

Costume Class Tips

On Halloween or at the show, here's how to be creative and safe

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Doesn't everyone like to play dress-up? And what horse lover hasn't spent at least a few hours fussing over a pretty pony? By participating in a horse show costume class you will get the opportunity to have some creative fun with your horse, yet still enjoy the competitive challenge of competing for a ribbon. Here are some helpful tips to get you going.

Before you plug in your hot glue gun, choose appropriate costumes for you and your horse. Duos are a good choice, with you playing one role and your horse playing the other. Examples of possible duos include: Bride and groom, angel and devil, farmer and cow, Santa and reindeer, zoo animal and safari guide, and princess and prince. Of course, while envisioning the wardrobe possibilities, you also have to ask yourself, "Do I want to sew?" The more elaborate the costume—particularly the horse's outfit—the more likely you'll have to design an original pattern using tracing paper, then sew it together.

Once you've settled on a concept, take a trip to the local craft store. The easiest fabric to use for costumes is felt, which you can purchase by the yard. Felt comes in a variety of colors and is inexpensive and durable. At the same time, shop for any embellishments you might need that can't be found around the barn or lurking in your back closet. Feather plumes and boas, washable water-based paints, spools of ribbon, holiday decorations and artificial flowers can all contribute to a festive costume. If you're planning to use props, make sure you can gather them up long before you need them. Otherwise, you'll be frantically searching for hard-to-find items like a giant baby bottle or a pair of silly plastic sunglasses the night before the event.

As you hunt for the perfect costumes, don't neglect safety issues. If your horse will be wearing any sort of mask, be certain the eye holes are large enough so they don't impair his vision. Refrain from using any prop that has sharp edges or rigid metal rods, just in case you or your horse take a tumble. Don't use any item that is toxic (your horse might get the munchies during the judging procedure) or could be caustic to your horse's skin or hooves. Glitter, for example, should only be applied using glue that will wash off with mild soap and water, or use glitter spray and hoof polish designed specifically for horses.

Finally, do a dress rehearsal. The costume class is not the place to discover that your horse is adamantly opposed to wearing a Batman cape, or that he will not tolerate ribbons festooning his tail. Because horses are herd animals, if one determines that a costume class is a very scary place the event could explode into a wild melee.

With some imagination and planning, you can keep your costume class adventure fun—and safe!