

Reining Alberta Spring Classic Town Hall Meeting Report

By Libby Laycraft

I thought the meeting was a success. There were 55 people in attendance which wasn't too bad for a Wednesday afternoon during paid warm-ups. No topic was out of bounds and a lot of the "sensitive" issues were put on the table and discussed.

NRHA

NRHA Executive Director, Dan Wall, led us through his presentation which featured a multitude of statistics about the NRHA membership, programs, services and trends. A number of interesting comments arose such as;

- NRHA membership numbers have not shown significant growth in North America
- The number of approved shows in north America has increased
- The number of entries per show has increased.

One third of the NRHA membership has been a member for less than 5 years, which indicates that retainage of members, is a problem. The three most common reasons that people drop their NRHA membership are:

1. Earn out of category, therefore are not competitive at the higher level
2. Not competing at all in a given year
3. Too expensive

88% of the NRHA membership will participate in less than 10 shows per year.

As a result of some of these challenging statistics, the NRHA has attempted to introduce new programs and conditions to encourage existing members to continue to participate at shows, by developing new classes and modifying changes to class eligibilities, etc. In addition they are trying to develop new programs targeting reining enthusiasts at the beginner and green levels and allowing them earlier access into the sport.

Dan also explained why the NRHA developed the International Affiliate Program (IAP), of which 15 countries are now active participants. One of the main reasons was to help the NRHA staff in dealing with the language barriers that existed and the challenges that brought with processing paperwork.

The IAP has been a success for the NRHA. Growth in Europe and other non-North American countries has been significant since its inception. Essentially what this program, along with the controversial "Judges Rule" has accomplished internationally, is to bring the majority of Reining events world-wide

under the umbrella and approval of the NRHA. In many countries outside North America, the sport of reining was developing independently of the NRHA. The significance of the IAP is that most of that growth and development is now under NRHA governance.

The impact of the IAP in Canada however, is not comparable to that seen in other international countries. In fact, and not surprisingly, Canada more closely reflects the same trends in membership and event growth as that seen in the United States.

Dan also explained the new entry level programs that the NRHA is developing and emphasized the fact that these programs would be available to all regional affiliates but they are strictly optional. NRHA is prepared to offer some fabulous prizes; Montana Silversmith buckles and NRHA jackets.

Dan was also asked about the Show Steward requirement, and he explained that this service is required at the very large shows for the benefit of the competitors, animals and show management.

Reining Canada

Gerry Loewen, current President of Reining Canada outlined the activities of RC in addition to the benefits and services it provides its membership. Discussion and explanation of the RC membership took place, in particular why the fee was mandatory for Canadians while U.S. based NRHA members could compete in Canada without having to pay the Reining Canada membership. The RC presentation can also be found on the RA website.

Equine Canada

Equine Canada's CEO , Akaash Maharaj, explained the role of Equine Canada (EC) as the national governing body of horse activities in Canada covering the areas of; recreation, sport, provincial federations, and breeds and industry.

The current focus of EC with respect to Reining is at the FEI level, in particular high performance.

Akaash introduced JP Forget, a member of Equine Canada's Canadian Reining Committee (CRC), which was put together in the fall of 2008. The CRC's mission is to promote and develop the Canadian reining community.

JP acknowledged that development of a coaching skills program for Reining is under development, utilizing methodology from Sport Canada's Long Term Athletic Development program which has been accepted by many other sports in Canada.

Part of the objective of the CRC is to bring new people to the sport of Reining – in particular those that are new to equine sport. The significance of this objective is to enable Reining to be accessible at an entry level, which currently it is not.

JP also pointed out that there are three "major" organizations (NRHA, RC, EC) that have all stated common goals in Canada;

- Increase membership
- Promote the sport of Reining
- Develop Reining across Canada

It is important that these three entities can work together to;

- Have effective use of resources
- Avoid duplication
- Avoid unnecessary costs
- Improve communication

An interesting statistic is in Alberta there are 21,000 horse owners and over 300,000 horses. Approximately 3,000 horse owners are involved in Hunter/Jumper in comparison to Reining with approximately 500. Obviously there is room for growth!

EC memberships at this point follow a “user-pay” approach. There is currently no plan to collect a levy for membership.

EC intends for the CRC to be made up of elected representatives

The EC presentation will also be made available on the RA website.