



SHOW HORSE

Athlete Pathway



Foundations

Talent

Elite

Mastery

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What is an athlete pathway?

Every equestrian is developing in their own way and at their own pace. In addition, every equestrian has their own goal whether it be lifelong participation in equestrian sport or sporting excellence at an elite level. The athlete pathway provides a discipline specific, practical guide for equestrians in reaching their own goals.

Each stage of the equestrian athlete pathway provides an overview of athlete preparation, programs, on and off horse development, equipment, competition, support and education. It is designed to inform our community about the pathways to high performance, and to support our program providers to deliver long-term athlete development opportunities.

Purpose of this document

This document has been developed to outline a clear and accessible athlete pathway within Equestrian NSW. It provides a structured overview of how participants can develop and progress at their own pace, from foundational grassroots involvement through to high performance. The pathway aligns with Equestrian Australia frameworks and standards, ensuring consistency and quality across all levels.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

The Australian Institute of Sport has developed a framework known as the FTEM. The FTEM is an evidence-based framework that focuses on the Foundation, Talent, Elite, and Mastery levels of sport. The framework has been used to support equestrians to participate and progress in their chosen discipline while promoting a holistic athlete approach on and off the horse. More information regarding the FTEM Framework can be found here: [\(FTEM\) Pathways | ASC](#)

What is FTEM?



Foundations

Foundations contribute to and underpin our Participation Pathway. These progressive and dedicated levels are pivotal to acquiring and refining the fundamental movement skills and early physical literacy required for athletic development.

Talent

Talent supports the pathways to high performance. Using a best practice, inclusive and holistic approach the future talent potential of a pre-elite athlete is identified, confirmed and developed through effective programming and competitive opportunity.

Elite and Mastery

Elite and Mastery focus on the pinnacle of the sport pathway. Athletes enter and perform on the world stage and are supported through a dedicated and individualised approach including committed preparation, camps, sport science/sports medicine and quality coaching.

What is a Show Horse?

Show Horse is an equestrian discipline that allows individuals to compete with their horse or pony in events that are specific to the type of horse or pony that is being shown. Individuals may begin to ride at any age but are permitted to compete from the age of five, where horses are permitted to compete from the age of three onwards.

Show Horses are required to demonstrate correct confirmation, movement, manners, and paces which are subjective to the decision of the judge for each class on the day. The judge will place the horses in their chosen, ranked order from first onwards based on which horse demonstrates the best confirmation, movement, manners, and paces.

Show Horses are exhibited in three divisions depending on their height - pony, galloway, and hack.

A pony is a horse that must not exceed 14 hands, a galloway must be over 14 hands and not exceed 15 hands, and a hack is over 15 hands.

All horses competing in EA events must carry an EA measuring certificate.

Show Horse Events

Events are for either the horse or rider depending on the horse or ponies' confirmation or for rider classes, the age of the rider.

A horse or pony may compete as either a Show Horse or Show Hunter but not both.

A Show Horse is a horse or pony that demonstrates good confirmation, comfort and is an educated riding horse.

A Show Hunter is a horse or pony that demonstrates the ability to display boldness, be of middle weight / heavy weight but not unduly heavy, show substantial bone without being unduly fine, be sound, well mannered, and good confirmation.

A Rider Class is a competition between riders to determine who demonstrates the most correct and effective riding ability, while maintaining elegance.

There are also show horse events such as, Childs classes, Leading Rein Pony, First Ridden Show/Show Hunter Pony, Newcomer, and Working Hunter. You can learn more about these [here](#). Agricultural Societies also hold similar show horse events.

To compete in Show Horse New South Wales all competitors must be a member of EA. Show Horses must also obtain a competition license which can be purchased with a competitor's membership. [Membership Benefits](#) | [Equestrian Australia](#)

Equestrian Sport Pathway

EQUESTRIAN FOR LIFE Participation & Officials



Competition in official, participation & club events from Interschools to National level

Enjoyment of recreational equestrian activities across the lifespan privately or with clubs

Engagement in off horse equestrian activities; official qualifications, organising and volunteering

SPORT EXCELLENCE Talent to Elite Pathway to High Performance



Podium - National Teams/ Olympics Representation
Sustained International Success

M1

Podium Ready EA HP National Squads
Podium success in peak international / world cup competition

E2

Podium Ready State Discipline Squads
Elite Status through State Representation/ achievement at National Level Competition

E1

Podium Potential - State Rising Star/ Development Squads
Preparation for transition through Individual development plans, competition preparation & exposure

T4

Developing
Top 10 performance at FEI level competition. Commitment to Individual development plan (IDP).

T3

Emerging
Performance potential identified through athlete profiling supported by IDP

T2

Potential Identified
Initial demonstration of skills at State or Official Competitions/ coach identification

T1

Regular coaching & participation in club activities and competitions. Introduction to event coordination/ volunteering/ officials pathways

F3

Introduction to competition through clubs/ interschools. Skill development through clubs and private coaching

F2

Learning and acquiring the basic foundations of equestrian activities fundamental for safe and effective participation via clubs, pony club & private coaching

F1

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

F₁

Learning and acquiring the basic foundations of equestrian activity fundamentals for safe and effective participation.

Participants are enjoying their first equestrian experience, or are re-learning basic fundamental skills through both formal or informal learning.

Competition

At this stage, participants are not yet competing

On-Horse Development

Participants learn fundamental riding skills, such as balance, posture, and the various gaits including walk, trot, and canter, while steadily building their confidence.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes may explore a healthy off the horse fitness program which will assist them to develop their new skills on the horse e.g. core stability.

Athletes are also encouraged to attend local events to watch and learn about the discipline.

Horse Welfare

While it may not be necessary for athletes to own a horse, participants are able to learn about horse welfare and how to ensure the horse is well cared for and healthy. Equestrian NSW offers helpful online learning modules to support your understanding of horse welfare, including:
[Horse Welfare - The Other 23 Hours](#)
[Ethics & Welfare - an introduction](#)
[Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse](#)

Equipment

Seek guidance from a professional to ensure basic riding equipment is correctly fitted. Basic riding equipment includes:
 Helmet
 Riding boots
 Bridle, saddle, and saddle accessories
[Check current helmet safety standards](#)

Programs & Support

It's important for participants to have fun while developing the fundamental riding skills. This starts with finding a suitable environment to help individuals build confidence, knowledge, and community connections. The clubs and organisations below provide valuable opportunities to learn, meet fellow equestrians, and access ongoing support and guidance:
[Coach Finder](#)
[Pony Club NSW](#)
[ENSW Affiliated Clubs](#)

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

F₂

Introduction to competition through clubs/interschools. Skill Development is through clubs and private coaching.

Participants are enjoying the learning process while developing their knowledge by participating in show horse activities. This may be through club participation, coaching sessions with an accredited coach or local events such as an agricultural show.

Competition

At this stage, competition may not be a focus, however athletes may attend local events and focus on having fun and building their confidence.

On-Horse Development

Participants are enjoying spending time in the saddle. Participants may be interested in further developing their fundamental riding skills by riding more regularly with an accredited coach and engaging in local club activities.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes are encouraged to continue exploring off the horse exercises that promote a healthy lifestyle (i.e. a fitness program promoting balance, core stability, and flexibility) while becoming more familiar with the [Show Horse Rules](#).

Horse Welfare

Horse welfare goes beyond basic care; it is important to prioritise the horse's physical and mental wellbeing. Continue learning how to keep horses well cared for and healthy. Individuals may seek guidance from accredited coaches or equine professionals.

[Basic management and care](#)
[Maintaining a healthy horse](#)
[Grooming horses](#)
[Housing of horses](#)
[Basic hoof care](#)

Equipment

All gear must be correctly fitted for both the horse and rider. Seek guidance from a professional on fitting the following equipment:

- Leather saddle.
- Natural sheepskin saddle cloth (numnah)
- Leather bridle which matches the saddle

For the specific dress code and equipment for Show Horses or Show Hunter Horses refer to page 19 – 27 of the [EA National Show Horse Rules](#)

Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from engaging with local riding schools, clubs, fellow equestrians, and coaches by attending local events, lessons, or volunteering. This provides participants with the opportunity to meet like-minded equestrians.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

F₃

Regular coaching & participation in club activities & competition.

Introduction to event management, volunteering and officials pathways.

Participants are building more confidence allowing their riding skills to become more technical.

Competition

At this stage, athletes may begin to compete more regularly at local or age-appropriate events (i.e. NSW Junior Show).

To keep up to date with current Agricultural Shows and for ENSW Show Horse events please refer to [ENSW Show Horse Events](#) and ENSW Show Horse Facebook page.

On-Horse Development

Participants are enjoying regular sessions with an accredited EA coach or are actively involved in a local club. They are demonstrating confidence and have developed strong fundamental riding skills.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes may deepen their understanding of Show Horse rules by volunteering as stewards or assisting committee members at events, helping them gain insight into competition management and judging processes.

Horse Welfare

Develop an understanding of horse welfare with a focus on caring for horses at events. Learning how to support a horse's wellbeing during travel and competition is an essential part of responsible horsemanship.

[Transporting Horses](#)

[Horse Care and Riding in Winter](#)

[Think Outside The Box](#)

[Equestrian Sport in Hot and Humid Environment](#)

Equipment

For the specific dress code and equipment for Show Horses or Show Hunter Horses please refer to pages 19 – 27 of the rule book which can be found [here](#).

Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from engaging with local riding schools, clubs, fellow equestrians, and coaches by attending events, lessons, or volunteering. Participants may also begin assisting or working with an established athlete to gain practical insight into professional training and competition preparation.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

T₁

Potential Identified.
Initial demonstration of skills at State or Official Competitions/coach identification.

Participant has demonstrated potential for high performance through their previous results at local competitions, or an accredited coach has recognised that the participant is showing initial signs of potential for higher performance.

Competition

Riders are competing successfully at local competitions and are beginning to compete more frequently at events such as Owner Rider Championships, or Summer Show Horse Championships.
To keep up to date with current NSW Show Horse events please refer to [NSW Show Horse Events](#) and ENSW Show Horse Facebook page.

On-Horse Development

Participants are consistently working to refine their riding skills by committing to regular coaching and focusing on technical precision in their workouts at an events.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes are encouraged to take a holistic approach to off- the horse training by focusing on both physical and mental wellbeing. They may start setting SMARTER goals to support their growth and competition preparation.

Horse Welfare

As athletes compete more frequently, they develop greater responsibility for their horse's care at events, learning effective feeding, watering, tying up, and yarding practices. Prioritising their horse's ongoing health and welfare assists with performance.
[Horse Welfare at Events v2](#)

Equipment

All tack must be correctly fitted and competition appropriate. Athletes may begin to invest in higher-quality equipment to support performance and presentation, while adhering to EA Show Horse rules which can be found [here](#).

Programs & Support

Participants may expand their support network by engaging with experienced coaches, mentors, and attend clinics beyond their local area. Some participants may begin to connect more closely by grooming for established athletes to gain deeper insight into high-level preparation and performance.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

T₂

Emerging.
Performance potential identified through athlete profiling supported by Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Participants demonstrate ongoing potential for high performance by confidently competing at events such as ENSW Horse of the Year. At this stage, participants are motivated, coachable, and increasingly committed to goal-driven development.

Competition

Participants are competing frequently and performing well at ENSW events which qualify for Show Horse Spectacular (i.e. Owner Rider Championships, Summer Show Horse Championships, Junior Show Horse Championship and NSW Horse of the Year.)

On-Horse Development

Participants work closely with their coach to follow their Individual Development Plan (IDP), focusing on polishing technique, improving ringcraft, and developing combinations suitable for higher-level showing.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes focus on strategies to effectively manage competition stress, developing tailored competition-day routines and time management skills. These practices help them maintain composure, optimise performance, and minimise anxiety.

Horse Welfare

With travel to longer-distance competitions, care extends over multiple days, requiring careful management of transport, feeding, hydration, and stress monitoring. Adapting to new environments and paying attention to heat, cold, and recovery ensures the horse's ongoing health, wellbeing, and performance readiness.

Equipment

All tack must be correctly fitted and competition appropriate. Athletes may begin to invest in higher-quality equipment to support performance and presentation, while adhering to EA Show Horse rules which can be found here.

Programs & Support

Engaging in roles such as a groom or working pupil allows individuals to gain practical, hands-on experience under the guidance of professionals. These opportunities deepen knowledge of horse care, management, and competition preparation.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

T₃

Top 10 performance at FEI level competition. Commitment to Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Participants are highly dedicated to training and performance, demonstrating strong ringcraft, attention to detail, and a clear commitment to long-term progression as a holistic athlete.

Competition

At this stage, athletes are competing frequently and are consistently performing well at NSW Horse of the Year and NSW Show Horse Spectacular.

On-Horse Development

Participants follow a structured Individual Development Plan (IDP) with clear performance goals. Emphasis is placed on refinement of technique, improving presentation, and developing strong ringcraft.

Off-Horse Development

Following competitions, athletes focus on developing self-reflection skills to critically assess their results, recognise strengths, and pinpoint areas requiring further improvement. This process supports ongoing growth and performance development.

Horse Welfare

As the volume and intensity of a competition schedule increases understanding how to keep horses healthy and free from prohibited substances is a key part of responsible horse care in competition. Clean sport is essential for protecting horse welfare. Everyday management decisions such as, feeding, medication, and supplements, can impact competition readiness, longevity, compliance and anti-doping rules.

[Equine Prohibited Substances](#)

Equipment

All tack must be correctly fitted and competition appropriate. Athletes may begin to invest in higher-quality equipment to support performance and presentation, while adhering to EA Show Horse rules which can be found [here](#).

Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from structured support that helps refine their skills and prepares the individual for the next level of competition. This includes access to discipline specific development squads, high level coaching, and mentoring from experienced riders and officials. Riders engage in targeted competition exposure.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

T₄

Podium Potential - State Rising Star/Development Squads. Preparation for transition through IDP's, competition preparation & exposure.

Participants have shown consistent results at State-level competitions and are progressing toward National-level performance. They demonstrate strong commitment to the sport, managing a training and competition schedule.

Competition

At this stage, athletes are consistently placed in the top three placings at NSW Horse of the Year to qualify for Show Horse Nationals.

On-Horse Development

Riders concentrate on refining advanced skills and enhancing competition readiness. Programs are designed to promote consistent performance, technical accuracy, and the progressive development of the horses capability.

Off-Horse Development

Participants continue to incorporate technical, physical, physiological and psychological practices off the horse to improve their performance.

Horse Welfare

As horses compete consistently at higher levels, soundness assessments become increasingly important. Ensuring horses are fit for the demands of competition reduces the risk of injury and supports long-term wellbeing. These practices align with [FEI Veterinary Regulations](#) and the [FEI's Code of Conduct](#), which promote ethical care and horse welfare at all levels of the sport.

Equipment

All tack must be correctly fitted and competition appropriate. Athletes may begin to invest in higher-quality equipment to support performance and presentation, while adhering to EA Show Horse rules which can be found [here](#).

Programs & Support

With a more demanding competition schedule, athletes are encouraged to engage a wider range of experts to optimise performance. Support may include sports psychologists, nutritionists, and physiologists for the rider, alongside equine specialists to ensure the horse's wellbeing and readiness.

Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

Show Horse

E₁

Podium Ready State Discipline Squads. Elite Status through State Representation/achievement at National Level Competition.

Participants are successfully competing at national level with consistent results and are recognised as State representatives.

Competition

At this stage, athletes have competed successfully at Nationals.

On-Horse Development

Riders fine-tune their performance by focusing on execution, horse management at a professional standard, and are consistently achieving high results at Show Horse Nationals.

Off-Horse Development

Athletes adopt a fully holistic approach to performance, prioritising health, wellbeing, and balanced lifestyle choices. They actively contribute to the sport as mentors, role models, and ambassadors, supporting development pathways and fostering a positive sporting environment.

Horse Welfare

As horses compete consistently at higher levels, soundness assessments become increasingly important. Ensuring horses are fit for the demands of competition reduces the risk of injury and supports long-term wellbeing. These practices align with [FEI Veterinary Regulations](#) and the [FEI's Code of Conduct](#), which promote ethical care and horse welfare at all levels of the sport.

Equipment

All tack must be correctly fitted and competition appropriate. Athletes may begin to invest in higher-quality equipment to support performance and presentation, while adhering to EA Show Horse rules which can be found [here](#).

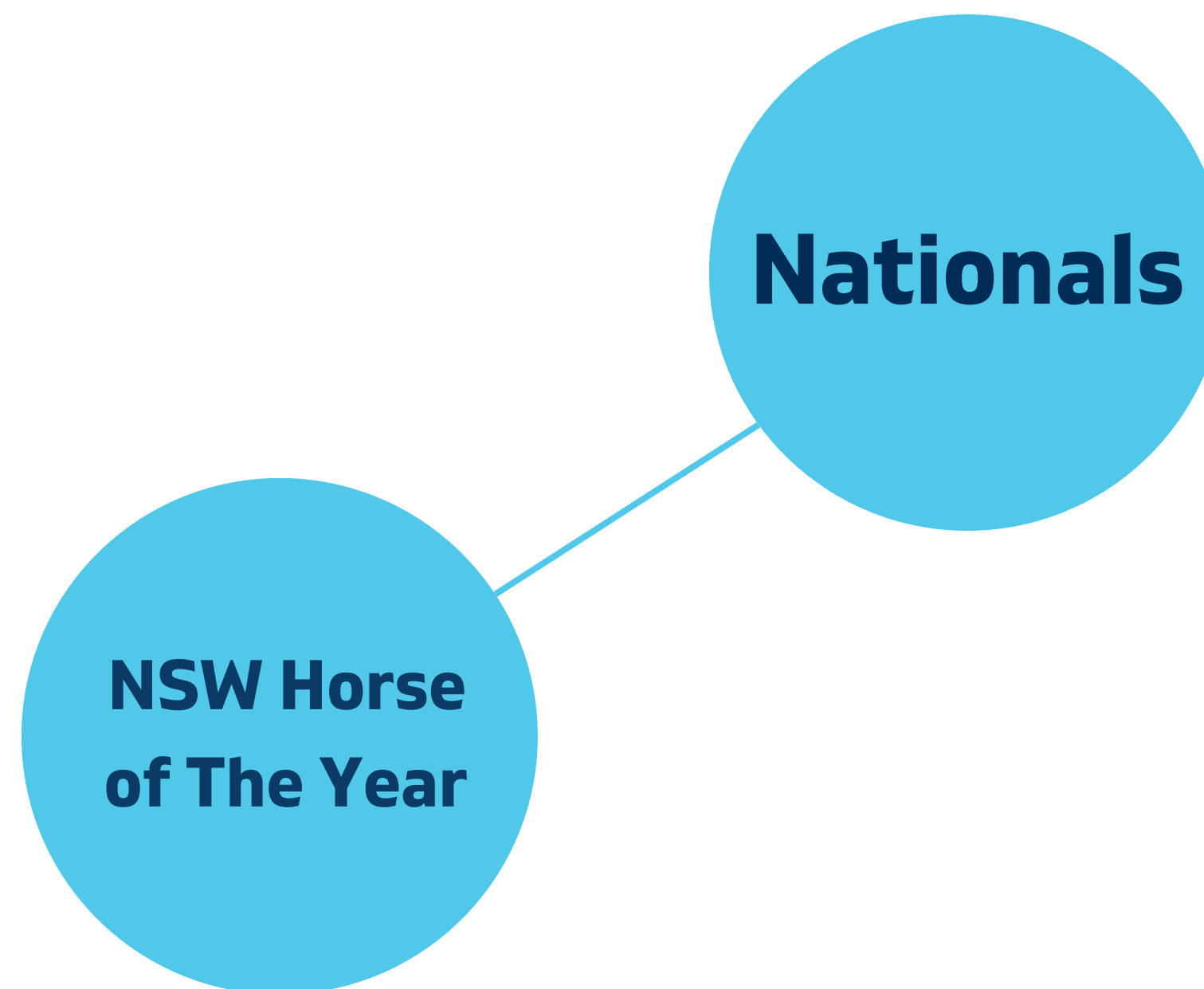
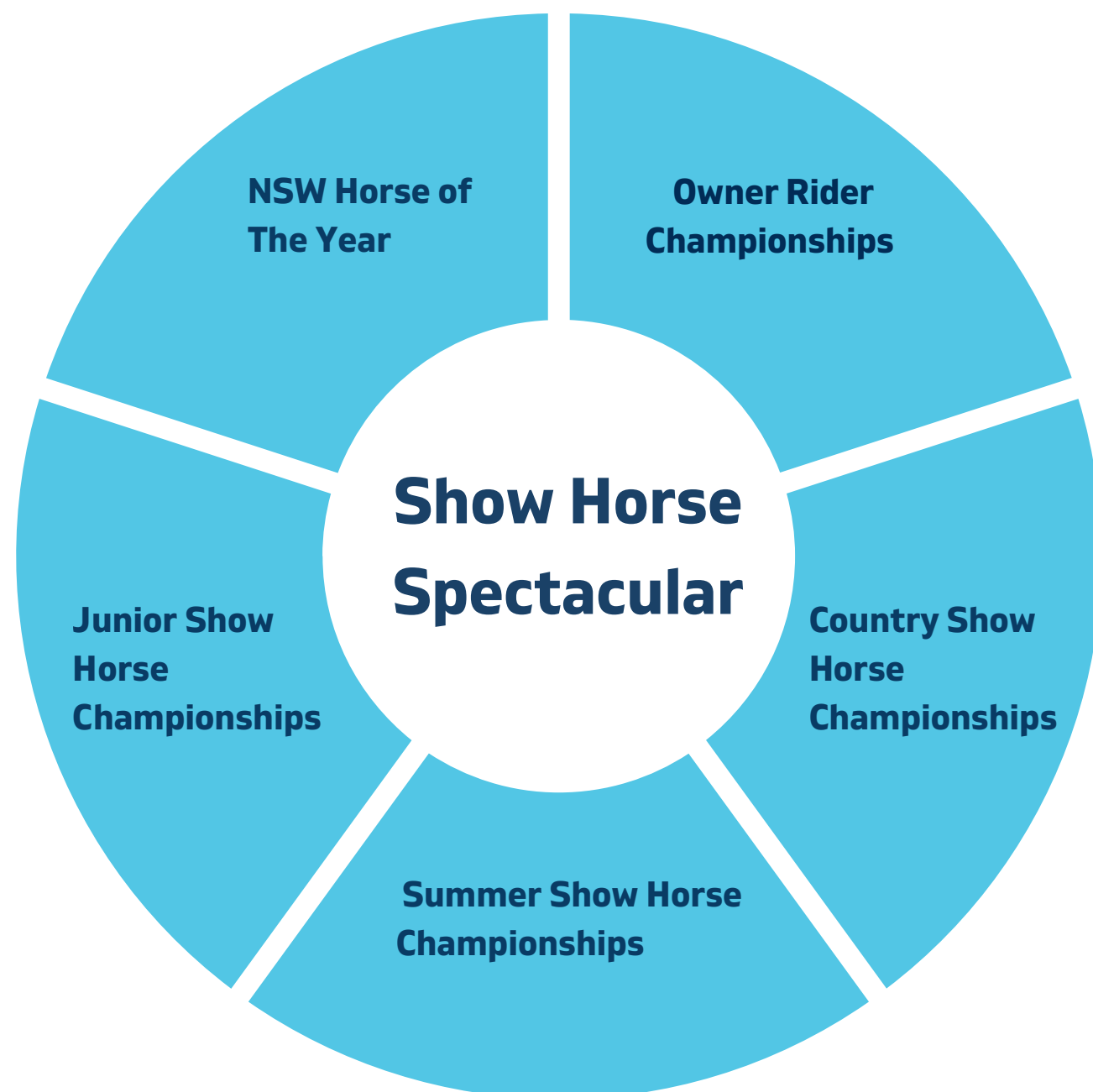
Programs & Support

Participants who have reached the Elite level may begin to give back to the sport by becoming a [Judge](#).

Qualification Criteria for ENSW Show Horse Events

Participants who place first, second, or third at any of the show horse events run by the ENSW Show Horse Committee are eligible to compete at ENSW Show Horse Spectacular

Only those who place first, second, or third at the NSW Horse of the Year are then eligible to compete at the Show Horse Nationals.



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