



Horse Show Etiquette

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Horse Show Etiquette:

7 Ways to avoid being a huge a—... jerk at the show.

For the last 5 years, I've been more of a behind-the-scenes horse show goer than an actual exhibitor, so I'm not a person who necessarily knows all of the official rules of competition. However, I absolutely could write a manual on the unofficial and unwritten rules, which happen to be just as important as far as I'm concerned. Horse showing isn't a team sport, but it does involve working very closely with many different people who you may or may not even know, so there are a number of things you can do to make yourself less of a jerk and more of a conscientious horse show enthusiast, in whatever role you may occupy. So whether you are a rider, groom, ring crew member, first time horse show Dad, or unwilling boyfriend supporter, these are your words to live by:

Be neat.

Everyone hates an unsightly mess. Or at least, I do, and as an equal member of the horse show community it is your duty to respect my right to a clutter-free aisle. Don't throw your stuff on the floor. Sweep your area. Don't leave your hay stack looking like horses are eating directly from the pile itself, especially if that mess is now creeping into your neighbour's area. And for the love of god, if someone has just swept the aisle do NOT shake out a blanket on the floor or take your horse out of it's stall without picking his feet.

If you have an unmannerly horse, do something about it.

If your horse kicks, put a red ribbon in his tail and keep your distance. Warn others at the wash stall and when hand walking. If he bangs in his stall, maybe try a slow feeder hay net and apologize profusely, so that everyone in the barn doesn't slowly lose their mind and plot ways to let him loose without you knowing. There is only so much you can do, but people will be more tolerant if you are making an effort to keep others safe and happy.

Don't steal warm-up jumps.

Just don't do it. Don't lie about how many out you are, or pretend you didn't see me waiting, because it's just plain rude. Offer to share if you have to, and communicate honestly with the other people in the warm-up ring about how many jumps your horse will need so that everyone makes it to the ring on time.

~~Show up on time.~~ Show up early.

Do not keep a ring waiting, unless you would like to make an entire class full of enemies. Make your posted order, or sign up for a spot you know you are going to be able to make.



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Conflicts are sometimes going to be unavoidable but work with the in-gate person and other competitors to sort out the best possible plan for everyone. In the unfortunate event that you still end up holding up the ring, don't wait until your trainer arrives to even mount your horse and then proceed to engage in the Olympic Games of warm-ups while everyone watches, judging you profusely and hoping you would just fall off already.

Don't be a lunatic in the warm-up ring.

Pass left to left and only on the inside. Do not tail gate. Do not choose pony day, when there are 30 somewhat out of control 7 year olds warming up, to practice your gallop sets and speed turns. If you are doing this, you are being dangerous, and you are once again being a jerk.

Don't loudly complain about other competitors, judges, horse show management, or staff.

I get it. Its been a long day, all your horses were bad and all the rings were late and it makes you feel better to let off a little steam and do some good old fashioned complaining. Resist. It's not a good look on anyone. Legitimate concerns should be taken up with horse show staff at an appropriate time, in a respectful manner. Its never appropriate to maliciously comment on the success of a competitor you don't think should have won. One day you will be the person who caught a lucky break and with the situation reversed, you too will be hoping for some compassion.

Do not have a temper tantrum. There's no crying in baseba—erhm, show jumping...

Riding is hard, showing is stressful, trainers are mean, and sometimes horses are bad. But no matter what happens you need to do your very best not to throw a temper tantrum, because this is a game and we are all privileged to be here. Do not yell at your mother, don't talk back to your trainer, do not jump off and kick your dumb horse in his stupid leg, because all of these things are disrespectful to everyone else who has to bear witness and downright unacceptable. Sometimes everyone just needs to cry, but do that in the privacy of a stall and then brush yourself off, get a grip, and proceed with a smile on your face because horse showing is fun, goddamnit.