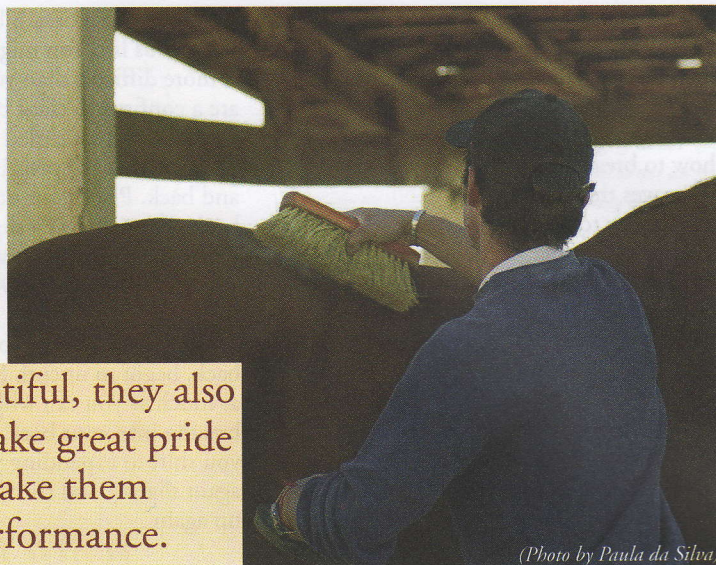


Grooming Increases Circulation

by Ruthann Smith



(Photo by Paula da Silva)

Rich, glistening coats not only look beautiful, they also indicate inner well-being. Top grooms take great pride in rubbing on their horses not only to make them shiny, but also to improve health and performance.

Proper grooming increases circulation. Show horses are groomed vigorously each day for about 45 minutes before and after work. Results include:

- a deep layered shine
- resilient skin
- improved muscle tone
- reduced soreness
- increased suppleness
- invigorated bodies

Tight bodies are prone to injury. Just as athletes warm up, stretch and get massaged, horses are groomed. A vigorous grooming routine should begin with shorter sessions. Horses may need to get accustomed to deep muscle massages. Here are techniques to optimize your grooming program.

Currying

Start with a stiff brush or curry. Use the stiff brush on mud, avoiding the heels, which could cause scratches. Currying is perhaps the most important thing you can do for your horse. Use a flexible rubber curry or mitt. Gently curry bony areas such as shins to ward off crud. On muscular areas, start lightly to draw blood to the area. Then add pressure, following hair growth in a circular motion. Curry from your back rather than wrists to create greater flow. You'll increase circulation in both you and your horse to warm up.

Brushing

I use a clean brush in each hand, moving from my back. Another technique cleans the brush over a curry with each stroke. Work with medium then soft brushes in a vigorous rhythm with elbow grease.

Stimulate skin to make it more comfortable and resilient. Reduce irritation by wiping skin inside ears, under the tail and between teats daily. Then use a soft brush or towel on the skin to bring out protective oils.

Good grooming:

- prepares bodies for work by bringing oxygen to the muscles, carrying away lactic acid buildup and toxins that cause stiffness
- improves tone by stimulating muscles
- relaxes minds
- reduces soreness and injuries with massage

Strapping

Tone and shine by strapping large muscle groups including the neck, shoulder (not on the bone), and rump (not the kidneys). Use a folded towel to pop muscles rhythmically. This does not feel like a slap, but a light bounce. The muscles anticipate and contract to keep even lay-ups toned.

Polish

Rub on the entire body with a folded towel. Use elbow grease, circling with hair growth. Finish with all hair smoothed out as it grows.

Tails and Manes

Tails and manes grow when the hair flows. Kinky locks are brittle because natural oils can't slide down the shaft to replenish and protect hair. Motion stimulates the oils. This is why we don't leave braids in overnight. Pick tails daily to keep hair clean and organized for shine and fullness.

After the Ride

After you have worked your horse, walk lots and groom again to reduce muscle stiffness and soreness. Sweat left on his coat can parch the coat, leaving skin more sensitive, damaging hair and dulling shine.

Grooming can help you tune into and connect with your horse. Proper techniques will promote well-being to make your horse look, feel and perform best. So, rub on and enjoy!



Ruthann Smith, world-class braider and groom, teaches Top Turnout Clinics and developed the progressive and cost-effective Lucky Braids coat care and braiding products. Find more grooming tips at: LuckyBraids.com.