





Farm in Round Hill, Virginia.

Hunter rider, trainer and U.S. Equestrian Federation 'R' judge **Tom Brennan** began his successful career winning two individual championship titles at the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association Nationals and captaining his Stonehill College team to the IHSA championship title in 2002–03. He then joined Tony Workman's training business, Winter Hill Farm, in Hillsboro, Virginia, as a

Workman's training business, Winter Hill Farm, in Hillsboro, Virginia, as a groom and worked his way up to co-trainer. Along the way, clients such as Lynn Rice helped to partner him with talented horses in the show ring. He qualified for Indoors for the first time on Dividend, then rode Gramercy Park and Purple Heart to multiple major championships. In 2012, Gramercy Park was named the USHJA World Championship Hunter Rider Program Hunter of the Year and Tom was named the WCHR National Emerging Professional Champion. A few years ago, Tom and his wife, Tracy, also a trainer, established Vineyard Haven

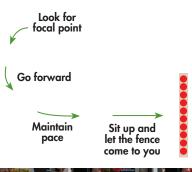
obstacle he meets is simple, forward and enjoyable to watch.

How do you produce a round like this? By making a

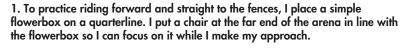


Riding a hunter round, I work on demonstrating beautifully consistent rhythm, smooth turns and balanced takeoffs so all a judge will notice is Lynn Ellen Rice's Callucci.

Pick up the Pace







2. As I canter Callucci around the turn to the flowerbox, I look beyond it to the chair. When it lines up with the center of the flowerbox, I ask him to go forward. This creates a confidence and rhythm in our approach. You can see he is perfectly straight. As a consequence, I don't need to make any major changes to his stride in front of the flowerbox. Instead, I simply sit up a few strides away from it and let the "jump" come to me.

fantastic first impression and demonstrating beautifully consistent rhythm from beginning to end as well as smooth turns and balanced takeoffs and landings. To help you achieve these things, I'll discuss pace and give exercises to practice maintaining it to a jump and through a turn to a line.

Start the Way You Want to Finish

>>TOM'S TIP

Canter the first fence of a course as if you've already cantered four jumps. Don't ride hesitantly and underpaced, a common mistake for Adult Amateurs. A winning round starts right from your opening canter and first jump. This is not a warm-up or a freebie jump—it counts. Canter the first fence as if you've already cantered four jumps. This sets a tone that you plan on doing this round smoothly and with confidence.

The most frequently used symbol on my judge's card for the first jump in the Adult Amateur divi-



Focal

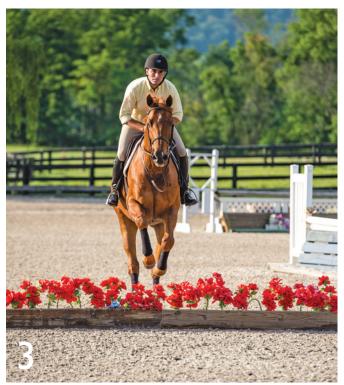
point

sion is the notation I make for slow and close. Riders tend to be hesitant and underpaced. As a result, they end up too deep and/or weak to the first jump. This makes me think, "Do they even want to jump that?" If the feeling you're presenting is, "I'm not sure I want to be out here right now," then you shouldn't expect a great score.

Some hesitation comes from nerves. For tips on combating them, see the sidebar, "Keep Your Cool," on page 6. Some of it is lack of experience. Perhaps

the biggest difference between amateurs and professionals is that amateurs "wait until it's time to go" whereas professionals "go until it's time to wait." Professionals are confident going forward to the jumps—even when they have not yet determined a takeoff spot. If you are already going forward and need a small stride increase to get to the jump correctly, it's available to you. If you need to wait and give your horse an extra fraction of a second to settle the stride, that's easy to do, too.

However, if you're overly cautious and don't go forward to the jump, you won't have those options. You may see a distance late in the approach and try to attack it. Startled and thrown off balance by this sudden change, your horse will make a mediocre jumping effort and land on the other side disorganized. Worst-case scenario: You approach the jump cautiously and then see the need to slow down even more. At this point even the most athletic horses will struggle to do their job. Without impulsion, straightness and confidence, our kind partners find themselves digging out of holes our backward rides produce right in front of the jump. This can result in an awkward chip, a refusal or crash. Even if the jump isn't



a total failure, you still have created a drastic change in pace, which is a major fault in our sport because of these unsafe scenarios.

Similar errors occur often on single fences with long approaches. For some riders, this is a Pandora's box. Feeling as if they have too much time and need to be doing *something*, they get caught up in changing things—sometimes multiple times—whether they are looking for the perfect distance or trying to straighten their horses.

Riders showing in the 2-foot to 3-foot-6 hunter divisions merely need to arrive in the vicinity of a good takeoff spot to give their horses the opportunity to jump a fence well. They don't need the same precision that riders jumping 4 or 5 feet need. Instead, they should focus on establishing the right rhythm, pace and track, and then relinquish control of the distance.

The following exercises will help you do that. You will need an adjustable horse who is willing to go calmly forward. (Although these exercises are designed primarily for riders jumping at or below 3-foot-6, they're easy to modify for all levels.)

Homework: Pick up the Pace

Begin by practicing picking up more pace. Get comfortable with the concept of going forward until you see it's time to do something else, whether that's calmly and subtly asking your horse to wait or to increase his stride slightly without changing his rhythm. Here's how:

Place a flowerbox or pole on the ground on a quarterline or on a long approach on a diagonal. The goal is to go from one end of the ring to the other end on a straight track, jumping the obstacle "out of stride"—maintaining the same forward, rhythmic canter the entire way, without making any changes.



3. In the air over the flowerbox, I keep my eye on the chair—where I want us to end up. My job at this point is to let Callucci take care of the jump while I stay quiet and balanced in the saddle.

4. After he lands, my eye is still on the chair. This helps me stay on track without losing my pace or rhythm. Again, Callucci remains perfectly straight, following the cues from my balance and focus on the chair.

As you enter the turn, look where you want to end up.

Find something specific to focus on, like a leaf on a tree branch or a knot in the wood of the indoor wall. This is your focal point. The ground pole or flowerbox should just be a part of the straight path to your destination. You can glance at it briefly, but focus primarily on your point *beyond* the end of the arena. Your body will follow your

>>>TOM'S TIP

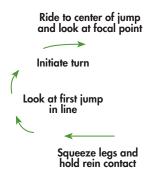
If you don't see a distance to a fence, trust that you've taken care of your pace, rhythm and path. Sit up a bit and let the jump come to you.

eye and so will your horse. If he strays from the track, don't take your eye off of your focal point. Keep looking at that point while using your legs, seat and hands to guide him back on track.

Coming through the turn, go forward. This not only improves your chances of jumping the flowerbox out of stride, but it also helps make your horse straighter. Imagine if you have a loose piece of string on a table in a serpentine-like shape. If I tell you to straighten it by pushing on either side of the string, it will take forever to get it straight. However, if you pull the two ends apart to lengthen the string, it'll straighten right out. It is the same with your horse. The best way to straighten him is to lengthen him.

Once you've established that forward canter, stay on it. Tell yourself that this is no different from any other approach. I hear so many students ask, "What do I do when I don't know what to do?" Trust that when you don't see a distance to the pole or flowerbox—whether you're 20 strides away or two strides away—you have taken care of your pace,

Maintain Pace Through the Turn



1. As I canter around the end of the ring, I turn my head to look at the first jump in the line. Meanwhile, I stay balanced in the saddle and connected to Callucci, ensuring that he maintains his nice forward rhythm.

I initiate my turn as the standard of the second jump in the line starts to come into view between the standards of the first, as you can see in this photo.



rhythm and path. All you have to do is sit up and let the jump come to you. Whatever the outcome, it will be better than a last-minute change coming from panic.

Focal point

Canter this way over the pole or flowerbox in both directions two or three times. Then go on to other things. Revisit the exercise later in the ride or on another day that week, just to remind yourself about the importance of a consistent pace, path and rhythm. Repeating these consistent approaches will give your "eye"—your ability to judge the distance to a good takeoff spot—a chance to develop. You will never get that chance if you change your canter on every approach.

Keep Your Cool

To begin a round with confidence, make sure you have done your homework, arrived early enough to learn the course and discussed your ride with your trainer. The more times you can get in the show ring, the better your nerves will be. If you are not able to show frequently, find ways to mimic a competition scenario at home or at a friend's farm. Set up a course in the ring and put a few warm-up jumps in another ring or adjoining paddock. Warm up in this separate area just as you would for a show, then walk into the ring and ride the course as if you were at a horse show with nobody talking you through it. Jump the course just once and tell yourself to live with the results. This "no-second-chances" attitude will help you learn to process your rounds and prepare better for next time.

To perform your best on show day, use the same strategies that schools teach students before tests: Get a good night's sleep, don't leave things to the last minute, wake up early enough to eat a good breakfast and stay hydrated. It can be mentally challenging to wait hours for your class at the horse show. Many riders get too nervous to remember to eat or drink, and that really affects their performance. Try to get something in your stomach a few hours before your class, even just small sources of protein, like nuts and grains. Fuel the machine to keep your body performing and your brain firing. If you can, bring a supportive friend to remind you how fortunate you are to have the ability to ride in a horse show. This is all supposed to be fun! Afterward, assess your day as a stepping-stone in a long journey, not the end result.

Make Smooth Turns

Another often-underestimated element in an exceptional hunter round is turns. Done correctly, they make jumping much easier. Done incorrectly, they make jumping *much* more difficult. If riders turn too early or too late, they usually end up attacking the jump, pulling back on the reins, hoping for more time or trying to move the horse left or right to correct the path belatedly. All of these throw your horse off balance, limiting his ability to jump a square, straight, quality jump.

Maintaining the same pace around turns is challenging for many riders. They canter to the end of the ring, lose the pace on the turn and then try to find the canter again afterward. In a beautifully smooth hunter round, that canter has to be present and accounted for throughout the entire turn.

Another troublesome habit that ruins turns is riding with "laser vision" between your horse's ears. Riders who do this usually turn first and then look to see where they are. It's like shifting lanes in a car: You shouldn't just turn your car and then see if you ended up in the correct lane.

These mistakes are especially common when the approach to the jump involves going around



OS @ AMY K. DRAGOC





- 2. Then, as the two fences line up, I focus my eyes on a point beyond the far end of the ring while asking Callucci to go forward to the center of the first jump. You can see that his focus is straight ahead as well.
- 3. As he jumps the first jump, I keep my eyes focused on that point beyond the end of the ring. Despite the extreme heat (during a midsummer photo shoot), Callucci is still looking eager and interested in his job. His trajectory stays perfectly straight while we're in the air over the first jump.
- 4. As we approach the second jump down the line, I drop my weight lightly into the saddle to support Callucci on takeoff, but I am still concentrating on my focal point. I know that he is in the best position to jump well because we've maintained a great rhythm, pace and track from start to finish.

another obstacle. For instance, having to go around an outside line to get to a single jump on the diagonal seems to really play with people's eyes. Riders tend to wait until they're past the first obstacle before planning the turn. By then, they have missed the correct turn and end up on the wrong track to the fence. They spend the next several strides correcting that mistake and re-organizing, which often destroys the jump and the flow of the round not to mention confuses the horse.

The solution to turning problems like these sounds simple, but it isn't always easy: Look before you turn. Get comfortable turning your head to look where you want to end up-before you start your turn-then bringing your horse into line with where your focus is. Remember, your body and your horse will follow your eyes.

Homework: Maintain Pace Through The Turn

By giving yourself a system to rely on, you can develop quality turns and eliminate erratic and inconsistent approaches from your courses. This next exercise, turning on a line, and the ones I'll share next month will improve your turns and your ability to look ahead.

Turning on a line builds on the focal-point skills you learned in the previous exercise. Set up two fences in a line down the side of the arena, at least five strides apart (72 to 76 feet, depending on your horse and fence height).

Canter to the end of the ring and squeeze your legs on your horse's sides while holding enough rein contact to prevent him from going faster. This will engage his hind end with energy and improve his canter. It also will help you maintain the pace through the turn so you have

leave it that you had when you entered.

present and accounted for throughout the entire turn. the same canter when you

TOM'S TIP

Maintain the same

pace around turns.

The canter has to be

As you canter across the end of the ring, turn your head to look at the first jump in the line. When the second jump comes into view between the standards of the first jump, initiate your turn to the line. As you complete the turn and the two fences line up, ride to the center of each one, focusing your eyes on a point beyond the far end of the ring.

Practice these two exercises until you're comfortable maintaining your pace to a fence and around a turn to a line. 2

Practical Horseman thanks Lynn Ellen Rice for providing the facility and horse for the photos in this article.

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8 Tips to Groom Your Horse Beautiful

Attention to detail is key to a happy horse with a healthy coat.

horse with a beautiful, shiny coat is not only a pleasure to look at—a bonus if you're competing in front of a judge—but also shows off good health and happiness. For a grooming program to achieve these qualities, an effective, simple feeding and conditioning program is the foundation. Then you need attention to detail for the rest of his care program and elbow grease, but not as much as you might think. Horses don't like to be fussed with constantly. Between shows, they need only a thorough 30-minute grooming once or twice a week with shorter sessions interspersed.

Below are eight steps that you can include in a program to help you groom your horse beautiful.

1. Feed Him Right

Produce the shine on your horse's coat from the inside out. Feed plenty of clean, good quality hay—usually grass for youngsters and a grass or alfalfa mix for performance horses. Add a commercial feed if your horse needs it to maintain body weight. From that start you can consider adding a supplement intended to bring out the best in his coat. These supplements typically include some combination of biotin and omega-3 fatty acids.

Closely monitor your horse's body condition to keep him from getting too fat or too thin. When you run your hands along his sides with slight pressure, you should be able to feel his ribs,



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but you shouldn't be able to see them or the bony processes of his spine. This applies to hunters and dressage horses. Jumpers and eventers could be a bit leaner. Your horse's topline should be curvy rather than angular with a natural crest to his neck and a rounded profile over his hips and rump.

2. Perform an Overall Wellness Check

Every time you see your horse, perform a quick inspection to help ensure his health. The first step is a visual examination: an all-body scan for nicks, cuts, lost/loosened shoes or anything else unusual. Take a minute or two to do this as you're haltering him to bring him in from the pasture or out of his stall.

After you tie or cross-tie him, always pick his feet, being sure to remove any rocks and double-checking the status

of his shoes. Take advantage of this moment to inspect his legs more closely. Before lifting each leg, slide your hand down it, feeling for bumps, cuts, heat or swelling. The earlier you catch injuries and other issues, no matter how minor they are, the better chance you have at resolving them quickly and preventing them from developing into major problems later.

In addition, take his temperature, digital pulses, respiration and heart rate. This way you know what's normal and, as with the visual inspection, can catch a brewing problem at the beginning when it's easier to treat. Checking his digital pulses around the fetlock are a good indication of what's going on in the feet. If one isn't normal, it might be a sign of a hoof issue. Or if your horse travels and competes in shows, checking his vital signs, especially his temperature, could alert you early to an illness, such as shipping fever. If his temperature is elevated after a trip, speak with your vet immediately to get a head start on treatment if needed.

3. Let Your Horse Get Dirty

Letting your horse get really dirty and then grooming him will encourage you to curry him more—10 minutes currying for each of your horse's sides. Over time, this will allow the horse's natural oils to coat the hairs, which will help repel dirt and get out stains. Even after visible dirt has been removed, spend another 10 minutes brushing your horse to bring out a sheen. A soft brush works best for this final touch, or you can use a clean hand towel and wipe over your horse in the direction of coat growth using a slight bit of pressure.

4. Pay Attention to Your Brush Strokes

Your horse's coat hairs reflect the most light when they're flattened and aligned. So, maximizing shine is all about smoothing the hairs down as much as

STABLE MANAGEMENT

possible in the direction of natural growth. The closer attention you pay to the unique and varied hair growth patterns on your horse's coat, the more shine your grooming will create.

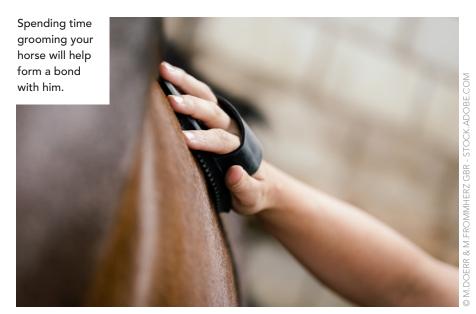
A secret to success is the specific stroke techniques you use with your grooming tools:

Currycomb: Use with vigorous, circular motions all over his body, avoiding the face and lower legs. Loosen dirt on these more sensitive areas with a grooming mitt in a scrubbing motion.

Stiff/Dandy brush: Use short strokes in the direction of hair growth, applying as much pressure as your horse comfortably tolerates. If you notice signs of discomfort such as tail-swishing or ear-pinning, back off on the pressure. End each brush stroke with a flick up and away from the coat to whisk the dirt off the body.

Soft/Body brush: Use longer strokes to smooth the hairs down and together. Pay close attention to areas where the natural hair growth changes direction. Whereas many people try to save time by skimping on the flank, you add that much more shine to your horse's overall appearance by carefully brushing up and out to the sides of this area, smoothing down all the hairs. If your horse is particularly dusty, such as during the winter when long, thick coats trap more dust and dandruff, carry a damp sponge in your free hand during this grooming step. After each stroke with the body brush, slightly dampen the ends of the bristles by running the brush across the sponge. This will help to remove the dust from the coat and the brush.

Rub rag: Spend more time—at least three to five minutes per side daily—with a clean, thick towel than with any of your other grooming tools. Apply quite a bit of pressure with each stroke of the rag, following the direction of the hair growth. This will help produce the "bloom" and dapples of a gorgeous coat—and your horse will love it.



4 Steps to Cleaner Brushes

Reducing your horse's risk of skin problems is as easy as cleaning his brushes. Just a few minutes spent sanitizing your grooming tools can help prevent the spread of rain rot, ringworm and other bacterial or fungal skin infections. Follow these four steps at least twice a year.

1 Vacuum. Use the hand tool of your vacuum to suck as much dirt as you can from the base of the brushes. This will make the subsequent steps more effective.

Wash. Dunk each brush in warm water and equine shampoo. Add a teaspoon of equine shampoo to a standard 20-quart water bucket, swish the brushes around a bit and let them soak for a few minutes. As the dirt lifts from the brushes, the water will turn brown; change the water and repeat if it looks really grungy. Don't forget to wash your hoof pick, shedding blades, curry and mane combs also. When you're satisfied the brushes are clean, rinse them thoroughly under running water until you see no soap bubbles on the brushes or in the runoff water.

3 Disinfect. Prepare a disinfecting solution by adding a quarter cup of bleach to two gallons of water, and soak currycombs, brushes and hoof picks in the solution for a half-hour. Then rinse the tools twice to ensure that all the bleach is gone.

4 Air-dry. Let your grooming tools air-dry, preferably in the sun because the ultraviolet rays will help kill off any remaining pathogens.

Store your newly cleaned brushes in pairs, with bristles pushed together to keep them from becoming bent or flattened. Keep your tools in a lidded container to protect them from dust, mold and mouthy dogs.

STABLE MANAGEMENT

When this step is complete, a grooming spray can also add to the shine and help keep stains at bay.

Clean, damp sponge: Wipe over his eyes, muzzle, insides of ears and under the dock.

5. Tackle Grass Stains

The best way to remove grass stains from a horse's coat is to give him a long, soapy bath, using a coat-whitening equine shampoo and a lot of elbow grease (see #8). But that's not always possible. Instead, you can "spot clean" grass stains using a two-step technique.

- "Pretreat" the stain with a sprayon spot remover. Most call for spraying the stain until it is saturated, then rubbing the area with a clean cloth to remove it. Remember to keep rotating the cloth to a clean area as you work, or you'll be rubbing the stain back onto the horse.
- With the worst of the stain gone, try "hot toweling" for a deeper clean. This involves dipping a clean towel into very hot water (just cool enough that you can comfortably submerge a gloved hand) and wringing it out until it's nearly dry but steaming. Then, rub it on the stained area, again regularly rotating it to a clean section. Repeat as necessary to lift the dirt from the depths of the coat without soaking it.

Once the stain is gone and the area is dried, you can prevent future discolorations with a generous application of a grooming spray to problem areas. These types of products coat the hair shafts, keeping dirt and stains from sticking.

6. Focus on Mane and Tail Care

Tail: In warm weather, your horse's tail will be his first defense against flies. To help him make the most of his tail—and to make it look nicer, too—give it a quick, no-wash makeover.

Begin by dousing the tail with a grooming spray or gel. This will coat the shafts of the hairs, making them



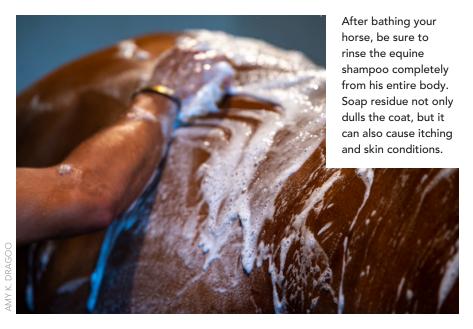
slick and helping tangles, dirt and burrs to slide out easily. Make sure the product penetrates thoroughly into the innermost hairs and the entire length of the tail.

Allow it to dry before carefully using your hands to work out the biggest tangles. The easiest method is to hold the tail at the end of the bone and lift it to a near-horizontal position with one hand. Then shake out a few hairs at a time and comb them with your other hand. Remove any burrs or dirt clods you encounter as you go. This process

will be slow, especially with a thick tail, but it's a good way to detangle without pulling out hairs.

Then go through the tail again with a wide-toothed comb. Spread it out on your thigh and work from the bottom of the tail upward, grasping firmly just above the section you are combing to avoid pulling out hair. Ease out any knots carefully by hand, adding another bit of spray or gel if necessary.

Finally, part the hairs to examine the skin over the tailbone, looking for ticks, injuries or other signs of



trouble. You can remove ticks and treat minor abrasions on your own, but call your veterinarian if you see anything unusual, such as lumps under the tail, which could be melanomas.

To make a tail look fuller and neater, you can bang it—making a horizontal blunt cut to the bottom of it. You're most likely to see this look in the event world, but it's also fairly common in the dressage and jumper rings. This handy technique is not just for competition. Banging a thin, straggly tail prevents the longest and weakest hairs from breaking while making the tail appear thicker and healthier. If a banged tail isn't your look, you can still give the illusion of a slightly fuller tail by trimming the longest hairs. Ask a friend to put an arm under the top of your horse's tail to simulate its natural carriage while you trim the hairs at the bottom.

Mane: If you plan to braid at shows, shorten your horse's mane evenly to a length of 3 to 4 inches. Anything longer will produce too-thick braids that are more likely to lie crooked on the neck. A shorter mane makes for an easier, faster braiding job, too. If you don't plan to braid, let your horse's mane

grow slightly longer—5 to 6 inches—so that it will lie down more easily.

Be sure his mane is squeaky clean before you braid it. Dust and dandruff between braids is very unattractive. If you have trouble getting a grip on the clean hairs, first spray the mane with water or Quic BraidTM.

7. Bathe with Care

Save soapy baths for when your horse is particularly dirty or needs to be clean for a special occasion. Even gentle bathing products will strip some natural oils from your horse's coat, reducing his shine. After sweaty rides, just rinse your horse with clear water.

If you're preparing your horse for a show, go the extra mile to give him a really deep clean. Use scrubby mitts and sponges to loosen dirt at the skin level, paying particular attention to the base of the tail and the crest of the neck. Apply a liberal amount of equine shampoo directly to his mane and tail by hand and work it all the way down to the skin, checking for ticks as you go. Allow that to sit while you wash the rest of the body.

Fill the bucket with warm water and add an ounce of equine shampoo. Start-

ing behind your horse's ears, apply the sudsy water with a mesh shower scrubby or mitt instead of a sponge and work it into the hair. Not only will a scrubby remove stains better, but it dries out quickly, making it less hospitable for mold and other bacteria. Continue doing this over the rest of his body and legs on that side. Then shampoo the other side, starting again just behind the ears and working your way over the entire body.

As you go, pay attention to areas you can't see. Parts of your horse that aren't easy to wash probably need it the most, such as under his jawbone. Squat and contort yourself as necessary to safely scrub your horse's midline, a favorite feasting place for small insects.

Next, be sure to rinse the equine shampoo completely from your horse's entire body. Soap residue not only dulls the coat, but it can cause itching and skin conditions.

8. Consider the Seasons

Summer: No matter how healthy your horse is, his coat won't be attractive if it's bleached by the sun. To protect the rich natural color of his coat, turn him out at night during the summertime or cover him with a good fly sheet.

Winter: Clipping some or all your horse's long winter coat will save hours of time cooling him off after rides. It will simplify daily grooming and create a neat, tidy appearance. It also means that you'll need to blanket him both indoors and outside on cold days and nights. Many people trace clip or partially body clip (leaving the hair long on the legs and face) to train over the winter and go to clinics, but if you're competing during the colder months of the year and really want to impress the judges, consider giving your horse a full-body clip.

Follow these basic practices on a regular basis, and you will find that your horse's coat will shine with good health. •

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