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For Albertans About Albertans

Misty Rouse has groomed at several top show barns, but most notably must be her tenure as senior groom for Kelly Koss-Brix, the Canadian show jumping team member and head of the horse program at Spruce Meadows. Misty traveled with her string of horses all over the world, including an extended stay in Europe for competitions. Misty shares with us some of her tips for being a top level groom.

So here are my tips as a groom.....

If you have a horse with any white markings at all, do one of my favorite things for show season: CLIP THEM!! Legs or face, really. I used to deal with shedding white hair on everything, and once I started clipping all the white hair I realized I could make everything look clean and sharp.

I hated braiding manes until I spent seven months working in Europe. For the first four months I felt like an outsider as a groom that didn't braid. So I had a groom from our barn in Holland teach me how to braid, and then I was hooked! The horses looked so good and completed the whole show ring look. Needless to say I would have to get to the barn at 4 am to make sure I had the time to complete my morning chores and then braid everyone! As I got used to it I got much faster.

I feel like the most important thing as a groom is not only to be at the ring on time, but to also get to know your rider. They are under so much pressure. We forget what it is exactly our riders are facing. "Do well! Win!!" We as grooms are the ones that are there no matter what. We are there for schooling; we learn the routine; we get it when it's just a bad day; we, as the grooms, are the consistent factor. I may sound dramatic, but I lived a big chunk of my life with a rider that I respected and admired. The least I could do for her was to have everything just right on show day.

In my routine I like using Ivory dish soap to wash the horses. I always found they were clean and soft after. I use a Healthy Horse Care moisturizer daily. I liked that the horses got used to being sprayed with various things – handy for fly spray season!

Personally I didn't like leaving the hair at the withers long when clipping, because there always seemed to be shavings that I couldn't brush out. So, I clipped the main hair to the top of the point of the withers.

Show Sheen was my tail conditioner of choice. I also preferred a hoof oil to a hoof conditioner – I felt it looked better.

Also with research and experience most show horses develop ulcers to some degree. I used Omega Alpha products for it – Gastra-fx and Biotic 8. I had great results from these products.

After a show I would always bandage the horses that jumped 1.20m and up. I used to use poultice, but the following morning I would have such trouble washing and drying legs so I looked for a solution that was just as effective with less work. I came to find Traumeel and Back on Track no-bows! I found this combination to be much better than poultice, and I really came to depend on these things.

When it comes to showing on grass, I used to cork according to the footing, but I realized each horse moved and landed differently. So, for the sure-footed horses that landed still and square I used small, wide front corks, and thin, long corks behind. I found that the long corks in front didn't have enough "give" on the landing, and could cause injuries. But the thin, long corks behind gave enough grip to take off well. We must not forget the quarter hole in the hind shoe – I put a short, wide cork in there for optimal turning. I liked to have the farrier drill the quarter hole a touch closer to the heel cork hole, to help reduce the torque on the joints while turning.

I always loved what I did as a groom, and I cared deeply for the horses. I got to know them all as the unique individuals they are.