

# HORSE CARE MYTHS & TIPS

By Ruthann Smith

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## Prepping Manes

I call it “being sheep,” when everyone does something – whatever it is. But, is it achieving the objective? Here are some pertinent points to consider before following suit. Some may be surprising. Though, preparing more than a hundred thousand manes, this is what I know to be true. I hope it will empower you.

Turning-out a mane is largely about using it as a line to create an optical illusion. Whether braided or not, it is a means to optimize the horse's conformation. In some breeds and disciplines the mane is ideally so big and beautiful that it becomes the attraction. Other manes are shortened to not only stay out of the reins, but also to make the neck appear longer; more athletic and beautiful.

### Scissors

The adage is, “Never touch a mane with scissors.” If the mane is short, using scissors makes it fall in clumps and not flat on the neck. Even if you cut up into the mane, with the scissors perpendicular to the crest, it looks cut. When the hair does not lie flat on the neck, it cannot make the clean line to enhance conformation. This holds true for banded manes as well.

A better option is to use a large body clipper blade to tease and cut the length. This tapers the bottom of the mane, allowing it to fall beautifully. Done well, the line is clean so it looks cut, but falls to look more natural.

Moreover, a cut mane is blunt and will not braid well. Knots loosen as the hair, thick at the end, tries to straighten. A taper allows the mane to hold knots better.

Long full manes and scraggly manes are not the same game. If a horse has a long but thin mane, I clean up the ends so it looks thicker. Just like you trim your own hair, doing so will help the mane be healthier and grow better.

### Washing

The old idea of having a mane dirty



**This is an optimal bottom line. It lies flat and compensates for irregularities to make the neck look longer and rounder when the horse is in motion.**

to braid better is outdated. First off, dirty hair and skin are dry and itchy! Washing the mane is an easy way to reduce rubbing. Moreover, you are showing. Competition is an opportunity to demonstrate your love for the horse with attention to its needs. A dirty mane indicates lack of respect or knowledge.

As far as grit in the mane and braiding, if you learn a proven technique and wet the mane well, you'll do a beautiful job. The grit idea was based on lack of skill as well as previous shampoo options. It used to be that equine shampoos all stripped the natural oils and then used petroleum to add back the shine. That's what made manes slippery. Now, you can use an all-in-one shampoo that does not strip oils, conditions with aloe vera, leaves plenty of natural texture as well as reduces irritation with the finest grade Australian tea tree oil. Braiding and banding clean manes is easier and more comfortable.

### Pulling

I never use pulling combs. They cut my hands and sound terrible when they

hit the floor. More importantly, they encourage horses to resist. The old idea of wrapping hair around the comb to pull it out only teaches horses to fear pulling. Pulling from the roots does not hurt. But, if you take too much hair, it can irritate the skin. If you need to wrap the hair, you are pulling too much at once.

You may have let your horse's mane grow over the winter. Please resist the temptation to pull a lot at once. It is not fair. Pulling a little bit over a period of time is your best bet. It builds your horse's confidence and the process need not be a problem. Plus, it will not grow in all at once. If it does, it pushes the hair and braids in undesirable directions. Your best bet is to maintain manes over time.

### Training

Any mane can lie neatly on one side with a little coaxing. If the mane is on the wrong side, all over the place or split, start with training braids. Wet the mane, put in fat braids and leave them in a day or two. This will get the hair falling in the proper direction.

You want the mane to look painted-

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*This swooped line and long bridle path make this horse's ears look enormous and his neck inverted. There is only one straight line that works.*



*A cut mane is blunt and does not lay flat. So, it can't maintain a clean line to enhance conformation.*

on gorgeous, with that clean line. It is easy to achieve the effect with these daily maintenance techniques:

- **Wet Brush.** At the very least, you want to use a stiff dandy brush to wet the mane over before and after work. Dip the bristle tips in a water bucket. Flick off the excess. For short manes, wetting the underneath first helps it hold better. Start by brushing up from the base of the crest to the end of the mane. Then, brush from the other side of the crest, over the top and down the length of the mane. Long manes have more of their own weight. So, just brushing over the top should be fine.

- **Damp Towel.** This is a great thing to do when grooming or while a horse is waiting on the cross-ties. It works in three ways: weight, moisture and direction. The weight of the towel helps flatten and smooth the mane, so it stays really beautiful. A dry towel helps. A damp towel is even better. The best is a warm, moist towel. Either way, be sure to ring it out well. Water dripping could be disconcerting to the horse. Plus, you won't want him to look wet, just stunning.

My favorite part of this process is how you remove the towel. It really makes all the difference. Reach under the neck to grasp the towel on either side of the neck. Pull down on both sides, toward the ground. This adds pressure along the crest. Maintaining weight in both hands, pull to slide the towel over the crest in the direction of the mane. In this way, the

towel smooths out the hair so it all falls in the same direction and flat. Very fancy!

The mane is the icing on the cake. Well-maintained hair speaks volumes about your horsemanship. A horse that comes off a truck or into a schooling area with a clean, crisp line to its mane turns heads. With these simple routines, you can be much more effective and efficient, while sporting magnificent manes.

Details for: pulling manes peacefully, proper blade usage, choosing shampoo, braiding beautifully and achieving long, thick manes naturally are at the Grooming Resource at TopTurnout.com.

*Ruthann Smith founded Lucky Braids™ LLC to promote top turnout. Sharing best care practices and developing progres-*

*sive grooming products, she is committed to raising the bar of horsemanship by making quality care easier. Find more of Ruthann's grooming tips at LuckyBraids.com and on Facebook.*

This is not a stallion.

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