



2026 USHJA PONY HUNTER DERBY CHAMPIONSHIP **SPECIFICATIONS**

Changes to 2025 in bold, italics and underlined.

I. Qualifying Criteria

- A. All ponies that have placed first (1st) through twelfth (12th) overall in at least one (1) USHJA Pony Hunter Derby at a licensed USEF Channel I or Channel II competitions within the qualifying period will be invited to compete in the USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship.
- B. The qualifying period begins at the conclusion of each coast's 2025 qualifying period and will include competitions with a start date of no less than 60 days prior to the start of the coast's 2026 championship. (Exact qualifying dates will be listed on the website [here](#)).
- C. If an East Coast and West Coast Championship are offered qualified ponies may only compete in one Championship.
- D. Entries may be limited on a first-come, first-served basis as needed for scheduling constraints.
- E. USHJA at its discretion can open up the qualifying procedures to allow additional entries should insufficient entries be received by the deadline to fill a championship.
 - 1. In the event the qualifying needs to be opened up to increase entries, it should revert to the previous qualifying criteria that requires ponies to have completed one (1) USHJA Pony Hunter Derby.

II. Defining Eligibility

- A. Riders, owners, and trainers must be current Active members of the Federation and USHJA to participate in this class.
- B. Ponies must be registered with USHJA and have an active horse recording with the Federation to participate in this class.
- C. Ponies must have a valid measurement card or form issued by the Federation.
- D. Rider age and pony size: See HU141 for current Federation policy. Any rider under the age of 18 years may compete on any pony that is eligible for the Green Pony Hunter section.
- E. At the East and West Coast Championship riders may compete on a total of three ponies, no more than one of any one size.
- F. Rider substitutions will not be allowed after the first round.

III. Competition Format

- A. The USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship will be composed two (2) rounds: Classic Hunter Style Round and Handy Hunter Round, show management may split the class by size if entries exceed ninety (90), fence heights will be adjusted by size (small- 2'3", medium- 2'6" and large- 2'9"-3'0"). If a height section has less than six (6) ponies, they must combine, combined height sections should be either small/medium or medium/large. If required, a Jump-off Round will be held.
 - 1. The PHD Championship Classic Hunter Style Round consists of the qualified and entered ponies present for this event. These ponies will compete over a Classic Hunter Course. All ponies must trot a circle for soundness after their classic round, prior to leaving the ring.
 - 2. The PHD Championship Handy Hunter Round consists of the top 12 ponies, from the Classic Hunter Style Round. These ponies will compete over a Handy Hunter Course.
 - 3. Jump-off Rounds, if required, consist of the ponies tied for first place. These ponies will compete over a Handy Hunter Course. All other ties will be broken according to the tie-breaking procedures in Section IX.

4. If needed, Competition Management is permitted to schedule the USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship over two (2) days.

IV. Official Jog Format

- A. All ponies must complete a trot circle for soundness at the conclusion of their Classic round prior to exiting the ring.

V. Course Requirements

- A. The course diagrams for each round must be posted a minimum of one hour before the start of the first round, unless the second round is held at another time. In that case, the course for second round must be posted a minimum of one hour prior. Copies of the courses must also be available for distribution.
- B. Jumps in ALL Rounds
 1. Obstacles must simulate those reminiscent of the hunt field and the course must offer a variety of classic jumps with different appearances such as: natural post and rail, stone wall, white board fence or gate, coop, aiken, hedge, oxer, brush, logs, natural foliage.
 2. Natural obstacles such as banks and ditches are not allowed.
 3. A minimum of 2" difference is required for the back element of all oxers.
 4. Ground lines are not to exceed 16" in depth from the vertical plane of the jump. For appropriate jumps, no ground line is necessary.
 5. The jumpable portion of any fence must be a minimum of eight feet on its front face.
 6. Flat cups may only be used for log fences and in accordance with Federation rules.
 7. Fence heights: Small Pony - 2'3"; Medium Pony – 2'6"; Large Pony 2'9"- 3'0". One hundred percent of fences must be set at the appropriate height per pony size.
- C. Classic Hunter Style Course (First Round)
 1. A minimum of ten obstacles must be offered in the Classic Hunter Round.
 2. At least one in and out.
 3. At least one bending line.
 4. At least one line with an unrelated distance.
 5. At least one long approach.
- D. Handy Hunter Course (Second Round)
 1. A minimum of eight obstacles must be offered in the Handy Hunter Round.
 2. The course should simulate riding over hunt country and must include a minimum of two handy options, such as: tight turn options, different tracks, clever options for jump approaches, pen type obstacles, hand gallop a jump, trot a lowered obstacle not to exceed 2'0" in height, halt and/or back.
 3. Leading over an obstacle and opening and/or closing a gate(s) while mounted or not mounted is not permitted. Gimmicky options are not appropriate.
- E. Jump-Off Round
 1. A minimum of eight obstacles must be offered in the jump-off round.
 2. The course should simulate riding over hunt country and must include a minimum of two handy options.

VI. Order of Go

- A. The Classic Hunter Style Round order of go will be determined using a random draw.
- B. The Handy Hunter Round order of go will be determined by the scores from the Classic Hunter Style Round, with the lowest score returning first and the highest score returning last within each height.
- C. All ponies must be ridden in the sequence that appears on the jumping order for each round of the competition.

VII. Judges

- A. There will be a total of four judges. Judges will be seated separately in two panels consisting of two judges per panel.
- B. One judge on each panel must be an R-licensed hunter judge while the other may be an R-licensed or r-licensed judge.
- C. All judges must be Federation licensed and in good standing with the Federation and USHJA.

- D. No guest cards will be granted for this competition.
- E. The judges will be hired by the host competition manager.

VIII. Judging System

- A. The Classic Hunter Style Round shall be judged and numerically scored on quality, movement, jumping style, manners and way of going. Pace and brilliance are to be rewarded. The two panels' scores will be announced separately and then averaged for a final average numerical score.
- B. The Handy Hunter Round shall be judged and numerically scored on quality, movement, jumping style, manners and way of going. Pace and brilliance are to be rewarded. Handiness is taken into account in the judges' base score. Jumping decorations to utilize a shorter track is NOT permissible. The two panels' scores will be announced separately and then averaged for a final average numerical score.
- C. The final average score of each pony-and-rider combination from the Classic Hunter Style and Handy Hunter Round will be added together to determine their final overall Pony Hunter Derby Championship score. This score will determine the final overall standings for the Pony Hunter Derby Championship.
- D. The Jump-off Round(s), if required, shall be judged and numerically scored on quality, movement, jumping style, manners and way of going. Pace and brilliance are to be rewarded. Jumping decorations to utilize a shorter track is **NOT** permissible. The two panels' scores will be announced separately and then averaged for a final average numerical score.

IX. Tie Breaking Procedures

- A. Prior to the start of the PHD Championship, one judging panel in each round must be designated as the tie breaking panel. In addition, one of these panels will be designated as the overall tie breaking panel.
- B. To determine awards and order of go, if applicable, all ties in the Classic Hunter Style Round and Handy Hunter Round will be broken by the designated tie breaking judging panel score for each round.
- C. All ties for Overall Championship Champion (first place) will compete in a Jump-off Round. If a tie occurs after the Jump-off Round, the exhibitors will be named co-winners, will evenly split the prize money, but tied entrants must determine the distribution of awards amongst themselves.
- D. No more than 12 entries will compete in the Handy Hunter Round. The Handy Hunter Round will only consist of the top 12 entries from Classic Hunter Style Round. Any ties will be broken by the score of the designated Classic Hunter Style Round tie breaker judging panel.
- E. All ties for other than first place in the Overall PHD Championship standings will be broken using the score of the designated overall tie breaking judging panel.
- F. No judging panel may award the same score to any two competitors in any one round unless a competitor's score is below the cut-off score for awards.

X. Prize Money and Awards

- A. Recognition will be given to the following for the Overall Champion of the Championship:
 - 1. Owner
 - 2. Rider
 - 3. Trainer
 - 4. Highest overall scoring Large, Medium, and Small pony.
- B. The Overall Champion will be presented with a bridle ribbon, neck sash, pony cooler, keeper trophy and a sponsor award, if available.
- C. The Reserve Overall Champions will be presented with a bridle ribbon, neck sash and, sponsor award if available.
- D. Ribbons will be awarded to the top twelve (12) placings for each phase, and top twelve (12) for overall placings.
- E. The top 12 overall places shall be awarded \$5,000 in prize money. In the event that competition management chooses to split the championship by size, it is the sole responsibility to the competition to ensure that each section receives \$5,000 in prize money.
- F. Prize Money will be distributed as follows:

1 st place	30%	7 th place	4%
2 nd place	22%	8 th place	3%
3 rd place	15%	9 th place	2%

4th place 10%
 5th place 6%
 6th place 5%

10th place 1%
 11th place 1%
 12th place 1%

G. USHJA Year-End Awards

1. For USHJA year-end awards purposes, a computer ranking system tracks both money won as well as the points earned by pony and rider in each zone as well as nationally. Awards will be presented at the conclusion of the competition year.
2. In order for points earned to be applied toward USHJA standings and awards, a minimum of six (6) entries must complete the first round, regardless of competition Channel.
3. Year-End Points will be awarded for the overall placings of the USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championships as follows:

1st– 50	7th– 15
2nd– 40	8th– 10
3rd– 35	9th– 7
4th– 30	10th– 5
5th– 25	11th– 3
6th– 20	12th– 1

XII. Competition Requirements

- A. Competition Management will collect and remit to USHJA the \$35 per pony entrant fee at Channel I (Premier and National) competitions and competitions that have been approved for a Special Competition classification, and the \$25 per pony entrant fee at Channel II (Regional) competitions.
- B. The following meetings must be held prior to the start of the class:
 1. Officials Meeting must be attended by the judges, Course Designer, Steward, USHJA Designated Representative and Competition Manager to review the specifications, judging system and to walk the course.
 2. Course Designer, and management must be available during exhibitor course walk at the in-gate to answer any questions regarding course, judging system or class specifications.

XIII. USHJA Contact Information

Please contact one of the following USHJA representatives if questions arise pertaining to the USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship that cannot be answered by the Show Steward or Management based on the class specifications provided.

Sara Murray-Smith –USHJA Sport Program Coordinator (859) 225-6735

Patricia Roberts – Pony Hunter Task Force Chair (713) 683-8636

Britt McCormick– USHJA President (972) 467-6008

The USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship and the related format and specifications are the sole properties of the USHJA and may only be held, conducted or used upon the terms and conditions specified by the USHJA. USHJA reserves the right to change language in documents related to the conduct of the USHJA Pony Hunter Derby Championship as necessary for the purposes of consistency and clarity.

