

Best Conditioned

There have been questions asked about the What's and Why's of the Best Condition awards, so this article has been put together to provide some information and explain how these awards are calculated.

Historically this award was called the Fittest Horse award and used very similar criteria to that which is used today. At longer rides, such as Marathons, there is an award for Best Managed. This award is focussed on the management of the horse over a multi-day event where different challenges are encountered to that of a shorter one day event.

The Ride Organiser presents a Best Conditioned (BC) award for each riding division for each endurance ride at the event. The first five successful riders in each riding division are eligible to present for BC. However, for endurance rides of 120km or less, where a rider is more than 1.5 hours behind the first successful horse in their riding division, the Chief Steward may elect not to invite the rider to present for BC judging. This is on the basis that the time differential will have a major impact on the scoring for the event.

A rider can elect not to present their horse for BC and must notify the Chief Steward of this decision. The horse will then not be eligible to compete in the BC award.

A horse which requires invasive treatment after the commencement of the horse's pre-ride veterinary examination and before the judging of BC will not be eligible for inclusion in the BC competition.

The BC award is determined using a specified calculation methodology and compares the efforts of the horses eligible for the BC award.

A designated veterinarian (usually the Head Veterinarian) will inspect each of the horses and complete the veterinary score section of the BC calculation sheet. This inspection is to assess the post-ride metabolic condition of the horse. The horse will be asked to work out, either under saddle or under lead (at the discretion of the designated veterinarian), which allows the veterinarian to assess the willingness and capability to move freely of the horse.

For rides of 160km or more, after a gait examination in hand, horses shall be presented under saddle. The BC for rides of this distance should, where possible, be held on the day following the completion of the ride.

Where BC is to be judged under saddle, the horse shall be ineligible unless the horse is ridden by the rider who rode the horse in the ride and must carry, in the BC workout, the minimum weight required for the riding division in which the horse competed.

Horses that are judged with an irregular gait by the designated veterinarian during the BC horse inspection will be excused from the competition and will be ineligible for BC.

The calculation of the BC award covers the following:

- Vet Score – Includes Heart Rate score, surface factors, appearance and gaits. This is scored out of a total of 50 points. This score is multiplied by a factor of 3 to get the total Vet Score.
- Time – The time taken by each rider deducted from the time of the fastest rider's time. This value is then subtracted from the standard score (200) to give the Time Score.
- Weight – The weight of the rider is deducted from the weight of the heaviest rider. This value is then subtracted from the standard score (100) to give the Weight Score.

The values from each of these scores is then added with the winner of the BC for the weight division being the rider with the highest overall score. If there is a tie for first place the BC will be awarded to the horse with the highest Vet Score. Where the Vet Scores are equal then it shall be award to the horse with the highest Time Score. Where the Time Scores are equal the BC will be awarded to the horse with the highest Weight Score. If this is equal then the competition will be declared a tie.

Best Managed

The Best Managed (BM) award is presented by the Ride Organiser for a micro-marathon or marathon ride. It can also be presented for any introductory, intermediate or endurance ride. The BM award is judged by the Head Veterinarian or their delegate. All riders who successfully complete the designated ride are eligible for consideration of the BM award.

In the selection of the BM award the following factors are considered:

- The condition of the horse at the final veterinary inspection
- The time taken to complete the course
- The horse's heart rate recoveries during the ride
- The weight carried by the horse
- The relative or total absence of problems encountered during the ride
- The success with which the rider overcame any problems during the ride
- The skills displayed during the ride that made the ride the least strain on the horse and/or most promoted the horse's welfare to endure the ride

Clause 20 of Section 1 – General Rules of the AERA Rulebook provide the full rules governing these awards.