

Preparing for a Horse Show – 05/09/2020

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Preparation for a horse show begins months before the actual show date. Both horse and rider must be physically and mentally prepared for a competition, good preparation will increase your chances of having a positive experience and a lot of fun.

Start of the year:

Renew your Memberships – most memberships expire at the end of the previous year, renewing your memberships early will ensure that you do not miss any newsletters or important dates.

Meet with your Instructor – to make a plan for your show schedule and decide what shows you would like to attend and what classes you are ready to enter.

Make a Goal List and Training Schedule – Goal lists help us mentally prepare for showing and give us specific items to work towards. A training schedule helps to ensure that our horse, who is also an athlete, is muscularly developed and has the proper stamina to compete.

Schedule and Appointment with the Vet – Horses that compete must be up-to-date on their vaccinations and have a negative coggins, your horse's coggins will need to be submitted with your show entry form.

Two Months Before the Show:

Check Opening and Closing Dates – Show entries must be submitted several weeks in advance of the actual show date; they must include full payment for the show, a copy of your horse's coggins, and signatures of the horse's owner and your trainer. Start early to make sure you properly have your show forms filled out.

Begin Practicing your Tests or Patterns – Start reviewing your tests/patterns/jump course, schedule an extra lesson to go over them. Practicing them will help you know where your weak areas are.

Prepare your Show Clothing – Blouses should be ironed, show jackets should be dry-cleaned. Make sure your show breeches still fit and are cleaned. Pack your garment bag with gloves, pins, hair supplies, etc.

Check Your Horse's Feet – Does your horse need their feet trimmed or new shoes? You do not want to wait until the last minute to try to get an appointment with the farrier.

Start Preparing your Horse's Mane – If your horse has a short mane now is the time to start thinning it out and to make sure it is the proper length for you to braid. Start early so if you make any mistakes the mane has time to grow out.

Book your Hotel – If you are competing far away from home book a hotel close to the show grounds. It's best to stay at the same hotel as the other rider's from your barn so check with your instructor or fellow riders before making your reservations.

The Week Before the Show:

Clean and Oil your Leather – Saddles, bridles, boots, and any other leather items need to be taken apart and thoroughly cleaned. Use an old toothbrush to reach the area's that are hard to clean. Oil your leather so it stays soft, this will also help to protect it if you get caught in the rain on show day. Your equipment needs to be as clean and polished as you and your horse will be. After cleaning it store it with a cover or in a bag so that it will stay clean.

Clean your Metal – Bits, stirrup irons, and any other metal items should also be cleaned and polished.

Clean your Grooming Supplies – Using dirty brushes on a clean horse defeats the purpose of giving your horse a bath.

Clip your Horse – Your horse's bridle path, ears, legs, under the chin, etc should be clipped and tidy. The only thing that's worse than an unclipped horse is a half-clipped horse. Give yourself the time to do it thoroughly and to do it well.

Bathe your Horse – Your horse will need a bath before you leave for the show. Grey horses may need a bath the day of the show; white socks or any other white markings may need a touch-up the day of the show.

Start your Horse on Electrolytes—If you're showing during the summer months it's important to make sure your horse has proper hydration. Electrolytes will help prevent your horse from becoming dehydrated and sick.

Print Directions to the Show – Make sure you know where you are going. Do not rely on your cell phone or GPS to get you there. Have a paper copy and map of the directions, address, and phone number of the show grounds.

Check your Ride Times (for dressage shows) – Ride times are typically posted one week before the show, check your ride times so you can make a schedule for when you will need to arrive at the show grounds, have your horse braided, etc.

Label your Equipment – Make sure all of your items are labeled with your name (or your horse's name). Use a permanent marker. It is easy for items to get jumbled or misplaced at a horse show, labeling your items helps you keep track of your stuff.

The Day Before you Leave:

Use your Checklist – Pack all of the show items you will need the day before you leave for the show. Use your checklist to ensure that you do not forget anything. Load your car and/or the horse trailer with these items.

Update your Show Binder – Check your show binder to make sure you have copies (and extra copies) of your horse's coggins, your membership cards, directions to the show, emergency contact phone numbers, a stall card for your horses stall, copies of your tests, etc.

The Day of the Show:

Care for your Horse – Without your horse you wouldn't be here! Make sure your horse is fed, has clean water, and that their stall is clean. Groom your horse and take them for a walk around the show grounds so they can become accustomed to their new surroundings.

Keep your Area Clean – Make sure your equipment and barn area are kept clean and free of obstacles blocking the front of horse's stalls.

Watch and Learn— Use this as an opportunity to watch other riders and learn from those who are doing things well both inside and outside of the show ring.

Don't Blame the Judge— The judge is giving you their honest opinion for your performance in that moment. Remember, doing well in the show ring starts many months before you get to the show ring. Every time you enter a show you are asking the judge for their opinion.

After the Show:

Take Everything Home with You—Don't forget to check and double check that you have re-packed everything before leaving the show grounds.

Unpack at Home—Unpack all of your equipment and make sure it is properly put away and clean (especially if you have borrowed someone else's equipment).

Take Care of your Horse—Remember, your horse is an athlete too and your horse is probably as equally tired and sore as you are. You need to make sure that your horse gets exercise the days after the horse show to stretch out their stiff muscles.

Settle your Accounts—Make sure you have paid for your coaching, trailering, and lease fee (if you do not own your own horse).

Praise your Horse—Even if your show didn't go as you were expecting make sure you praise your horse for their effort.