

*STOCK HORSE
PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION
With Julie Wardell*

It takes about six weeks to prepare a horse for competition.

The following six points in show preparation are vital if you wish to be competitive in the show ring:

1. *Worming*
2. *Feeding*
3. *Shoeing and or corrective hoof care if necessary*
4. *Rugging*
5. *Tail care*
6. *Training*

Stand back and take stock of your horse.

What sort of condition is he in?

Six weeks before our first show most of our show horses are stabled, but I can prepare a horse for the show ring just as well, but not quite as easily, in the paddock.

To have your horse in show condition he has to shine from within. To reach this goal your horse must be 100% healthy.

1. **WORMING**

The first thing we do when we bring a horse in for show preparation is to give him a worm drench.

2. **FEEDING**

After worming, a feeding programme should be worked out.

There are many products on the market today that will suit your particular horse.

Read the label on the bag - check to see if the product within contains ingredients that will give you what your horse requires.

We find that good hay in generous amounts will bulk him out.

Specially prepared oil products or canola oil daily will help to produce a shiny coat.

After about four weeks your horse will start to look and feel pretty good. If you find he is starting to get a bit above himself and becoming a bit of a handful under saddle then it's time to reduce his rations.

3. HOOF CARE

Shoeing an/or corrective hoof care if necessary.

Get your horse's feet in good order.

Regular shoeing will do this.

If you are showing a young horse, have a critical look at his legs and the way he places his feet. He may need corrective trimming.

In the six weeks you have given yourself for his preparation, with corrective trimming you should be able to have him placing his feet and tracking correctly.

It's a good idea to have the horse's feet trimmed or shod at least a week before your event thus avoiding any chance of tenderness.

4. RUGGING YOUR HORSE

First thing to do before you rug your horse is to give him a wash.

A correct fitting rug should not rub your horse anywhere. Make sure you have the right size for him. Horses are measured from the centre of their chest to their rump. So if your horse takes a 5'9" rug, then you will see that when you put a tape measure to the points I just mentioned, it will be 5'9".

Even so, some rugs will still rub so keep a watchful eye on the places that are most likely to rub. These are - chest, shoulder, wither. We find that rugs with a pleat on the shoulder help reduce rubbing as will a satin lined bib. If you have a front strap that rubs, just get an old woollen sock and cut the toe out of it and threadle the strap through it.

We use hoods with our rugs, but combos may be used. If your horse is out in the sun during the day his colour will fade and his coat will dry out in the places he is not covered.

Wash your rugs when they get dirty or sweaty.

5. TAIL CARE

How bad does a tatty tail look?

I know you will probably think that tail care is not necessary but it makes all the difference in your overall presentation.

Step back and have a look at the shape of your horse.

If he is a long barrelled horse then you would cut his tail about hock length so that it gives a shorter length in his appearance.

A short barreled horse requires a longer tail that will give the impression of a longer horse. His tail should be trimmed midway between hock and fetlocks.

The easiest way to keep your horse's tail clean and undamaged is to have a tail bag sewn into his rug. Another way is to place a stocking over a clean plaited tail.

6. TRAINING

Don't leave it to the day before the show to introduce your horse to electric clippers.

During your show preparation you should get your horse used to the sound and feel of electric clippers. It's so much easier when it comes to the day before the show to clip up a horse unafraid of the clippers.

Having a horse stabled, rugged and fed won't get him conditioned. Regular exercise is necessary to get nice muscle tone.

If you are planning on doing the led classes then you should have your horse fully trained for these events. Your horse should be obedient, quiet, walk on or trot on and stop when asked. He should also stand without fidgeting, and get used to people walking around him like a judge would do. This all takes time, but it is time well spent.

Young horses are prone to getting splints so I would recommend to those of you with young horses to get yourselves into the habit of putting leg guards on your horse before you ride or lunge them.

THE DAY BEFORE THE SHOW:

TRIMMING:

With your electric clippers, trim mane, legs, face, ears. Socks, stockings or blazes can be enhanced by a light trim (this may be done a few days before the show).

A grooming razor is probably the best for trimming hair around nose and muzzle.

Trim tail carefully. A little bit at a time is better than too much too soon.

WASHING:

Thoroughly shampoo the horse's body and tail. There are many shampoos available now that are specific to your horse's colour - these do work and can enhance his natural colour.

For the white parts I use shampoo for white horses.

Condition the mane, tail and forelock.

After rinsing out the shampoo and conditioner, scrape the horse down and then spray finishing polish all over the body and through the tail and forelock. The polish helps untangle the tail hair. After spraying on the polish, sponge the horse to get good coverage.

Rug your horse up with clean rugs, hood and tail bag. If you have lightweight leggings, put them on too. This will save time in the morning on the day of the show if you have clean legs to start with.

Before you go to bed check what time your first class is on and make sure you allow yourself plenty of time to present both yourself and your horse to perfection.

Have your gear polished and clothes ready for the morning.

Check your grooming box to make sure you have everything you need.

DAY OF THE SHOW:

Get up early! Get your horse fed and watered before breakfast! Don't dawdle and chat!

First thing is to groom with a stiff brush and sponge off any dirty patches that may have occurred during the night. Follow up with a soft body brush. Brush tail thoroughly.

Cover-up any blemishes as best as you can.

Make-up will enhance the horse's appearance providing you use it sparingly.

Paint hooves on top, backs, and underneath. Also put a dab of black on the chestnuts on the horse's legs.

Cover your horse up with rug, hood and tail bag. Keep him out of the mud or dust.

Get yourself dressed now, taking care to look as presentable as your horse.

Take a bag containing a soft brush, cloth and sponge with you into the show-ring for last minute touch-ups.