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Riding High: Spirit of Excellence Highlights, Leaderboard Standouts & the Road to the Grand Finale Futurity and Derby

The Spirit of Excellence 2025

This year, ORHA riders had another opportunity to show right here in Ontario at the beautiful Y Not Farms and Equestrian Facility in Meaford Ontario. The Spirit of Excellence took place on Saturday July 5th and owners Ron and Gillian Lubinski ensured a great show atmosphere inviting riders to enjoy the beautiful grounds. Riders cruised around the largest reining pen in Ontario overlooking gorgeous views of the escarpment. Ron explained that hosting shows and promoting reining has been a long-time focus:

We followed our dreams and want to contribute to the development of reining and also educate others of the benefits of a reining foundation for any discipline.



78 years young Gillian Lubinski and YNotDunny's last ride at the Spirit of Excellence. Photo by Diana Macdonald

Rider, Mary Tyrrell had a very successful weekend splitting her time between riding and scribing for the day:

Well it was hot, hot, hot at the Spirit of Excellence but the show was well attended. Worried my mare and I were going to overheat, I didn't warm up like I usually do. To my surprise, Ali stayed with me through the whole run. It was our best ride ever and we won the Ltd Non Pro and reserve in the prime time! Thanks so much to the judge's wife for scribing for me so I could compete and to Ron for making sure everyone stayed hydrated. Special thanks to my coach Tim Stanton for all his support and believing in me and my mare Prize Ammunition!

The experience at The Spirit of Excellence leaves no doubt about the meaning behind its name—excellence is clearly the standard at Y Not Farms. 79 riders made their way to Meaford to participate in the one-day event. With payouts totaling \$6,100.00 for NRHA category 1 entries and 10 classes offered, it is easy to see why so many decided to load up their reiners for the day. Ron and Gillian's dedication to reining and riders is truly admirable. Sadly, Ron's brother passed away just weeks before the show, but Ron was determined to ensure that The Spirit of Excellence would go on as planned. The ORHA family would like to offer their sincere condolences to Ron and family and thank them for the amazing show experience had by all!



Mary and her partner, Prize Ammunition



Beautiful views at Ynot Farms Samantha Speed riding Y Not Wowza (owned by Ron Lubinski). Photo by Diana Macdonald.

There is still time to qualify and plenty of show season left to enter the race so come on out! Please check for the most up to date standings at <https://orha.on.ca/results> and contact shows@orha.on.ca if you have questions about qualifying. If you are not on the list due to missing volunteer hours, please contact ajanzen@orha.on.ca to sign up to help at the GRAND Finale!



THE RUNDOWN

Awards Banquet Sneak Peek: Current Leaders

Class	Leaders
Youth 14-18 & Youth Rookie	Julie Lowe, Avril Young
Rookie L1, L2, Prime-Time	Michele Seip
Int and Ltd Open	Darby Mailhot
Rookie Pro	Michelle Seip (Andrea Renaud)
Green Reiner 1	Jesse Gregoris, Barb MacDonald
Green Reiner 2	Barb MacDonald
ORHA Green Reiner	Jon Clapham, Barb MacDonald
Ladies and Mens	Jon Clapham
Novice Non-Pro L1	Ashley Gregoris
Novice Open L1	Addison Spur (Darby Mailhot)
Non-Pro and Prime-Time Non-Pro	Mike Joslin
Int and Ltd Non-Pro	Christine Clapham
Green Horse	Sharon Hart, Sara Brown (Peter Knelsen)



A GENERAL: What it Means to Me as a Non-Pro—Mike Joslin

Whether you are chasing belt buckles, derby dreams or just starting out in the reining pen the first place reiners should be looking for guidance is the NRHA handbook. Here, judging standards, rules and terminology are explained in detail. The "A General" captures the spirit reining and the ultimate goal for riders:

A General:

"To rein a horse is not only to guide him but also to control his every movement. The best-reined horse should be willingly guided or controlled with little or no apparent resistance and dictated to completely."

—Jim Willoughby, NRHA Hall of Fame Inductee

Mike Joslin, an ORHA Non-Pro, took some time to reflect on the A General and how it should be guiding us in the pen and at home:

As a non-pro competitor in the NRHA, the journey to success is about more than just perfecting maneuvers or collecting ribbons. It's about embracing the principles that make reining unique: the harmony between horse and rider, the dedication to fairness, and the commitment to doing things the right way.

A General serves as a guiding light for competitors, reminding us that the best performances come not from force or dominance, but from a true partnership with our horse. In this article, I'll explore the meaning of this rule from the perspective of a non-pro rider, sharing how it influences preparation, competition, and growth.

What is A General?

At its core, A General defines the essence of reining:

1. **Willing Guidance:** A reined horse should perform maneuvers willingly, without signs of resistance, showcasing trust and communication between horse and rider.

2. **Complete Control:** The horse should respond to subtle cues, making it appear as though the rider is simply "thinking" the movements into action.

For a non-pro like me, this rule isn't just about impressing the judges—it's about the journey of becoming a better horseman or horsewoman and building a partnership founded on respect and understanding.

Why A General Matters to Non-Pros

As non-pros, we often juggle riding with other responsibilities—careers, families, and life outside the arena. Yet, A General offers us a chance to elevate our approach to the sport by focusing on the values that define reining.

1. It Encourages Ethical Horsemanship

A General reminds us to train with patience and prioritize our horse's well-being over short-term results. For non-pros, this is especially important as we may not have the same resources as professionals, making the quality of our relationship with our horse even more vital.

2. It Builds Confidence

When I train my horse to willingly perform with minimal cues, I gain confidence in both my skills and my horse's capabilities. This confidence translates into smoother rides and better performances.

3. It Strengthens Community Respect

Adhering to A General isn't just about personal achievement; it's about contributing to a culture of sportsmanship and respect within the reining community.

How Non-Pros Can Apply A General

As a non-pro, incorporating A General into my reining journey requires intentionality and reflection. Here are a few ways I've worked to align my approach with this guiding principle:

1. Focus on Training for Willingness

In my experience, training isn't about drilling patterns but about creating a positive environment where my horse feels safe and engaged.

- **Start Slow:** I break maneuvers into small, achievable steps to build my horse's confidence.
- **Reward the Try:** By rewarding effort, I encourage my horse to willingly engage with the process.
- **Listen to My Horse:** When my horse shows signs of frustration or fatigue, I take a step back and reassess.

2. Prepare for Competition with Integrity

Before every show, I remind myself of the values outlined in A General.

- **Practice with Purpose:** I aim for quality over quantity, ensuring my horse stays fresh and responsive.
- **Know the Rules:** Understanding the rulebook helps me compete fairly and respect the parameters of the sport.

3. Compete with Grace

Whether I'm winning or losing, I try to embody the spirit of A General by:

- Supporting fellow competitors with encouragement and respect.
- Reflecting on my performance to identify areas for growth.
- Celebrating the progress my horse and I make together, regardless of the results.

A Personal Story of Growth

Early in my non-pro journey, I struggled with the concept of willing guidance. I often felt frustrated when my horse resisted, thinking it was a reflection of my shortcomings. Over time, I realized that my horse wasn't being difficult—he was trying to tell me something.

By shifting my mindset and focusing on partnership rather than control, everything changed. I started paying attention to the smallest cues my horse gave me, adjusting my approach to build trust. The first time we nailed a pattern with that sense of "effortless" cooperation, it felt like magic—and it all started with the principles of A General.

Why Rule A General Resonates with Non-Pros

For non-pros, A General is a reminder of why we do this: the joy of working with a horse, the thrill of connection, and the pride