, followed by 23'1" (7.0m) to a larger oxer. Be sure to use a ground rail at every jump. These distances are tried and true and they work well for mares prepared well. Very inexperienced mares that hesitate and go too slowly or conversely, those that flatten out and go too quickly through the chute, may find these distances too long or too short.

🔗 How do I begin to train my mare to free jump?

Brushing boots and bell boots are allowed and you should use them. It is best not to use polo wraps as they can unwind during a round and become very dangerous. You will need a small bucket of feed as a reward after each round, a person to lead the mare in, who could also be the same person that catches the mare. You will need at least two whip handlers using longe whips that have had lots of experience in jumping and have a good eye for jump take-off timing. It would also be nice if you had a leather lead strap made approximately two feet long to lead the mare into the chute and to catch her after each round.



CARLA CARLETON PHOTO

The first few times the mare goes through the chute, a whip handler should follow behind the mare to prevent her from turning around and running out the in-gate. One whip handler is stationed between jump one and two and the other between jump two and three. It is best not to hit the mare but to drop the lash down behind her so as to encourage her on through the chute. But forward progress is essential, and if she stops, she must realize that the only place to go is forward.

You can start by leading the mare over three 'piles' of rails where the jumps will be. Do this until she walks quietly over all the piles. Then walk her over the first pile, pick up a jog and then the two of you jog over the next two piles. Do this until she is confident – for some, it's one time and for others, it's many times. Next have your helpers with longe whips in place. Let her jog through on her own. Now you're ready for some construction. The following is one suggestion: 1) two piles to an 'X'; 2) one pile to two 'X's; 3) three 'X's; 4) two 'X's to a small vertical; 5) one 'X' to two small verticals. The mare will tell you when it's enough for the first session. It is far better to go slow, and let her be confident and want to do the exercise again, than do too much, get her tired or overface her and have her lose confidence.

In future training sessions, you advance from the 'X' and two small verticals to an 'X' to a small oxer (not square) to a larger oxer (also not square). Be sure to widen the oxer as you raise it and pull out

the ground line some. The middle jump (the smaller oxer) usually stays at about 2'6" or 2'9" h by 2' or 2'3" w — this is a rounding fence, and for most mares, it helps set them up for a good go at the bigger oxer. The final oxer is the one that gets raised in height and width to the mare's highest capability. If your mare gets quick and rushes the fences, she might need to be led into the chute at a walk. You can also put in ground poles halfway in between the jumps to make sure she puts in a canter stride and doesn't try to bounce. These ground lines halfway in between the jumps, make the mare look, be careful, pay attention and slow up.

I believe that a closed chute works better for most mares, because of the mares' lack of training and conditioning. They do not have enough 'bottom' to gallop around for five or ten minutes and play 'catch me if you can' in between each round. The closed chute saves time for all and saves the mare from running out of gas before she can progress enough each session. In the MPT, it could help her show what she can do before tiring out. This does not mean that an open chute is not acceptable or even better for some mares and some circumstances. The open chute can teach the mare to adjust her stride better.

Every practice session at home need not test the mare to her highest capability. Rather, a slow steady build up of the height and spread of the jumps can instill confidence in the novice mare. If a bad schooling session happens, it is always best to go back down in difficulty until confidence is restored. Try to come to the test knowing the capabilities of your mare.

Experience shows that the best-prepared mares usually are rewarded with the best scores for the day.

Left: EM Wunder (Wertherson-Deidre's Decision/Dollberg) received a jumping ability score of 8. Bred by Cindy Wilkes, Ga., and owned by Jill Peterson, Fla.

🔗 How often do I need to free jump?

Free jumping can be great fun for everyone, especially the mare. It is disheartening to see ill-prepared mares make mistakes at the testing that should have been addressed at home. Free jumping should be done once a week for six to eight weeks before the testing. If the mare is clever and has some jumping talent, then she may catch on quickly and the extra sessions just build up more confidence. But for the mare that isn't so clever or talented, she needs every single session she can get to do her personal best with confidence the day of the MPT. Experience shows that the best-prepared mares usually are rewarded with the best scores for the day.

Hopefully this gives you some idea of what to expect at a MPT. The Mare and Stallion Committee members always remain available to help clarify and answer any questions you may have. If there are inspections sites in your area, it is a good idea to go watch one before bringing your mare. Many of the inspection site hosts offer schooling sessions prior to the MPT day. Take advantage of clinics that may be offered. The judges and inspection site hosts want this to be a positive experience for both you and your mare. Have a happy and safe testing. Give it a try and good luck! ■

AHS board member Suzanne Quarles was appointed to the AHS Mare and Stallion Committee in 1997. She judges extensively and has been a US Equestrian-licensed Combined Training judge and Technical Delegate since 1976.