

Horse Photography Tips from Equine Photographer Shawn Hamilton

Improve your horse photography with tips from professional equine photographer Shawn Hamilton.

September 2010 Extra

After judging the 2010 Horses and Friends photo contest in Horse Illustrated, professional equine photographer Shawn Hamilton shared with us some of her best tips to taking great photos of horses, and we wanted to share them with you!

HI: What advice do you have for amateur photographers?

SH: If you just want to take good pictures, then practice, practice, practice. Go to workshops and assist professional photographers. You will learn more than you can imagine.

HI: What are some of the most common mistakes amateur photographers make?

SH: Just taking the picture thinking, "OK, I got it," and walking away. If the shot was worth stopping and taking, then walk around the subject, look at it from different angles, look at the light, and the shadows, and watch for distractions and clutter in the image. Clean and simple is good.

HI: What are some of the most important things to consider or think of before snapping a picture?

SH: First of all, you need enough light to warrant the shot. If it is an action shot, you need to bump up the speed. A 500th of a second or more can stop action. If you have the ability to set up the shot, make sure your subject is clean, your background is not distracting from the subject, and try your best to create some kind of a mood or feeling. Ask yourself, "Is the image compositionally balanced?"

HI: What are your top tips for specifically taking photos of horses?

SH: Make sure the horse is clean and the tack (if applicable) is clean and in good repair. Avoid ugly backgrounds, poor-quality fences, manure piles, trucks, et cetera. Focus on the eye of the horse if it is a close up, or the shoulder if it's a full-body shot. You don't always need to have the light behind you. Try working with backlighting; it can have wonderful effects. If it is a white horse or a black horse with a white saddle pad, check your histogram. Make sure your whites are not blown out. Know your camera.

HI: Is there anything else that is important for people to know about when photographing horses?

SH: Have fun. Explore your options. Try different things. Don't just shoot what you see in magazines. Look at things from all angles. If you see something that looks interesting to you, shoot it, play with it. Go beyond the norm. Shoot in the rain, snow and wind, as well as in the bright, sunny days. Different weather produces all sorts of different light. Play with the light. Most importantly, don't forget your camera! When you are going to a horse show, a trial ride or just up to the barn to do stalls, take your camera with you. Keep it loaded with a card and a fresh battery, and always have a second back-up battery that is charged.

Now it's time to put your skills and these helpful tips to the test. Grab your camera and practice, practice, practice!

Further Reading

2010 Photo Contest Honorable Mentions
Photography Tips from Bob Langrish
Photography Tips from Christina Handley
Photography Tips from Sharon Fibelkorn