



Let's Meet Our Judges . . .

The National Walking Horse Association proudly announces its Judges for the 2011 National Show. So, that you will know a little more about these wonderful people, short biographies have been prepared for each. We are most honored to have all of them in these very important roles. Now, let's meet our judges!

The Honorable Mike Castonia

Mike Castonia began his riding career at a very young age, riding many different breeds of horses. At age 16, Mike's aunt introduced him to the Tennessee Walking Horse. Mike fell in love with the kind, gentle nature and smooth, comfortable gaits of the walking horse. After a lot of hard work, he became a professional trainer and has been training walking horses for over 20 years.

In 1998, NWHHA was formed and Mike became one of NWHHA's first licensed judges. In previous years, he also judged Mountain Horses. Travelling around the country to see the different horses and exhibitors is what Mike truly enjoys about being a NWHHA judge. He takes great satisfaction in being a part of the level playing field that NWHHA offers its competitors. Mike said it's great to see the exhibitors enjoy and have fun showing their horses . . . sound horses.

This will be Mike's first opportunity to judge the Nationals. "With the economic situation and ongoing regulations changes challenging our industry, this is an important time to showcase our natural horses' abilities. I am truly honored to be selected to judge our National Show," said Mike. The Nationals brings together the best exhibitors, horses, and judges. Mike is truly looking forward to working at the Nationals; especially, getting to work with the other outstanding judges.

The Honorable Roger Hand

Roger Hand has been around horses all of his life. His dad bought him his first horse when he was 10 years old. He started showing when he was 15. "I started working outside horses when I was 16 and haven't stopped since," says Roger, "I paid my tuition at Auburn by training horses."

Roger is one of the industry's most experienced judges. He has been a licensed judge with NWHHA for ten years, and has been judging horses for over 40 years.

When asked what he enjoys most about being a NWHHA judge, Roger said it is getting to watch all of the nice, flat shod horses at the show with no interruptions.

To Roger, being asked to judge the NWHHA Nationals is an honor. And, it's very rewarding to him, too. After judging the 2011 National, Roger will be the only person to have judged all three major walking horse shows: the Celebration, the International, and the National.

The Honorable Jennie Jackson

Jennie Jackson has been involved with horses for over 45 years; and, with Tennessee Walking Horses for more than 37 of those years. Her judging career spans more than 21 years during which time she has judged different breeds of horses and mules. For the past 7 years, Jennie has been a licensed judge with NWAHA.

Jennie says that being around so many clean, flat shod, sound moving Tennessee Walking Horses as an NWAHA judge gives her such a rewarding feeling. “To be able to judge classes with a level playing field of horses and riders from around the country, to me, represents not only where this breed started from, but the excellent breeding and training programs for our horses that has more AOT capabilities. This is truly a breath of fresh air to me.”

Judging the Nationals will actually be a bitter-sweet feeling for Jennie as she has for years looked forward to being an exhibitor participating at The Nationals. But, now from center ring judging so many of the breeds’ best horses and riders, she is excited to have such an honor. Jennie states, “We as a breed have truly come a mighty long way and I am thankful to see the progress NWAHA has contributed to being one of the most outstanding show venues.”

The Honorable Julie Sessions (Versatility)

Julie Sessions has been involved with horses for 40 years in her home state of South Carolina and is a 30 year 4-H volunteer horse leader. Kids, showing, judging and enjoying horses has been a way of life for many, many years for Julie. From 4-H judging competitions to judging the NWAHA National is a horse judging journey. She’s been a professional horse woman for 10 years. Julie is an instructor, clinician, horse show coordinator and judge. She has been an NWAHA judge for 10 years. As a member of NWAHA, she takes pride in her involvement in the Versatility Program. Since 2006, she has written patterns for the versatility classes at the National and has been the Versatility Coordinator for the 2009 and 2010 National.

“I always believed in giving back to something I feel very strong about and have been involved with, be it 4-H, a local show circuit or a national competition. We all can make a difference by being involved . . . the people and horses we meet and the things we learn along the way make it the best!!! I look forward to judging this great bunch of walking horses at 2011 Nationals, it is an honor. Smile, do your best and have fun; I’m going to!!!”

The Honorable Betty Ortlieb (Dressage)

Betty Ortlieb has been riding her whole life and started showing as a teen. For more than 35 years, she has been training, teaching and competing clients' horses, as well as her own. Betty and her students have won many local, regional and national awards on horses she trained in various disciplines including hunters, jumpers, English and Western pleasure, sidesaddle, and both Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing. In the late 70’s, her main focus became Eventing and Dressage. Betty has had the great fortune to work with Michael Matthews, Tom Poulin and Dr. Max Gahwyler. Currently, Betty and her husband Gary own and operate Mirkwood Farm in Northern Kentucky, where she teaches and trains all breeds believing passionately that classical dressage training benefits all horses and riders.

Betty’s judging career spans more than 25 years. In the 90’s, she graduated 'With Distinction' from the USDF 'L' program. While keeping a busy judging schedule and regularly attending continuing education programs, she earned her USDF University Silver Diploma.

2011 will be Judge Ortlieb’s third year to guest judge Dressage at the NWAHA Nationals and she considers it a great honor. She enjoys seeing the growth of classical riding in NWAHA, and the walking horse industry, and feels lucky to be a part of this growth. She said, “I love the enthusiasm the competitors show learning about Dressage and competing on their non-traditional breed! And seeing so much improvement in such a short time!”