

## Perfect Your Showmanship Patterns

### Seven tips to bring home a blue ribbon in showmanship class.

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Attention to detail is critical when you're competing in showmanship. Follow these tips for maneuvering the patterns during a class.

#### Memorize the pattern.

Before your class, close your eyes and visualize you and your horse performing the pattern confidently and flawlessly. In your mind's eye, take notice of details such as: Are the cones on the right or left of your horse? Where is the judge standing?

#### Practice.

If you have a warm-up area available, set up water bottles or other props to simulate the position of the cones. (Make sure that you're not interfering with other competitors' warm-ups.) Work the pattern a few times until you feel comfortable. Be careful not to over-school your horse before the class. If you do, he might start to anticipate and make a mistake instead of listening to you. Overworking him could also make him cranky or cause his performance to be expressionless.

#### Plan your approach.

Know how the cones are oriented in the arena before you enter so that there aren't any surprises. If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

Be thoughtful about your starting position. Four or 5 inches to the left or right will determine whether you will have room to execute 360-degree pivots without swerving to avoid a cone or running one over. Also, plan where you need to make transitions. If the cones are close together, gait changes will come at you quickly. If that's the case, a cue for the jog might need to come a stride or two early to prevent a late transition.

#### Follow the straight and narrow.

Getting from point A to point B without drifting is a challenge. Stay on track by imagining that a bright pink line has been drawn on the ground to guide you. You can also focus on and aim for a point in the distance. Be particularly vigilant about holding a steady trajectory when the judge is watching you approach for inspection.

#### Take your time to set up.

It's far better to take an extra moment or two to get your horse square than to end up with a sloppy presentation. However, taking more than 15 seconds of the judge's time is inappropriate. That may seem unreasonable, but a finished showmanship horse will set up in four seconds or less.

#### Pay attention.

During a class, you are always being judged. Don't get caught admiring your new boots when the judge looks in your direction. Keep an eye on your horse, too. Correct him if he's resting a leg or is no longer square. Let him relax while you're waiting for the rest of the class to enter, but don't let him think it's OK to snooze.

#### Relax and have fun!

If you're nervous, it will affect your horse's performance. So, do your best and enjoy yourself. If you don't do as well as you'd hoped, there is always next time. For more advice on calming your show nerves, see [Fixing the Fear Factor](#).

For more about polishing your showmanship presentation, [click here](#).