



SADDLE SEAT SOUTH AFRICA



sport, arts & culture

Department:
Sport, Arts and Culture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Member of SASCOC and The South African Equestrian Federation

Datum/Date: 10/07/2025

SSSA

NATIONAL SADDLE SEAT CRITERIA

2026

1. GENERAL

At Saddle Seat South Africa (SSSA), we are committed to upholding the highest standards of fairness, transparency, and integrity in our national selection processes. Every rider, regardless of province or background, deserves an equal opportunity to compete at the highest level. Our goal is to ensure that selection for national teams reflects merit, skill, and dedication. We remain steadfast in protecting the integrity of the sport, respecting all horse breeds, and recognizing the effort of each rider who participates under the banner of SSSA.

- 1.1 Eligibility of Horse Breeds: The selection criteria are open to all breeds of horses.
- 1.2 All horses entered must possess a valid green SAEF passport, which must be up to date with all African Horse Sickness (AHS) vaccinations as required by national veterinary regulations.

- 1.3 Provincial Requirements: Riders must meet the requirements of their respective provincial selection criteria, including individual riders not forming part of a provincial team.
- 1.4 Trial Dates: The national trials will take place on 30 and 31 January 2026.

Closing Date for Entries: 11 JANUARY 2026

- 1.5 Venue: BE Human, Bloemfontein.
- 1.6 Appointment of Selectors: SSSA will appoint three (3) selectors who are in good standing with their organizations and the sport.
- 1.7 Assessment: Riders will be evaluated on railwork and approved SSSA tests.
- 1.8 Tests Publication: A pool of tests will be published no later than 60 days prior to the trials.
- 1.9 Video Review: Selectors will submit final scores only after video consultation of each session to ensure fairness and consistency.
- 1.10 SSSA is not responsible for providing backup horses.
- 1.11 **Definition of Officials:** For the purposes of this document, “Officials” refer specifically to the Selectors appointed by SSSA to evaluate riders during the National Trials. These individuals are responsible for scoring, applying selection criteria, and ensuring fair and consistent assessment throughout the process. SSSA may expand this definition in future versions of the criteria as needed to include other roles involved in officiating.

2. TEAM SELECTION

- 2.1 National Team: The top six (6) riders in each division will be selected to represent South Africa at the 2026 ISSEA World Cup.
- 2.2 Protea Colours (Senior): SSSA will submit a Senior Protea Colour Application to SASCOC via SAEF for the 6 riders in (2.1).

- 2.3 Prospective Team: SSSA will also select a SA Prospective Team from the remaining group of riders.
- 2.4 Team Size: The size of the Prospective Team will be determined by the competition format and participating countries as submitted to ISSEA by SSSA.
- 2.5 Protea Colours (Junior): SSSA will submit a Junior Protea Colour Application to SASCOC via SAEF for the riders in (2.3).
- 2.6 Protea Eligibility: Protea Eligibility: National Protea Colours may only be awarded by SASCOC if the competition includes participation from international teams outside of South Africa. If the event involves only teams from within the African continent, applications for Protea Colours will not be considered.
- 2.7 Application Reconsideration: If SAEF declines or rejects any Protea Colour Application (whether Junior or Senior), SSSA will engage with SAEF to understand the reasons for the decision and obtain any recommendations or revised criteria. Based on this feedback, SSSA will amend and resubmit the application where appropriate.

In cases where SAEF recommends that Federation Colours be applied for instead of Protea Colours, SSSA will proceed to submit a revised application under the appropriate category to ensure eligible athletes are still recognized at national level.

SSSA respects and accepts the final decision made by SAEF regarding the awarding of colours and will act accordingly.

3. TRIAL STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Group Formation: Groups will be formulated before the start of the trials, based on the ranking of each rider within their province. Individual riders will be added at the end in alphabetical order.
- 3.2 Provincial Rankings: All provinces must submit their ranking lists no later than 7 days prior to the trials.
- 3.3 Group Size (Day 1): The number and size of groups will depend on the total number of riders and will be determined once all rankings are submitted to SSSA.

3.4 Entry Cost: The cost per division will be announced no later than 31 December 2025.

3.5 Trial Format:

- Day 1: Full Rail and SSSA Test
- Day 2: Full Rail and SSSA Test

3.6 New Grouping (Day 2): New groups for Day 2 will be determined based on Day 1 results. Number of groups and sizes will depend on the number of riders in the trial AND the preferences of the selectors.

3.7 Final Results: The combined scores from Day 1 and Day 2 will determine the final rankings used for:

- Selecting the top six (6) riders per division to be nominated for Senior Protea Colours as outlined in Clause 2.2, and
- Selecting the remaining high-ranking riders for the South African Prospective Team, as outlined in Clause 2.3.

These scores will also determine the Provincial Competition Winners.

3.8 Finality of Results: The selectors' results are final and binding and will be presented at a GALA evening on 31 January 2026.

This framework ensures that the national team reflects the best talent across the country, assessed under fair and transparent conditions, with due process for recognition at the highest level through SASCOC and SAEF. SSSA remains committed to the development of the sport and the athletes who carry our flag.

4. **AGE DIVISIONS, ELIGIBILITY & PARTICIPATION AGE DIVISIONS**

4.1 Riders must be 14 years of age on the 1ST (first) day of January 2026 to qualify for THE SENIOR PROTEA TEAM and 12 years of age for the PROSPECTIVE TEAM status.

- 4.2 The aforementioned 1 January date refers to the year in which the Competitions for which the teams are selected are to be held, and not the date of the NATIONAL TRIAL if the two do not occur in the same year.
- 4.3 Riders previously representing the SA Senior Protea Team/s may not revert back to a SA Junior or President team in the division/s for which he/she obtained Senior status.
- 4.4 A rider MAY qualify for SA Senior Protea Team status in the Three-gaited division and for SA Junior Team status (or President) in the Five-gaited division or vice versa IN THE SAME YEAR.
- 4.5 Riders are eligible to represent the Protea teams in both the Three and Five-gaited divisions.

5. ELIGIBILITY FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM SELECTION PROCESS

- 5.1 Riders must be South African citizens.
- 5.2 All riders under the age of 18 must provide SSSA with a Birth Certificate that includes the full names of both parents, as issued by the Department of Home Affairs.
- 5.3 Riders 16 years and older must present either a valid RSA Identity Document (Smart ID Card) or a Birth Certificate that includes the full names of both parents, as issued by the Department of Home Affairs.
- 5.4 Riders must have an RSA Passport.
- 5.5 RSA Passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months after the date of the International Competitions.

6. HORSE BEHAVIOUR

- 6.1 If a horse behaves in an unruly manner at mounting, there will be a 5-minute timeout for the trainer of said horse to be called to correct the matter.

- 6.2 If the horse behaves in an unruly manner to the extent that it is declared unsuitable and unsafe, the horse will be excused, and the rider in question will be permitted to ride his/her backup horse.
- 6.3 FALLS. The fall of horse or rider does not necessarily cause elimination but is penalized at the Selectors' discretion and/or the standard bad luck rule.
- 6.4 In the case of a soundness or health problem, the officials will refer the horse to the treating veterinarian for a professional assessment and appropriate care.
- 6.5 In the case of unruly behavior, the official(s) will report the horse to the Ring Master for consideration of a replacement.
- 6.6 It is imperative that our officials are strictly committed to ensuring the well-being of all participating horses. In alignment with SSSA guidelines, officials must not permit any horse to continue competing if there is an agreement that the horse is unsound or behaving unruly.
- 6.7 This decision-making process should be thorough and prioritize the health and safety of the horses and rider above all else.

Ensuring the welfare of the horses is a moral obligation and SSSA trust that all officials will exercise due diligence and compassion in their assessments.

7. HORSES SOUNDNESS AND REPLACEMENT:

- 7.1 The Veterinarian (may be on call) must be consulted for evaluation if the soundness or health of a horse are in questioned before/after a rider has competed on said horse.
- 7.2 Reserve horses are only allowed to come into play if a) the horse used sustained an injury, b) declared ill during the competition, and is disqualified by the veterinarian, c) declared unsuitable and unsafe (clause 6).

7.3 SOUNDNESS ON DAY 1 (RAIL AND TEST)

If a horse becomes lame BEFORE the start of the competition (at least 1 hours) or AFTER the day's routine, the horse will be excused from the competition. The rider will then be given the opportunity on his/her backup horse.

7.4 If a horse becomes lame DURING participation or called in by the competition officials, the horse and rider will be excused from the arena. The rider will then be given the opportunity to continue on his/her backup horse (5-minute time allowance).

7.5 ONLY the Veterinarian will make a FINAL decision on soundness and illness, and the Veterinarian's decision will be final.

7.6 Veterinary Costs – Responsibility

7.6.1 If a veterinarian is called by officials (selectors) during the trial to assess a horse due to concerns about soundness or behavior, and the horse is found to be fit and sound, the cost of the veterinary assessment will be covered by SSSA.

7.6.2 However, if the veterinarian confirms that the horse is lame, ill, or unfit to continue, the owner or rider will be held responsible for the full cost of the veterinary consultation.

7.6.3 If a rider, trainer, or owner independently requests veterinary services (i.e. without instruction from the selectors), the cost will also be for the owner's account, regardless of the diagnosis.

7.6.4 The veterinarian's decision will be final and binding in all cases regarding the horse's fitness to continue.

Note:

Because lameness cannot be predicted, SSSA council asks that riders and trainers have a positive understanding of every solution that is offered, so that every rider has a fair chance.

Compiled by: SSSA COUNCIL

Approved: JULY 2025 - SSSA