

Story by RUTHANN SMITH

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Photo: Kat Carlisle, Copper of Camelot, sports his summer coat.

With sound practices, the sun may just kiss your Gypsy horse's coat by highlighting its richness, no matter the color or season.

the Grooming *kit* SUN-KISSED OR BLEACHED?

We will never be as strong as the sun, but we certainly do not need to give it the reins, either.

There are lots of things that can minimize the sun's impact on a horse's coat. Simple practices can eliminate drying agents while enhancing the coat's own defenses. Gypsy horses have plenty of hair, which we love to celebrate. Burned and brittle does not have the same effect as big shine and lofty, soft hair. For that, hair needs to be healthy and supple. Adjust your grooming routine early, and your Gypsy horse can sport a rich coat, mane and tail all summer long.

Avoid

Parched coats are vulnerable to getting burned, as well as irritated. Most sun-bleaching is perpetuated by agents that dry the coat or attract rays, which maximizes damage. The most common causes are salt, mud and petroleum products.

Drying Agents: Salt from sweat and dirt from mud draw out natural moisture and oils from the coat. Think about it. Epsom salt soaks can pull out an abscess or clean a deep wound. Poultice is a mud pack we use to pull heat and swelling out of legs. Left on the coat, salt and dirt deplete moisture. Salt (sodium chloride) is also a very common additive in horse shampoos. Pay mind. That ingredient is a sure bet to washing away the horse's natural protective oils.

Attractors and Suffocators: While the skin's natural oils protect the horse from elements and irritation, synthetic ones can burn and suffocate the hair. Imagine if you wore baby oil at the beach. You'd be scorched in no time. The same goes for the horses. Hair not only gets bleached, but also brittle. Many products marketed to repel bugs, create shine, and detangle are petroleum-based. Instead, use products that promote the coat's resilience and the hair's strength. If you choose well, it will be easier than ever to manage hair.

Protect

Your best strategy is to enhance the horse's own defenses. The coat's natural oils protect hair and skin. Unlike applied oil, they let it breathe, which is pivotal to growth and sustainability.

The very best thing you can do to improve your horse's coat is to curry it vigorously every day. This not only rids it of damaging salt and dirt, but also brings oils to the surface and exfoliates to release them. Currying and brushing help move oils down hair shafts to fortify and seal them. Doing so refines hair as well. When coarse hair is dried out, it's porous, so stains readily penetrate. A vigorous grooming routine protects the coat as well as makes it easier to keep clean, especially if you use a shampoo that actually improves the condition of the coat. Stuff just does not stick as much to a healthy, silky coat.

Motion is pivotal to healthy hair. Just as good grooming creates circulation to stimulate natural oils, motion helps carry the oil down the hair shaft. That is why I advocate against leaving braids in. Kinks impede nourishing oils from sliding down the hair to fortify it. So, if you choose to leave braids in, be sure they are super loose and that you take them out to give the hair a chance to flow every day.

Discriminate

To avert sun-bleaching, be discerning. Some products make claims that are not realized. For instance, manufacturers tell me sunscreen in shampoo is a marketing ploy, since it rinses off. Shampoos that strip natural oils not only take away the shine, but stripping the oils actually leads horses to get dirtier. Spray on shine can never simulate a deep-layered glisten, nor rich color. Over time, some detanglers can make hair brittle, leading to breakage. Conditioners that just coat hair are not fortifying to promote well-being. Look for detanglers and conditioners that contain ingredients to help strengthen the hair.

Natural fly sprays may include essential oils, but are water-based. I prefer that to a poison and petroleum mixture. If you have the opportunity to turn your horse out at night, that most definitely minimizes sun damage. It generally results in fewer insects to contend with as well. A good equine all-in-one shampoo should gently clean, condition, fortify and detangle any coat, mane, tail and feather.

Shampoos should specify: pH balanced for horses, otherwise, they will be very difficult to rinse and likely leave a film that attracts drying sun and dirt.

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Groom

Hair that glows and moves a lot is not only stunning, it's healthy. A vigorous daily routine of lots of currying and brushing are key to a luxurious and resilient hair coat. Coarse hair has more texture and dries out easily. Curry, curry, curry to maintain a deep color and glimmer. A sound daily grooming routine has a ripple effect on your horse's health.

Soft brushing and toweling facial skin makes it shine, indicating its natural defenses are in full force. If needed, human sunscreen can prevent pink muzzles from burning.

Manes, tails and feathers can be easiest to keep full and flowing if you use a good all-in-one shampoo and comb hair when wet. For manes and tails, twist the length and hold the bottom to protect roots. Then, comb from the bottom to your grip as you work your way to the base. When it dries, hair will want to separate instead of make ringlets. Therefore, it will be easier to maintain as well as move lots, pulling oils down the shaft as it does. So, hair is not only more beautiful, it also easier to maintain.

Gloat

Rich coats and full, flowing hair turn heads. They make us smile and relish the gorgeous Gypsy horses in our lives. No one likes to admit that his or her horse is sun-bleached. Now it may not need to be true! Take these tips to heart and you will have some leverage. Instead of bleaching, let the sun ensure that your horse glistens!

Ruthann Smith, developed Lucky Braids to promote Top Turnout™. Lucky Braids™ All-In-One Shampoo and Enzymatic Spray, were awarded Product of the Year and Top Pick for Greys & Whites by *Horse Journal*, the equine version of *Consumer Reports*. Lucky Braids Handy Salve has yielded unprecedented results. Learn more about how to make quality care easier at: TopTurnout.com and on Facebook.



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