

2025 AHA Convention – A First Timer’s Experience

Reno, NV

An early morning flight out of Edmonton started the trip with Pam, Karen, and Dana on the same flight. After a layover in Denver, we were on our way to Reno!

Once we landed in Reno, we made our way to the Silver Legacy Resort and Casino where we were able to check in and make our way around getting the lay of the land...which took us until at least Friday to not get lost anymore. The Silver Legacy is attached to the Eldorado and Circus Circus! If you keep doing circles around the casino trying to find your way, you will spend more money, right?

Wednesday afternoon gave us a chance to check in and receive our delegate and committee member credentials if they applied. We received a welcome bag, lanyard with credentials, and our voting information card. There were a few committee meetings on Wednesday that some were able to partake in. There was also a first-time convention goer’s meeting which I attended. This was helpful as they gave you the general lay of the land, where meetings were held, what information was needed to vote and how to login to the VVoters website. We were able to ask questions and get any other information we needed for our stay during convention. The evening was rounded out with a welcome reception for those who wanted to join in.

Thursday morning started out with General Session I where a few reports were shared and our AHA President, Lisa Blackstone addressed the group. Lisa spoke that promotion and increasing numbers are still at the forefront of priorities. From January to the end of May, the restructuring resolution ad-hoc committee met every other week to discuss changes and to create the new resolution we voted on this year.

248 delegates were credentialed and 28 alternates/guests registered for the 2025 convention.

Stan Morey – executive director- gave his report. Youth/mid-summer were down in numbers, and he expressed its imperative we support the youth as they are the future of the industry. Sport Horse Nationals was a great show and is a great avenue for growth.

A stat that I noted which was interesting; 80% of members in AHA have competition cards.

Jonathan Horowitz of the Arabian Jockey Club reported next and wow...what an incredible and inspirational presentation. He spoke about the stories of racehorses who start at the racetrack and end up doing other jobs after that career. His message was “who unites around these horses?” He used the horse Backgammon as an example that as a racehorse he was owned by a Seikh, then sold to a coach who used to coach Olympians and then was used in a program to bring young teens into the endurance industry. His point was to not be narrow visioned but to see where we can all unite and serve the breed- “let’s see who is out there”.

This year, they had the largest certificate registration since 2019/2020. He shared news that Churchill Downs has reached out to the club for them to potentially have their UA Cup race on the same weekend as the Kentucky Derby...what a stage for the Arabians!

Treasurer's Report

Reported as of November 12/25

Youth Nationals \$302,768 income

Sport Horse Nationals \$170,067

Distance Nationals -20.00

Ranch Horse Nationals -2000.00

US Nationals \$1,484,503.00

Cash on hand \$6,428,460.00

Sweepstakes account \$9,707,883

Halter \$9,079,000

Legal \$166,683.00

Cash Reserve \$1,070,118.00

Challenges that AHA still faces are facility increases, wages, decreasing registration numbers, and decreasing memberships.

Membership and registration financials were not included as they are always ongoing.

2027 Convention Locations presented.

Reno, NV – Silver Legacy provides a \$5000 sponsorship as incentive

Tulsa, OK – Hyatt Downtown. An Anonymous \$5000 sponsor + Hagales put forward another \$5000 if Tulsa was selected

Orlando, FL – Hilton – an anonymous \$5000 sponsor was given, and another \$5000 was put forward later as well

Anchorage, AL – no catering or food order minimum which would make a huge cost difference.

The location would be voted on in General Session II on Friday afternoon.

Committee meetings commenced for the day after General Session I completed.

Amateur Committee Meeting

I am a member of this committee, so I was eager to sit and hear what the discussion was in this meeting.

Skylar Powell spoke on a project he has been working on that will change the course of the current points leveling system we have. He spoke that he feels decreasing the points that are required to level out of Select would make the Choice level a bigger group. At this point in the meeting, it was pointed out that this would be at a local/regional level since Nationals doesn't offer choice. He continued to explain what his "dream" structure would include, and it is as follows: A 4-level system that includes a beginner select (Select I) and an advanced select (Select II). The beginner select will have never won before and the advanced selects will have won a national title in a different group or

pointed out of the beginner select. Splitting the select will keep all divs. smaller and with equal playing fields. He sees us being able to bring in a step-down program like the reining industry. Must be showing (potentially add a certain number of minimum shows) and if you score under a number of points within 2 years, then you can go back down a level (choice back down to advanced select for example). This would exclude good riders who over a lifetime achieve a certain number of points at a high number. This would all allow for certain positives like how the reining industry can market a “level 2” horse for sale; we could market an “advanced select” horse. This also would limit the people who are scared that they will point out of select and therefore maybe don’t show as much or stop showing because they leveled out but still are at the bottom of the next level. Skylar also discussed the possibility of working out a solution for those who do really well as a youth with lots of opportunities but then turn into adults who maybe take a break and “start over”; for example, rolling off the 10th year of points – how can we adjust for situations like this where you excelled as a youth but maybe with time and less money are not still an “elite rider”?

Market Development and Promotion Committee Meeting

Banana Ball’s Head Coach, Joe Marcinek spoke and gave so many excellent “buzz words/statements”.

- Reach the 4-year-old kid with our information, events, and outreach
- How to be out of our comfort zone and be different. Whatever is normal, do the opposite.
- If we were to start over today, what would we do?
- Over the top meeting- no limit, no budget, what’s your over-the-top idea?
- How do we make people constantly curious about our horses, shows, etc?
- Everything we do, does it add to the experience?
- Fewer things, done better. More does not mean better.
- Our breed does every discipline and is in every industry and we typically sell it as being versatile and able to do everything- what’s on thing we can sell it as and perfect that one thing? (Family horse?)

Equitation/Showmanship Committee Meeting

I am a member of this committee.

There was discussion on a rule stating that the gate must be closed for the rail work AND the pattern. There are shows that are in violation of this and we should remove “and pattern” or we will have to enforce the existing rule at all shows. Motion made to delete those words and then come back as a resolution for next year.

A committee member brought up a concern and a question on if a rule change can be made to tying up the tail in a showmanship pattern to prevent stepping on it at the back or in a pivot. Lots of discussion around this and a few members came together to rewrite the rule and bring forward a resolution next year for it.

At a national level, showmanship and in hand trail is only for 3 years and over- yearly and 2-year-olds should be included. A formal recommendation was made, and the BOD will vote on it once it is brought forward to them.

This concluded committee meetings for the day. There was a meet the Board Candidates and Governance Resolution meeting at the end of the day where we discussed the restructuring resolution, and they presented the candidates for the new board positions that we would vote on Friday.

Our regional caucus meeting followed where we discussed the restructuring resolution and welcomed Donna Kavanaugh in as our new Regional Director.

The night ended with a R17 dinner, and it was immensely enjoyed by all!

Friday

Education and Evaluation Committee Meeting

The country trot resolution was discussed at length, and it will have amendment. It has been amended to include country trot but leave strong trot and hand gallop but to change them to country strong trot and country hand gallop.

Discussion of chain over nose for 1–2-year-olds in sport horse instead of just over the nose.

Also need to increase committee member #'s. The current number of members is nine, need two additional members added.

Equine Welfare Meeting

Stan Morey talked about EHV-1 and the implications on the industry that this will have and has had. He commented that microchipping may make tracking of EHV-1 easier. He opened the floor for discussion about microchipping and it opened lots of debate. A vet in the room commented that vets don't scan microchips before doing health papers or before they go into auction or slaughterhouses so it's not really an overall safety precaution at the AHA level. Would more be used for shows, registration, rescue horses, etc. USEF had a rep there so that people could ask their questions to. USEF will not change their minds on microchipping because it's already been a 3-year process to roll this out and will come into effect December 1.

Gordon Potts came forward and straight forwardly asked if there would be a penalty for not microchipping. USEF rep says show secretary will be checking microchip #'s from the entry forms. They will need to advise the person their horse needs it done but a penalty per se...no. And further information on an actual penalty will be answered by a different USEF contact once she asks.

Local Committee Meeting

Lots of programs have been worked on by this committee and they are working hard to continue down that road. Meet an Arabian has \$40,000 available in grant money available in increments for people who are wanting help to hold a Meet an Arabian event.

Joe Alberti spoke on discovery farms and how they are working towards a rebranding of the name and using the word “farms” in it as it doesn’t accurately represent everyone who can utilize this program.

Working to improve the AHA website even further for newcomers and members who need resources to create events, etc. The video library section of the website is an amazing resource that we should all be looking at more often.

Conversation about academy classes and how they are growing more and more, and how shows should be including them- yay Aurora and Alberta industry!

General Session II – commenced Friday afternoon

Announced that 2026 US Nationals would be adding AOTR choice sweepstakes jackpot classes. 288 delegates credentialed; 36 alternate/guests registered.

Resolution 1-25 – restructuring resolution. People were asked to speak on this and both for and against sides were presented. Vote was taken after a relatively short amount of time after it was called to vote. THIS RESOLUTION HAS PASSED WITH A 76.4% FOR.

Resolution 3-25 – passed.

Resolutions 2-25 through 12-25, and 14-25 through 18-25 were a part of the consent agenda, 16-25 withdrawn.

Removed 6-25. Consent agenda adopted.

Resolution 6-25 is being rewritten as discussed in the committee meeting. Every gate will be prefaced with “country”, country walk, country trot, country strong trot, etc. John Power read the amendment, and the board decided to vote on it. Approved with an 83%.

2027 Convention location will be Orlando, FL.

Our own Karen Caughell made it on the nominating committee by votes.

Board of director’s vote: announced on Saturday.

An interesting conversation in between reports between Gerald Macdonald and myself regarding value/fun shows. Include a combined dog and horse in hand trail class. Randomly draw a dog and a horse, each run their own course. The pair with the fastest combined score, wins.

The day was concluded with the AHA banquet and awards ceremony where Aurora took home the Membership Retention/Recruitment award and \$500, as well as Club of the Year and an additional \$500!!!

Saturday

General Session III

The morning started at 9AM which for our group, put us at a disadvantage because we all had to leave to catch our flight so unfortunately, we did not hear all of the reports that were scheduled for general session III but as previously mentioned, the AHA video library is a great resource and they have put up the presentations from convention.

The couple of reports we did get to hear were as follows:

Arabian Horse Foundation

Over \$70,000 in scholarships. \$5000 to research and education.

USEF Relationship Ad-Hoc Report

An informative report that unbiasedly went through the pros and cons of leaving USEF and/or how to navigate the relationship.

3 options- stay, go to USEF with compromise, or leave and figure it out on their own.

The first sentence in the affiliate agreement does not even serve anyone that isn't striving to be an Olympic athlete.

The positives that they provide are immense and hard to duplicate, rulebook, drug testing, safe sport, horse of the year award.

Is USEF AHA's partner or our regulator they asked. When does over regulation become overreach?

Over \$900,000 a year is paid to USEF from AHA.

60% of people in a survey put out don't show anymore due to the expense.

The consensus was that it will not stay the same. There will be compromise made or the road to leaving will be explored.

Youth Report

Increase in youth judging participation this year.

469 new youth free memberships this year.

Conclusion

What an incredible experience this was. I am so grateful I was able to attend this year and experience convention in person for the first time. So many people have said over the years, everyone should go once.... EVERYONE SHOULD GO ONCE. It was an incredible experience to be in the same place with so many like-minded individuals who all want the same thing for the industry, and where so much change can be affected. It provided me much needed excitement and hope for the future of our industry and re-inspired the passion that I have for this industry.