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Category: Horsemanship

The Horsemanship Interview

Following the completion of your pattern you may be asked to dismount before the judges for a short interview. You will want to ride to about 10-feet in front of the judges to dismount. Stop your horse with his feet under him. Place your left hand, with reins, on your horse's neck and your right hand on your saddle horn to dismount. Step off your horse swiftly but calmly, avoiding brushing its rump with your right leg. Step to your horse's head and gather your reins as if you were showing your horse at showmanship (avoid having your reins touch the ground). [Photo number five](#) in this series shows how your reins and arms should be held as you walk to the judges. Stop approximately 3-4-feet from the judges and turn slightly toward your horse. You want to be in a position where you can see the judges and hear their questions but still keep an eye on your horse. Stand by your horse's head and stand approximately 12" from your horse to discourage them from rubbing on you. As you interview avoid moving around and standing too relaxed. Your arms and reins should remain in a similar position as the photo example during this time. If the judges ask where something is (pastern, hock, pommel, etc.) verbally explain the location instead of pointing. By pointing you are giving the other contestants a hint as to what to expect in the interview.

When it comes time to remount, turn your back to the judges and back your horse several steps. You can either remain in this position or you can turn your horse at a 90-degree angle to the judges. Do a quick tack check, especially your cinch and tighten if needed. Using the techniques outlined in the video below, remount your horse. Work on making mounting a three-step process - stand next to your horse, left shoulders together and place your foot in the stirrup; take one "hop" step so you are at a 90-degree angle to your horse and then make the "jump" to mounting position. Again, swiftly yet carefully mount your horse without bumping its rump with your right leg. One of the reasons this technique is preferred over other techniques is that it helps avoid an unladylike position. Also, if your horse steps forward their momentum will put you into place rather than leave you hopping after them.

It is important to PRACTICE dismounting, interviewing and mounting again. Very few contestants practice this and then become frustrated their horse won't stand quietly during the interview or when they go to mount. While you are training your horse randomly stop, dismount, stand as if you are being interviewed, remount and work some more. Keep doing this throughout your rides and you and your horse will be comfortable and relaxed during the interview.

Safety is an important aspect of this portion of the competition. Even the calmest horse can become agitated after working a pattern and may fidget and fuss. You want to ensure the judges are not at risk for being stepped on or kicked by your horse. Never, ever in any circumstance drop your reins. The moment in which you are suspended over your horse while mounting and dismounting is one of the most vulnerable positions you can be in. If you do not have the reins in your hand then you are placing yourself, and the judges, in a potential wreck situation. This is not "Project Cowgirl", save the stunts for another competition.

At right Lindsey Ahrenholtz, Miss Rodeo Iowa 2009, demonstrates the proper way to hold your reins and to stand next to your horse during the horsemanship interview. She is relaxed and able to see the judges as well as her horse so she can react if her horse becomes spooked or agitated. Also notice the good quality, clean leather tack she is using; the fit of her clothes; how her hat is sitting level on her head; the appropriately sized earrings she has chosen and how her hair is neatly pulled back.

No matter your experience level the key to earning the most points you can possibly earn is to practice, practice, practice; to study, study, study and to pay attention to every last, minute detail. Never stop learning, just 15-minutes of studying equine science knowledge every day will put you steps ahead of your fellow competitors, especially during the horsemanship interview.

