

SHOWMANSHIP AT HALTER

Showmanship at Halter is essentially horsemanship on the ground. Where ever horses are bought or sold, a horseman attempts to fit his horse and set him up squarely on his feet and legs so that the horse can be presented to his best advantage to the perspective buyer. Therefore it is essential to understand the basic skills of fitting and showing a horse at halter. There are three aspects involved in showmanship at halter. They are: (1) Fitting the horse; (2) Training the horse; and (3) Showing or presenting the horse.

I. Fitting the Horse

- A. Feeding – It takes a minimum of 45-60 days of feeding 10-15 lbs. of grain a day to fit a horse for halter if he is at or near his normal weight at the time that you start feeding.
 1. Horses being fit for show or sale need a high quality balanced diet for maximum growth and conditioning. The average horse needs about 10% protein for maintenance. Horses being fitted should received up to 14% to maximized muscle development and improved hair coat. A mixed feed with vitamins and minerals added is recommended. Adding whole grains (such as oats) to a balanced feed will unbalanced the vitamin-mineral content in the feed and is undesirable. Fat in the form of corn oil can be added to the diet to increase the energy of the feed and add a shine to the hair coat.
 2. Exercise is needed to develop muscle and maintain a healthy horse. The horse should be exercised 15 to 30 minutes per day. For an average horse a typical protocol would be 5 minutes of waling, 10 trotting, 5 loping and 5 to 10 minutes walking to cool down. The horse should be exercised both directions. Always observe your horse's breathing and sweating rate. If your horse is breathing hard or sweating excessively, stop. Injuries occur most often as a result of fatigue. In training the horse, remember learning will cease when the horse becomes fatigued.
 3. Care must be taken to make sure that the horse does not get too fat, especially in the neck and throat latch area. Hoods and neck wraps may be needed to sweat the horse's neck to produce the cleanliness and trimness desired in halter horses.
- B. Worming program - Horses must be wormed a minimum of two times per year. Generally, horses are wormed in the late fall after the first killing frost, and early spring. However, there is a great deal of difference in the need for worming in certain areas, depending on the concentration of horses, whether they are pastured or stalled, and the movement of horses in and out of the barn. Halter horses in Louisiana should be wormed every two or three months to obtain the best results.
- C. Stalling a Horse - Horses that are being fitted for or shown at, halter must be stalled or kept in a shaded area to keep the sun from bleaching out their hair coat. The easiest way to lose the shine and natural gloss to a horse's hair coat is to leave him out in the sun,

especially if you wash him and then leave him in the sun. The sun dries out the natural oils in the hair and bleaches out the natural dark color in the hair.

D. Washing Your Horse

1. Rinsing a horse with water only is the most desirable and produces the best hair coat.
2. Soap takes the natural oil out of the hair coat and therefore will usually dull the hair coat slightly. Soap should never be used immediately prior to going to the show. Sweat tends to dull the hair coat and efforts must be made to wash the sweat from the hair coat daily.

E. Brushing the Horse

1. Rubbing brings out the natural oils and shine in a horse. Daily brushing and rubbing is necessary for good hair coat quality.
2. A circular motion should be used to free the dirt and dandruff from the hair coat.
3. In brushing the legs of the horse, it is usually necessary to use your hands to rub the legs to get the dead hair and dirt loose, and obtain the desired effect.

F. Trimming and Clipping the Horse

1. Mane - The mane should be two to four inches long. The mane should be pulled not clipped. Pull the mane by grasping the longer hairs in the mane, brushing the shorter hairs up, and pulling the longer hairs out. This process gradually thins and shortens the mane. The bridle path should be approximately six inches long. In order to avoid extending the length of the bridle path you should not clip completely back to the mane each time. Clip all the way back to the mane only on the day of the show or sale.
2. The Tail - The tail should be long and hang to the ground. Ideally the tail should be tangle free and every hair should be approximately the same length. Short hairs must be pulled and never clipped, especially at the root of the tail. Clipped hairs at the root of the tail tend to stick the horse, and will cause him to hold his tail out, which distracts from his hind quarters. So the tail, like the mane, should always be pulled and never clipped. With long tails, it is important to keep them braided so they don't step on them. The braid should be taken out and washed a couple of times a week.
3. Excess hair should be clipped from the ears, muzzle, eyebrows, fetlocks and legs of the horse. This tends to give the horse a cleaner and more refined look, especially about his head, neck and muzzle. The legs should usually be clipped a couple of days before the show so that the clipper marks do not show.

- G. The Feet - The feet should be trimmed smoothly or shod. The angle of the feet should be natural to the horse and the hoofs should be polished. Polish should be taken off the hoof after the horse has been shown since most polishes tend to dry out the hoof. Sand paper can be used to take the polish off the hoof.
 - H. Show Coat - Show coat products can be used to cover up some of the mistakes that may have been made prior to the day of the show. The show coat products put a little more oil and a little more gloss on the hair coat of the horse. Baby oil is used around the eyes and nose of the horse to make the area darker and glossier. Oils need to be removed after the show to avoid sunburn and dust collection.
 - I. Fly sprays may be used to keep insects off your horse while you are showing him. However, many sprays are harsh and may cause damage to the hair and distract from the hair coat. Since fly sprays are used on horses daily, the pyrethrin base sprays are the most common and desirable sprays. Sprays with residual effect are harsher and may damage the hair coat. Daily spraying with these sprays can cause sickness and sometimes death in horses. READ THE LABEL.
 - J. Tack – The halter should be clean and fit properly.
 - 1. Adjust your halter to fit snugly everywhere on the horse's head. Then nose band should be half way between the nose and eye and the cheek pieces should fit snugly around the jaw.
 - 2. Keep your lead shank clean and avoid dragging it in the dirt if possible. The lead shank should be a length that fits comfortably in the hand of the exhibitor. One or two larger coils can be carried in the left hand. Several tight coils are discouraged.
- II. Training Your Horse - The horse should move quietly, smoothly and responsively in everything that he is required to do in the showmanship class. This requires that the horse be trained properly, and have preparatory cues for each maneuver. The horse must be willing and ready, but not scared or wild.
- A. Leading - A war bridle, butt rope or some type of come-along will be necessary to get the horse to lead quickly and respond to the slightest cue.
 - 1. The horse must lead at your shoulder.
 - 2. The horse must lead straight.
 - 3. In leading, the horse should start before the exhibitor. This requires a cue of some type to prepare the horse to start.
 - 4. The horse must lead at the speed required of him and must be very responsive.
 - B. Turning the Horse - The horse should always be turned to the right if he is turned 180°.
 - 1. A horse should turn around his rear legs. In other words, the rear legs don't move.

2. The exhibitor should push the horse away from him (to the right) when turning and never walk around the horse's head and pull the horse's head toward him.
3. The exhibitor must observe the horses turning radius to keep from pushing the back legs off track.
4. If the horse starts anticipating turns and starts to move sideways, turn the opposite way in practice to stop this problem.

C. Setting the Horse Up - In setting the horse up, the most important thing is to establish a pattern and be consistent.

1. The back feet should be set first. Use the right rear foot as the plant foot. Then position only the left rear. Only one rear foot ever moves in this procedure. Move the left rear forward or backward to position it beside the right rear leg.
2. The front feet should be set up second. The right front is the next logical foot to place because of the diagonals of the horse. Then the left front foot.
3. Pull down on the lead and move the back feet. Lift up on the lead and move the front feet. Then the horse knows which feet you are trying to move at all times.
4. If the horse doesn't want to move his back feet and doesn't respond well, back him up and lead him forward several times until he moves readily when asked to do so. Always lead the horse forward or back the horse into position. Twisting the horse while trying to set him up usually results in a horse standing crooked on his rear legs.
5. Front Legs - If the horse does not respond well when you are trying to set up his front legs, bump his feet with your toe to move them. If you don't get any response, it may be necessary to step on his foot to teach him to move and respond.
6. As soon as the horse is set release all pressure to let him know that he responded correctly.

III. Showing the Horse - The exhibitor must follow instructions specifically, and be alert and responsive to the judge's movements at all times.

- A. Leading the Horse Around the Ring - The horse should be led from the left side and should be led as briskly and alertly as possible. Leading the horse rather fast tends to make the horse lead straighter and makes both the horse and exhibitor look more alert and gives them a special sparkle. The lead shank should be held in the right hand and fairly close to the head so that the horse cannot wander while being led. Large coils, or no coil at all in the lead shank should be used for safety sake. The horse's head should be kept up and as alert as possible. The exhibitor should be aware of the other horses around him and when leading or setting up, he should allow ample room for safety for himself and the other horses. The exhibitor should check the judge regularly and be responsive to his requests.

- B. Leading To and From the Judge - The exhibitor should lead absolutely straight to and from the judge. When leading away from the judge, check as soon as your horse is turned to see if the horse is straight with the judge. If the horse isn't straight with the judge, line your horse up and then lead back to your spot as straight as possible. Lead completely through the line up before returning to your original position.
- C. Turning - Always turn to the right if you are turning 180°. Turns should be brisk, smooth and as responsive as possible.
- D. Setting the Horse Up - Give yourself plenty of room in line, at least six feet on each side to insure safety and avoid disturbance from movement of other horses. Always check your horse before you move him. Many experienced horses will be square already and will not require moving. Set your horse up as quickly as possible and check back with the judge for possible instructions. When your horse is set up, observe the horse and the judge at all times.
- E. Posing with the Horse - The exhibitor should be turned toward the horse at all times except when leading. He should be standing to the side facing the horse's head or move slightly toward the front of the horse and facing the horse's shoulder. The exhibitor should never stand directly in front of the horse or turn his back to the horse. The exhibitor should be in a position at all times to observe the horse and the judge.
 - 1. Exhibitor should be on the opposite side of his horse from the judge when the judge is in front of the horse.
 - 2. Exhibitor should be on the same side of his horse as the judge when the judge is behind the horse.
- F. The Exhibitor Must Look the Part - The exhibitor should dress neatly and appropriately and display a friendly and competent manner.

Showmanship at Halter displays the horsemanship of the horseman as much as Western Pleasure, Reining or Barrel Racing. Proper horsemanship on the ground is just as rewarding as horsemanship in the saddle. All horses need to be properly fitted no matter what events they are to participate in. With a little bit of training and a proper technique in showing, Showmanship at Halter can be just as enjoyable and rewarding as any other event.