

Top Turnout

Big Hearts Win

Proper presentation shows a horse to be very healthy, comfortable and willing. If you look well prepared, the judge will believe you, at least for the important first few strides. So, if you want to get the judge's attention, you need a naturally healthy coat and well-fitted tack on a quiet, confident horse or pony.

Here are common errors and best care practices for earning the judge's respect:

Hair and Skin Shine

There is nothing like the real thing. No shine agent is going to give the deeply layered shine that speaks volumes about nutrition, daily grooming and coat care products. Instead of stripping or suffocating, a good all-in-one shampoo should be pH balanced for horses, conditioning and detangling (comb tails wet). Healthy coats are even easier to keep clean! Since they are not dry and porous, dirt does not stick as readily and stains don't penetrate.

Inside ears and around eyes and muzzles will sport big shine if you just vigorously soft brush and towel the skin daily. There is no need to buy or manage stuff to make skin shine. Those products are typically toxic and/or attract drying sun and dirt. So, they are not good for the horses. Just let skin be healthy. Good grooming is most successful at achieving the glow.

Eyelashes

Long hairs around eyes are feelers that keep a horse from banging his head at night. I understand cutting them is a norm in some circles. However, judges love horses. They respect when you make choices for the horse's benefit. So, make sure your horse is

well cared for and prepared. I never cut long lashes, regardless peer pressure. Safety first.

Ears

Wipe the inside of your horse's ears routinely. Use a slightly damp towel or the like to clean the inside. You never want anything to drip in the ear. If you keep up on the ears, there will be no gunk and the skin will shine. Plus, the friction will exfoliate to help natural oils enrich, shine and protect the skin.

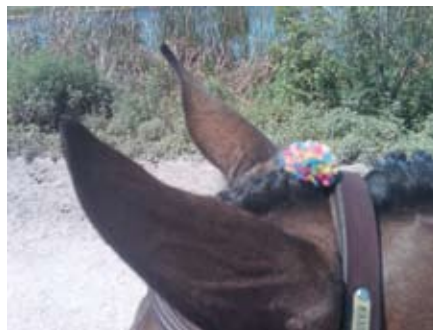


Photo: LuckyBraids.com

This image demonstrates shortening a bridlepath. This one was trimmed to sit under the halter. The crownpiece fits forward of that. A better trim would be cut only under the crownpiece. The pom-pom shown here was special for Easter.

BridlePaths

Bridlepaths do two things: they help organize hair and can refine throatlatches. Generally, your best bet is to trim the bridle path to only be about an inch wide, sitting just under the bridle's crownpiece, which is a bit ahead of where the halter rests. In these instances, the longer straight bottomline of

the mane thins the throatlatch to make the neck and head appear more attractive.

Exceptions can include long mane breeds and some western horses. With long manes, a slightly longer bridlepath can highlight the throatlatch for refinement. Western horsemen also aim to make the throat and head more refined with a longer bridlepath to leave more focus on that part of the neck. For me, the long line a properly crafted mane is often more effective. However, tradition rules here.

If a huge forelock needs to be braided, don't pull it. The tuft will never look right. Simply trim the bridlepath further up the backside of the poll but not to the top of it.

Manes

A straight line looks longer than a jagged one. Shortened manes, whether worn pulled, braided or banded, are about effectively creating the optical illusion of the neck being longer and perhaps rounder. Compensating for changes in the topline as well as the hairline, a clean line enhances conformation. The effect makes the neck look longer.

Keep in mind that a blunt mane can't maintain the clean line throughout the day's activities. Down or banded, it will never lie flat against the neck for that painted-on look. Also, braids will loosen as the ends of a blunt mane will fight to straighten and thereby loosen braids.

Full manes are valued for their volume. However, even the most cautious conventional wisdom does not promote the healthiest hair and growth. Braiding 12,000 manes and tails, I have given this a lot of thought. There is an easier way and it makes for the biggest manes.



Photo: LuckyBraids.com

Whether worn down, braided or banded, a shortened mane should maintain a clean bottom line all day. The resulting optical illusion enhances conformation by lengthening the neck and refining the throatlatch.

Tails

Fake tails are largely unnecessary. Wigs have become a norm due to prevailing tail care myths. There is a sounder means to promote full tails naturally. However, it is not yet widely known.

Heels

Scratches are preventable. Your best defense is to only put bone-dry legs into stalls. To prevent the crud, which is a fungus, keep heels clean and dry. Damp skin is soft and gets microabrasions from bedding and footing. Fungus enters and crud ensues. Dry legs will stay healthier.

Most medicated and antibacterial shampoos parch skin, leaving it vulnerable. An all-in-one shampoo should gently kill fungus as well as fortify, leaving heels more resilient.



Photo: LuckyBraids.com

Almost every horse could have a naturally full tail. However, even the most cautious and deliberate conventional wisdom inadvertently prevents them.

Hooves

Sure, good feet look attractive with some shine. However, applying hoof oil as the horse enters the ring only makes dirt stick. Hoof paint seals hooves, drying them out.

It's easy to achieve shiny and clean hooves without detriment to their condition. The trick is when and how much. Almost any hoof dressing will do. In the barn, as if applying shoe polish, fold up a piece of paper towel into a small pad. Put a little dressing on that and wipe onto the shell of clean hooves. Remove any excess. Let that sit as you finish tacking up.

At the in-gate, knock dirt off the hooves. I like to use a small medium dandy brush. Avoid scratching damp heels with bristles. Now you can enter with hooves that sport a light, healthy shine and stay clean.

Tack Fitting Tack

Well-fitted equipment is a must. In order to be willing and able, a horse can't be distracted by equipment. Could you concentrate on working if it was suffocating or pinching you?

Throatlatches need to be loose enough to easily fit a full fist. Otherwise, it constricts



Photo: LuckyBraids.com

Nosebands should not constrict breathing nor rub the cheekbone.

the horse's wind capacity and ability to bend.

Saddle pads should be pulled way up into the pommel of the saddle. This keeps it from constricting movement. Leaving lots of room above the withers allows the animal to use his shoulders freely and stretch the neck comfortably enough to do its job well.

Bits should never hit horses in the teeth. Generally, an even two to three wrinkles on each side of the mouth is the proper adjustment.

Nosebands that constrict the nostrils, hence breathing, only make horses panic and resist. Rubbing the point of the cheekbone is also painful and distracting.

Attitude Willingness

What happens in the ring has everything to do with how the horse is handled in the barn. There, its worldview is established. If the experience in the barn is wrought with harried chaos and unexpected reprimanding, the horse can't have its head on straight. Success requires handling a horse in a way that makes it easy for your partner to do the right thing. Your bringing a steady clear energy to the equation is pivotal. If you are disorganized and hurried, all the horse knows is there is a problem. So, manage your time well. Keep a routine and be quiet



Ruthann Smith founded Lucky Braids™ to raise the bar of horsemanship by making quality care easier. Find more best care practices and the award-winning Top Turnout™ All-In-One Shampoo, Enzymatic Whitener Spray and Handy Salve at LuckyBraids.com.

The Grooming Resource

Find details of best care practices for achieving: big tails naturally, easy-to-clean coats, healthy heels, manes that maintain a clean bottom line all day, as well as, many more handy tips at: TopTurnout.com.

Suggested reading:

- Tall Tails
- White Lies
- Nix Scratches
- Prepping Manes
- Peaceful Pulling
- Pulling Demystified
- Buff Braiding
- Big Hair
- Shampoo



Photo: LuckyBraids.com

Best care practices make quality care easier.

inside yourself. You want the horse to feel confident all its needs will always be met and that it is able to its job well. Then, it can relax and look to please you.

Results

Quality care and handling on a daily

basis is not only easier, it also sets your horse sound of body and mind.

Pay attention to its needs every day. As a result, you'll be able to enjoy the process and many benefits of top turnout. After all... big hearts win.