

Grooming Tips From the Top

Show groomers share secret techniques for making their horses stand out on show day.

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Every top show groom has his or her own bag of tricks out of which they pull some secret technique to make their horses stand out. Here's a list of tips to help you shine on show day: For really white socks or stockings, dust the legs with baby powder, corn starch or French white chalk. To cut down on static electricity in the mane and tail, use dryer sheets. One wipe-down through the hair will help eliminate static. Rub a dab of baby oil along the bridle path to get rid of that chalky, just-clipped look and make it shiny. For breeds that show with a patent-leather shiny hoof, fill in any old nail holes with a spackling compound that matches the color of your horse's hoof. For a black foot, the color of the compound won't matter. To polish the feet, use the wax-based, cake shoe polishes to add a deep luster to the foot while protecting it from the drying effects of hoof lacquer, which can be applied over the shoe polish. When you don't need to pull the mane, use thinning shears to shorten it without having the chopped look of scissor cuts. Clippers can give you the effect of a pulled tail, without having to pull out hairs. Run the clippers carefully along the outside of the dock and down about 4 to 6 inches, just up to the point where the hair begins to crest over. Thin the hairs along the top of the tail and blend longer hairs to gradually blend into the shorter ones. Use setting gel when braiding to help stray or short wisps stay put in the braids. Wash your horse a couple of days before the show so the oils of the coat have time to work to the surface for a natural shine. Keep a light sheet on to keep the coat clean until show day. If you choose not to band a western horse's mane, lay a dampened towel over the neck to help the hairs lie down smoothly. Keep a wrap on your horse's braided tail - temporarily - so that it arrives at the show grounds with the braid intact. Apply only one coat of hoof oil or dressing if arena footing is deep. The oil will collect dirt, but the judge will know that you made the effort. Instead of using rags to wipe down your horse, purchase inexpensive knit gloves (available at most drug or hardware stores) and apply the product directly to them. When you are finished, they can be washed. For coarse tails, use a hot oil treatment in addition to your regular equine conditioner to soften the hairs and make them flow. If your horse gets shavings in its braids, use a small, short-bristled brush to gently remove them without damaging any of your work. If you clip the inside of your horse's ears, place cotton inside to prevent hairs from entering the ear canal and also to deaden the buzz of the clippers.