

Competition Countdown Guide

Prepare for success with this countdown guide to show season.

June 2007

Gearing up for the first show of the season can be a little overwhelming. Whether this is your first year out or you're a seasoned competitor, you know that preparation is key to success. That's why we're giving you this handy guide to help you get ready for that blue-ribbon ride. Here's a simple way to keep you on schedule, from three months prior to the competition to the day before the big event. Using our countdown guide for everything you need, you'll be ready to go.

Training Three months before show: Many pro trainers advise showing at one level below your schooling level. This way, you will ride with confidence at a comfortable level, yet still be challenged in the face of competition. So if you're riding dressage Second Level in practice, compete at First Level. If you're jumping 3' courses, stick to 2'6" at the shows.

One month before show: Go over your show program and decide which classes/division you're going to enter. Start tailoring your riding sessions with these in mind.

One week before show: Challenge yourself in final schooling sessions. Tune up any riding problems.

One day before show: Lightly hack your horse for exercise. You've already worked out any issues the week before, so you should be prepared for your classes.

Grooming/Health Three months before show: Consider supplementing your horse's diet so that he has beauty from within: a burnished coat, great hoof condition and an ideal energy level all come from good nutrition and supplements.

One month before show: Start getting your horse's mane and tail in shape. Pull mane (if appropriate for your breed or event) to correct length over several days. Use detangler on tail to avoid unnecessary hair-pulling.

One week before show: Do a deep cleaning spa day with shampoo, conditioner, whitener, et cetera.

One day before show: Bathe your horse and spray him with coat polish (avoiding the saddle area). Clip his whiskers, bridle path, ears and other areas, (jowl, fetlock) as needed. Braid or band the mane and wrap the tail and any white socks, if necessary.

Equipment Three months before show: Inventory your show tack. If you are using your working tack for showing, determine if you need to purchase any extra items for top turnout.

One month before show: Try on your show apparel and replace anything that is uncomfortable, outdated or in disrepair. Inspect all your tack's stitching and repair or replace where needed.

One week before show: Deep clean and condition your tack. Polish silver and clean stainless steel. Make sure all show clothes have been washed, dry cleaned or ironed as needed.

One day before show: Do a light cleaning. Polish boots and gather all show apparel.

Transportation Three months before show: Make sure your horse is comfortable with loading, unloading and hauling. Show day is not the time to find out that your horse refuses to trailer.

One month before show: Inspect your trailer for protruding objects, tire condition, rust, damage to floorboards, et cetera. Fix any electrical issues.

One week before show: Change your tow vehicle's oil, check brakes and fluids.

One day before show: Pack equipment in trailer, including grooming items, stable equipment, feed, et cetera. Fill gas tank in rig.

Further Reading

30 Blue Ribbon Tips
Downloadable Horse Show Checklist