

Be a Horse Show Buddy

Here are some tips on how you can help your friends have a successful show.

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Competing at horse shows can be a fun and rewarding experience, but it takes a lot of work just to get horse and rider into the ring. Not everyone has the luxury of a trainer or grooms to accompany them to shows, and trying to do everything by yourself can be overwhelming.

The benefits to attending horse shows with your friends are many. Splitting costs such as tack stalls and hauling makes showing more affordable. Cheering for your friends and having them there to cheer for you can help ease nervousness and make the experience more fun. And being there for each other while getting ready for classes can make everything go much more smoothly than if you each tried to do it on your own.

Here are some tips for helping your friends have a great show experience.

Before the class Don't let your friend run around frantically trying to get everything ready. Have her focus on one task while you take care of something else so that no one gets overwhelmed. Nothing is worse than having your horse wipe slobber across your freshly-cleaned show shirt or coat right before a class. Help prevent this by offering to bridle your friend's horse for her. Offer a leg-up. Though mounting may be no problem at home, it often becomes considerably more difficult once the fitted show clothes are on. Reduce the risk of ripped seams and give your friend a boost. Or, if the exciting show atmosphere is getting to your friend's horse, stand in front of him or hold him lightly, if necessary, to keep him from walking off before your friend is safely in the saddle.

At the warm-up ring Bring a bucket with you to the in-gate. Have a couple of rags, a soft brush, hoof oil and a tail comb. That way you won't have to go running back to the trailer or stable if you need to do some last minute touch-ups. Bring a bottle of water so your friend can rehydrate after her class or between rounds. In a crowded hunter warm-up ring, your friend may need an advocate on the ground to ensure she gets a chance at the warm-up jumps. You can help out by communicating with trainers and other riders and adjusting the jumps if necessary. Before your friend heads into the ring, towel the dust off her boots, clean up any excess slobber around her horse's mouth, apply a final coat of hoof oil, make sure the legs on chaps or jodhpurs are pulled down and do a final check for dirt or shavings in the horse's tail and under his belly. Keep some safety pins and a roll of electrical tape with you at all times. You never know when you may need them.

During the class Some people appreciate any coaching they can get while others just want to go out there and focus on their game. What you may think is helpful advice may just be a distraction to your friend. On the other hand, if your friend has asked for help or is especially nervous, she may need a bit of encouragement from the rail, even if you're just reminding her to breathe. Offer to videotape your friend's class so she can see what went right or wrong, or simply to have the ride preserved. Some larger shows with official videographers may have restrictions on cameras at the show ring, so be sure to check with the show management.

After the class Congratulate your friend when you meet her at the out gate. Ask how she thought her ride went. Whether it was flawless or a disaster, talking about what went on in the ring while it's still fresh in her mind will help make the class a learning experience. Take the horse after your friend dismounts so that he doesn't decide to rub his head on her show clothes. You can start untacking and cooling him out while she goes to change.

Make sure you and your friends are ready to show. Download our free horse show checklist.