

An Explanation of the American Quarter Horse Graded Stakes Process

Introduction

The purpose of the American Quarter Horse Graded Stakes Committee is to provide owners and breeders of racing Quarter Horses a reliable guide to the relative quality of Quarter Horse bloodstock by identifying those races whose recent renewals have consistently attracted the highest quality competition. The Committee meets annually to evaluate and affirm the relative quality of these races, and issues its collective opinion in the form of ranked Grades: Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3, with Grade 1 being the highest. Horses winning these graded races may reliably be considered as superior racing stock, and the breeding stock producing them as superior breeding stock. The committee will separately evaluate and grade restricted American Quarter Horse races.

Broad acceptance of the graded stakes system allows its potential use for promotional and other purposes. Racetracks may benefit from having their races graded, just as a graded win may increase a racehorse's value. While the Committee recognizes that individuals and organizations may utilize grading for purposes beyond the Committee's own, such uses play no role in the grading process. As was true at the beginning of the grading project in 1983, the Committee's aim is to identify and assess those races which over a stated period have attracted the highest importance and quality of field – quality herein defined in terms of the relative of excellence of participating horses.

The Racing Committee approved a number of changes to the grading process at the 2008 AQHA Annual Convention, and this document will explain the reasons behind those changes within the context of American Quarter Horse racing's stakes history. This guide is also provided as an aid to understanding the Graded Stakes Task Force's work.

Graded Stakes History

This document details the original criteria of the graded stakes system and the changes it has since undergone.

On December 2, 1982, the American Quarter Horse Association Executive Committee formally adopted the Graded Stakes Program for Quarter Horse racing. The guidelines used in grading the stakes races for 1983 were as follows, *(the guidelines listed here are in abbreviated form)*:

1. All stakes races having been run at least the three consecutive years previous to consideration for Grade 1, 2, 3, shall be reviewed by the graded stakes subcommittee. Not all stakes races would receive a grade.
2. Primary criterion for grading stakes is the quality of horses attracted to the race. The number of quality horses in a field reflects an appraisal by racing participants of the importance of a stake. Longevity of a stakes does not make the race important if it does not attract a quality field of horses.
3. No stakes restricted by the place of foaling is to be considered for classification.
4. Subjectively, the graded stakes subcommittee should favor races with level weights or weight-for-age races, rather than handicaps. Due consideration should be give to traditional stakes.
5. Handicaps should be considered carefully, as they may by design permit a horse of lesser ability to win over a better horse burdened by an assigned high weight.
6. The graded stakes subcommittee may grant opportunity for track management to appear before the subcommittee in support of a particular grade.

Of the 14,317 races contested in 1981, 429 met the necessary qualifications for a stakes race. Of these, 235 were eligible for grading. A total of 93 stakes races received recognition as Graded Stakes. This total is 0.65% of all races run in 1981.

Effective January 1, 1985, certain restricted races were elevated to the status of “black type” races. These races were classified as Restricted Stakes and shall always be designated by the symbol “R”. In addition, these races will be eligible to be graded. Example: R1, R2 and R3.

The following types of races will be eligible for designation as Restricted Stakes:

- A. Races restricted to state of breeding, foaling or residence of owners.
- B. Races restricted to those horses sold in a certain sale or sales with at least 100 yearlings consigned representing at least 15 stallions.
- C. Races restricted to the progeny of a restricted group of stallions, provided:
 1. The stallions stand at and are the property of five or more distinct breeding farms.
 2. The foals eligible for the race represent a minimum of 15 stallions on the original nomination list.

Minimum gross purse requirements became effective with balloting for 1995 Graded Stakes status. If a race falls below the minimum purse requirement for the grade it was given, the grade will automatically be dropped to the appropriate level for the following year.

Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Three-year-olds & Up
G1 & RG1 – \$100,000	G1 & RG1 – \$75,000	G1 & RG1 – \$50,000
G2 & RG2 – \$ 50,000	G2 & RG2 – \$35,000	G2 & RG2 – \$25,000
G3 & RG3 – \$ 25,000	G3 & RG3 – \$20,000	G3 & RG3 – \$15,000

In 2000, the AQHA Racing Council approved the following increases to the minimum purse requirements. The Racing Council also approved that should the purse fall below the minimum gross purse requirements, the race may still be considered for grading and not automatically be lowered if it meets the following added money minimums. These levels were used in the approval of the 2001 through 2008 graded stakes.

MINIMUM PURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Three-year-olds & Up
G1 & RG1 – \$150,000	G1 & RG1 – \$100,000	G1 & RG1 – \$75,000
G2 & RG2 – \$ 75,000	G2 & RG2 – \$50,000	G2 & RG2 – \$35,000
G3 & RG3 – \$ 35,000	G3 & RG3 – \$25,000	G3 & RG3 – \$20,000

MINIMUM ADDED MONEY REQUIREMENTS:

Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Three-year-olds & Up
G1 & RG1 – \$100,000	G1 & RG1 – \$75,000	G1 & RG1 – \$50,000
G2 & RG2 – \$ 50,000	G2 & RG2 – \$35,000	G2 & RG2 – \$25,000
G3 & RG3 – \$ 25,000	G3 & RG3 – \$20,000	G3 & RG3 – \$15,000

In 2004, the Official Guidelines for Grading AQHA Approved Races were modified and approved by the AQHA Racing Council to reflect the following:

1. A minimum purse requirement of \$15,000 was established for a race to be considered an official stakes race.
2. Distance requirements were set into place for a new race to be considered for Grade 1 status:
 - a. 2-Year-Olds – After August 1, 2005, the race must be at least 350 yards
 - b. 3-Year-Olds – Must be at least 400 yards
 - c. 3-Year-Olds and up – Must be at least 400 yards
3. **MINIMUM PURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Three-year-olds & Up
G1 & RG1 – \$250,000	G1 & RG1 – \$150,000	G1 & RG1 – \$100,000
G2 & RG2 – \$100,000	G2 & RG2 – \$75,000	G2 & RG2 – \$35,000
G3 & RG3 – \$100,000	G3 & RG3 – \$50,000	G3 & RG3 – \$25,000

4. 870 yard races will be required to have a \$100,000 minimum to be considered for Grade 1 status, have a \$50,000 minimum for a Grade 2 or have \$25,000 minimum to be considered for a Grade 3 status.
5. Starting in 2006, a new race must have been run for two years before it will be considered for a grade.
6. If an existing graded race is moved, it will retain its previous graded status unless it shows improvement or decline deemed necessary to change its graded status.
7. In the event a race falls 20% below the minimum purse requirement for one year, it will be allowed to retain its current graded status and then be subject to review by the Graded Stakes Committee.
8. A race whose conditions give preference to non-qualifiers of another graded stakes race does not qualify for graded stakes status.
9. The following point scale will be used to evaluate the quality of races:
A three-year rolling average of black type points will be used to evaluate a race's quality.

Grade	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
G1	100	80	60
G2	50	40	30
G3	25	20	15
RG1	50	40	30
RG2	25	20	15
RG3	15	10	5
Non-Graded Black Type Races	5	0	0

NOTE: The black type points system is an advisory tool for the committee, only. The Graded Stakes Committee will not be required to adhere to them in classifying races; they were developed to compare one field vs. another. These points will not be used for a horse's official record or in determining regional high point awards.

Starting in 2005, the Graded Stakes Committee will be comprised of 16 geographically diverse members; eight elected from the Racing Committee with no more than two members from any one state, these members will serve staggered three-year terms. Eight additional at-large members who shall also be from geographically diverse areas will be appointed by the Racing Committee chair and approved by the Racing Council.

In 2007, the following guidelines were added:

10. To require that racetracks that wish to have their races considered for grading must have their conditions and nominations schedules on file with AQHA prior to grading of the race.
11. In order for AQHA to grade a stakes race such race must have conditions limiting entry and competition to only American Quarter Horses registered with the American Quarter Horse Association.

12. The Racing Council can appoint a replacement for anyone who is unable to vote.

As of January 1, 2009 the minimum purse and points requirements will be the same for both open and restricted graded stakes. **A point system has been established to evaluate the quality of races** – A three-year rolling average of stakes points will be used to evaluate a race’s quality.

- Points earned by each individual horse in an open stakes race will affect only other open stakes races that they compete in that year.
- Points earned by each individual horse in both restricted and/or open stakes race will affect other restricted stakes races that they compete in that year.

STAKES RACE POINT SYSTEM:

Grade	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
G1 & RG1	100	80	60
G2 & RG2	50	40	30
G3 & RG3	25	20	15
Non-graded black type	5	0	0

This race point system was developed to compare one field vs. another. These points do not affect official AQHA points nor are they reflected on a horse’s official record. They are only used for the purposes of grading stakes races. *Example: A horse runs*

- 1st in the Mardi Gras Futurity (RG2) earning 50 points,*
- 2nd in the Remington Park Futurity (G1) earning 80 points,*
- 4th in the TQHA Sale Futurity (RG1) earning no points,*
- 3rd in the Oklahoma Juvenile Challenge (G3) earning 15 points and*
- 6th in the Texas Classic (G1) earning no points*

For the year, this horse has 95 points in open races and 50 points in restricted races. The Mardi Gras Futurity and TQHA Sale Futurity stakes point averages will reflect the total 145 points for this horse. The Remington Park Futurity, Oklahoma Juvenile Challenge and the Texas Classic stakes point’s averages will reflect 95 points for this horse.

A. POINT AND PURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimum Requirements for 3-year average of stakes points using the 3 previous years
 Minimum Purse Requirements for open and restricted graded stakes races

Age	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
2-Year-Old	45+	20 – 44.9	10 – 19.9
	\$250,000	\$100,000	\$50,000
3-Year-Old	60+	40 – 59.9	20 – 39.9
	\$150,000	\$75,000	\$35,000
3-Year-Old and Up	60+	40 – 59.9	20 – 39.9
	\$100,000	\$50,000	\$25,000

870-yard races must have a \$100,000 minimum to be considered for Grade 1 status, have a \$50,000 minimum for a Grade 2 or have a \$25,000 minimum to be considered for a Grade 3.

B. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

1. A \$15,000 minimum purse requirement for a race to be considered an official stakes race.
2. Distance requirements for a new race to be considered for Grade 1 status:
 - 2-Year-Olds – After August 1, the race must be at least 350 yards
 - 3-Year-Olds – Must be at least 400 yards
 - 3-Year-Olds and up – Must be at least 400 yards
3. For a restricted race to be considered for open graded status, purse money may be allotted for horses meeting the restricted criteria, but that money can only be a maximum of 20% of the total purse. Grading consideration will only be based upon unrestricted purse money (minimum of 80%).
4. Starting in 2006, a new race must have been run for two years before it will be considered for a grade.
Starting Jan. 2013 (graded races for 2014) a new race must have been run for three years before it will be considered for a grade.
5. If an existing graded race is moved, it will retain its previous graded status unless it shows improvement or decline deemed necessary to change its graded status.
6. In the event a race falls no more than 20% below the minimum purse requirement for one year, it will be allowed to retain its current graded status and then be subject to review by the Graded Stakes committee.

Note: Starting with the grading process for 2011 races, all races eligible for a grade must meet the minimum purse and points levels established to be considered for a particular grade. There will no longer be grace periods or allowances for purses or points not meeting the minimums.

Effective April, 2011:

6. The Graded Stakes sub-committee has the discretion to allow a race to retain its current grade if that race falls no more than 10% below either the points or purse requirements.
7. A race whose conditions give preference to non-qualifiers of another graded stakes race does not qualify for graded stakes status.
8. To require that racetracks that wish to have their races considered for grading must have their conditions and nominations schedules on file with AQHA prior to grading of the race.

9. In order for AQHA to grade a stakes race such race must have conditions limiting entry and competition to only American Quarter Horses registered with the American Quarter Horse Association.
10. A review of these guidelines will be conducted every 12 months with a report to the Racing Council on any possible revisions.

At the 2012 Racing Conference, the Racing Committee recommended the following additions:

Criteria for Consideration for Grading Unrestricted and Separately Restricted Races:

- *Drug testing* – A race is not considered for grading unless the testing meets or exceeds the guidelines and procedures established by the various racing jurisdictions' governing body/racing commission. (Referred back to the Equine Health, Welfare, Integrity and Research subcommittee for review).

As of January 1, 2014, any trial races, with the exception of the Z Wayne Griffin Directors trials, are not eligible for stakes/blacktype status.

Solely for the purpose of grading stakes races, a horse can accumulate stakes race points in the current trace year and carry those points forward to the next racing year only. Points will not affect any races in the past. Example – 2 year old points carry forward to the 3 year old year, however, points earned as a 4 year old will not affect any races as a 2 year old or 3 year old.

Explanation – the committee will review the graded stakes ballot for 2015 using both methods to determine the impact on the number of races in each graded category.

American Quarter Horse racing and stakes programs are dynamic products of regulatory, contractual, and competitive conditions in many local and regional environments. The AQHA grading system is designed to accommodate the flexibility and dynamism of AQHA racing; a grading system that could not quickly respond to our ever-changing conditions would never be appropriate in our country.

Judgment and flexibility thus must always be a part of the system.

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