



FREE
GIFT

25

WINNING
SHOW TIPS

From the Editors of
HORSE
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25

WINNING SHOW TIPS



Competing with your horse can be fun if you are well-prepared for it. Here are some tried-and-true tips to help you choose the right competition, find appropriate attire, show-groom your horse and more.

BEFORE YOU ENTER

1. Before the show season begins, sit down and plan a schedule that fits your goals and your budget. Do you want to show as much as possible? Then your best bet is to pick smaller, local competitions to stretch your dollar. Are you more interested in the prestige of the A-circuit? Multi-day shows can be very expensive, so pick a few that you are most interested in and spread them throughout the season so your bank account isn't pummeled with one show bill after another.

2. Attend a show similar to the one in which you will be competing to see how the event and your classes will run, as well as what kind of competition you can expect.

3. Investing in high-quality show clothing in classic styles will save you money in the long run. Beige or khaki breeches and a navy show coat have longevity in the hunter ring. Conservatively colored show pants and chaps that complement your horse

are timeless in the western show pen. Above all, show clothes must fit well—get them tailored if necessary.

4. Study the rules before show day, and call the event manager to clear up any questions you might have. Know what tack and equipment you are allowed to use and what attire is required. A member of the United States Eventing Team was disqualified from the 2008 Olympics after his cross-country ride because he unknowingly used boots on his horse that were over the legal weight. If it can happen to Olympic riders, it can happen to anyone. Don't let it happen to you! Read and understand your rule book.

5. Choose an appropriate level of competition for your ability. If you or your horse are new to showing, attend some schooling shows. Schooling shows typically have a more relaxed environment and the judge may be able to offer feedback on your performance. At bigger shows, compete at a level below what you are schooling at home to ensure a confident performance.

6. Take some lessons. Even if you don't regularly ride with an instructor, getting some feedback from a professional who understands your discipline and the show circuit can prove invaluable. If you need some extra help, most instructors will also coach you at a show for a fee.

7. Save some money by splitting trailering costs with friends or fellow boarders. If you're headed to a rated show on your own, check out the United States Equestrian Federation's ride share program at www.clubequestrian.com.



LESLEY WARD



TARA GREGG

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

8. Make a checklist of everything you'll need to bring to the show and pack as much as you can the day before you leave. Download a free checklist at HorseChannel.com/HorseShowChecklist

9. Bring a helper with you on show day. Even a non-horsey parent, friend or significant other can be a lifesaver when you need an extra set of hands or eyes while you're getting ready.

GROOMING

10. Practice your braiding or banding technique well before show day. If you're showing hunters or dressage at larger, rated shows and your braiding skills are a bit rough around the edges, consider shelling out a few bucks to pay a professional. It will make a big difference in your overall turnout. On the other hand, if you have a knack for braiding, you



LESLEY WARD



LESLEY POTTER

may be able to turn it into a side business and offset some of your show costs by braiding for other exhibitors.

11. Clip and bathe your horse the day before the show and keep him clean overnight with a stable sheet. Most larger showgrounds have wash facilities, but bathing ahead of time will give your horse a sleek coat and avoid that fluffy, just-washed look. If you're competing early, you may want to braid or band your horse's mane the night before. A stretchy, Lycra hood will keep his braids neat and intact overnight.



12. If your horse has white socks or stockings, use a whitening shampoo to get rid of stains. You can also touch them up with baby powder before entering the ring to make them really bright. Use a damp cloth to wipe away any excess powder that falls on the dark part of his legs.

13. Before you mount up, run a clean, dry towel or a fleece grooming mitt over your horse to remove dust and bring out a healthy shine.

14. In some breeds and disciplines, it's appropriate to use clear hoof polish or hoof black for a finished look. Use wax-based shoe polish before applying hoof black to seal in moisture and create a smooth, even color. After the hoof black or clear polish has mostly dried, add a coat of baby oil over the hooves for extra shine and to prevent dirt and bedding from sticking to the polish. For disciplines where hoof black isn't





used, paint on a coat of hoof oil just before entering the ring.

15. Baby wipes are an essential component of a horse show tool kit. They can be used to clean the inside of your horse's ears, around his face and under his tail. They're also good for you if you need to freshen up in between classes on a hot, dusty day.

16. If you're doing all or most of your own grooming, invest in a lightweight jacket and some snap-off pants to wear over your show clothes to protect them from dirt and horse slobber until you're ready to mount up.

AT THE SHOW

17. Arrive at the showgrounds early to get the lay of the land. Locate the show office and warm-up areas, and if there are multiple show-rings, find out which ones will hold your classes. Knowing this ahead of time will prevent scrambling later on.

18. If your horse is new to showing or tends to get worked up in unfamiliar surroundings, arrive early and ride or handwalk him around the grounds. If you're at a multi-day show, you may be able to arrive the day before competition begins to give your horse a chance to settle in. If he's a real greenie, bring him to a local show but don't enter any classes. Just ride him around the showgrounds to get him used to the atmosphere. Keep him out of the way if he starts to get worked up—don't let his nerves affect the competing horses.

19. If your horse is going to be stabled on the grounds, post your contact information near his stall in case of an emergency. You can download a stall card to hold this information at HorseChannel.com/HorseShowChecklist

20. Pack a cooler with bottled water and healthy snacks. Fruits and veggies are always good to munch on, and high-protein snacks such



as almonds and string cheese will give you sustained energy. Most shows will have food vendors on the grounds, but they don't always offer healthy options. You won't perform your best after a lunch of soda and fries!

21. In the warm-up ring, go with the flow and ride in the same direction as the other competitors. If you need to work in the other direction, let the others know. If everyone is going in different directions, the rule of thumb is to pass left shoulder to left shoulder. If you're jumping, call the warm-up jump you're heading for to alert other riders and avoid a collision. Watch out for young riders and green or misbehaving horses. If your horse is the one acting up, leave the ring promptly before he starts to affect the other horses.

22. Always have a few rolls of electrical tape and some safety pins with you in case you need to make some last-minute adjustments to tack or clothing.





23. If you are competing in jumping or trail classes, or any class that includes a pattern, take the time to learn your course or pattern ahead of time. Go over it with your instructor or a friend, or practice it on foot. Having it solidified in your mind will allow you to enter the ring with confidence.

AFTER THE SHOW

24. Having a friend video your class is a great learning tool. After the show, watch your video to see what you did right and what you can work on before the next competition. Discussing your classes with your instructor or an equestrian friend shortly after the show is also a good way to learn from the experience.

25. Remember that competing should be the icing on the cake of horse ownership. If it's not fun, step back and ask yourself why. Are you putting too much pressure on yourself or your horse? Are you



energized by competition, or do nerves leave you feeling drained? Scaling back to a lower level of competition or trying a new discipline may help renew your enjoyment of showing.

HORSE

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