

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

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PRACTICAL HORSEMAN

EXTRA

CATCH THE JUDGE'S ATTENTION

Show-Day Turnout Tips

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INCREASE YOUR SCORE

By paying attention to a few details, you can catch the judge's attention.

By Holly Hugo-Vidal

Wouldn't you love to increase your score from the judges with just a few changes? Of course you would. The best part is that you don't have to ride like John French, Kelley Farmer or Scott Stewart to do this. You just need to pay attention to some details.

Let's start with your appearance: I can tell you from a judge's perspective that when a rider walks into my ring and is well turned out, I automatically feel positive and anticipate a good round. Why? Because I assume she is with a knowledgeable trainer who is not only concerned with turnout but good training as well. By turnout I am referring to the appearance of both the horse as well as the rider. First of all, the horse needs to be in good weight with a shiny coat. Next, he should be very clean. If he has white socks, they need to glisten. If it's a recognized division, he also should have his feet painted as well as his mane and tail neatly braided. He should be clean under his tail as well—a pet peeve of mine. The tack should be clean and fit properly and the saddle pad should be super white and fit the saddle correctly.

As for the rider, starting at the top, she

A well-turned out horse and rider can make a judge anticipate a good round.





At the end of an under-saddle class, head for the center of the lineup.

should have a properly fitted helmet with hair neatly contained in a hairnet, a nicely fitted riding jacket that is flattering and clean, and polished boots. Though I am a traditionalist, I do like the high-tech fabrics that are being used today. I guess it goes without saying that I don't care for bling on clothes, tack, spurs and stirrup irons.

Now, let's go a few more steps to raising that score!

Equitation

In an equitation flat class, try to enter the ring as soon as the gate is opened and show off what you do best as you make an early pass by the judge's stand. Once the class is called to order, position yourself away from the crowd. It is not the judge's responsibility to find you. Make it easy—without being obnoxious—by placing yourself in front of her. For example, if the judge is on the outside of the ring, when you pass, make sure you are by yourself and far enough into the ring so she can see you. Move your number very slightly to the outside so the judge can see it. Avoid being so close to her that she can't see your leg. You want to be seen with your horse as an entirety. When you are on the opposite side of the ring, make sure you are not hidden by another rider so when the judge looks straight across the ring, there you are! The placement of

the riders in the arena is constantly changing so you need to be very conscious of where the others are. This requires you to have eyes in the back of your head as well as in the front.

When it's time to line up, head for the center of the lineup. Make it easy for the judge to write your number down on top. Also, remember you are being judged from the time the class is called to order until the ribbons are handed out, so while you are standing in line, continue to maintain your position with your reins short enough to have contact of your horse's mouth. Sit at attention.

To ride a course, walk into the ring with your reins the length you will use them for the round as well as a plan that shows the judge you understand the questions of the course and you are confident. Wear a confident expression and don't make odd faces when you're jumping. Remember this is a horse *show*. You never want to go into the ring still discussing the course with your trainer. Be prepared before you ride through the in-gate.

Hunters

The under-saddle class results can be improved as well with a few simple tips. Focus on many of the details described above, such as horse and rider turnout and placement in the ring. In addition,

make sure to show off your horse's trot by sending him out of the end of the ring with his hindquarters underneath and his shoulders swinging. This will make him move a little better than just poking along. Of course, you don't want to cause him to break into the canter so use good judgment. Make sure his canter is even, smooth and balanced. Keep a light contact with his mouth. It's not a pleasure class, so you don't want long reins.

One more thing: When you are in a model class where conformation is also judged, you can help your horse or pony obtain a better ribbon by not only standing him up properly but by continually showing him off. Encourage him to prick his ears and look bright. The judges go up and down the line and then get together and take another look at the horses. Show off your horse until the class is pinned. Watch the judges, and don't look bored and defeated. Keep your horse looking interested as well. If he looks dull and sleepy, you could move down in the line. Just last week, we had a ring conflict and asked a Junior to jog and model one of our horses. Apparently she either forgot her instructions or got as bored as she looked. Soon the horse took on the same bored expression and they promptly got moved down one place. Now, I'm not saying that wouldn't have happened with our professional rider standing at the helm, but it's food for thought.

These ideas are meant to be helpful and not a guarantee of a blue ribbon. The rider I am attempting to help must ride well and the horse has to move adequately well for these ideas to effectively produce a higher score.

Good luck showing and always love and care for your horse regardless of the color of the ribbon! 🍀

Based out of Arbor Hill Farm in Canton, Georgia, Holly Hugo-Vidal maintains a busy schedule with her junior and adult riders as well as giving clinics and judging. With her former husband, Victor Hugo-Vidal, she ran the successful show barn Cedar Lodge Farm in Stamford, Connecticut, learning from Victor's ability to help anyone with a desire to accomplish his or her goals. Her next mentor was show jumper Rodney Jenkins, who provided her with lessons in reading horses and creating in them a desire to please. She is the author of the book Build Confidence Over Fences!

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SHOW-DAY TURNOUT

TIPS



Carol "Hoffy" Hoffman and Avenue Blue, whom she shows in the Amateur-Owner division, are ready to step into the show ring. He has a gleaming coat, clean and well-fitting tack and saddle pad, and neat braids. Hoffy is dressed in clean, neat, well-fitting and conservative attire. This ensures that all of the judge's focus is on the horse, where it should be.

The manager of a top hunter/jumper barn, who also is a judge and competitor, explains how to make sure you and your horse shine when you step into the show ring.

**Story and Photos by
Nancy Jaffer**

Your horse is fit, your lessons have been right on point and your confidence level is high as you trot into the show ring. But did you forget something?

Could that be dust on your boots? Is your saddle pad less than pristine? What about the gunk on your horse's bit?

Turnout—the way you and your horse look—may be the last thing you consider, but overlooking it is a mistake. "Turnout is what gives you the edge to be a winner. It's about attention to detail," says Carol "Hoffy" Hoffman, a U.S. Equestrian Federation R hunter and hunter seat equitation judge who also is a successful hunter exhibitor.



There are many aspects to aesthetically pleasing, safe turnout: Avenue Blue's martingale is adjusted properly and the strap between his legs is not dangerously looping. The saddle is sitting behind his withers so it doesn't make them sore and limit his shoulders' range of motion. The reins are

over his head so Hoffy can hold the entire length of them, giving her more control than if they are over his neck. The stirrups are run up so they can't get caught on anything.



Avenue Blue's neatly braided mane shows off his neck and makes him look elegant. The noseband sits just under his large cheek bone. The keepers are pinched so the cheekpieces won't get loose.



Hoffy recommends keeping your horse's braided tail neat with a bandage so he doesn't rub out the braids between classes.

"When I'm judging, I get an initial impression of the way the horse and rider are turned out, their attention to detail.

"I make a note of it, and it can be a tie-breaker. It's the overall picture—a winner looks like a winner." Good turnout demonstrates "respect for the sport, respect for the horse, respect for yourself and respect for the judge," she adds, noting that both the horse and rider are athletes.

The manager of Market Street in Frenchtown, New Jersey, where she is a partner and co-founder with Olympic show-jumping medalist Anne Kursinski, Hoffy has officiated at many of the country's biggest shows, including the National Horse Show and the Devon Horse Show. She previously worked with Patty Heuckeroth and Gene Cunningham, both members of the National Show Hunter Hall of Fame, and is respected for the meticulous way Market Street is run.

"I think people can ride better when they're turned out well because they feel better about themselves," she says. "Riding is such a mental game anyway."

Hoffy also contends that when a horse is turned out well, he performs better. Michael Matz always used to say that, too, she remarks.

While looks are important, good turnout goes beyond that. Hoffy explains point by point what to do to make sure tack fits and is adjusted properly, which ensures the safety of you and your horse.

She also advises how to come up with an overall picture that is pleasing and correct for hunters and jumpers both at the show and in a clinic. Of course, first things first—always make sure your tack is in good repair, the leather supple, not cracked, and the stitching intact.

Before getting into turnout for specific disciplines, there are a few points that pertain to any horse-and-rider turnout, whether you are showing in hunters, equitation or jumpers:

- Your horse's coat needs to shine, which comes from good nutrition and lots of daily grooming.
- He should be trimmed, including his coronary bands, muzzle and ears so there are no stray hairs. If his coat is long, he should be clipped.
- The tack needs to be clean and conditioned, the bit and your spurs should be polished and your attire should be clean and well-fitting.
- Have an expert correctly fit the saddle and make sure to place it properly when you tack up. Nine times out of 10, the saddle is too far forward, creating sore withers and limiting your horse's range of shoulder motion. It needs to be just behind the withers.

Hunters and Hunter Seat Equitation

Hunters and equitation classes are judged subjectively so when riding in them, you

want to make a good first impression.

- Braid your horse's mane and tail neatly. Braiding started with a foxhunting tradition, designed so the horse's mane and tail would not catch on brambles. In the ring, it gives neat look that shows off the horse's conformation. For his mane, make sure there are enough braids so his neck looks elegant. If you can't braid, hire a braider and learn how to do it properly. A bad braid job is a distracting eyesore.
- Keep your horse's braided tail neat with a bandage so he doesn't rub out the braids between classes.
- Make sure the cheekpieces on the bridle are properly pinched down so the keepers don't slide. Pinch the ends between your thumb and forefinger so they stay in place. If they slip, the cheekpiece may begin flapping, a distraction for you, your horse and the judge.
- Adjust the throatlatch so you are able to get four fingers between the leather and your horse's throat. It shouldn't be too tight, which is uncomfortable for the horse, or hanging too low, which can distract the judge.
- Adjust the noseband so it lies just below the maxilla, which is the big bone on your horse's cheek.
- With the help of your trainer, properly adjust the standing martingale, which has one strap that is looped through the noseband under the horse's jaw. Its placement is different for every horse. The martingale



WRONG: The browband is crooked, the noseband is too low, the bit is too high and the keepers are not pinched down, leaving loose, distracting ends. The martingale strap is dangerously loose and the stirrup irons could get caught on something.



Before getting your horse ready for a jumper class, organize and lay out your tack, from saddle and belly guard to ear bonnet, boots and saddle pad.



Motto is a jumper and doesn't have to be braided like a hunter, but his mane is neatly pulled and Hoffy is dressed as neatly and appropriately as when she rides in the hunter divisions.



Rectangular saddle pads are acceptable in the jumper ring. This one is adjusted so the saddle is sufficiently above the center of the pad and the cantle does not rest on the seam, which could make the horse's back sore.

is on the long side if you can raise it with your hand and it touches your horse's throat. At that length, it could flap around when he is jumping, which is distracting.

■ Correctly adjust the two keepers at the end of the martingale or breastplate strap that runs between your horse's legs. The first keeper on that strap should be slid forward, up against the buckle, while the second keeper is slid back against the girth. Be careful that strap stays flat

against your horse's skin and doesn't loop because his shoe can get caught in it when he's jumping. In the worst-case scenario, he will not be able to unfold his legs and could crash.

■ Use a well-fitting, white fleece saddle pad, appropriate for hunter and equitation classes, that just rims the saddle so only about 2 inches show. After putting the saddle on the pad, pull the pad up into the pommel so it clears the withers and

doesn't press on the horse's back.

■ Whenever you are leading or standing with your tacked-up horse, bring the reins over his head so you can hold the entire length of them and have more control. Don't loop them over his neck as they are when you're mounted. Also keep your stirrups run up, instead of down, until you are ready to mount. If the horse reaches back to go after a fly, the bit could get caught in stirrups if they're down.



When putting on jumper boots, start with them high on the cannon bone, then slide them down to where they fit comfortably over the horse's fetlock.



WRONG: To lead a jumper wearing a running martingale, if you loop the shank through the bit and clip it back to the bottom ring of the chain (above), it creates an opening where the horse can put his leg. This also can happen if you run the shank through both sides of the bit and clip it to the bottom ring (inset). For safety, clip the lead to one side of the bit.

Jumpers and Jumping Seat Equitation

Though jumpers are judged objectively, rather than subjectively, turnout is just as important for that discipline as well, Hoffy says. Proper turnout “raises the level. Look at the top riders—they present their horses and themselves perfectly.” Whether you’re trying for a spot on a Nations’ Cup squad or international team or just riding in a local show, people notice and admire a horse and rider who look sharp. Team selectors and “people who count notice attention to detail—the proper way of doing things—whether it’s how your tack fits or how your horse is turned out. It says a lot about you,” Hoffy points out.

- If a horse isn’t braided, don’t let his mane flop to both sides, which looks messy. To train it, get elastic bands at a tack shop and with the mane wet, braid it on the right side and leave it in for two days only. Longer than two days could cause the hair to break off at the root.

To maintain the horses’ manes at Market Street, they are brushed every day with wet rice-root brushes.

Make sure the mane is short and tidy.

If the mane is too long, it can get caught in the reins.

- As with hunters, make sure the regular noseband is beneath the maxilla, doubly important when using a flash noseband. If the regular noseband sits too low, the flash will be too low and cut off the horse’s air.

- A running martingale, which is used for jumpers and is less restrictive than a standing martingale, has two straps with rings on the end that slip through the reins. The length is personal preference, but you can figure out an acceptable length by holding up the straps when they are not attached to the reins to see if they reach the withers. You can, however, go shorter but be careful not to overdo it.

- When you use a running martingale while you’re standing with your horse, make sure the reins are over his head, which is the opposite of how you handle the reins when using a standing martingale or no martingale. Attach a lead shank with a chain that is polished, not dull or rusted.

- Rein stops, which prevent the running martingale rings from sliding up to the horse’s mouth and perhaps getting caught on the bit, should be adjusted so they

are 4 to 6 inches from the bit; the exact amount is a matter of personal preference.

- Re-cover rubber reins when they are worn or sticky. These reins give you a better grip when the rubber is fresh, and if they are sticky, you can’t get a proper grip because they will stick to your gloves.

- If you are using a rectangular saddle pad, which is acceptable in the jumper ring where it can bear a logo and carry a number, make sure its middle seam is centered under the pommel and gullet and that the saddle is sufficiently above the pad so the cantle does not rest on the seam, making the horse’s back sore.

- Make sure your stirrups are polished, not dull or rusty. More important, they must be large enough to enable your foot to easily slip out of them if you fall off so you can get away from the horse and don’t risk being dragged.

- Buy properly fitting bell boots that are just short of the ground when the horse is standing still. Don’t buy bell boots that are too big around the rim or too long. Some people prefer them that way because they’re easier to pull on, but there is a risk the horse will step on them. If it takes

some effort to put them on, they will protect the bulbs of the heel properly and keep the horse from pulling a shoe. Pull-on bellboots have a better chance of staying on than those that fasten with Velcro®.

■ Make sure the bell boots are intact before you put them on. If they look like someone took a bite out of them, the appearance is seedy.

■ Properly fitting shin boots need to be low enough to protect the entire tendon and reach to the bottom of the fetlock. Often, however, they're adjusted too low, interfering with flexion of the fetlocks. Start out by putting them high on the cannon bone, then move them down until they're in the right place, comfortably over the fetlock, before fastening them.

■ An ear bonnet should be straight between the horse's eyes and the ears should fit neatly. The bonnet should not be bunched under the crownpiece, and the ears should not be too big, so he looks like Eeyore, or so they fold over at the tips.

■ Attach the lead shank to only one side of the bit so it doesn't loop. If you run it through both sides and then clip it to the bottom loop of the chain, it creates an opening into which a horse could put his leg should he drop his head to rub his nose on his cannon bone.

Tips for the Rider

■ Riding boots that aren't high enough look hokey. When the leather at the ankle drops and wrinkles, the boots should just cover the bone on the outside of your knee. At the other extreme, boots that are too high can fold and look sloppy. Today, you don't necessarily need custom boots to be well-dressed because there are many good off-the-rack boots to fit a variety of leg shapes, sizes and heights.

■ Trim spur straps if they are too long. You don't want more than an inch of strap after you put it through the buckle. Turning spur straps under the buckle to shorten them doesn't look good.

■ Jacket length can be about mid-fanny or go to the bottom of your derriere when you're standing up. It's your preference, but the jacket should not be so long that



Before entering the ring, have someone wipe the slobber from your horse's mouth and dust your boots, including the soles. By paying attention to all of these small details, you'll impress the judge from the start with your horsemanship skills.

it gets caught on the cantle.

■ Make sure the jacket is big enough and doesn't gap to reveal your shirt between the buttons.

■ If you're showing informally or at a clinic, wear a neat polo shirt or other collared shirt tucked in to your breeches. If you can't tuck in your shirt, make sure it's short enough that it doesn't get caught on the cantle.

■ Women should not wear anything low-cut that shows cleavage.

■ Stay away from hooded sweatshirts—they flop around if the hood is down or cut off peripheral vision if the hood is up.

Before Entering the Ring



For a clinic, you want your horse to be clean and your tack to be tidy and well fitting. You should be dressed in conservative attire and wear a collared shirt that is tucked in.

Have a helper:

- Check that the keepers are still secure.
- Wipe off your horse's mouth.
- Dust off your boots, including the soles.

By paying attention to these details, you will let the judge know that you are a serious competitor who cares for her horse and has entered the ring prepared to show off her horsemanship skills. 🐾



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