

**The Big Sky Draft Horse Expo** added a new class at last year's show, the Master Teamster Classic. So what exactly is it and how is it judged?

The Master Teamster Classic consists of 3 parts; driving for precision (obstacles), driving for work and driving for speed. Let's take a look at Driving for Work. Each year the event coordinators decide whether you will be asked to skid logs, hook to a wagon or sled, harrow or cultivate, spread manure, etc. Last year it was hooking to a sled.

Many teamsters wondered what they would be judged on. Well here are a few pointers. Safety is a huge issue when working with teams and thus it was easy to take away points from teamsters who did not have their lines in hand when hooking and unhooking their teams. Just because you can have a header does not mean you can throw the lines on the ground and hookup. You must look at this event as if you were truly by yourself (no header) and hook and unhook your team in a SAFE manner. Just because you trust your team at home and have gotten lax, does not mean that they cannot be spooked under certain conditions. Look at it from a judges point of view, if your team were to move off while you were hooking or unhooking did you the teamster have the team under your COMPLETE control? In a judged competition the header should NOT touch the team at any time; they are only there in case things get out of control.

Did you step into a hooked teams tugs to hook/unhook? I saw that happen quite a few times. When you got on the sled did your team stand quietly waiting for your command to go? Did "you" start them off together?

Precision driving (obstacles) would also be judged along these same lines. The hooking & unhooking part IS being judged, do it in a safe and correct manner! Did you keep your teams working together and smoothly, not one horse/mule in front of the other? If you had a refusal, how did you handle it as a teamster? Did you use your voice, whip and lines correctly?

Driving for Speed is, well let's just say since it is judged, not the fastest one across the finish line. If you have a team where one gets more excited and is out in front and has his head in the air, then you need to be a smoother, quieter driver to keep them working together.

Last but not least did you as a teamster learn the pattern before-hand? Last year there was a bit of confusion, some of it the teamsters fault and some the event coordinators fault. This year will be different as there will be one person in charge of the pattern set-up. So questions will be directed to that person only.

Good luck and hope to see many of you out there this year competing for the money!