

## Rider Fear: Show Strategies

*By Patrice D. Bucciarelli*

According to equestrian sports psychologists, there are things riders can do to overcome ring-related anxiety:

**Own the situation:** The presence of spectators, judges, other competitors, friends and family, and the absence of “do-overs” all turn up the heat to perform well. Awareness of the added pressure is a first step to overcoming stage fright.

**Make a dry run:** An unfamiliar place can add stress on show day. Sports psychologist Dr. Paul Haefner advises becoming acquainted with the show venue ahead of time. “Take a drive out there,” he says. “Practice the route and become familiar with the facilities.”

**Practice procedure:** If loading your horse into a trailer rattles your nerves, go through the process a few times before show day.

**Get organized:** Haefner suggests adopting a show-prep routine and executing it in a timely fashion. “Make sure tack is cleaned well ahead of time and everything else is in place, so you’re not rushing around at the last minute getting stressed out,” he says.

**Slip away:** Show venues are usually busy, noisy places. But escaping the hustle — even for a few minutes — can have a calming effect, says Haefner.

**Redirect:** Concentrating on what riders can control in the ring works wonders when it comes to reducing anxiety. “For example, if you over-ride, concentrate on not tightening your legs around your horse,” suggests Dr. Janet Edgette, who specializes in equestrian psychology.

**Just do it:** Experience helps build confidence, says Haefner, so seize opportunities to participate. “If you show infrequently, do it more often,” Haefner advises. “Go to a show every weekend for three months, just to get the experience.”

And when you do, Edgette says, be sure to pack your pride. “Bring your dignity, no matter how you place or how you perform.”

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