

By Ruthann Smith,
creator of Lucky Braids All-In-One Shampoo

the Grooming kit BIG hair

We all love to look at big, flowing manes, tails and feathers. But, let's face it: they can be a bear and don't always look that clean and dreamy.

The good news is the way you can achieve the very best hair is actually easy. It only requires a shift in your routine. This article will share how I discovered the benefits in this paradigm, as well as how to achieve big, shiny and flowing manes, tails and feathers that are easy to maintain.

Over the last few years I have traveled to the Bahamas to: consult for a private stable, teach Top Turnout Clinics, go to shows and (I have to share) swim with the horses. It was glorious! My friend named Baby could not get enough of the water!

In the Bahamas, I had the opportunity to study the coats of five Gypsy horses over years. One showed in jumper classes, so I braided him. I even puffed up feathers for a book photo shoot. Having professionally braided 12,000+ manes and tails, much of my life has been lived with hands in horses' hair. So, the venture into the Gypsy horse reality was the kind of thing that really inspired me.

Gypsy horses typically have an inordinate amount of hair. Usually, when a horse has so much, braiders figure they can afford to lose some. Big hair is difficult to twist. Braiding the Gypsy mane had me grumbling a bit, I admit. But, when I next returned to find only a fraction of the mane left, I was saddened.

Braiding

First, let me address the idea of leaving long braids in to manage hair. Having braided for 30-plus years, I knew that when you leave braids in, the hair gets brittle and eventually breaks, even if they don't rub their braids. Researching to develop the Lucky Braids All-In-One Shampoo, I learned why. Hair needs its natural oils to protect and strengthen it. The oils moisturize, fortify and defend hair from elements. When hair is kinked into braids, oils don't travel over the turns to nourish the strands. Perhaps you know of frizzy hair that is dry. It is the same dynamic. Hunters are unbraided every day and their manes and tail tops are wet brushed to straighten hair. This is pivotal to replenishing.

Another element to factor in is that wet hair stretches. It contracts when it dries. Have you ever put wet hair into a ponytail and then gotten a headache? That's why. So, if you braid hair when wet, remember that as it dries, braids will tighten.

You may see manes and tails left braided. It is only a norm in certain circles. In Wellington, Florida, where the top hunters, jumpers, dressage horses and polo ponies in the world winter, you'd be hard pressed to find a tail bottom braided. It is not done. And, there are plenty of enormous tails.

I don't recommend leaving in braids. But if you do, be sure braids are loose. Then, hopefully, the braids won't totally inhibit the flow of protective natural oils that strengthen it.



For daily care, pick tails to organize hair. Pinch sections at the roots and pull, straightening to comb that piece. Collect organized hair for a big healthy tail. Picking is easy and quick to keep up on, if you comb tails wet.



Twisting and combing the wet tail will protect length and the roots. Always stand to the side and close to the horse to avoid being kicked. Stand the horse square to work on the hind end.

Every couple days, give the hair a break by letting it down, wetting it to straighten and then re-braiding.

Motion

I have found the old idea of not touching manes and tails, in an effort to promote growth, is a fallacy. For one, when you do try to organize the hair more breaks because it is an ordeal. No way around that. Plus, when hair is fluffy, it moves a lot. This stimulates oils and lets them flow freely down the hair shafts. Ringlets don't move as readily as flowing tails. Even coarse thick tails can be light if the hair is separating instead of falling into ringlets or being coated with product.

Maintenance

Given that hair stretches when wet, it is actually more forgiving then as well. It has give, which is good news because if you organize healthy hair when wet, it dries wanting to

separate rather than wrap into knots. The process is easier, and you won't need heavy conditioners or suffocating and typically toxic detanglers. You just need to keep hair healthy and care for it as follows:

Choose Shampoo Carefully – Many, especially older ones, are counterproductive. Conventional whitening shampoos and ones in jars are the worst. Sodium chloride (salt) is commonly used for lather, but it strips coats, leaving hair dry so it is brittle and attracts dirt. You also want a shampoo pH balanced for horses. Otherwise, it will be difficult to rinse and leave a film that attracts dirt. Tea tree oil is a natural antiseptic and anti-fungal. Anti-bacterial and antiseptic ingredients don't usually kill fungus as well. They actually just dry skin, leaving it vulnerable to irritation. Tea tree oil is versatile and effective, though it is a compound and can vary greatly in quality. You want to be sure the shampoo specifies the tea tree oil is medical-grade or pharmaceutical-grade. Then, it will

effectively and gently serve the horses well. A shampoo rich in aloe vera also helps skin regenerate, feeds roots and conditions the coat.

I always thought dapples came from the inside out. But, I have learned they can be washed away, too. The proper shampoo will enrich coats and can even help it bloom in a short time.

Comb Wet – Wet hair stretches, so it is forgiving.

Organizing hair when wet, after using an all-in-one shampoo as outlined above, means long hair dries big and flowing. It will even be healthier for that.

Here's how:

- Choose a big comb with wide teeth that are spaced far apart.
- Comb feathers
- For manes and tails, twist length of hair to protect strands.
- Grab bottom and gently comb from bottom to grip, until section is organized.
- Move grip up length about six to eight inches and start combing from bottom to grip. Whenever there is a snag, work it from below.
- Organize hair to dock or crest

Keep Clean – Grooming every day is not just a matter of cleanliness. It is a means to checking for cuts and soreness. After all, if you can address a little wound, heat or soreness, you can solve issues before they warrant ghastly vet bills. Plus, dry hair is porous. It attracts dirt, which dries it out. Poultice is a mud that draws out heat and swelling. Likewise, mud and salty sweat draw out natural oils to parch coats as well. So, a vigorous curry and brushing before and after work will exfoliate to stimulate and release natural oils. It will also warm up muscles, alert you to soreness and rid the coat of impurities. Brushing out feathers will not only make them look cleaner but also help them to stay that way. Dirty hair gets dry. Keep it clean and it will be easier to stay that way.

Keep the Romance

The mane in the Bahamas was destroyed because they regressed to using a harsh whitening shampoo and then suffocated it with a de-tangler. Within a couple months, the hair got notably brittle and thin. Add to that, leaving braids in and the mane became long but stringy instead of full and fluffy. For me, the romance was gone.

For you, there is an opportunity. If you use a good shampoo and comb hair wet, long hair can be glorious and easy to maintain. So, enjoy!



Lucky Braids Products

Lucky Braids™ All-In-One Shampoo and Whitener enzymatic spray were awarded Product of the Year and Top Pick for Greys & Whites by *Horse Journal*, the equine "Consumer Reports." Developed by world-class groom and braider, Ruthann Smith, Lucky

Braids products make it easier to take better care of horses.
Find more info and tips at: LuckyBraids.com.