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Category: Horsemanship

Tack Selection

When it comes to choosing tack for your rodeo queen pageant consider the following as the most important criteria:

1. Good quality leather
2. Clean and in good condition
3. Fits horse and rider

Take pride in your tack and purchase the best quality you can afford. This does not mean encrusted with silver and bling of the latest style. Tack is an investment and spending a few extra dollars on good quality, classic, heavy-duty tack will serve you better in the long run than purchasing inexpensive and/or trendy tack. Regularly cleaning and conditioning your tack is time well-spent in protecting your investment.

Don't make the mistake of thinking the saddle you ride in daily or your other tack is not "fancy" enough for a rodeo queen pageant. Too many contestants borrow a saddle that they have not ridden in for the day of the competition and it shows in their performance. Again, the most important traits of your tack are that it is made from good quality leather, it is clean and in good condition and it fits both you and your horse.

Saddle - Your saddle should be clean, in good repair and must fit you and your horse. Many contestants ride in saddles that have a seat that is too big for them which makes it difficult for them to properly sit and balance. Another common mistake is having stirrups that are too long, which unbalances the rider and prevents them from fully using their seat as an aid. If your saddle has a bank cinch it must be connected to the front cinch with a hobble strap and it must be snug to the horse. Back cinches that are not snug pose a safety hazard and are completely incapable of doing their job of keeping the saddle in place.

Saddle Pads - Select a pad that enhances the fit of your saddle and one that is in a neutral color. Avoid putting a blanket over a pad as this increases the risk of your saddle slipping. Your pad should be centered on your horse and have an equal amount framing your saddle. Clean your pads regularly, your horse will appreciate your effort!

Headstalls and Bits - A properly fitting, clean and in good repair headstall is much more important than a headstall covered in bling and of the latest style fad. Headstalls with a brow band sit more squarely on your horse's head and are more stable. Your bit should enhance your riding and be an aid, not a hindrance. Different styles of bits need to be adjusted differently in your horse's mouth. Curb bits are to be used on horses ages 5 and over with snaffles used on younger, less trained horses. Ideally you will be mounted on a horse that is aged and using a curb bit. Both types of bits require a properly fitting chin strap. When using a snaffle bit you must use two hands on the reins or the bit will not provide the correct action in your horse's mouth. If you are uncertain about the bit you are using, or if your horse would do better in a different bit, seek the help of a qualified trainer.

Reins - Split or Rommel reins are preferred over single (roping) reins. These types of reins are preferred on curb bits and allow better control by having the ability to lengthen or shorten as needed (a skill you need to practice frequently). When using split reins they are to be held together in the left hand with the extra reins hanging down on the left side of your horse. With Rommel reins you must have 18" between the button and your right hand on the Rommel. The left hand is preferred as it is the traditional hand to use although we are seeing more right handed riders in the show pen. More traditional judges may score you a few points lower if you use your right hand. If you are using a snaffle bit on your horse then you must use split reins, crossed at the withers and with both hands on the reins.

Tie-downs - Judges should not count down for riding with a tie-down but some judges will deduct points. Ideally you should not need a tie-down for your horsemanship horse but if you are riding a timed event horse for the competition do not remove the tie-down unless the horse can truly keep their head in the proper position. It is better to ride with the tie-down than to have a horse that is tossing their head and running through the bit at the stop.

When using a tie-down you MUST use a properly fitting breast collar with a tie-down keeper (also known as a hobble) attached to the center ring of the breast collar. This keeper can be made of leather or parachute cord (neutral color) and keeps the tie-down strap in proper position. When adjusting the tie-down strap stand next to your horse facing their neck and press the middle of the strap up to the bottom of your horse's neck. It should easily touch without having too much slack on either side. If it does not touch then it is too short and needs lengthened. Likewise, if there is a lot of excess strap on either or both sides it is too long and not of much use. The tie-down nose band should not interfere with the bit and sit comfortably in the middle of the horse's nose. When attaching the tie-down strap to the cinch make sure the part of the snap you use to open the snap is facing down and away from your horse's belly.

Leg Protection - Using leg protection on your horse is optional. If you chose to do so then boots and wraps should fit well, be clean and in good shape and be of a neutral color (although contrasting clean, white wraps are a sharp look).

Flag Boot - Always use a flag boot to carry a flag as it will provide security with the pole. Make sure the boot is large enough in circumference and short enough for the flap pole to fall out of in case of an emergency.