

Secrets of the Horsekeeping Housewife

By Cindy Hale

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Sometimes when I step outside my immediate neighborhood, away from the bridle paths and the pick-up trucks adorned with AQHA and APHA bumperstickers, I feel alone. Almost alienated. And then, when I least expect it, I'll cross paths with another horsewoman who's trying desperately to blend in, yet whose mannerisms and comments give her away. Such an instance happened yesterday.

I was in Target—don't we all buy our barn t-shirts there?—shopping for pajamas. I like the soft, stretchy ones with the drawstring waists. Yet they also have to be a particular color like heather gray or navy, or of some kind of wild print. That's not because I'm especially fond of those colors. It's because it takes me a while to get up and going in the morning. Don't tell anyone, but I often stumble outside just after dawn, half-awake, and toss hay to Joey while still I'm wearing my pajamas. And I'll also admit that I often clean Joey's stall in those very same pajamas, although I do step out of my slippers and don my muck boots. (Well, most of the time). So you see, I can't have some foo-foo pink or daffodil yellow PJ's. They just wouldn't work. Alfalfa flakes and shavings stand out like exclamation points on those pastels. It'd be too obvious to Ron that his demure wife had been shoveling horse manure in the very same clothes she sleeps in.

So there I was, perusing the pajamas when I struck up a conversation with another woman who was also picking through the PJ's. Without any prompting, she volunteered this: "I have to have a dark color so it doesn't show the dirt. Lots of times I clean the horse corrals in my pajamas."

"You do?" I gushed. "So do I!"

And then we both started laughing over the fact that sometimes we were really naughty and didn't bother to wash our pajamas immediately afterward. Once in a while—wouldn't our mothers and our husbands just die—we wear the same pajamas again! The two of us stood there and snickered like a couple of tarnished angels.

That was a moment of true revelation. Apparently there are other horsewomen out there, walking among the civilians. I just had to learn to be more observant in order to recognize them. After giving it some thought, I've come up with five other ways to distinguish the horsekeeping housewife from non-horse afflicted women:

1. At the grocery store she buys that really big bag of carrots. And it's not because she's brewing up a cauldron of stew.
2. Cosmetics? That would be lip gloss.
3. She owns more pairs of above-the-ankle white gym socks than the average male high school athlete.
4. She's totally noncommittal about her own hair color. Yet she hoards every box of Lady Clairol's Warm Espresso for those occasions when she needs to reconstitute her brown gelding's sunbleached coat right before the big weekend horse show.
5. When she gives her husband a gift card to the local home improvement store, she has ulterior motives. It's not so he can buy some new tool he covets. It's because she has a whole list of barn repairs.

Now that you know what to look for, keep your eye out for the shy, somewhat camouflaged horsekeeping housewife. She's out there, among the native inhabitants. If you want to know where to find her, you might start looking in the pajama department.

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