

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 1 of 10

When done right, horse show grooming can be an easy and routine part of your horse show experience. There are simple tricks to keep the process smooth and stress-free for both you and your horse.

Before you advance into the world of horse show grooming, make sure you master the basics of general horse grooming. Without the basic foundation of grooming knowledge, getting prepped for show could cause a few more headaches than you need.

## Clipping

### Clippers

Before setting off to clip your horse, you will want to make sure you have the right clippers to get the job done. When it comes to selecting clippers for horse show grooming, you will need to do a little research.



Keep in mind the type of work you will be doing on your horse. There are many shapes and sizes when searching for new clippers. They can range from light to medium to heavy in size and intended use. The manufacturer should list intended uses on the package. Generally clippers used for light use or trimming are meant for clipping your horses ears and face. The heavier use clippers are generally used for body clipping or clipping larger areas of hair.

The size of your clipper blade is also important in determining how fine the clippers will cut. For example, a size 40 blade produces a very fine cut and is most suitable for working over the face and ears. Other blade sizes will work as well, just keep in mind that the lower you go from 40, the more blunt the cut and longer the hair that will be left behind. Clipper blades range in size from 3 3/4 to 40.

I tend to rely a little on word of mouth when looking for a new set of clippers. I have found that it is beneficial to borrow clippers from fellow barn mates at a show (especially when your own clippers decide to die after one ear is clipped).

Bottom line, the clippers you select are crucial to your horse show grooming tasks.

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 2 of 10

Ready to get started? With your clippers in hand and your horse securely tied, you are now ready to clip him for show.

### Muzzle

During the off season from showing (if you have one long enough) your horse will grow longer whiskers on his muzzle. This is usually and easier area to clip in the horse show grooming process. Make sure you turn your clippers on to test how they are running and to see how your horse reacts to the noise. You want to turn them on before touching your horse with them to avoid possibly startling your horse.



*www.sxc.hu user Wusse*

Once your clippers are on and your horse is aware of them, place the clippers over his muzzle with the flat side of the blade on him. Then move over his muzzle working your way around the front, sides, and back of his muzzle. The clipper placement is to ensure a smooth and closer trim than if you were to hold the blade to his muzzle at an angle.

Make sure you get all the long hairs on the front of the nose and even gently work the clippers into the nostril area. I recommend looking at your horse's muzzle from a variety of angles to make sure you don't miss any major areas. Sometimes the lighting in the barn can be poor so take your horse out into the natural sunlight if you can.

Some horses don't like the noise or the vibration of the clippers. In this case you can try using a disposable shaver for your horse show grooming to clean up the muzzle, it works quite well and gets a very close shave. I have even used a razor after using the clippers to get the smaller and finer hairs off the muzzle. Getting a horse used to the clippers (especially one that will be shown) should be a regular part of its early training program because clipping will be a regular part of your horse show grooming regimen.

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 3 of 10

### Eyes

If you look around your horse's eyes you will see some longer hairs around the top and bottom of the eye. It is recommended that these hairs be trimmed off as well in the horse show grooming process.



You may want to rub the clippers around your horse's face a little to make sure he is still calm about the sound and feel around his face. Take a little extra caution when running the clippers near the eye. When clipping the hairs above the eye you will want to place the clippers again flat side down and you may cover your horse's eye if you choose.

When working on the hairs below the eye try holding your horse's eye. Move the clippers in an upward motion, taking care not to trim the eyelashes on the upper lid.

Again if your horse doesn't like the clippers you can use a disposable razor blade for your horse show grooming with caution instead.

### Bridle Path

Next on your clipping list for horse show grooming is trimming the bridle path. The bridle path is the area which the crown piece of the halter or bridle rests near your horse's poll area.



*Wikipedia user BLW*

The length of the bridle path should only be as long as the horse's ear. To measure this you can press your horse's ear back and flat to his neck. You may also want to tie back the portion of the mane you will not be cutting, or you can simply hold it out of the way. Work in a front to back motion or vice versa, whichever is more comfortable for you.

### Ears

When clipping your horse's ears you will want to fold the edges together, cupping his ear. The first few strokes with the clipper should be in a downward motion at the edges of the horse's ear. Once this is completed open the ear up and begin trimming the inside of the ear.



Continue working in the downward motion for the upper part of

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 4 of 10

the ear. For the hair at the base, you may want to clip in an upward motion while scooping the hair out of the way.

Many horses are great with all other clipping except the ears. If your horse is having trouble with this part of your horse show grooming, you can use a twitch to divert his attention from the clippers. You may want someone else to assist you by holding the horse and the twitch while you focus on clipping.



### Legs

You may also want to consider clipping your horse's legs if you plan on making an appearance in a showmanship class. Start by clipping the overhanging hairs around the coronet band. To do this you will use an upward motion.

You may also need to trim a little higher on the legs to get some of longer hairs around the fetlock. Horse show grooming principles for clipping legs involve a downward direction on a dark-coated horse, and an upward motion on white legs.



*Wikipedia user BLW*

### Body

Body clipping is a heavy-duty and very time-consuming task. Make sure you have the time and the dedication to complete this task. Usually you will need to body clip if you are heading to a show during colder weather and your horse has already grown his coat.

You will need a heavy set of clippers to finish the job. If you try to body clip with a lighter pair of clippers you will likely burn out the motor or dull the blades.



# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 5 of 10

### Mane & Tail

Your horse's mane and tail are also an important part of the horse show grooming process. When you show, the mane will either need to be banded or braided. However, you may see horses with long mane making a comeback in the western pleasure arena.



*www.sxc.hu user whains*

You will need to trim the mane to an even length. The length to which you will cut your horse's mane may depend on your use in the show ring and personal preference with horse show grooming. If you are showing strict western classes, you may want the mane a little shorter since you will likely only be banding. If you are going to be competing in more english or hunter classes you will want to consider braiding the mane and therefore leave it a little longer.

Your horse's tail will also need some regular maintenance for horse show grooming to keep it in top shape. If the tail is generally loose and not tied up or in a sock on a regular basis you will want to make sure you set aside time to comb through the tail.

If you choose to tie up the tail, there are a variety of tail socks that you can use. It is a great way to keep the tail clean and out of the way when you are working your horse. If he has a naturally long tail, a sock will keep him from stepping on it. I have had better success using the tail bags that you have to braid-in than the single socks that you just tie-in.



# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 6 of 10

### Banding & Braiding



Usually after I get done bathing before a show, I move right into the banding portion of my horse show grooming process. Once again make sure your horse is secure because he will have to stand still somewhat for you to get his mane ready.

Banding is the easier and more common way to go. If you are showing at a smaller show in both english and western events, banding is a good choice. When you start banding you may want to have a step stool to help you reach your horse's mane a little easier.

When starting it is easier to wet down the section of mane you will be working on. Separate out a small section of hair, about 1 inch in length. Clip back the rest of the mane to avoid banding in stray hairs at random. Next, wrap the band around this section of mane at the top near the skin. Continue to hold the section by applying a downward pressure which will help it to lay flat once it is banded.

Continue this process down the mane, trying to maintain even and straight lines with your sections.

Braiding is a little more difficult part of the horse show grooming process. You will need special braiding tools and a little bit of skill to braid. You can do this by using bands, yarn, or a combination.

You want to section the mane off as you did for banding. You will then want to braid down each section with or without yarn in the braid. Loop the braid up and underneath the top of the braid and pull it through. Then use the excess yarn or a band to tie it and secure it. It will take some practice to get this right. If you are short on time and need your horse's mane braided, there is also the option to have someone braid your horse for a fee. Once you are finished with your horse's mane you will want to make sure the mane will lay

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 7 of 10

flat at the show the next day. Use a lycra or stretchy hood to secure the mane in place. Then if you wish to do so, put a sheet over your horse to keep him clean even if he lays down over night. You can now take a breath because you are done with your horse show grooming for one night. Get some sleep because tomorrow will be a busy day.

### The Morning Of The Show

A few hours in the morning before the horse show starts may seem like plenty of time, but trust me it goes by very fast. If you are in showmanship or halter you will want to use this time wisely and get your horse polished for your class.

This part of horse show grooming is made up of touch-ups and finishing touches. Lunge your horse first if he needs a bit of exercise before the show.

For my morning horse show grooming I usually start with the legs and feet. Begin by cleaning off any dirt on the legs or hooves, which may involve a quick hosing off to get the feet clean. If your horse has white socks or markings on his legs that you intend to brighten, do this BEFORE you move onto hoof polish.

I have used both spray white and baby powder and tend to lean more toward the spray because it makes a little less mess. If you are using a spray white, you will want to be a little careful not to spray the hoof or the tail. If you do have an accident and get paint where it doesn't belong, rubbing alcohol works wonders to get those stains out.

Once your white touch-ups are complete you can move on to hoof polish. I usually do this out of the stall area in the aisle. Trying to get polish on in the stall is pointless because odds are your horse will move and now you have shavings embedded in the polish before it has a chance to dry. There are horse show grooming mats you can get your horse to stand on which make it even easier.



*Wikipedia user BLW*

There are a couple of horse show grooming rules you need to keep in mind when choosing

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

---

Page 8 of 10

---

and applying hoof polish. On quarter horses and even most paints you will be able to use black hoof polish. I believe with paint horses you have the option to also use clear polish. However, if you are showing an Appaloosa DO NOT USE BLACK HOOF POLISH even if you have a darker horse. The Appaloosa is a color breed and you must use the clear polish to exhibit the striped hooves which are one of its color characteristics.

Clear polish is easy to apply, and if you mess up a little it won't show. On the other hand, if you are working with black hoof polish I recommend using a pair of gloves and keeping some rubbing alcohol nearby. If your horse decides to move at just the right moment and you wind up with a nice black spot on his leg instead of his hoof, simply apply some rubbing alcohol to a rag or towel as well as directly to the spot and scrub a little to get it out. It is a simple horse show grooming trick that has helped me out a time or two.

Once all four hooves are polished they will need some time to dry (this is why I start with the legs). Next you can move on to finishing the mane and tail for show. You will want to brush out the tail, making sure all the shavings are out that may have been picked up during the night. Once combed through you can now move on to adding in the tail extension if you are choosing to use one.

Placing a tail extension in depends on the type of tie-in you have. You want the tail below the tailbone and deep enough under to give a more natural appearance. I usually clip up the overlying hair of the tail and hold the extension in the tail about where I want it. You want your tail to hang at about the level of the fetlock and not any lower. If a tail is too low you run the risk of having your horse step on it.

Once you decide the depth and about the height you want, go ahead and select a small section of tail at that area to braid. You will use this braid to secure the tail in place. You will only need to braid about 2-3 inches, but make sure it is thick enough to support the weight of the tail. Secure the end of the braid with 1-2 bands. Now that your braid is complete, place your tail extension against the braid to double check the height you will need.

If you have a tie-in, proceed to using the strings at the top of the extension to tie it in to the tail. For other varieties of tail extensions you may need to use a different method to secure the extension into the tail. I have also found that with the dark tails, wrapping the top of the tail with some electrical tape will help give some extra stability to the tail.



# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

Page 9 of 10

Once the tail is secure, unclip the overlying hair and blend the tail with your fingers into the extension. You want to make sure you have enough hair blended over the top of the tail extension to give it a more natural look. You don't want the top part of the tail extension to be visible through the tail. Once finished, the extension should blend nicely with the rest of the tail.

If you have some time before your class, you can protect the tail while you finish getting ready by applying a little vet wrap around the area of the tail where the top part of the extension has been tied and taped in. Another valuable horse show grooming trick.

Moving on, make sure you have time to check your banding/braiding job. The sleezy or hood you put on should have minimized the amount of touch-up work you need to do. Start by removing the hood and check to see if all the bands/braids look secure and are laying flat. You may have a few random sections that need attention. Tighten those sections and give one last spray with some Quick Braid or even regular hairspray (if you use hairspray, spray some in the palm of your hand and then apply to the mane. This reduces the chances of you spraying your horse in the eye).



*www.sxc.hu user CraigPJ*

Check over your horse's coat. You may need to polish it up with a dandy brush and a dust rag. Once you have "dusted" your horse you can now apply your coat polish over his coat. Get a few sprays in his tail as well. Take the soft brush and dust rag over your horse's face. If he is one that doesn't like the water on his face and head during bath time, you can hand wash him with a damp rag.

Check over his face and head to make sure you didn't miss any stray hairs in the ears or on the muzzle. I would recommend using some sort of grease or highlighter over your horse's muzzle, eyes, and possibly ears. If you don't want the grease on your hands you can use a rag or towel. The highlighter will make your horse's face really shine in the show ring. Once you are decked out in your showmanship outfit, keep in mind your horse has grease on his face and that may not be good for a lighter color outfit.

Now that your horse is ready to go you can safely assume that his hooves are dry and you

# Horse Show Grooming

## How to Shine Like A Champion In The Ring

---

Page 10 of 10

---

can let him relax in his stall. You may want to tie your horse in the stall after he is ready to keep him from lying down. If you have a while you can tie some hay up in a bag for him and make sure he has access to his water bucket. If this is the case you may want to wait until your class is closer before putting the highlighter on his muzzle. If he has it on and starts eating hay, he won't have it on by the time he goes in the class.

Never tie your horse using your show halter (unless you possibly want to spend the money on a new one). I would wait until you are ready to head down to the show arena before putting it on. If you have to tie him with it on, I would recommend putting his barn halter on over the show halter and securing the tie to the barn halter.

Now your horse show grooming is done and you are ready for the day! Have fun and don't forget to take the vet wrap out of the tail before you show.

<http://www.stock-horse-show-source.com/horse-show-grooming.html>