



# NARG

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North American Riders Group

## **NARG President Chris Kappler Revisits the Mileage Rule**

I received overwhelming response and positive comments to my article in our previous newsletter challenging the USEF mileage rule. Here are more thoughts on why NARG believes the date protection system needs to be removed. So here I go again!

NARG truly believes the system is broken!

First, how can someone be inspired to start a new horse show when there are no "dates" available, anywhere except possibly Death Valley in July. For example, Old Salem has made multi-million dollar improvements recently and tried to add a first rate summer horse show and was rejected by the USEF after a long request process. This horse show had support of the local horse community, but was shut down by one of the monopolistic show managers that didn't want competition. There are dozens of examples like this.

Second, the wonderful historical shows that the system was put in place to protect are still being put out of business. The mileage rule seems to do much more to help management companies who run lengthy series of shows than to help some of our favorite quality competitions like the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden, the Charlotte Jumper Classic and the American Gold Cup that run only one week a year all of which have disappeared. The most upsetting example of this to me is the apparently impending end of the American Invitational, which is suffering more every year because of Equestrian Sport Production's Winter Equestrian Festival and post-WEF circuit. The mileage rule has done nothing to protect one of the greatest Grand Prix's we have in this country.

The Federation believes the answer to date protection is to create show standards. This is a worthy goal that has been assigned to the USHJA for them to create and implement. Unfortunately, the amount of time and effort that will go into deciding what should constitute minimum standards will be endless. If you poll ten people at a show you are likely committee at every competition in America to decide if the standards are met? This sounds like a very expensive proposition that will undoubtedly be passed on to the exhibitor once again. And, it is unlikely to ever be passed in a substantive form with actionable results. Frankly, we believe the NARG top 25 evaluations have done more already to stir competitive juices by show managers and is making a meaningful difference to the quality of horse shows. We also believe that the only true way to improve the quality of horse shows in North America is to eliminate the mileage rule and let a free market system drive continuous improvement.

Show managers don't like this solution. They say that they have made large financial commitments to start or improve their show and that they need protection for their investment. They want a guaranteed client list through a monopolistic system. My competition is the trainer in the aisle right next to me. I would like to go to a show where I am the only trainer for all the exhibitors that attend. But, that's not realistic. And neither is the mileage rule as a crutch to protect investment. New businesses like hotels, restaurants and shopping malls are formed every day with significant capital investment and no guaranteed customer base. If those businessmen want to see a financial return on their investment than they better deliver a superior value that attracts and retains customers. Why should the business of running horse shows be any different? Show standards are not the answer! Shedding the mileage rule and creating a free market place is the only way for exhibitors to decide what competitions deliver the superior value.

Our goal at NARG is to offer solutions, not just point out problems. We think there is a five-year phase out solution for the mileage rule that could satisfy all involved. If the current rule allows protection of 250 miles then we propose reducing the mileage protection by 50 miles a year for the next five years. This would give the current shows a long time to recoup their initial investment and, more importantly, a head start to improve and strengthen their event so they could withstand competition. At the same time, this phase out would begin to allow for new shows to open as the mileage protection areas begin to shrink.

While NARG wants horse shows and horse show managers to make a fair profit, our goal first and foremost is to making show jumping competitions in North America the best in the world. That can't happen in a system that protects mediocrity. We hope that progressive show managers and the Federation will support our push to eliminate the mileage rule. We truly believe that show managers that deliver superior value will easily withstand competition. We also believe that the sport will benefit and that benefits everyone.



**Together** we can improve our sport

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