

# Open

- Any dog of any age may compete in the NCA Open class.
- Any handler may compete in the NCA Open class.
- A handler who has competed in any Open cattle class is no longer eligible to compete in the NCA Intermediate or NCA Novice class.
- Dogs who have competed in an Open class may not be eligible to compete in some non-sanctioned classes at some trials. Please check with the trial host to determine class eligibility before running.

# Nursery

- Eligibility for the NCA Nursery class is determined by the age of the dog. Only dogs that are younger than 30 months at the start of the qualifying year (April 1<sup>st</sup>) are eligible to compete in the Nursery class for that year.
- To compete in the 2027 NCA Regional Finals and the 2027 NCA National Finals, Nursery eligible dogs must have been born after October 1, 2023.
- Any handler may compete in the NCA Nursery class.
- Points determination for the Nursery class:
  - Points for the Nursery class are determined based on the class size, including ineligible dogs.
  - Ineligible dogs will not receive points, but eligible dogs will receive credit for all dogs that they place above in the class.

# Intermediate

**To be eligible to compete in the NCA Intermediate class, a handler must have received no points in a sanctioned Open trial before April 1, 2012 and must not compete in Open cattle class after April 1, 2012.**

- Dogs of any age may compete in the NCA Intermediate class.
- An Intermediate handler/dog team may compete in any class, except Open, for which the dog is eligible.
- NCA Intermediate class points are awarded to the handler/dog team.
- An NCA Intermediate handler may acquire a dog of any level at any time during the qualifying year and make that dog part of his/her Intermediate team.

- Because any NCA Intermediate points earned are assigned only to that handler/dog team, any NCA Intermediate points earned by a dog in the NCA Intermediate class are not transferable to another Intermediate handler.
- Intermediate handlers may move up from Intermediate to Open at any time during the qualifying year. If they elect to do so, the following will apply:
  - Once they have run in an Open cattle class, they may not move back down to earn NCA Intermediate points.
  - Any NCA Intermediate points earned up to that date will be forfeited and that handler may not earn any further NCA Intermediate points.
  - They are no longer eligible to compete in the Intermediate class at that year's NCA Regional Finals or NCA National Finals.
- At the end of a qualifying year, the top two NCA Intermediate point earning handlers are no longer eligible for the NCA Intermediate class.
- At the conclusion of the NCA National Finals, that year's Champion and Reserve Champion Intermediate handlers are no longer eligible for the NCA Intermediate class.
- Beginning with the 2026-2027 trial year, any Intermediate handler who finishes in the top 5 overall in the final round of the NCA Nursery Finals class is no longer eligible for the NCA Intermediate class and will be advanced to the Open class.
- If an Intermediate handler is moved out of Intermediate by rule in a local association, the NCA will honor that move-up beginning in the next qualifying year. At that time, that handler will no longer be eligible for the NCA Intermediate class.
- If it is determined that a handler has run in an NCA Intermediate class who is not eligible for that class, that handler will be removed from the class results and not counted in the points calculation for that Intermediate class.

## Novice

- The NCA Novice class is limited to handlers who are not competing in the Open cattle class.
- NCA Novice class points are awarded to the handler/dog team.
- Any dog with any eligible handler may compete in the NCA Novice class.
- Handlers will earn NCA Novice points and are eligible to compete in both the NCA Regional Finals and the NCA National Finals at the end of the qualifying year.

- Handlers may not earn points in both NCA Novice and NCA Intermediate classes in the same qualifying year.
- If a Novice handler elects to compete in an NCA Intermediate class, this is only allowed if a Novice class is not offered at said trial, then they will not lose any NCA Novice points earned up to that point and they will not jeopardize their NCA Novice eligibility. (Whether a Novice handler is allowed to compete in the Intermediate class is determined by the individual trial host, not the NCA.) Trial host must label novice handlers and their class will be sorted out to make a novice pointed class.
- If a Novice handler elects to compete in any Open cattle class, they will lose any NCA Novice points earned up to that point and they will no longer be eligible to compete in the NCA Novice or NCA Intermediate classes. Once done, this cannot be reversed.
- It is the handler's responsibility to ensure that their information on file with the NCA office is current and correct before they run at a trial
- A Novice handler may move up to Intermediate or Open at any time during the qualifying year. If they elect to do so, the following will apply:
  - They will forfeit any NCA Novice points earned up to that date.
  - The team is disqualified from earning NCA Novice points for the remainder of the qualifying year.
  - They are no longer eligible to compete in the NCA Novice class at that year's NCA Regional Finals or NCA National Finals.
- If a Novice handler elects to move up to the NCA Intermediate class at any time during the qualifying year, it is their responsibility to declare their intent BEFORE going to the post in order to award any NCA Intermediate points.
- At the end of a qualifying year, the top two NCA Novice point earning handlers are no longer eligible for the NCA Novice class.
- At the conclusion of the NCA National Finals, that year's Champion and Reserve Champion Novice handlers are no longer eligible for the NCA Novice class.
- Beginning with the 2026-2027 trial year, any Novice handler who finishes in the top 5 overall in the final round of the NCA Nursery Finals class is no longer eligible for the NCA Novice class and will be advanced to the intermediate class.
- If a Novice handler is moved out of Novice by rule in a local association, the NCA will honor that move-up beginning in the next qualifying year. At that time, that handler will no longer be eligible for the NCA Novice class.

- If it is determined that a handler has run in an NCA Novice class who is not eligible for that class, that handler will be removed from the class results and not counted in the points calculation for that NCA Novice class.
- THIS IS FOR BEGINNER HANDLERS. Eligibility for the Novice class is determined by the handler. Any dog can compete in the Novice class. The NCA board reserves the right to move up a Novice Handler after their second trial if it is felt deemed, they do not fit the Novice criteria. If a NCA board member is not present, the trial host may contact a board member to discuss a handler. If you answer YES to any of the following criteria, you cannot enter the Novice Class:
  - Do you train outside dogs?
  - Do you give lessons?
  - Do you promote yourself as a stockdog clinician?

## 1st Year Novice

In addition to rules in the 'Novice' section, the following rules apply to first year Novice handlers:

- Handlers in their first year of competition in the NCA Novice class receive a one-year free membership in the NCA.
- After the end of their first qualifying year, a membership must be purchased in order for the handler to continue to earn NCA Novice points, to compete in an NCA Regional Final, or to compete in the NCA National Finals.
- If a first year Novice handler elects to compete in the Intermediate class and wishes to earn NCA Intermediate points, they must purchase a membership before NCA Intermediate points will be awarded.
- If a first year Novice handler elects to move up to the Intermediate class, it is their responsibility to declare their intent to move to the NCA Intermediate class **BEFORE** going to the post in order to award any NCA Intermediate points.

# Horseback

- The Horseback class is offered at the NCA National Finals and Regional Finals
- Any dog of any age can run in the horseback class.
- Any handler can run in the horseback class, Novice through Open handlers are eligible and any qualifying handler can run in the horseback class at the NCA finals.
- Handlers' eligibility for foot classes will not be affected by participation in the horseback class.
- The horseback class is a standalone class with no divisions; this is the only sanctioned horseback class.
- The NCA will track and sanction a horseback jackpot class held by another organization if all classes of handlers are allowed to run without it affecting handler eligibility