

Tack Advice for the Show-Ring

We asked two nationally respected judges what kind of picture they like to see from riders showing in front of them.

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What does the judge want? That question is on the minds of all competitors as they enter the arena. We asked two nationally respected judges what kind of picture they like to see from riders showing in front of them.

Western and Quarter Horse judge Don Burt of Portuguese Bend, California, points out that riding is a sport steeped in tradition, and riders should take their cue from that. Fads come and go in the equestrian world, but the circle always turns back around to traditional styles. He advises riders to avoid flamboyance, and to spend any extra money on lessons rather than fancy equipment.

"You want tack and clothing that is workmanlike, and you want it to fit," says Burt. He cautions female riders who dress to emphasize their personal attributes to remember that it is the horse that is being judged. Clothing that is too tight (or too loose and sloppy) is distracting and does not present a pleasing picture in the show ring. "Be good, and you will be found," he says.

International dressage competitor and judge Jessica Raneshousen of Unionville, Pennsylvania, also likes tack to be understated. She says that while overall impression is not a tie breaker, poorly chosen or fitted tack is a distraction that may affect your score. For instance, colored or contrasting reins distract from your overall look and, worse, attract attention to unsteady hands.

Raneshousen thinks that tack looks best when it matches the horse - brown tack on a chestnut horse and black tack on a black or bay. Glittery browbands or lined cavessons can be distracting as the horse comes down the center line. If they are crooked or poorly adjusted, they make any mistake more obvious.

"Good appearance is a lot of little things," she says. "You can have a nice appearance without spending a lot of money." Proper fitting of tack costs nothing extra and cleanliness costs only time. Dirty bridles or boots show an indifferent attitude that will not impress the judge, no matter how expensive the tack may be.

Not surprisingly, both of our judges agreed on what they want to see in the show-ring. "Aim for elegant simplicity," says Raneshousen. Burt agrees: "You want a simple but elegant look." Many experienced judges think along the same lines, and that should make tack decisions simple for competitors.