

# Safekeeping

## Daily Practices to Avert Injuries

### Bathing Faces

By Ruthann Smith  
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Do you know that bathing faces can be a matter of life and death? I personally know two horses that have died from being sprayed in the face. Dead. And not pretty... One horse at Spruce Meadows resisted, flipped over and got a metal spike through his head. A Grand Prix horse in Wellington stepped back and slipped, breaking his hip and rupturing an artery – as broken pelvises are apt to do.

Horses resist for good reason. Water in their ears is unhealthy. Plus, it is traumatic. How would you like water forced at your face? Besides, why would you get the horse supple in the morning and then tense him all up with something like the hose? Thing is, horses let you know spraying the face is problematic. So, be a keen horseman and listen well. Never spray a horse in the face.

It is important to keep faces clean, however. Otherwise, the hair falls out. And, crusty faces can't be comfortable. Grooming before and after work with a rubber mitt, brush and towel does wonders. There are also easy and relaxing ways to bathe faces:

A warm damp towel is the easiest solution. Fold the towel so it does not flap, and rub vigorously. The heat and dampness will pull out the salt and dirt. Horses love this.

Rinsing with a sponge works well, but water may run down your arm. Just wet the sponge and press it on the face to rinse.

If a horse does not like its face washed, come from behind the ears. Massage therapists agree it is soothing to stimulate points at both the poll and the base of the forelock. Even very aggressive horses relax with this approach. The idea is to move the kinked hose up the neck/over the crest and then let water trickle over the poll to the forehead. There is a trick to it, so be careful and organized:

- Make sure the hose is not gushing. Medium pressure is fine.
- Fold your lead rope in your left hand, holding around the center. Never wrap a lead around your hand.
- Kink the hose about three feet from the end.
- Hold the kink of the hose in your left hand with the lead. Be sure water is totally stopped.
- Use your right hand to control the end of the hose.
- From midway up the neck, move the hose over the crest and to the poll. (Note: Horses spook if the hose is too close to the side of his face – the hose should travel along the top of the crest).
- Once the end of the hose is between the ears, very, very, gently allow the slightest trickle of water to fall over the front of the face.
- Once the horse relaxes, gradually increase

#### Positioning

I like to back the horse into a corner when possible. If the horse resists, it will tend to move backwards. Eliminating that option can simplify the process.



PHOTO: RUTHANN SMITH, LUCKYBRAIDS.COM  
This very difficult stallion from Peru is totally relaxed while getting his face rinsed.

the water flow, sure to never let water in the ears.

In my experience, every horse loves to have his face washed with the towel as well as from behind the ears. So, be careful and revel in your horse's pleasure. ■

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