



# MEMBERSHIP GUIDE



# MISSION STATEMENT

The National Cutting Horse Association promotes and celebrates the cutting horse, whose origin on Western ranches allows us to support ranching and its Western heritage.

By establishing rules for the conduct of cutting horse shows, NCHA strives to give cutters a level playing field and a progressive class structure which accommodates everyone from the beginner to the advanced competitor.

NCHA draws on the diverse talents and background of its members and encourages their participation in helping it achieve these goals.



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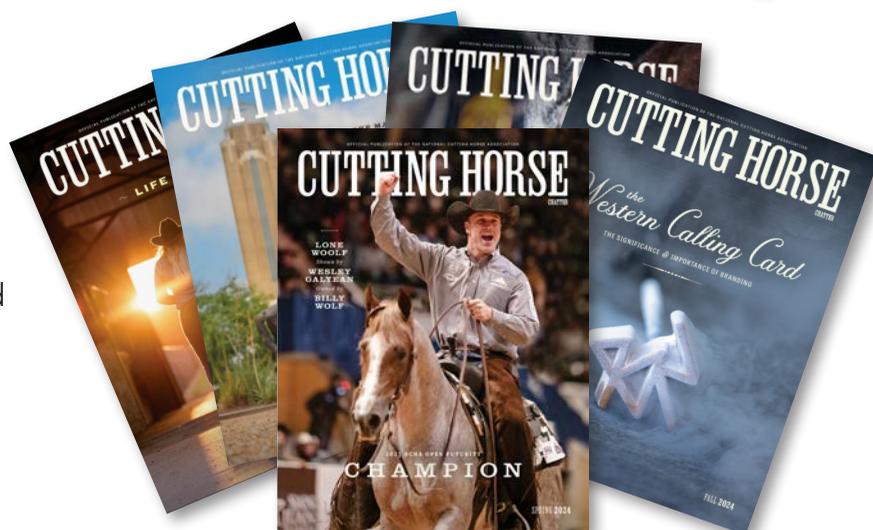
## NCHACUTTING.COM

Whether you want to reference the current rule book, find a local show, or get more information on the NCHA Triple Crown, [NCHACutting.com](http://NCHACutting.com) is the No. 1 source for all things cutting.



## CUTTING HORSE CHATTER

The quarterly Cutting Horse Chatter provides membership highlights, stories from around the world, and more delivered directly to your mailbox or available online at <https://www.nchacutting.com/cutting-horse-chatter-magazine>.



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## In the beginning, there was the horse...

When American cowboys of the 1800s began using their best horses to separate individual cows from a herd, it was part of the daily job. They would never have imagined cutting as one of the world's most popular equine sports. But each year, thousands of cutting events—from Austin, Texas, to Australia—attract riders ranging in ages from eight to over eighty.

Cutting's heritage runs strong and deep, like the centuries-old mesquites that flourish on the Texas plains. From Chisholm Trail to present day, cutting horses have been indispensable tools in the cattle trade.

During the era of the open range, cattle from one outfit often drifted and mingled with those of other outfits. Twice a year, neighboring ranches

would join in a roundup to sort out their brands.

Every outfit traveled with a remuda of horses. Within the remuda, each cowboy had a string of horses, but the cutting horse was the elite member of the remuda. A typical cutting horse might have started out in a cowboy's string, but his sensitivity to cattle brought him to the attention of the roundup boss. He was the horse that pricked his ears toward a cow and followed her with his eyes, instinctively knowing not to crowd her, yet was wary of her every move. He made the difficult job of separating cattle easier and quicker; he even made it fun.

"It was worth the trip to brush country just to sit above Ol' Gotch and feel his shoulders roll, watch his ears work and his head drop low when he looked an old steer in the eye," said cowboy humorist Will Rogers after a visit to a South Texas ranch during the 1920s.

As big cattle outfits gave way to small farms and ranches in the twentieth century, pickup trucks and squeeze chutes took the place of cow horses. A few large ranches still rounded up cattle the old-fashioned way, but cutting horses were fast becoming obsolete in ranch work.

Today, the National Cutting Horse Association has given the cutting horse new life

in one of the world's most exciting equine events.

The first advertised cutting contest was held at the 1898 Cowboy Reunion in Haskell, Texas. Fifteen thousand people, lured by ads in the Dallas News and the Kansas City Star attended. Since the nearest railroad was 50 miles away, they came on horseback or by wagon and hack.

The cutting contest offered a prize of \$150, a substantial sum in those days, and 11 riders entered. Old Hub, a 22-year-old horse, whose fans swore that he could work blindfolded and without a bridle—was brought out of retirement by Sam Graves for this one event. Their two day trip to town was one for the history books as the duo won the competition. Graves set aside half of his winnings to ensure Old Hub had the best of care for the rest of his days. The first record of cutting as an arena spectator event came at the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth, Texas, when a cutting horse exhibition was added to the annual rodeo in 1919. It became

a competitive event the following year.

By 1946, there were so many cutting horse contests being held, under so many different sets of conditions and rules, that a group of 13 cutting horse owners met at the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show and decided to form an association to establish standard rules and procedures for holding such competitions.

Later, at a meeting in Mineral Wells, Texas, the association was incorporated, and Pat Dalton suggested the name 'National Cutting Horse Association,' because it looked as though it had the potential to grow into something big.

The first NCHA show was held in Dublin, Texas, in the fall of 1946. By 1963, the association recorded the results of 727 events, of which 504 were recognized as NCHA championship events. In those days, cutters vied for a piece of \$404,183 in prize money. That included \$23,225 paid out at that year's NCHA Futurity.

Fast forward to today, and the contestants at the NCHA

Futurity will be divvying up more than \$3.5 million—over a hundred times the offering of that first year in a single event. Yet for many, cutting's greatest rewards



are intangible. The bond between people and horses that makes the sport so special also links it to the sweat and dust of the Old West and sets it apart from all other events.

"The people who brought cutting from the open range to the arena, and turned the skills of the horse and cowboy into the contest, were real sports," said Buster Welch, a legendary cutting champion. "That fine sportsmanship is still alive and well in cutting today."

Among the horses in this picture from a cutting horse event in 1948 are such greats as Snooks, Poco Bueno, Skeeter, Old Paint and Benny Binion's gelding that was NCHA's first World Champion. Riders include early NCHA Presidents Ray Smyth, Gay Copeland and H. Calhoun; and legendary riders Milt Bennett, Guy Harrell, Pine Johnson, Phil Williams and George Glascock. Photos by Frank Reeves, courtesy of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.



# NCHA MEMBERSHIP

NCHA offers multiple membership options so members are able to compete against peers of the same skill level. All riders and horse owners must be current NCHA members to show in NCHA events. Visit the most up to date NCHA Rulebook for complete details at <https://www.nchacutting.com/resources/order-a-printed-rulebook>.

## AMATEUR

Amateur must not:

- a. have been paid to train, assist in training, or been employed astride a horse in any equine discipline.
- b. have been married to, lived with or resided on the premises with a professional horse trainer in any equine discipline.

## NON-PROFESSIONAL

A Non-Pro may not receive direct or indirect remuneration for training horses astride in any cattle/cow related equine disciplines or remuneration to show, train or assist in training a cutting horse or cutting horse rider.

## PROFESSIONAL

Any rider who has been paid remuneration to show, train or assist in training a horse or rider in any equine discipline.

**Plan on Showing?** Before you show in an Amateur or Non-Pro class, you need to hold an Amateur/Non-Pro status. Applications for Amateur/Non-Pro status can be found on [nchacutting.com/members/non-pro-application](https://www.nchacutting.com/members/non-pro-application).



# NCHA CHARITIES FOUNDATION

*The NCHA Foundation supports the National Cutting Horse Association through youth programs and scholarships, animal welfare research, historical preservation efforts, and continued education of the sport of cutting.*

## **YOUTH PROGRAMS & SCHOLARSHIPS**

The NCHA Foundation is proud to provide scholarship and programming opportunities to NYCHA members pursuing their goals! From scholarship cuttings and events to seminars and clinics, we ensure opportunities are available to youth members both in and out of the arena. In addition, the NCHA Foundation oversees youth member's individual scholarship accounts and distributes scholarship payouts directly to the student's educational institution of choice.

**NCHA**  
**FOUNDATION**



## **HISTORY AND PRESERVATION**

The NCHA Foundation is responsible for the acceptance, preservation, documentation, and other activities related to the curation of NCHA historic memorabilia. The Foundation is currently working towards making such memorabilia available to the public for educational charitable purposes.

## **CONTINUED EDUCATION OF THE SPORT OF CUTTING**

It is a large part of our mission to coordinate and assist with educational programs and presentations which aid in promoting the cutting horse and the sport of cutting. Such programs include NCHA Foundation fundraising events, judging and cutting clinics, and informational activities at industry wide events.

## **ANIMAL WELFARE RESEARCH**

The Animal Welfare Committee is responsible for supporting the projects that fund and promote the welfare of cutting horses. This includes research projects that can improve the length and quality of life of cutting horses and programs which aid in disaster relief efforts for the equine community.



# NATIONAL YOUTH CUTTING HORSE ASSOCIATION



The National Cutting Horse Association was formed with its main goals being to promote cutting competitions, standardize contest rules and preserve the cutting horse's Western heritage. The National Youth Cutting Horse Association (NYCHA), was formed in 1993 to offer youth members the opportunity to develop their horsemanship skills, practice sportsmanship and discipline, develop leadership skills and learn responsibility in caring for their horses and themselves. The NYCHA offers several programs and opportunities to fit the needs and abilities of all horses and riders.



# YOUTH MEMBERSHIP

*NYCHA membership is open to all youth who are 18 years of age or younger.*

*There are two age divisions, Senior Youth (14-18) and Junior Youth (ages 13 and under).*

## **NYCHA WORLD FINALS, SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP CUTTING AND CONVENTION**

Each summer, the NYCHA holds its World Finals, Youth Convention and Scholarship Cutting in Fort Worth, Texas. During the event, youth members compete for scholarships, conduct business meetings, elect officers, participate in family fun night and attend educational workshops. The annual youth awards banquet is held in conjunction with the convention and cutting competition to recognize members' achievements throughout the year.

## **PROGRAMS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

### **LEAP Program**

The Levels of Excellence Award Program (LEAP) was created to recognize youth for their participation in NYCHA activities. Points are earned through participation in NYCHA activities such as attending workshops, community service, writing a newspaper article, helping with fundraisers or participating in cutting events. LEAP points become crucial when it comes to scholarship applications and other awards.

### **Scholarship Programs**

More than \$150,000 in college scholarships are awarded each year through a variety of scholarship programs and youth scholarship cuttings. The scholarships are awarded based on involvement in NYCHA activities, academic achievements, financial need and community involvement.

### **Judging Programs**

Additional opportunities for involvement outside of the cutting pen are available for members. Judging contests and other programs that aim to develop professional skills are offered throughout the year.

## **LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION**

The NYCHA National Officers and Board of Directors conduct the business of the NYCHA. They are responsible for implementing NYCHA programs at the local level, promoting the sport of cutting and informing youth members about activities and fundraisers.



# SHOWS

In addition to the 1,500-plus NCHA-approved shows held annually around the world, NCHA produces five shows each year. Three are the Triple Crown events held in Fort Worth for limited-age competitors, a National Championship for weekend cutters, and the World Finals for weekend cutters.

## LIMITED-AGE SHOWS

Fort Worth is home to three annual NCHA limited-age events, also known as the Triple Crown of Cutting. Each show has limited-age classes offering millions of dollars to the payout. The first jewel is the NCHA World Championship Futurity held in November and December. The Futurity is for 3-year-old cutting horses that have never been shown before in competition. The second jewel in the Triple Crown is the NCHA Super Stakes held in March and April for horses ages 4 to 6. The third and final jewel for the Triple Crown is the NCHA Summer Cutting Spectacular held in July and August. This competition is also for horses ages 4 to 6. A horse that wins the World Championship Futurity, the Super Stakes and the Summer Spectacular in the same point year in the same division is crowned as the Triple Crown winner.

## WEEKEND SHOWS

Weekend shows are a great place for beginners all the way up to professional trainers. Shows feature a progressive class structure offering some, or all, of NCHA's 13 approved classes so everyone has the opportunity to compete against others at a similar level of achievement. At the end of the point year, riders can qualify for the Eastern National Championship or one of the 16 circuit finals, based on their eligibility on final day of that point year. All of these events have thousands of dollars in added money.

Also, at the end of the point year, the Top 15 in 11 of NCHA's approved classes may compete in the World Finals held in conjunction with the NCHA World Championship Futurity in Fort Worth, TX.

NYCHA members can compete in Junior (13 and under) or Senior (14-18) classes at weekend shows. NYCHA members have the opportunity to compete for thousands of dollars in scholarships each year. Their success at weekend shows will contribute to their future education. Each summer during the Summer Spectacular Cutting in Fort Worth, TX, the NYCHA holds its Youth World Finals for the two Youth classes.





## DIFFERENT TYPES OF WEEKEND SHOW CLASSES

Thirteen standard classes are offered at NCHA events. Classes can be based on the qualifications of the rider, the qualifications of the horse or the qualifications of both horse and rider. Regardless of the class, Amateur/Non-Pro riders must own the horse they compete on. For complete eligibility requirements, visit [NCHACutting.com](http://NCHACutting.com).

### RIDER CLASSES

Classes are based on the rider and his/her accomplishments.

- 1. Non-Pro** – Riders holding a Non-Pro card and Amateur status are also allowed to enter this class. There is no limit on the amount of money which the horse or rider have won.
- 2. \$35,000 Non-Pro** - Riders holding a Non-Pro card with less than \$35,000 of lifetime earnings at the beginning of the point year.
- 3. Unlimited Amateur** – Open to qualified holders of Amateur cards, excludes Non-Pro Hall of Fame riders. If rider is under the age of 60, they must have less than \$250,000 in Non-Pro earnings. The horse must be owned by the rider or rider's immediate family.
- 4. \$50,000 Amateur** – Open to qualified holders of NCHA Amateur cards who have \$50,000 or less in lifetime earnings at the beginning of the point year. The horse must be owned by the rider or rider's immediate family.
- 5. \$15,000 Amateur** – Riders holding an Amateur card with less than \$15,000 of lifetime earnings at the beginning of the point year. The horse must be owned by the rider or rider's immediate family.
- 6. \$2,000 Limit Rider/Any Horse** – The class of choice for members who are new to cutting. This class is open to all riders with lifetime earnings in cutting competitions of \$2,000 or less at the beginning of the point year.
- 7. Senior Youth** – Riders who are 14-18 (Youth point year June 1 –May 31).
- 8. Junior Youth** – Riders who are age 13 or younger (Youth point year June 1 – May 31).

## HORSE CLASSES

Classes in which restrictions are based solely on the horse. Any rider can compete in these classes. The term “Novice” refers to the horse.

**9. \$5,000 Novice** – Open to all horses of any age that have \$5,000 or less of eligibility earnings at the beginning of the point year (excluding limited age events).

**10. \$25,000 Novice** – Open to all horses of any age that have \$25,000 or less of eligibility earnings at the beginning of the point year (excluding limited age events).

**11. Open** – Any horse can be ridden by any rider. There are no restrictions on the horse or rider.

## HORSE/RIDER CLASSES

Classes in which there are restrictions on both the horse and the rider. The term “Novice” refers to the horse and the term “Non-Pro” refers to the rider.

**12. \$5,000 Novice/Non-Pro** – Open to horses with eligibility earnings of \$5,000 or less at the beginning of the point year (excluding limited-age events) and the rider has a Non-Pro card. The horse must be owned by the rider or rider’s immediate family member.

**13. \$25,000 Novice/Non-Pro** – Open to horses with eligibility earnings of \$25,000 or less at the beginning of the point year (excluding limited-age events) and the rider has a Non-Pro card. The horse must be owned by the rider or rider’s family member.



# JUDGES

Cutting judges are similar to other sports' referees in that they evaluate the run at live speed, enforce the competition rules and determine the contestant's score. A judge's score can range from 60 to 80 points and a show can use one judge up to, and as many as, five judges. When a panel of five judges is used, the lowest and highest scores are discarded and the three middle scores are totaled.

Like most referees today, NCHA judges can use video to watch re-plays at NCHA-approved shows. A competition can be video reviewed immediately following each "set" of cattle to determine if a mistake was made in the application of a major penalty. After the judges review the run, the score may then be adjusted to reflect a final score.

To become a judge: [nchacutting.com/judges/become-a-judge](http://nchacutting.com/judges/become-a-judge).



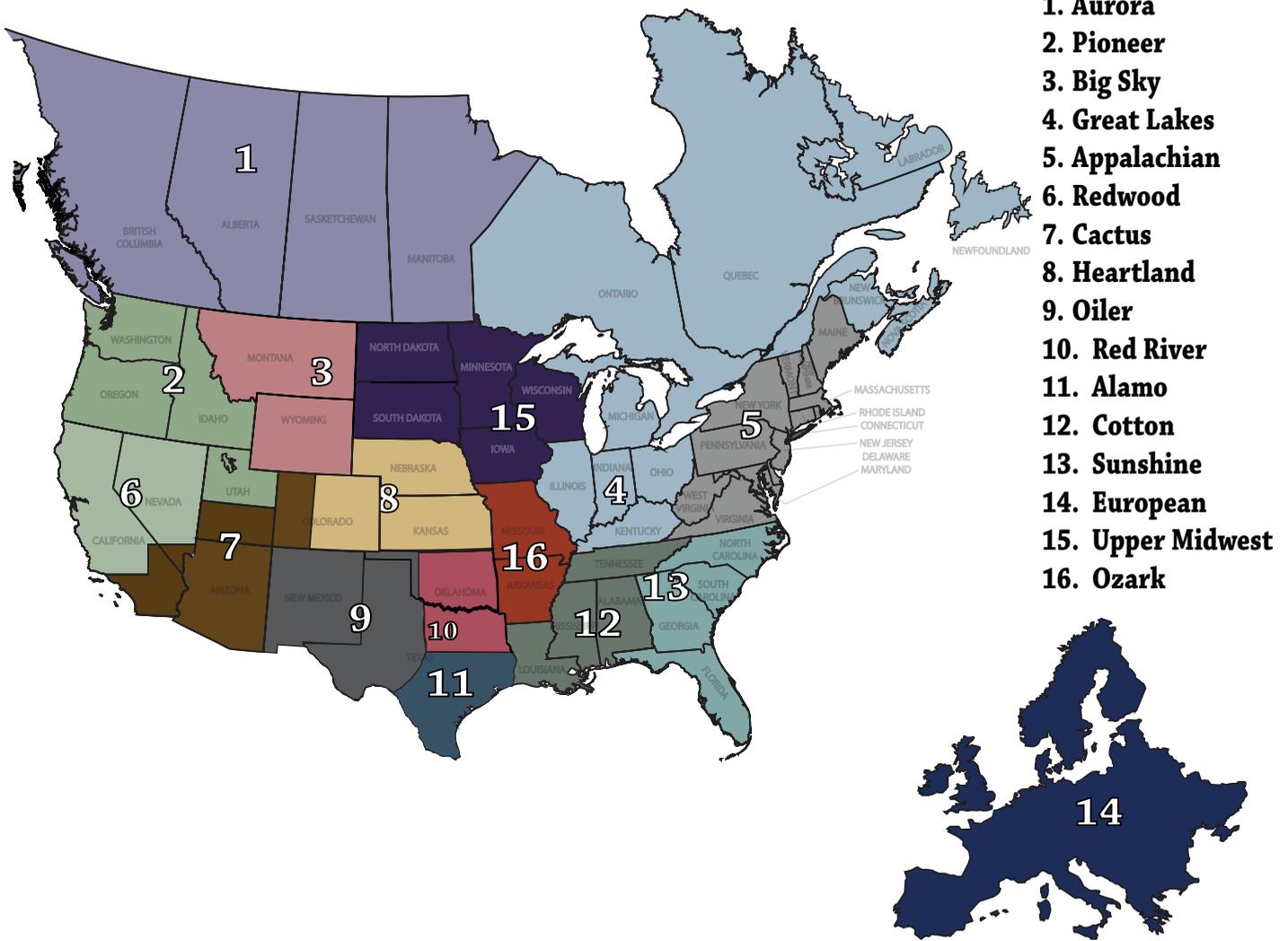
# SCORES AND WINNING

Since cutting is a judged event, there are certain characteristics in a run that determine a horse's score. Reflecting a mirror image of the cow and its movement is the ultimate goal of the horse. Reining or visibly cueing your horse or allowing the cow to get back to the herd before "quitting" the cow also results in the deduction of points. Matching the cow's movement and body position and keeping it in the center of the arena all help to add points to the score. Every rider starts out with a score of 70 from each judge and as the run progresses, each judge adds or deducts points as necessary. Once the run is over, each judge tallies up points to get the competitor's score with the highest score being declared the winner. For more on judging go to: [nchacutting.com/judges/judging](http://nchacutting.com/judges/judging).





The National Circuit Program develops 16 unique geographical circuits where cutters compete for points at every NCHA-approved weekend competition. The points are tracked by NCHA and used to calculate circuit standings and circuit championship qualification. At the conclusion of the qualifying deadline, the top 30 in each class are then invited to compete at their local circuit championship. At the conclusion of the point year, 12 circuit contestants will be invited to compete at the National Circuit Championship show held during the 2025 NCHA Super Stakes.



1. Aurora
2. Pioneer
3. Big Sky
4. Great Lakes
5. Appalachian
6. Redwood
7. Cactus
8. Heartland
9. Oiler
10. Red River
11. Alamo
12. Cotton
13. Sunshine
14. European
15. Upper Midwest
16. Ozark

# FAQ

## How long does my NCHA membership last?

NCHA memberships can be purchased for one year. One year of membership begins on January 1 and is valid through December 31 of the same year, whether it is purchased on January 1 or halfway through the year.

## Do I have to ride my own horse to show in NCHA competition?

There are several NCHA classes in which the horse's rider does not have to be the owner of the horse (Open, \$5,000 Novice, \$25,000 Novice, \$2,000 Limit Rider, Junior Youth and Senior Youth), excluding Amateur/Non-Pro riders. Holders of Amateur/Non-Pro cards may compete in the \$2,000 Limit Rider on any horse, regardless of ownership, without jeopardizing their Non-Professional status. In all Amateur and Non-Pro classes, the horse must be owned by the rider or rider's immediate family.

The \$2,000 Limit Rider class is a great way for any member who is new to cutting to gain experience before stepping up against more experienced riders.

## How do I find out where the weekend shows are being held?

Visit [NCHACutting.com](http://NCHACutting.com) to find out about weekend events. You can search the comprehensive listings by state, city or month.

Additionally, the NCHA National Circuit Program boasts 16 circuits around the world, offering members the ability to compete for NCHA titles while staying close to home. More information on the NCHA National Circuit Program can be found at [nchacutting.com](http://nchacutting.com).

## Why does NCHA use five judges for the major limited-age events?

Nearly 20 years ago, NCHA instituted the Adjusted Monitor System in order to make judging fair for each contestant. The system is used at all major limited-age events with five judges and may be used at three-judge shows.

According to the system, the high and low scores are tossed out in a five-judge show, leaving three scores to

be tallied. A monitor is assigned to make rulings on major penalty discrepancies and to evaluate the judges' performance during each go-round.

## How do I obtain an Amateur or Non-Pro card?

Before entering any Amateur or Non-Pro class at an NCHA show, you must complete an Amateur/Non-Pro application, in addition to your membership, for approval to the NCHA office. Your approval status will be indicated on your membership card.

The normal approval turnaround time for receiving your card once received at NCHA is two weeks. However, if you need immediate approval because you are planning to show right away, call the Membership Department at 817-244-6188 and they will make every effort to get your application approved sooner.

If you are planning to show in either an Amateur or Non-Pro class, your NCHA membership card should have "Amateur/Non-Pro" printed on the card. If your membership card does not have this printed, contact the Membership Department.

# NCHA \$1,000 ACHIEVEMENT BUCKLE



Once a rider wins \$1,000 in lifetime NCHA weekend earnings from approved classes, he/she is awarded a trophy Gist buckle, compliments of NCHA. Whether a person is a weekend warrior or World Champion, NCHA wants to congratulate them on their achievement. Every professional trainer started out as a beginner and worked their way up. Whether a person's goal is to become a World Champion or cutting is just their hobby, the first jewel in their crown is the NCHA \$1,000 Achievement Buckle.

## HOW DO I GET STARTED?

There are many ways to get further involved in the exciting sport of cutting.

### FINDING A TRAINER

The best way to get more familiar with the sport is to spend some time with a local trainer who is an invaluable source of information. The NCHA provides a free digital trainers directory at [NCHACutting.com](http://NCHACutting.com) that displays local trainers in your area. These professionals can show and teach you every facet of the sport.

### VISIT NCHACUTTING.COM

[nchacutting.com](http://nchacutting.com) is the official website of the National Cutting Horse Association. Whether you want to view the most up-to-date rule book, watch video tips, learn about past champions or look at the schedule of upcoming shows, NCHACutting.com is your resource for the most current information.

