

## 30 Blue Ribbon Tips

**What rider wouldn't like to add a blue ribbon to their collection? Use these tips to help snag the blue at your next show.**

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If you haven't already, attend a show and watch the classes you plan on entering so that you know exactly what to expect.

If your horse is a greenie, take him to a show and don't enter any classes; just evaluate how he handles the new surroundings.

Make a list of everything you need to take to the show; then pack the day beforehand, checking each item off your list.

Have a friend or family member on hand at the show to help with last minute grooming, giving your boots a wipe before you enter the ring or just providing moral support.

Before each class, visualize how you want your ride to be—professionals find this technique helpful.

If you don't have a lot of money to spend on show clothes, stick to classic colors and avoid flamboyant trends.

Dress up your everyday tack by using a special pad or blanket reserved only for show.

Teach your horse to trailer load confidently, well before an event. Show morning is no time to discover that your horse hates straight loads or won't travel alone.

If your discipline calls for show-day braiding or banding, start practicing well ahead of time, or hire an expert to do the job for you.

Bathe your horse for the show, and then cover him up for the night with a sheet/blanket; add a stretchy hood if you've braided or banded. If he has white stockings, protect his legs in standing wraps, too.

School one level higher than you show. That way you can compete with confidence, even when nerves and distractions might get in the way.

Give yourself—and your horse—plenty of time before your classes start to get accustomed to the showgrounds.

Know how your horse behaves in the company of others. If he is unruly, it's probably not time to show yet.

Warm your horse up, but don't burn him out. Save his best energy for the actual class.

Don't school your horse in gadgets and then expect him to perform in the show-ring without them.

Clean your tack the day before the show: Make sure it's in tip-top shape, and polish any silver.

Know what the show-ring turnout requirements are, and make sure you comply. Poor turnout shows lack of respect to the judge.

If your horse is having a meltdown in a rail class, head to the center of the ring and just stand quietly. Better to chalk it up to experience than create a dangerous situation.

Some disciplines have strict rules and regulations about equipment. Study your rulebook closely to be sure that your tack is "legal."

Warm-up ring etiquette: Pass left shoulder to left shoulder; if you're working at a faster pace, stay well to the inside. Keep your eyes on horses that are circling or changing direction.

Hunters and jumpers: In the warm-up ring, call "heads up" on the fence you're jumping.

Hunt-seat riders: Attach your entry number on your back by threading a black shoelace through the number, then through your coat's last buttonhole; tie off and hide the bow under your coat.

Western riders: Affix your number to your blanket with safety pins, decorative blanket conchos or a number holder.

At home, practice any special tests that you think might be added to your classes, such as riding without stirrups, sitting the extended trot or executing a figure-eight.

Never hold a class up; you could be disqualified. If you are making a quick tack change, or have classes running simultaneously, have someone inform the show steward immediately.

If you're new to showing, pay your trainer a rail fee to coach you for the day.

Dressage riders: Memorize your tests even if you have a caller. Practice the tests in your arena on foot during the weeks leading up to the show.

Your day isn't done just because your classes are over. Attend to your horse's needs before relaxing with friends.

Ask a show steward if you can see the judge's scorecard or sheet to gain a greater understanding on how he or she pins a class.

Don't forget to close out your check before leaving the showgrounds!

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