



## Dakota Showdown Horse Trainer Challenge Competitor Agreement & Rule Book

The Dakota Showdown Horse Trainer Challenge is a competition in which volunteer foster homes and professional trainers work with a Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue horse for a minimum of 100 days.

The purpose of the Dakota Showdown Horse Trainer Challenge is:

- To show the public that rescued horses and other equines can be useful, trainable and enjoyable equine partners.
- To provide training and adoption opportunities for rescued horses.
- To provide a fun, competitive venue for Professional and Amateur trainers to display their horsemanship skills.

### Agreement

Trainers agree to provide training to a Dakota Showdown horse for a period of approximately 100 days prior to the Challenge competition at no cost. Trainers will be responsible for the cost of feeding their horse, shavings/bedding, and farrier work during the training period, and are responsible for all transportation of the Showdown equine, unless other arrangements have been made.

Highlight trainers will work at the Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue facility and are not responsible for the costs of care of the horse. Highlight trainers must commit to a minimum of 2 training days per week from May 15 to August 25, 2025, with their assigned horse(s). Highlight trainers may be assigned up to four horses, and will not share horses with other trainers. Highlight trainers are expected to attend farrier appointments for their assigned horse. If a Highlight trainer fails to meet the minimum training standards for a period of two weeks, they may be disqualified and their horses reassigned. Highlight horses may be adopted at any time during the training process, and if an assigned horse is adopted, the trainer may be assigned a new horse.

Both parties agree that no promises of success or minimum expectations have been made between trainer and the rescue, but that trainer will make a good faith effort to progress the education and skills of the Showdown horse.

Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and all costs associated with the Showdown horse are tax-deductible where allowed by law.

**Sponsors:** Participants may recruit individuals and businesses to sponsor their horse in the Challenge. Sponsors may help cover the cost of feeding the horse, gift equipment, gift services, etc. Sponsorships may be paid through the rescue as a tax-deductible donation and will be paid to the trainer as reimbursement of costs. Sponsorships made directly to the trainer or foster home are not tax-deductible, but trainers/foster homes may promote sponsors on their Showdown Facebook page, in signage on their stall, etc. If the trainer or foster home provides the name of the sponsor to the rescue (info@gentlespirithorses.org), the sponsor's name will also be listed on the Dakota Showdown web site.

**Finale:** Trainers agree to attend the Showdown Finale with the equine. Trainers are encouraged to arrive on Friday to allow both horse and competitor time to settle in, school the obstacles, and rest. All horses must arrive by 9:00 a.m. Saturday morning or face disqualification.

Trainers are expected to attend the dinner and be available to introduce their horse to prospective adopters throughout the Finale weekend. A complete schedule will be provided two weeks prior to the Finale.

Trainers should plan on being at their horse's stall/pen while the event is open to the public to allow prospective adopters to visit and ask questions.

**Adoptions:** All Showdown horses will be available to pre-approved adopters and adopters will be required to sign the standard adoption agreement with the rescue. All trainers are automatically approved to adopt unless notified otherwise. Adoption fees for Showdown horses will be set through an auction bidding process, with a minimum bid of at least \$1500.

Showcase and Foundation trainers, as well as Rising Star trainers who foster their assigned horse at their facility, will receive 50% of the adoption fee if their horse is adopted at the event or in the initial 30 days after the event unless the horse fails its initial trial period with its adopter. Rising Star trainers who work out of the Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue facility will receive 25% of the adoption fee.

If the horse is not adopted at the event or in the initial 30 days following the event and has met all the requirements of their division with a score of 75% the full points available, the trainer will receive 25% of any future adoption fee for a period of one-year following the Showdown Finale, with a maximum amount of \$500. This includes if a Foundation horse enters the Showdown as Showcase horse the following year.

Highlight Division trainers will receive 25% of the adoption fee if they meet the requirements of training and the horse is adopted between June 1 and October 1, 2025, subject to the 30 day trial period. Highlight trainers can choose to continue to train after the Finale which will extend their eligibility for an adoption split.

All adopters are given a 30-day trial period and are given a refund of their adoption fee if the horse is not a good fit and is returned to the rescue. If the horse fails its trial period due to any reason other than training problems, the 30-day period will be extended to allow the horse time to find a new home. If the horse experiences significant issues with its adopter such as bucking, unable to be trimmed, or other issues related to training, and those same issues can be replicated upon return at the rescue, the 30-day period will not be extended and the trainer will be ineligible for an adoption fee split of any kind.

If the trainer wins the bid to adopt the horse, only the rescue's 50% will be due to complete the adoption, and the trainer will waive the 30-day trial period. The adoption will be considered complete upon signing.

**Assumption of Risk of Equine Activity.** The Trainer acknowledges that the Trainer has been notified and hereby assumes all of the risks inherent in equine activity, including but not limited to, any of the following: a) the propensity of an equine to behave in ways that may result in injury, death, or loss to persons on or around the equine; b) the unpredictability of an equine's reaction to sounds, sudden movement, unfamiliar objects, persons or other animals; c) Hazards, including, but not limited to, surface or subsurface conditions; d) a collision with another equine, another animal, a person, or an object; e) the potential of an equine activity participant to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to injury, death, or loss to the person of the participant or to other persons, including but not limited to, failing to maintain control over an equine or failing to act within the ability of the participant.

### **Standard of Care:**

Every Dakota Showdown equine shall, at all times, be treated humanely and with dignity, respect and compassion.

Training techniques used on Dakota Showdown equines will be humane, least amount of force techniques, keeping in mind the mental and physical well-being of the equine at all times. Any evidence of failure to do so will result in an investigation and possible disqualification from the Challenge. If trainers demonstrate any excessively forceful training practices during the Challenge, warm-ups for the event, or any other time, the trainer can be docked points or removed (disqualified) from the competition at the discretion of the Training Challenge Coordinator.

The following list includes but is not limited to examples of unacceptable behavior and training techniques:

- No horse appearing to be emaciated, drawn or injured may be exhibited.
- Use of or evidence of inhumane training techniques or methods such as striking horse with objects, excessive spurring and/or excessive jerking of reins.
- Any inhumane treatment that results in wounds
- Laying down the horse as a means of submission or early in training using ropes or any type of leverage. This does not preclude teaching the horse to bow or lie down on their own as a trick

- Tying the horse's head up, or to their sides, or any other type of restraint that is intended to force a horse to submit. This does not include teaching a horse to stand tied, though a horse should not be hard tied if they have a history of pulling back as a way to force compliance (contact us for suggestions on how to teach a horse to tie safely if needed)

Additionally, the Dakota Showdown promotes and encourages the following examples of sound, compassionate, and successful training techniques and equine handling methods:

- A calm and willing partnership between horse and trainer, regardless of the obstacle or environmental challenge during competition or training phases
- Trainer maintains a credible level of dignity for the horse during all phases of training, competition, and repositioning if applicable.

Use of any performance-affecting drug on a Dakota Showdown equine at the Challenge will result in disqualification from the Challenge.

### **Veterinary Care**

Any horses that are leaving the state will have a current Coggins and 6-month health certificate as required by law provided by the rescue. If the horse will be remaining in South Dakota or North Dakota, the costs of a Coggins and health certificate may be the responsibility of the trainer.

Should the horse require emergency veterinary care while in the care of trainer, please contact either Tiffany Ring (605.376.1811) or Nina Ring (605.595.7048) immediately. Leave a voicemail or text if unable to get through.

The horse should be listed as owned by Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue, 29571 419th Ave, Scotland, SD 57059 and must have a separate billing account from your personal account. The horse must be identified by their rescue name. The rescue will reimburse all costs of veterinary care for accidental injuries and emergencies that are not the fault of the trainer (for example, injuries during turnout or fluke injuries during training). If the emergency is due to negligence or substandard care, the trainer will be responsible for the costs of care.

For non-emergency care, pre-approval must be obtained from the rescue. The rescue will be available to consult during the appointment to authorize additional services such as x-rays, chiropractic work, scoping, or other diagnostic methods the vet may recommend. The horses have been vetted and cleared for the Showdown. If the trainer does not receive pre-approval, the trainer will be responsible for the veterinary bill.

## **Bits and Equipment:**

Violation of these rules will result in dismissal from the class and a score of 0 for that class and potential dismissal from the Training Challenge:

Equines may be shown in a snaffle bit without leverage, hackamore, bosal, or sidepull. Using a curb bit (including a Tom Thumb), bits with a twist, spade or gag bit, and failure to get prior approval from the Training Challenge Coordinator for a curb bit will result in your disqualification for the Training Challenge. Tom Thumb bits are strictly prohibited. Using an ill-fitting, modified, or improperly worn bit may result in disqualification.

Prohibited equipment includes jerklines, tie-downs, tack collars, draw reins, a curb bit without a curb strap, wire, curb strap with tacks/rivets or solid metal curb straps no matter how padded, wire cavesson, bumper bits, metal bosals no matter how padded, metal hackamore, chambons, headstalls made of metal (even if encased in a protective material) or twisted rawhide. Please contact Training Coordinator if you have any questions regarding equipment requirements.

Natural horsemanship sticks and strings or other types of lunge whips, lunge lines, riding crops and drive lines are allowed as long as they are used correctly and humanely. At no time should there ever be any evidence that a whip was used on the horse. If there is swelling, welts, raw skin or blood, it is an indication that the whip has been abused by the trainer. If it is determined that a whip has been misused by a trainer, he or she will be disqualified from the Training Challenge and, if he or she has applied to adopt his or her Training Challenge horse, the application and adoption may be discarded and denied at the discretion of any of the following: the Training Challenge Coordinator, Adoption Coordinator, or Fostering Coordinator. Striking a horse during training, warm-up, or during any phase of competition is an automatic disqualification and the trainer will be removed from the training event and any trainer adoption application approval will be rescinded immediately.

Spurs are permitted provided they are used correctly and humanely, however the horse should respond without spurs as most adopters will not use them. At no time should there ever be any evidence that a spur was used on the horse. If there is swelling, welts, raw skin or blood, it is an indication that the spur has been abused by the rider. If it is determined that spurs have been misused by a trainer, he or she will be disqualified from the Training Challenge and, if he or she has applied to adopt his or her Training Challenge horse, the application and adoption may be discarded and denied at the discretion of any of the following: the Training Challenge Coordinator, Adoption Coordinator, or Fostering Coordinator.

Equines shown with a hackamore or snaffle bit may be ridden with one or two hands on the reins.

Trainers will all be required to ride with soft hands; no jerking on the horse's mouth will be permitted. The bit is a tool and should never be used as a weapon.

## Attire

Helmets will be required for any youth (under age 18) that are competing. Youth appearing in the arena without a helmet during the riding events will be dismissed from the arena and asked to return with a helmet. Adult competitors are encouraged to wear a helmet by awarding 5 points when a helmet is worn for the riding events.

All riders/handlers will wear a boot with a heel while showing their horses either under saddle or in hand in all classes. Failure to do so will result in dismissal from the ring and a 0 in that class.

## Classes (Definitions and Rules):

**Body Conditioning Class:** Animals will be judged for weight based on the Henneke body score system, coat condition, grooming, hoof condition and overall appearance. Equines are NOT in any way to be judged based on conformation or presence of previously incurred scars or injuries. Body conditioning may be judged while the horses are in stalls or during the Basic Skills test.

**Basic Skills Test:** Trainers will submit a video two weeks prior to the Showdown Finale showcasing the groundwork and basic skills portion of the test. Each horse/trainer combination will be asked to show off a predetermined set of basic skills such as: catching and leading, standing tied, picking up all four feet, standing for fly spray and deworming, accepting a saddle, loading in & out of a trailer, leading at walk and trot, yielding front and hind quarters, w/t/c on the lunge, etc. Foundation Horses may include mounting and riding if applicable.

**Riding Skills Test:** Showcase Horses will submit a video two weeks prior to the Showdown showing their riding skills. Each horse/trainer combination will be asked to show off a predetermined set of basic riding skills such as: mounting (with a mounting block is preferred), ability to walk, trot, canter both directions in the correct lead, turn both directions on haunches or forehand, transition smoothly up and down, halt quietly and back with a rider. Any other skills such as leg yield, side pass, simple lead changes, etc., are at the discretion of the trainer.

**Trail Class:** The goal of this class is to showcase the ability of the Dakota Showdown horse to the public. Horse and handler/rider teams will be given 10 minutes to complete an obstacle course. The obstacles will be typical trail obstacles such as: tarp, serpentine, hanging obstacles, arch, jump (no more than 18"), bridge, back-through, turn in a box, water or simulation obstacle, log drag, trot-/lope-overs, raised cavaletti, mailbox, gate, trailer-loading, pool noodles. Teams will be given three attempts on each obstacle. If the horse and rider or handler do not successfully complete the obstacle within three tries, they will receive a score of zero for that obstacle. Teams will be judged on completion of obstacles, completion of course in correct order, transitions, willingness and calmness of the horse. Trainers will receive point deductions if they do not navigate the obstacles in the correct order and/or enter and exit the obstacles in the correct places.

**Freestyle:** Each horse/trainer combination will be allowed 6 minutes (from entrance to exit) to showcase their horse through a freestyle exhibition. Music and props are encouraged, keeping in mind safety.

**TOTAL SCORES** will be a combination of scores in the compulsory classes of Body Conditioning, Groundwork/Basic Skills, Riding, and Trail, helmet score.

The divisions are scored on a 4 pt system that is an expectation based system, and each division has different expectations. For example, the Showcase division will be expected to ride through the trail course, while the Foundation division will “meet expectations” by willingly leading the horse through the obstacles.

Each Division will have placings, but Grand and Reserve Champion will be based on the scores of all divisions.

### **Social Media Information:**

Since one of the goals of the Dakota Showdown is to help horses get adopted and in an effort to help find horses homes we have added a horse promotion portion to the Training Challenge.

Trainers are encouraged to post updates about your horse on your social media platforms which we will share to the Dakota Showdown main page, but if you do not have social media, updates can be emailed to [rescue@gentlespirthorses.org](mailto:rescue@gentlespirthorses.org) and posts will be made on your behalf.

### **Social media points will be earned as follows:**

REQUIRED: 1-2 original updates and/or original photos or videos of the horse per month

5 points – 3-5 original updates and/or original photos or videos of the horse per month

10 points – 6+ original updates and/or original photos or videos of the horse per month

For a post to count, it must show the horse working on a training task. No pasture pics please.

### **Signature**

By signing this agreement, I agree to be bound by the rules of the Dakota Showdown outlined above.

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Trainer

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Date

## FILM/VIDEO RELEASE

I hereby grant The Dakota Showdown/Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue the irrevocable right and permission to use photographs and/or video recordings of me and the challenge horse, including photos/videos produced by me of the Showdown horse, on the Dakota Showdown and other websites, social media and in publications, promotional flyers, educational materials, derivative works, or for any other similar purpose without compensation to me.

I understand and agree that such photographs and/or video recordings of me may be placed on the Internet. I also understand and agree that I may be identified by name and/or title in printed, Internet or broadcast information that might accompany the photographs and/or video recordings of me. I waive the right to approve the final product. I agree that all such portraits, pictures, photographs, video and audio recordings, and any reproductions thereof, and all plates, negatives, recording tape and digital files are and shall remain the property of the Dakota Showdown/Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue.

I hereby release, acquit and forever discharge the Dakota Showdown, Gentle Spirit Horses Rescue, its current and former trustees, agents, officers and employees of the above-named entities from any and all claims, demands, rights, promises, damages and liabilities arising out of or in connection with the use or distribution of said photographs and/or video recordings, including but not limited to any claims for invasion of privacy, appropriation of likeness or defamation.

I hereby warrant that I am eighteen (18) years old or more and competent to contract in my own name or, if I am less than eighteen years old, that my parent or guardian has signed this release form below. This release is binding on me and my heirs, assigns and personal representatives.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Individual Photographed/Recorded

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Printed Name of Individual Photographed/Recorded: \_\_\_\_\_

If individual photographed/recorded is under eighteen (18) years old, the following section must be completed: I have read and I understand this document. I understand and agree that it is binding on me, my child (named above), our heirs, assigns and personal representatives. I acknowledge that I am eighteen (18) years old or more and that I am the parent or guardian of the child named above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian of Individual Photographed/Recorded

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_