

## PRESENTING YOUR MARE FOR INSPECTION

By CSHA Senior Inspector Alan J. Wedge

Here are some helpful hints for showing and presenting your sport horse. Remember that first impressions are always important so have your horse clean, well turned out to the best of your ability or contract someone to do that for you. Do not over look the hooves! You should have them trimmed up or shod at least a week or two in advance to ensure that the mare shows off her true gaits.



Make sure you have a **bucket** or **knapsack** full of things for last minute touch ups. I like to have **fly wipes**; a 3" **sponge**; a dry **towel** for dusting both you and the horse; a bottle of **water** to wet your whistle or to put on the towel. Be sure to have a non-greasy **sunblock or moisturizer** for make-up on your horse's eyes, ears, muzzle, knees and, lastly, hocks to accentuate the dark points. Stay away from baby oil and petroleum products as they may have a tendency to burn the skin. Include **coconut oil** for the hooves not hoof oil or hoof paint/lacquers because they could weaken the

hoof wall. Include more standard tools such as **hoof picks**; **hair comb** or brush, **soft (body) brush**; extra **shank** and **halter**. It is advisable to have an **extra bridle /or show halter** and **lead**. Include **Vick's ointment** if you happen to be handling a stallion for inspection. Ah yes ... I always handle in **gloves** and carry a medium length (no more than 30") **jump bat** (neutral in color) which you can use to engage your horse before entering the ring. If the horse is fresh or lazy it is advisable to lunge them to free them up.

Now the artistry begins! Take a few weeks to prepare your horse for the presentation. Perfect practice makes for a perfect performance! First take a close look at your model and decide what their weak and strong points are. You will want to enhance their strengths. Now is the time to decide how you plan to show your horse - as a hunter, dressage or jumper type? Each has a definite way of going. Remember, you want to show off the strong points and minimize any weakness.

Next it is on to teaching the proper foot steps starting with the hind legs (the motor). Say "**whoa**", then say "**step**" while lowering the head and neck. You encourage short half steps by lifting the head up just at mid stride - then say "**whoa**" and then pat or rub forehead of the horse, always rewarding! This is very important aspect. Work with the horse in a well-fitting halter (then a bridle later) and a good long shank. The longer shank allows you to move from side to side which gives the horse some space while in her pose. If your horse is young or fresh then lunge, ride or turn them out just long enough to take the edge off. The horse needs to be relaxed and settled so consider using fly spray if necessary.

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For the forelegs, say "over", while moving your hand from side to side. Her shoulders will be like a pendulum - one leg at a time and thus, the ballet commences. Step! Step! Over! Over! Whoa! Rewarding lots as we go! Be PATIENT! You will see her relax once she begins to understand what is expected. Sometimes I will train in a long chain shank that is long enough to go around their muzzle like a circle or bosal shape but not under chin as it can encourage rearing or striking out. If you do have to back up your horse while posing, keep in mind that your horse moves her legs in diagonal pairs. Therefore, to reposition the right hind leg the handler takes the horse's head down and to the left directly in front of the left front. You will see a straight line. Say "back" and apply some pressure to encourage the mare to move the right hind leg. Once the leg is in flight the handler says "WHOA". You may need to reposition the front leg so use your "over" cue and "Voila!", the horse is where you want her to be.

Once the horse masters the foot work, start on the pose, getting them to hold it for approximately 5 minutes. Now you can give them a break or short a walk about the paddock. Practice posing everywhere ... in the barn alley, by the trailer, paddock or in the middle of the arena all the while presenting her with distractions. Have someone walk around her or bounce a beach ball close by. Do anything unusual but be sure to pay attention and read the body language to ensure that it is not too much pressure. If the horse appears too nervous or agitated, back off! Give her some relief by halting the activity for a few minutes. Once she can hold the pose for 10 minutes, start addressing the type of pose. For a hunter I use my hand (back of the hand towards me or off to one side) to encourage them to extend the nose and neck (exhibiting a nice throatlatch).



A 3-legged square standing position demonstrates some depth to the profile. For the jumper or dressage horse, have their hind end more loaded by positioning or allowing them to carry their head and neck higher. You want to encourage more powerful gaits. Be careful in this phase, though, as the higher the head carriage, the lower the back. These types of horses may be posed in slightly off square position. Showing the horse in hand is a real art!

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With the hunter type, the Inspector likes to see a horse with a sweeping walk with as much over-tracking as possible and the nose a bit forward. Remember, the stride is only as long as her neck and nose. She should be balanced with an upward swing in her gaits. Do not force the head down as it will only make the stride short or choppy. The first few times you jog or trot the animal in hand practice with a fence on the outside to teach them to stay straight and under control. As they get comfortable be adventuresome and move outside to a larger ring and more distractions. With the jumper and dressage types, the inspector will look for a forward, uphill and round demeanor in their gaits thus looking through the bridle. Consider using a dressage whip with these horses.



Whether presenting on a triangle or straight pattern, know what is required and expected of you and your horse. When you move away from and back to the inspector, move slightly slower. They are only inspecting the hind end as it moves away and evaluating the front moving towards them. Show off on the profile portion of the pattern. You and your horse are almost like a mare and foal at this time. The horse will watch you and mimic your way of moving and speed. Relax your hand in the walk and take longer strides in this gait, not quick short steps. In the trot phase run with your hips forward. Many handlers will run with their shoulders forward thereby forcing the horse to on move onto the forehand.

Above all SMILE!

Be proud of your horse and enjoy showing her off.