

DRESSAGE TODAY

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EXTRA

9 Tips for a
Winning
Test

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9 TIPS FOR RIDING A WINNING TEST

Amy K. Drago



Top judges Lilo Fore, Anne Gribbons and Hilda Gurney weigh in.

By Nicole DelGiorno

If you've ever wondered what separates a 65 percent from a 70 percent, you are not alone. Many riders at some point in their careers find themselves consistently placing in the middle of the pack and feeling a little stuck. They practice their test diligently, they listen to the advice of their instructors, they study their peers and they do well, but can't seem to break into the top of their class.

So, we asked three of the world's best judges: How can we ride a winning dressage test? Here is their advice.

1 Ride Centerlines
Our first expert, Anne Gribbons, FEI 5* judge and U.S. dressage coach from 2010 to 2013, encourages riders to incorporate centerlines into their daily work. "To ride a centerline correctly you need a good degree of balance and straightness. The horse must be even on both reins and obedient to the half halt. The entrance must be straight, the downward transition must be smooth

and the halt square. The horse must stand at attention, with his nose on the vertical, ready for the upward transition, which must be prompt and energetic. This is the first thing that the judges see and it will make an impression. The problem is that many riders are not comfortable riding on the centerline. They do all kinds of exercises to supple the horse, but they don't ride him straight down the centerline. Straightness is not the very first level

of the Training Scale, but it is one of the more important ones and it should be addressed fairly early in the horse's training.

"Now let's talk about the downward transition to halt and its preparation," continues Gribbons. "When the horse trots or canters down, he must be balanced over his hind legs so that his front legs come down like snowflakes on the ground. He has already taken the weight behind so he is sitting down a little bit. Then he drops his front legs down and he is perfectly square. And that kind of a halt looks good from all angles. He should then stand, immobile and attentive with his nose on the vertical, and wait for the rider's forward aid. The transition upward must be engaged and energetic, and that is not so easy after the horse has been standing stock-still. If the horse is the least bit behind the leg, it will not look good. He will take the first step with the front legs and shuffle forward."

Practice is really the only way to perfect a centerline, says Gribbons. "Incorporate centerlines into your daily work. Practice going down in trot or canter and shortening the strides as if preparing for halt, but keep moving. It is important to vary where

you halt on the centerline and also to ride down the centerline many times without halting at all. The horse must always think “forward” and not anticipate the downward transition. It’s the horse’s responsibility to keep moving until you ask him to stop. Ride this line habitually until your horse is totally comfortable going straight and is waiting for your directive whether it’s a pirouette, leg yield or a halt.”



Disciplined Transitions

Another thing that impresses our judges is clear and confident transitions, particularly downward transitions.

Gribbons says that she doesn’t often see excellent downward transitions. “I see a lot of horses who can do forward transitions, but then the down transition is not nearly as crisp.”

She adds that transitions, although important at all levels, are especially important in lower levels, where they are really the meat of the test. “What is there that really separates a good rider from an excellent one when the lower-level tests have fewer movements? It is all transitions! Being disciplined at the beginning of the training will serve you well as you continue up the levels because there will always be transitions—now it is trot to canter, but eventually it will be canter to halt or passage to canter. Of all the tools that we have to train a dressage horse, the most important tool in the box is the transitions. The uphill balance, thoroughness and obedience that come with practicing transitions is the basis for everything at the upper levels.”

Transitions are another thing that our judges feel improve with repetition. But as the saying goes: Practice does not make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect. Riders must be picky about the horse’s responsiveness to the aids and his balance as he moves into

the next gait. Retired FEI 5* judge Lilo Fore explains how to maintain this balance in the downward transition: “It is very important for the rider to remember that the down transition has a forward action rather than a stopping action. Training the horse to rotate the pelvis and lower the croup will not happen overnight. It is a process which takes time and careful consideration. My explanation to the rider is to think of a downward transition as a new beginning of a new gait rather than the end of the gait they were in. They must always think uphill, even in a downward transition.”

Fore says to think of an airplane. “Airplanes land on their rear wheels

“Think of a downward transition as a new beginning of a new gait.”

first. I would like my horses to be like a well-flown plane, so the rider must learn to be a good pilot. When training transitions in this way, the horse will become more horizontal in his outline. From there he can learn how to bend behind the saddle in the loin and sink through the joints, allowing the hind legs to bear weight and not just cover ground. In the future, this will lead to lightness of the forehand and self-carriage. Engagement will begin, which can develop into collection and a degree of cadence. This is the magic of developing and enhancing our horses’ gaits and paces.”



In a Dressage Test, The Directives Give You The Answers

Many riders, when learning a new test, study the movements diligently, but Fore thinks they should pay more attention to the directives in

the next column: “Most riders know the required movements, but not the directives, and that is what we judges pay attention to,” she says. “We look to see how the horse is ridden in these required exercises. Is the horse ridden to the contact? Does he maintain rhythm and regularity in all gaits? Does he show a degree of suppleness appropriate for his level? Does the rider keep a tempo that facilitates balance? Even for a simple circle the directives are explicit: ‘consistent bend around the rider’s inside leg, placement and control over the size of circle, reach to the bit and the quality of the gait.’ The directives mention these important details and more.

“The movements are only beneficial if the directives are addressed,” Fore continues. “It takes focus and preparation, as well as mental and physical awareness of how the horse responds to our aids. Make the arena your friend—corners and circles are not the enemy! Learn to activate

the horse’s engine on these curved lines and send him into the contact. Impulsion and connection should always be maintained even when bend is needed for an upcoming corner, circle or lateral movement. The letters of the arena, the distance between them and the circle points must be understood by the rider in order to train the horse correctly. Riding accurately will help to teach acceptance of the aids and the contact. Without that we have nothing. So when you practice your test, do more than just ride the movement. Ride the movement and answer all the questions, meet the requirements of that movement as stated in the directives.”



Go Back to Basics: Develop the Quality of The Gaits

Olympian and “I” judge Hilda Gurney encourages riders to look past the



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required movements and really examine the quality of the horse's gaits and how it can be improved: "I think most riders do not focus on one of the foremost goals of dressage, which is the development of the gaits. To develop the horse's gaits, the rider has to have a supple, balanced seat and ride the horse from back to front. Only then can you have the horse really through and even on both reins. From there you must ride the horse boldly forward within his tempo.

"If you look at the Training Scale, rhythm is the first thing to come and, often, the first thing to go!" Gurney continues. "Riders need to remember that impulsion does not mean 'go faster.' Impulsion comes from balancing the horse between the aids and making him more supple and responsive. Riding forward to the bit, but in balance, improves the horse's gaits, whereas quickening the tempo and going faster push the horse out of his natural rhythm and diminish the quality of the gaits."

Gurney believes that riders are often unsure of how to develop the uphill

Olympian and "I" judge Hilda Gurney believes stretching—in moderation—is a really good exercise for developing suppleness in the horse's back. In this photo, Germany's Ingrid Klimke illustrates beautiful bend, suppleness and engagement on the Hanoverian stallion Doctor Wendell.

balance that improves the power and clarity of the gaits: "I think the most important thing for riders to remember when improving the gaits is to ride back to front so that the horse reaches for the bit without getting too low. You see some lower-level riders ride the whole test practically in a long and low frame. Stretching is a really good exercise for developing suppleness in the back, but it should be done in moderation, as it can encourage the horse to travel on the forehand. Eventually the horse must be on the bit and ridden uphill. I often see lower-level riders try to develop the uphill balance by pulling back. They are more worried about the headset than truly riding the horse through from the hind legs. It is only by strengthening the hind end and developing pushing power that a horse can be connected and uphill. This is why riding properly forward is so

incredibly important."

One mistake that our judges often see in regard to the quality of the gaits is riders sacrificing the suspension in the canter. Gurney expounds on the qualities of a good canter: "The important thing in the canter is to try to keep that jump because a lot of riders, in trying to collect the canter, make the canter flat or, in trying to build power, will often rush the tempo. The most important thing is to hear the rhythm of the canter. You can hear the good canter, and it isn't one-two-three. There is a fourth, silent moment that indicates suspension. When a horse becomes tense, that moment is lost and the tempo is a hurried one-two-three, one-two-three."

Probably the most difficult gait to improve is the walk, but Fore tells riders not to be afraid of educating the walk in their training: "How many times do we

FEI 5* judge Anne Gribbons explains that in a square halt, the horse must stand at attention, with his nose on the vertical, ready for the upward transition, which must be prompt and energetic. This is the first thing that the judges see, and it will make an impression.

ride and educate in the trot and canter and yet we are afraid to train the walk? Practice lengthening the strides, shortening the strides, doing transitions involving walk, and educate! Let the horse stretch in the walk, then shorten the reins into medium walk and try a few shorter steps toward collection, then back to the medium walk. Walk over poles to train the horse to lift his legs. There is nothing wrong with training the walk. Most problems in the walk occur because the rider allows the gait to get too slow and the frame gets short but the strides are not shortened or lengthened. The horse must be just as honest in the contact at the walk as he is in the trot and canter. The important thing is to never lose the forward desire when working in any gait."

5 Make Corners A Habit

Our judges unanimously agree that corners are an underutilized part of every dressage test.

Gribbons remarks, "Going into the corners is another thing that is not so hard to practice and makes a lot of sense because it provides an extra step or two to prepare your horse. But many riders neglect them, which is unfortunate because then they can't turn onto that diagonal or down the centerline and have their horses straight and balanced. This seems like a small detail, but it's very important because in today's competition if you want to win, you have to pay attention to all these small things. Otherwise, you will not understand why—although your changes were brilliant and your extension outstanding—you did not win."

Gribbons feels that riding corners is a habit that must be made at home. "Every corner is a quarter of a 10-meter circle. You are going to come in straight, bend for about two steps, straighten and then you're done. And if you do this in every corner it will become second



nature. It is something that is done in a few seconds, but it gives you a huge advantage: an extra step to prepare, a little more suppleness training, a moment to test your horse's obedience, a chance to collect your thoughts before the next movement. As you move up the levels, your success will be determined by how well you use the space and time you are given in the test."

6.

Refine Your Aids to Increase Responsiveness

Gurney brings up the important subject of refining the aids. "One thing I really like to see when people ride the test are subtle, refined aids. I think when aids are really loud and disruptive to the horse it does not make for a harmonious picture. The rider must become fit and disciplined enough to train the horse to respond to quiet aids," says Gurney.

It often happens that when riders practice at home they feel confident making corrections, but in the ring they sometimes freeze and feel the need to hold the horse together. Gurney thinks that this often happens because riders do not insist on their horse being responsive to the aids.

She says, "Riders, especially amateur riders, are often too worried about themselves making a mistake and forget to hold the horse accountable for being attentive to their aids. It is a vicious cycle in which the rider often ends up sacrificing her position, preventing her from riding effectively."

Gurney also stresses that the rider's timing is important to developing responsiveness to the aids. "The horse has to learn to respond within the tempo. This is what makes dressage different from reining or jumping. A reiner or a jumper must respond instantly. Therefore, he has to keep his feet on the

ground. If a horse knows that he must respond to a turn at any moment, he is not going to give you as much of a suspension period because he needs to be pushing off the ground to respond. He stays low to the ground and takes small, quick steps. In dressage, we want that suspension and you can't have a horse ready to respond at any moment and have suspension. You must teach him to respond within the tempo like a ballet dancer who must move in time to the music."

7.

Don't Rush the Rein-back

The rein-back is a movement that riders have trouble with

"Movements like the rein-back are the real point-getters."

all the way up through Grand Prix. Gribbons believes that problems arise when riders do not carefully train and practice the rein-back as part of their regular work: "Often the horse comes into the ring and looks confused when the rider asks for a rein-back, as if they have never practiced. I think a lot of this confusion comes from how horses are taught. I personally believe that the rein-back is not a natural movement for a horse and that it can be a little frightening for them. Horses do not feel comfortable going back like that because it sets them up as prey. So if the horse is taught in a forceful way with the rider pulling on the reins, it is likely he will panic and freeze up or run backward. This is why I train the rein-back in a very specific way." (To see Gribbons' approach to teaching rein-back, visit DressageToday.com.)

Gribbons continues, "In the ring,

the rein-back is either a testament to the suppleness and throughness of the horse or just the opposite! Movements like the rein-back are the real point-getters. Most horses today can do the exciting movements: the extended trot, half passes and changes. So what separates a great pair from an average pair is being able to do both!"

8.

Perfect Your Pirouettes

Gribbons feels that riders often overlook walk pirouettes. "Let's look at the Prix St. Georges. For the flying changes we get one score for each line, and we have now practiced them hundreds, if not thousands, of times and we are aggravated to death if one change isn't clean. But then I sit and judge the Prix St. Georges and I look at the half pirouettes at the walk, which very often look as if the horse is not quite sure about what the rider wants.

A thousand things can go wrong with this half pirouette at the walk: The horse can plant his hind legs, spin around too quickly, come above the bit or become lateral. So now you get a 5 for the half pirouettes at the walk. Wouldn't it be great if you could have gotten a 7 or an 8 instead? You do not get paid more for that whole line of changes than for the half pirouette, and the pirouette is not so difficult to get right. And I know why you don't practice it—because it's boring. Yes, it's boring, but, boy, if you practice that enough and it looks good, it's an impressive thing to collect points on," says Gribbons.

Fore also finds that riders do not understand the difference between turn on the haunches and pirouettes. "The difference is not just the size but the walk for the pirouettes must now show a shortening or collecting of the walk strides. The circle that the



One mistake that judges often see in regard to the quality of the gaits is riders sacrificing the suspension in the canter. Gurney says that the most important thing in the canter is to try to keep that jump because a lot of riders, in trying to collect the canter, make the canter flat or, in trying to build power, will often rush the tempo. A good example of suspension in the canter can be seen in this photo of Marlies van Baalen riding Miciano.

hind legs travel on in the turn on the haunches is up to 2 feet in diameter and is ridden from a medium walk, which is then slightly shortened.

“The pirouette, on the other hand, is ridden in collected walk with the hind legs stepping as much on the spot as possible,” Fore continues. “This can be a tricky thing to achieve. If the haunches are leading even slightly in the turn, the forehand will have trouble turning and the hind legs will get stuck or the horse will think backwards or maybe even turn in the middle. The horse’s shoulder must therefore be in a slight leading position, otherwise the front legs cannot cross in front of the rider and the hind legs will eventually get stuck.”

9. Establish Balance to Achieve Harmony

Harmony is a word that we find on every dressage test, but many riders find this to be an elusive quality. Fore says that harmony can be achieved only when the horse is balanced and comfortable and the rider has developed the ability to give clear, effective aids. It is a meeting of minds, a mutual understanding that the rider is the leader and will move the horse’s body in a way that maximizes his comfort and freedom of movement. In order to facilitate this, the horse must trust and comprehend the rider’s cues so that he becomes suspended between her quiet, accurate aids. A pair that is

connected in this way looks as if they are moving as one. It is the ultimate depiction of balance and the high-wire act of dressage. Fore emphasizes that harmony does not occur overnight. Balance must be built and tested and along the way, the horse and rider should break out of their comfort zone. She urges riders not to avoid manipulating the horse’s body, whether that be through frequent changes of direction or moving between different types of lateral work or changing the length of the frame and stride. This work teaches the horse to be attentive to the rider and improves his balance. She adds, “Only when the horse is balanced between all of the aids is harmony possible.” 🐾



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Get the MOST OUT of Your EQUIPMENT

Expert advice on maximizing the longevity of your gear

By Sophia Chavonelle

With proper care, a quality saddle can be expected to last a lifetime.

Paula da Silva-Armd.nl

Most experienced horse owners recognize the value of appropriately maintaining tack and equipment for practical, financial, safety and sentimental reasons. You have probably developed your own methods and routines, but is there something you could be doing better to extend the wear of your items? Or perhaps there's an important detail you're overlooking. What are the best ways to bring your favorite pieces back to life, while maximizing longevity? In this article, equine industry professionals Yvonne Bryant, of Equine TLC, an equine equipment laundering and repair service in Dickerson, Maryland, and Jennifer Hetzler, of Equus Now! tack store in Lewis Center, Ohio,

bring to light the best ways to maintain your equestrian equipment and apparel to prolong their life.

DT: How long should you expect most everyday equipment to last?

Yvonne Bryant: I personally believe that the lifespan of any equipment or apparel begins with the quality of the item. I also believe you will get what you pay for. However, items you have purchased on sale are exempt from this thought. Overall, any item used on a daily basis can last anywhere from three to seven years with the right care and maintenance.

Jennifer Hetzler:

- A saddle can be the second most expensive purchase one can make in his

or her riding career, next to the purchase of an actual horse. First, you'll want to make sure the saddle fits the rider as well as the horse. A saddle that poorly fits the rider, horse or both can cause all sorts of damage. So it is very important to make sure the saddle is a proper fit all around. Saddles can last a lifetime as long as they are properly cared for. Many of today's saddle makers suggest which products to use on their saddles. Some even make their own cleaners and conditioners. But the leather isn't the only part of the saddle that needs attention. The flocking in the panels should be inspected about every six months. Each saddle manufacturer may use different types of flocking, therefore, it's best to follow the guidelines as to how and



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Quality of materials and proper care are two major factors in longevity.

when to inspect the flocking. The tree of the saddle is very important because that is the frame on which the saddle is built. A saddle with a broken or compromised tree will cause damage to a horse's back. If you think there is just the slightest problem with the tree of your saddle, a saddle fitter or the saddle expert at your local tack shop will be

able to help you out.

- Depending on the type of leather, usage and care, a **bridle** can last for several years. I've seen some inexpensive bridles that are well cared for outlast some very expensive ones simply due to the difference in care. In a best-case scenario, you would have two bridles, one for schooling and the other for shows only. If two bridles aren't in the budget, then I would suggest investing in the best bridle that fits your horse

well and is in your price range. Some bridle manufacturers have specific guidelines on how to break in and care for their products. By following the guidelines, the bridle should last for several years.

- **Bits** can be made of all sorts of different materials. Some will last a lifetime, while others may last a few years, depending on what they are made of. Most bits made from metal (stainless steel, German silver, sweet iron or copper) can last for several years as long as they are kept clean and free of anything that could cause them to deteriorate over time. German-silver bits do well when they are cleaned regularly and polished when they need it. Bits that are covered or made of rubber will eventually break apart (the rubber part, that is) over time and usage. This can be caused by horses chewing on the rubber. If the rubber has been chewed up and is no longer smooth in the horse's mouth, it will make the bit very uncomfortable for the horse. A new bit would be recommended. Happy Mouth bits are made of stainless steel and high-tech plastics. These bits should be inspected regularly to make sure there aren't any rough spots on them that could cause irritation.

- If you wear tall **boots** every time you ride, it would be a good idea to make sure that they are durable. There are some nice inexpensive boots that can be used for everyday riding and, depending on how many horses you ride daily or how hard you may be on your boots, they can last a few years. Boots that are made of softer leather, such as calfskin, will not last as long if they are used for every day riding. They are designed to be used more for showing or if you only ride in tall boots once in a while. Most tall boots are now made with zippers. It's important that the zipper is kept clean and clear of anything that



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It is best to frequently wash horse laundry in clear, cold water.

would cause teeth to break or make it split. Zipper splitting can be avoided as long as attention is paid to care.

- A **helmet** is the most important piece of safety equipment a rider can buy. It is very important that the helmet fits properly and meets all of the safety requirements. When selecting a helmet, make sure it is an approved helmet. According to the majority of helmet manufacturers, your helmet should be replaced every four years due to changes in the fit over time or safety approval. These manufacturers also want you to be safe and have crash replacement policies that apply to their helmets. If you have fallen and hit your head, the helmet has been compromised and will need to be replaced. If this happens, refer to the tack shop from which you purchased the helmet for help with replacement according to the manufacturer's policy.

DT: What are some important considerations when it comes to taking care of leather tack, such

as bridles, halters, saddles and riding boots?

JH: The longevity of any leather tack will depend on its initial quality and the care you put into it. Properly taken care of, any leather should last for many years. It is most important to make cleaning your tack a habit. A regular regimen of cleaning any sweat, dust or mud after every ride will be the best thing for your tack. Glycerin soap is the most commonly used soap for tack cleaning because it has conditioning agents as well as cleaning agents. Castile soap is also a very reliable product for all kinds of leather: It balances the pH and does not contain dyes or fragrances. Castile soap, as with all soap, is best used with warm water. Use soap with as little water as possible and remember that your tack should be dried completely after cleaning. The No. 1 rule is to follow the manufacturer's instructions in the way that the product was made. As a rule of thumb, halters can be treated in a very similar way to bridles. Everyday halters should be cleaned very regularly and

dried thoroughly to ensure that any padding and stitching do not become worn. The metal hardware on halters—buckles, nameplates, lead snaps—can and should be cleaned up with wadding polish to prevent any tarnishing.

DT: How should everyday riding boots be cared for?

JH: Riding boots can be treated very similarly to other leather products, with an emphasis on everyday maintenance. After every ride, you should be careful to wipe off any arena dust from the leather, stitching and zippers. If your boots have become muddy or wet, the best thing for them is warm water and a mild glycerin soap, with a spray cleaner for the zippers. This should be dried completely, with any remaining residue wiped off as well.

Polish is best for covering up sun bleaching or shining after everyday use. Be sure to only use a conditioning polish, however, as some types are known to crack and harden the leather. As always, follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to best take care of your tack.

DT: When should conditioner versus oil be used?

JH: Think of leather the same way you think of your skin. How often do you use oil treatments versus hand lotion? It is the same with oil and conditioner. Conditioner is best used once a week or every other week, depending on the condition of your tack. Conditioner is great for keeping your leather goods soft, supple and clean. Oil, on the other hand, should only be used on rare occasions. It is best used for softening new tack or darkening brown leather. If you buy a used saddle, for example, oil can help soften the stiff leather. Both are best applied at room temperature with your hands, which help massage the product into the pores of the leather.

DT: What is important to know

about keeping bits clean and shiny?

JH: The most important thing to remember when cleaning up bits is not to dunk them in water after every ride. This is a very common mistake that people make. Dunking exposes the leather holding the bit and the reins to constant wet-dry conditions, causing the stitching to wear and leather to crack. Simply using a damp cloth, toothbrush or even bit wipes are much safer for your bridles. Bits must also be kept clean constantly. If you were a horse, you wouldn't want a dirty bit in your mouth. It is very important to make a habit of cleaning your bit properly every day. Many bit polishes exist on the market, some for particular brands of bits, that can help keep your bits looking new. When searching for a bit polish, be sure to find a nontoxic brand. This can be applied anywhere on the bit, from the rings to the mouthpiece, as long as the polish is thoroughly rinsed afterward.

DT: What kind of care does my horse's waterproof turnout blanket require?

YB: Turnout blankets should be cleaned once a year with a blanket-safe cleaner. From a technical standpoint, dirt attracts water. It is possible to have a turnout blanket so dirty that it will take on water and not be waterproof anymore. A good-quality turnout blanket can last more than 10 years.

DT: What are the best ways to keep machine-washable items in their best shape?

YB: When you are trying to keep saddle pads, polo wraps, horse boots, stable sheets, blankets and gloves clean, the best thing is to frequently wash them in clear, cold water. It is not necessary to use a cleaning agent on these items every time they are laundered. If you clean them with water frequently, you will be amazed at how clean they can



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Air drying laundry can often prolong the life of many fabrics.

remain. However, the quality of the item and how it was made will dictate things like pilling and shedding.

DT: What do I need to know about keeping my favorite pair of breeches in clinic-ready condition? What are the most durable kinds of fabrics?

YB: Breeches should be cleaned after every two or three rides in clear, cold water. Do not put breeches in the dryer or in with any equipment and apparel for the horse or barn. Anything made of elastic, with any type of stretch and give, will not perform after frequent trips through the drier. Anything that stretches will lose the ability to stretch when exposed to constant heat. The best (and safest) way to dry any apparel is by natural air dry or by using the air dry setting on your dryer. The air-dry setting will also take the hair off items. My full-seat breeches have lasted more than three years and look almost new and I use clear, cold water to wash them every two rides, even after hot, sweaty days. I have not noticed

any positive difference in my breeches when cleaned with detergent. There is no particular fabric that is most durable when it comes to breeches. Breeches come in four- and two-way stretch, and thicknesses vary. How much you ride will dictate the longevity of your breeches. Again, the thickness is definitely a factor in the longevity.

DT: Are there certain laundry detergents available that are best at removing tough stains?

YB: Detergents generally cannot and will not take out grass stains, blood and other types of stains, regardless of what the company may claim. Specific stains should be addressed by hand with a mild clothes (as in for human clothing) detergent and then put in the washer with cold water.

DT: What is the best way to care for show coats?

YB: Show coats made from wool and linen should always be cared for by a professional dry cleaner. I recommend

cleaning these at least once a year (or more, if they get particularly dirty or sweaty). Their cleanliness, as well as the quality of storage, will determine how often they should be cleaned. Some people store show coats (along with other similar items) in the barn, where rodents can access items or where the air is humid and mold can develop. I've seen people store their coats in their trailers as well and this can be just as bad.

Summer shows can be extremely hot, making sweat an issue. It's fine to machine-wash a coat as long as it is meant to be machine-washed. Just because a coat is polyester does not mean it is machine washable; nor does a wool coat always have to be dry-cleaned. But if it's machine washable, I would recommend a long wash with clear water (without detergent). It's amazing how clear water can clean items. Use a cleaner if you wish or if needed for stains and smells that won't come out. Clean as often as you feel you need to do so.

DT: Is it safe to wash some equestrian items together? Are there items that are not compatible?

YB: It is perfectly safe to wash polo wraps with saddle pads in clear water. However, you should never combine towels with any other apparel or equipment. Towels will shed lint and other fibers onto other pieces in the wash, especially polo wraps. Sometimes cleaning polo wraps in a net bag will help keep them from becoming too tangled. I would normally wash up to six wraps at a time to make untangling easy. Polo wraps do not need long washing cycles. Also, always be sure to attach the Velcro to keep them from clinging to each other. Another little shortcut I have used on large volumes (20 to 50 wraps) is to lightly tie about four wraps together. They clean just as well, but don't tangle as much.

DT: How can I best care for my riding helmet?

JH: Depending on the manufacturer, helmet care can vary. Two common mistakes I see people make is leaving their helmets in hot cars (which can make the shell of the helmet actually detach itself) and putting their helmet in the dishwasher. These are both very bad ideas! Many brands have removable liners. If you are going to buy a helmet with a removable liner, my suggestion is to buy two liners: the one in the helmet and an extra one. Because these liners should not go in the dryer, they can take a while to dry. An extra liner will allow you to keep riding when your other liner is drying. For helmets without a removable liner, particularly those

When caring for your tack, apparel and equestrian equipment, the most important thing to remember is to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

without much ventilation, there are helmet sprays and deodorizers available. I would recommend waiting until your helmet is dry and fairly clean (you can brush it with a soft brush or cloth) and spray it in a well-ventilated area, out of direct sunlight or high temperatures.

When cleaning the outside of matte helmets, glycerin soap can be used with a clean sponge or towel. To get the most dust off a helmet with a faux-velvet finish, use a nail brush or a slightly damp towel or shammy cloth.

DT: What is the best way to clean stubborn Velcro strips on my horse's equipment?

YB: A wire dog brush is a fantastic way to clean Velcro hooks. The Velcro hook is the prickly part that manages to capture debris. This should be cleaned out of your polo wraps, brushing boots, saddle-pad keepers and the chest closures on


blankets. The hooked Velcro that holds pieces together, such as on brushing boots, is usually the most frequently replaced item. Under two-year daily use, the Velcro will become dead and weakened, especially the chest captures of blankets.

DT: Body clippers are a big investment. How can I maximize their longevity?

JH: Body clippers are definitely an expensive item that many people want to keep in good condition for many years. Always avoid holding on to the clippers by the cord. The machine is very heavy and can detach from the cord easily. Allowing a horse to step on the cord of the clippers is also a very bad idea. The best thing you can do for your clippers is to keep them clean, oiled and sharp. Before clipping your horse, be sure that he is as clean as possible. Clipping dirty horses will hurt the motor, dull the blade and make it

difficult to clean the clippers afterward. If your blades do become dull, it is best to replace them or, if available, use a nearby sharpening service.

After every use, and even while clipping, it's a good idea to utilize a soft brush to remove all dust and hair from the blades. Use blade wash, cooling spray and oil as much and as frequently as the manufacturer recommends. Generally, use blade wash before and after clipping. Cooling spray should be used during clippings and you can also oil them as needed. Again, the manufacturer of your clippers will give you the best directions.

When caring for your tack, apparel and equestrian equipment, the most important thing to remember is to follow the manufacturer's instructions. From leather to metal to motors, keeping your belongings clean and in good repair is the most effective way to maximize their longevity. 



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