

## **Prepping for a Horse Show**

### **Beginners' Horse Showing – Phase One**

You've heard about horse showing... but what is involved?

Like dance class or music lessons, in riding we often work towards a goal of presenting what we have learned in competition.

Horse showing can be as simple as the first lead line class where young riders are led by a knowledgeable assistant at the walk and sometimes trot all the way to the Olympic disciplines of show jumping, dressage and three-day eventing.

The merits of competing in any sport are clear. Skills are learned that are transferable to other areas of life.

- Organization
- Self-discipline
- Sportsmanship
- Self-worth and confidence
- Patience
- And generally dealing with life as it happens as opposed to as it is planned.

### **So how do we get started?**

Old Orchard Farm offers several options for the beginner horse show rider and their families.

Five or six times a year OOF runs Hunter/Jumper schooling shows.

The summer series runs on holiday Mondays, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Civic Holiday, Labour Day, and the first weekend in June.

Everyone is encouraged to participate at some level.

The OOF junior riders also regularly compete at local horses show throughout the summer.

### **What do we do at a horse show?**

If we look at the horse show program we see divisions, and within those divisions, classes.

At the schooling show level (first level, OOF and Lollipop shows) you can enter classes individually or by the division. If it is your first show, you may just want to do a few classes, but if you are confident you can do the whole division. There are prizes for the top two point winners in each division.

The most basic beginner (after lead line) classes are the walk trot and walk trot canter. We also call these flat classes as there are no jumps.

In a flat class the riders enter the ring on the left rein (left hand closest to the center of the ring or going counter clockwise). Depending on the class the riders will be asked to walk trot and canter both directions.

In the beginner classes the Judge is looking for the rider first and foremost to be in control of

their mount and their own bodies. The winning rider will have the quietest position, stemming from solid lower leg position, still yet effective hands, will post on the right diagonal (rise as the outside foreleg and inside hind leg are going forward) and canter on the correct lead. In large classes the judge may divide the class into smaller groups to canter. Often the judge will call back the favorites and ask them all to canter together.

Next are the cavaletti or X's classes which are very low jumps arranged in a course that must be steered around jumping all of the fences in the right order. At OOF shows we divide the beginner division into age groups. The younger rider being from 10 years and under and older 11 to 18 years of age.

### **Good Grooming Awards**

Sherry Whitworth and Shady Lane Stables provide sponsorship for this Award. The Judge chooses the best turned out horse and rider in the lead line class and for the rest of the two beginner divisions.

### **Ages: How old am I?**

At all Canadian horse shows the ages are calculated based on the child's age as of January first of the current year regardless of when his or her actual birthday is. All riders cease to be "Juniors" once they are 18 on January first.

### **What do the prizes and points mean?**

In Canada and Great Britain ribbons or rosettes follow this colour sequence:

- First-red
- Second-blue
- Third-white
- Fourth-yellow
- Fifth-green
- Sixth-pink
- Seventh-purple
- Eighth-brown

At shows where points are accumulated, a

- First is worth 7 points
- Second is 5 points
- Third is 4 points
- Fourth is 3 points
- Fifth is 2 points
- Sixth is 1 point

At OOF shows and most of the big shows those numbers are multiplied by the number of competitors in the class.

That means that a sixth in a really big class might be worth more than a first in small class.

### **What should I wear?**

Although it would be lovely to be able to afford a complete brand-new riding outfit of your own, for your first couple of shows you may need to mix and match or borrow a few things. The obvious “can’t do with outs” are a properly fitted ASTM approved riding helmet and pair of boots with a small heel. For children under 12 paddock boots and gators (straps that go around the calf) are ideal.

For older rider’s paddock boots and half chaps are fine for schooling shows but tall leather field boots are the best. After that, next most important would be pants. Jodhpurs are long pants for children 12 and under that are worn with paddock boots. Breeches are mid-calf length pants to be worn with tall boots or half chaps and paddock boots. A show shirt or “ratcatcher” is a tailored shirt with a high neck and separate “choker” which fits snugly around the neck. Newer styles feature a diagonally crossed collar that snaps closed. This relatively inexpensive item makes a big difference. A show jacket is more of a financial commitment, but all of the clothing can be found used if you have the time to search.

### **What do I need to do to get ready?**

First thing to do is speak to your coach about which classes are most appropriate for your age and stage. Then set a date for your debut so that you and your coach have a goal date to work towards. At this point you should also book your coach to help you for that day as there are many ways that she or he will be helpful throughout the show. OOF coaches will be available during the show day at a fee of \$10.00 per class to a maximum of \$35.00 for the day. We strongly recommend that you take advantage of this service. Your day will be far less stressful and more instructive with a knowledgeable guide to help you through the process and courses. Your coach can advise you as to how to fill out your entry form. The easiest way if you have the technology is to do it online. This gets the entry directly to the show secretary. You save money by entering this way as long as you have done so 48 hours or more before the show. Remember to reserve your horse or pony on the entry as well as with your coach if it is school animal. Once you have booked your coach and of course your horse, you can start preparing for the big event.

The riding part of the preparation is obvious, but you will also want to make sure that all of your equipment and your horse are fit to show. Several days before the show you will want to be looking at cleaning up your mount, especially if it is the first show of the season. Horses and ponies get shaggy and dirty during the winter and that is partly how they stay warm and dry. The dirty oils in their coats help repel water and wind.

Once show season is here it is okay to bathe and clip and pull manes. GET HELP for clipping and mane pulling! These are jobs that if done badly will ruin the look of your horse for the whole season. You are pretty safe to bathe on your own but it doesn’t hurt to have help the first time or two.

The day before the show you will want to bathe your horse again, probably braid that newly

pulled mane (or hire someone with experience to do it for you, bad braids are much worse than no braids), clean your tack, wash saddle pads, polish all of the metal on your tack and generally be in the horse show mood. Check all of your clothes for cleanliness, polish your boots, make sure that you have a good hair net (if you're a girl) and lay everything out ready to go or be put on early.

If you dress in your show clothes the morning of the show be sure to wear scrubs or sweats over them until you are ready to get on your horse.

### **Show Day**

When you arrive at the show, (early so that you are not stressed) you will go to the secretary's booth to pay your entry fees and pick up your number. You can send a parent to do this job if you are under 18 as they will have to sign a waiver form for you. If you are 18 or over you must sign for yourself. Put your number on. Then you know where it is.

Find your horse and expect it to have rolled in the greenest nastiest pile of manure that you have ever imagined and to have tried to rub out most of its braids. If these things have not happened, consider it an exceptionally lucky day and that you are already a winner! Sponged off manure stains may take a long time to dry. Rubbing alcohol or Cowboy Magic are quick fixes and will take out most of the green stains. The braids can sometimes be faked with elastics but often you are better to redo the worst ones.

**Keep an ear open for announcements.** If you are riding over fences, you will want to do a warm up round in the ring that you will be competing in. Organize with your coach a flat warm up and then a schooling trip with his or her help. Your coach will help you understand the course, the striding, the focus points and the track that you will want to ride. After your warm up you can discuss with your coach how you can make it better and approximately how long you have to wait until you will be in the ring again. If it is going to be more than 10 minutes get off your horse and give it a rest. If the horse is fresher than you would like you may want to ride a bit longer, otherwise get back on about 15 minutes before you go back in the ring. At this point you can redo your flat warm up and refresh your horse's memory with a few jumps. Give yourself a few minutes at the gate to watch some other riders and learn from their successes and mistakes. This is a time for you to repeat to your coach what your "plan" is in the ring and visualize yourself riding the perfect round. This also ensures that you will not be late for your turn in the ring and will be appreciated by the gate steward who has not had to call for you or hold up the class. Do make sure however that you're not crowding the gate 20 trips away from your turn so that no one else can get into or out of the ring. The gate steward should call your number 4 trips away from your turn so that you will have time to get organized. You should listen for a number a few ahead of yours as well to be prepared.

When the rider in the ring before you come back to a walk after her round you may enter the ring and begin. This saves hours over the length of a day. We call this preloading the ring. Ride your course with eyes up, heels down and a smile on your face.

As you leave the ring at a walk after your class remember to pat your horse and thank the gate steward.

At this point you can ask your coach what you could do to improve your next class. Good sportsmanship will win out over temper and displays of disappointment. Remember very little ever goes as well as we hope, but as long as we learn to make it better next time we have been successful. Focus on what was good about the experience too.

### **Awards**

If the horse show gods have shone down upon you, and you and your team have been one of the more successful, you may be asked to jog back into the ring for a ribbon.

At the big horses shows saddles are removed for the jog, but at OOF we just make sure that martingales are undone so that the horse can jog with its head free to stretch out. The jog is a test of soundness, so the judge can be sure that your horse is fit, not sore, and therefore is eligible for the ribbon.

In a flat class ribbons are given out when you line up at the end of the class.

If today has been your day you may be Champion or Reserve Champion for your division. These awards are given to the top point earners in each division. Your name and number will be called for a special presentation. Don't take your braids out too early if you think you might be in the running. The pictures always look best when you're still all dressed up!

### **End of the Day**

It might have been good, or you might just have had a learning experience which is also good. Either way you must put the needs of your horse first. Tack must be put away, braids taken out, a liniment rub on the legs is required, then feed and return your horse to stall or field feeling comfortable and appreciated. Be sure to clean up your mess in the barn before you head home too. Start thinking about a plan for your next show!

**THANK YOUR PARENTS AND MEMBERS OF YOUR TEAM FOR THEIR SUPPORT!**

For more information on horseshow readiness, etiquette, terminology and style we strongly recommend additional reading at the [Show Ring Ready Blog](#)