

Let's Keep The Fences As High As The Payout

It seems like a simple enough concept: the higher you jump, the more money you win.

The higher you jump, the more likely it is that you've spent a lot of money purchasing your horse, that you've spent vast amounts of time and money training and traveling long distances from one show to another—maybe even abroad—to hone that training, and the more likely you're shelling out cash for regular, steep veterinary bills. You've probably acquired expertise that enables you to see distances, make technical adjustments and regulate a horse's stride and balance to jump the kinds of impressive courses that the general public may pay to come watch.

Basically, if you're competing at this level, you've probably devoted your life to getting there. And, let's face it, you're braver and willing to take greater risks, physically and financially. These are the riders who deserve to be rewarded with prize money.

Classes geared to juniors or amateurs—or any class at a lower height—should offer next to nothing in terms of prize money. This opinion was voiced by several members of the U.S. Equestrian Federation's Board of Governors when the prize money rule,

originally proposed by the North American Riders Group (for more, see story on p. 32) and brought forward by the Jumper Committee, came up for debate at the annual meeting.

That's not to say there can't be special classes for juniors and amateurs, something outside the ordinary that will make them want to attend a certain show. Competing on the grand prix field or under the lights, putting the prize ceremony in the main arena, providing announcements about the competitors' accomplishments as they enter the ring, even a program with information about the horses and riders entered, and, of course, quality prizes (just not money). The time, location and treatment of the class can mean at least as much as the payout at the end.

But *requiring* more money for classes with bigger jumps puts many show managers on the defensive. They point to sponsors who want to be aligned with these classes for amateurs and juniors and contend that declining the money for these classes will only result in the loss of that sponsorship for the show.

Anne Kursinski suggested that "maybe that money goes to the young rider program or the chef d'equipe for young riders. We could sell to the sponsors that there's another way to reach their target in this bigger grand plan of sponsorship for the USEF."

The rule change proposal was tabled for further research, but I hope that it comes up again at the USEF summer meeting and passes. Putting a dollar figure in front of a class name doesn't automatically give that class any prestige. Most of the people who enter that class aren't going to get a piece of that prize money anyway.

If you're competing at 3'3", this isn't your livelihood, and no reasonable amount of prize money offered at that level is going to cover the costs of owning and showing a horse. You're riding for fun, so enjoy yourself, seek out shows where the management makes an effort to make your classes meaningful, and let's leave the money to the professionals.



Beth Rasin

BETH RASIN, Editor

Editorial and Advertising Offices P.O. Box 46, Middleburg, VA 20118
Deliveries for FED-EX, UPS, etc. 108 The Plains Rd., Middleburg, VA 20117
Telephone 540-687-6341 **Fax** 540-687-3937

WEB ADDRESS www.chronofhorse.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND RENEWALS:
The Chronicle of the Horse
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PUBLISHER

VISTAN CORPORATION
info@chronofhorse.com

EDITORIAL

EDITOR	Beth Rasin	bethr@chronofhorse.com
MANAGING EDITOR	Sara Lieser	slieser@chronofhorse.com
SENIOR EDITOR	Kat Netzler	kat@chronofhorse.com
MEDICAL EDITOR	Christiana Ober, DVM	
EDITORIAL STAFF	Sharon Rose	sharon@chronofhorse.com
	Cynthia Curran	cynthia@chronofhorse.com
	Mollie Bailey	m Bailey@chronofhorse.com
	Coree Reuter	coree@chronofhorse.com
	Lisa Slade	lisa@chronofhorse.com
CONTRIBUTING WRITER	Molly Sorge	molly@chronofhorse.com
INTERNS	Lindsay Berreth	intern@chronofhorse.com
	Laura Brown	laura@chronofhorse.com
	Kara Berglund	intern2@chronofhorse.com
	Meghan Blackburn	webintern@chronofhorse.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Jane Furr	jane@chronofhorse.com
DESIGN	Joy Reid	joy@chronofhorse.com
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR	Lee Leach	lee@chronofhorse.com
GRAPHICS	Debbie Corrigan	debbie@chronofhorse.com
PRODUCTION	Linda Tavenner	linda@chronofhorse.com

ADVERTISING

DIRECTOR	Susan Lee	slee@chronofhorse.com
SR. ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE	Susan Dipietro	dipietro@chronofhorse.com
SR. ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE	Dawn Kirilin	dawn@chronofhorse.com
AD PRODUCTION MANAGER	Dianna Gregg	dianna@chronofhorse.com
DISPLAY AD DESIGN	Leigh Ann Molotky	leigh@chronofhorse.com
CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING	Mildred Ann Sudduth	classifieds@chronofhorse.com

CONSUMER CARE

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR	Lauren Maruskin	lauren@chronofhorse.com
BRAND MANAGER	Katie O'Malley	katie@chronofhorse.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

CONTROLLER	Patricia Boyce	pboyce@chronofhorse.com
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