

Showmanship: Perfect Your Presentation

An American Paint Horse Association judge gives pointers on horse and exhibitor turnout.

By Jennifer Nice

June 2007

The purpose of the showmanship class is for exhibitors to demonstrate their ability to show their horses, rather than showcasing the horse himself. In showmanship, the horse's conformation is not judged. However, how the horse is turned out is still very important. Grooming and conditioning factor significantly into the exhibitor's score.

American Paint Horse Association judge David Denniston, of Windsor, Colo., feels that exhibitors sometimes forget how important the horse's turnout is. "First and foremost, the horse needs to be in good condition," he says. "Exhibitors presenting horses that are severely underweight or appear emaciated should be faulted."

Denniston expects to see a horse that is clean and well groomed, and that includes the mane and tail. "I don't mind whether the mane is left natural, banded or braided, but, whatever choice the exhibitor makes, it should be neat and well taken care of," he says. "The same goes for the horse's hooves. They should be in good repair and well taken care of. This is more important than what color they are."

When judging showmanship, Denniston says that he will notice a poorly groomed horse more readily than he will a well-groomed, conditioned horse, and he will fault that exhibitor for the horse's poor appearance. "The most common mistake I see is manes and tails that are not presented well. Manes that are banded unevenly or braided poorly, tails that are tangled and in disarray, or horses that are simply dirty or poorly brushed really stand out."

Just as the horse's appearance factors into the presentation, so does the exhibitor's. An exhibitor does not want to stand out for the wrong reasons. "I couldn't tell you what the winner of a showmanship class was wearing, but if an exhibitor is turned out poorly, with a misshapen hat, boots that are in poor condition, or just an overall bad choice in an outfit, I will notice and remember that," Denniston says.

A nice outfit doesn't need to have a lot of bling or glitter. It simply needs to be professional, clean and well-fitting. The same goes for the horse's halter. The halter doesn't need a lot of fancy silver, but it does need to fit correctly.

Because showmanship is about how well the exhibitor presents the horse, attitude is another important factor. Denniston likes to see an exhibitor who is confident, poised and professional. However, he warns, the focus should still be on the horse. "One of the biggest mistakes I see in showmanship is an exhibitor who is more concerned with showing off himself or herself instead of the horse," he says. "The purpose of the class is to show the judge how well you can show your horse."

Ultimately, hard work and dedication will always stand out in the show-ring. "I respect and enjoy rewarding exhibitors in showmanship whom I know have spent countless hours working with their equine partners to perfect their presentation," Denniston says.

For more showmanship tips, see [Perfect Your Showmanship Patterns](#).