COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS CONDITIONS 2026

Eligibility Date

To contest The Country Championships in 2026, horses must legitimately be under the care of a NSW country trainer with a current stable return lodged on or before midnight 5 April 2025, being the eligibility date. The lodgement date of the stable return will be the sole determinant of the eligibility date.

The trainer must be licensed and operate from one of the following eight designated country racing regions in NSW.

Region
Mid North Coast
South East
Central Districts
Southern Districts
Northern Rivers
Hunter & North West
Western
BHFWRA

For the avoidance of doubt, horses trained in country regions outside of NSW and not in accordance with the definition of a country area in the Racing NSW Local Rules of Racing, are not eligible to compete.

Horses trained by a trainer that is the holder of a metropolitan or provincial licence are not eligible to compete.

Horses with a stable return or trained by a trainer at Canberra or the Australian Capital Territory are deemed to be in the South-East region.

Horses transferred to a country stable after the eligibility date are not eligible to contest The Country Championships, unless eligible to compete in that region prior to being transferred. A horse that transfers from one of the eight designated country racing regions above to different region after the eligibility date, is not eligible to contest The Country Championships.

Must Remain within Eligible Stable for Twelve Months

Horses contesting the 2026 Country Championships must for twelve months after the race, remain under the care of a trainer eligible for the race.

Where a horse is transferred from an eligible stable to a provincial, metropolitan, interstate or international stable within twelve months of the Final, failing to comply

with this important race condition, Racing NSW may impose a penalty on the connections including the forfeiture of any prizemoney won contesting the series.

Racing NSW will require that owners undertake to abide by this condition.

Horses may be transferred between trainers eligible to compete in the Country Championships, during the twelve-month period following the race.

This provision does not apply to horses retired from racing within a twelve-month period.

Racing NSW may at its absolute discretion provide permission for a horse to transfer to a non-eligible stable within the twelve-month period following the race, on application to Racing NSW.

Minimum of One NSW Race Start

Horses must have had at least one NSW race start for an *eligible trainer* to be eligible for the Country Championships.

Dual Training Locations

Horses trained by a trainer who holds a licence to train at one of eight designated country racing regions in NSW and at a provincial, metropolitan, or interstate racecourse are not eligible to compete in The Country Championships.

Location and Training of Horses

Whilst in training, from the eligibility date, the horse must remain located at the trainer's nominated training location and under the care of the nominated trainer. A horse that is spelled during the eligibility period must have a stable returned lodged advising the location of the said horse. The spelling of a horse will not render the horse ineligible for The Country Championships, provided it is immediately returned to the original nominated trainer when returning from the spell and the stable return amended accordingly.

Location of Horse Prior to Final

Subsequent 29 March 2026, all horses included in the final field (including emergencies) may be relocated to a metropolitan or provincial region. A horse that is found to be located in a metropolitan or provincial region prior to 30 March 2026, other than short term domicile in order to contest a race, may be ruled ineligible to compete in The Country Championships Final.

Racing NSW the Sole Judge of Eligibility

Racing NSW will be the sole judge to determine eligibility to compete in The Country Championships.

Qualifying Race Conditions

The Country Championships qualifying races will be Class 5 set weight plate races.

Races in the qualifying series will be restricted to horses Class 5 and below that have had had 20 or less race starts prior to contesting the regional qualifying race.

Weight Conditions

Country Championships Qualifiers will be run under the following weight scale:

59.0kg Class 5
57.5kg Class 4
56.0kg Class 3 or below

Fillies and mares will receive an allowance of 2kg from the above scale. There shall be no age allowance applied.

Ballot Conditions

In the event of a ballot being required for a race in the qualifying series, the order shall be as follows:

1. First eliminated shall be the lowest benchmarked runner(s) in ascending order;
2. If benchmarks are equal, the highest average prizemoney over the previous five starts;
3. No ballot exemptions are recognised.

Apprentice Claims

Apprentices cannot claim.

Eligibility for Qualifying Series

To be eligible for each regional race the horse must be trained by a trainer domiciled and licenced in that particular region. Horses cannot contest more than one qualifying race, or a race outside the region in which the horse is trained, with the exception of horses from the Broken Hill and Far West Racing Region as outlined below.

Wild Card Races Eligibility

To be eligible for the Wild Card races, horses need to have:

- Contested the regional qualifying race in the region in which they are trained, and not qualified for the Final; or
- Nominated and accepted for the regional qualifying race in the region, taking reasonable measures to contest the race, and without the trainer or owners in any way compromising the ability to contest the race, and been balloted; or
- Nominated and accepted for the regional qualifying race in the region and not started due to being withdrawn by order of the stewards, scratched with a veterinary certificate or scratched for reasons otherwise approved by Racing NSW.

Qualifiers to Contest the Final

Horses contesting regional qualifying races finishing first or second, or winning the Wild Card races, must contest The Country Championships Final, unless a veterinary certificate to the satisfaction of Racing NSW Stewards is provided stating that the horse is unfit to race.

Racing NSW reserves the right to have a horse inspected by a Racing NSW approved veterinarian.

Notification

The trainer of any horse qualifying for the Final must as soon as possible, notify Racing NSW stewards if there is any doubt over the fitness of the horse to take their place in the Final.

Alteration of Conditions

Racing NSW may at its absolute discretion alter any conditions or other elements of The Country Championships qualifying series at any time.

Series

The qualifying series of races will be staged regionally, one each in each Country Regions as follows:

Northern Rivers Region
Mid North Coast Region
Hunter & North West Region
Central Districts Region (excluding Dubbo)
Western Region (including Dubbo)
South East Region (including ACT)
Southern Districts Region

Horses trained in the Broken Hill and Far West Racing Association are able to compete in any association qualifying race but once they compete in a heat then they are ineligible to compete in any other qualifying race other than the Wild Card applying to that region.

Wild Cards

Northern – horses from the Hunter & North West, Western, Northern Rivers and Mid North Coast regions not previously qualified.

Southern – horses from the Southern Districts, South East, and Central Districts regions not previously qualified.

The Final is scheduled to be run on Saturday 4 April 2026.

Dates and Venues for Qualifying Races in 2026

Day	Date	Venue	Region
Sunday	TBA	TBA	Mid North Coast
Saturday	TBA	TBA	Northern Rivers
Sunday	TBA	TBA	South East
Friday	TBA	TBA	Central Districts
Saturday	TBA	TBA	Southern Districts
Sunday	TBA	TBA	Hunter & North-West
Sunday	TBA	TBA	Western
Friday	TBA	TBA	Northern Wild Card
Sunday	TBA	TBA	Southern Wild Card

Prizemoney

Prizemoney for the regional qualifying races and Wild Card races will be $150,000, divided as follows.

PLACING	PRIZEMONEY
1st	$76,250
2nd	$27,250
3rd	$13,050
4th	$6,700
5th	$5,000
6th	$4,000
7th-10th	$3,500
Equine Welfare - $2,250	
Jockeys Welfare - $1,500	

<u>The Country Championships Final</u>

The field for The Country Championships Final at Royal Randwick will comprise 16 starters, being the first two finishers in each regional qualifying race and the winners of both Wild Card races.

In the event that either the winner or second placed horse from a regional qualifying race or Wild Card race winners cannot contest The Country Championships Final, the vacant place in the field will be offered to the third or fourth placed runners from that region's qualifying race, in that order. Should the third or fourth placed runners from that region not be available to fill the vacant place, the vacant place for that region will be offered to the highest benchmarked second, and then third placed runners, in that order, from the Wild Card races.

Weight Conditions

The Country Championships Final will be run as an open set-weight plate race for qualifiers under the following weight scale:

59.0kg Class 6 and above
57.5kg Class 5
56.0kg Class 4 and below

Fillies and mares will receive an allowance of 2kg from the above scale. There shall be no age allowance applied.

Order of Emergencies

Up to seven emergencies will be declared following acceptances. These will comprise the highest placed runner from each of the regional qualifying races.

In the event of a scratching, accompanied by a veterinary certificate, the emergency runner from the scratched runner's regional qualifying race will be elevated into the field.

Apprentice Claims

Apprentices cannot claim.

Prizemoney

Prizemoney for The Country Championships Final will be $1,000,000, divided as follows.

PLACING	PRIZEMONEY
1st	$540,000
2nd	$195,000
3rd	$100,000
4th	$48,000
5th	$24,000
6th	$14,000
7th	$10,000
8th	$10,000
9th	$8,000
10th	$8,000
11th-16th	$3,000
Equine Welfare - $15,000	
Jockeys Welfare - $10,000	

Alteration of Conditions at the Discretion of Racing NSW

Racing NSW may at its absolute discretion, alter any conditions or other elements of The Country Championships Final at any time.