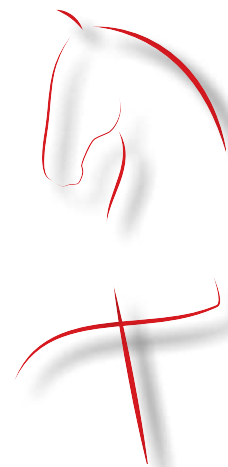




CHRIS MAUDSLEY

Success with competition halter showing



Successful showing takes practice, so make sure you practice at home regularly to prepare for the show and ensure that for at least 2 weeks prior to the show you practice using your show equipment, so your horse is used to the different feel. Don't leave everything to the day before.

It really helps to have a 'mateship' relationship with your horse: in other words, he must enjoy being around you and used to having some fun within your training routine.

Moving their head and shoulder is an important lesson for the horse to learn as it will allow you to change direction in the show ring while your horse stays with you at the shoulder. To ask the horse to move his head, neck and shoulder away from you, you need to find a technique that does not frighten them but guides them to where you would like them to be.

Stand on the near side of your horse (the left hand side) and place your left hand on the halter and gently push the face away. You will find that by just using the



Firstly, your horse should lead well beside your shoulder; if he finds this difficult then some horsemanship games will help him change his mind. Some horses, for instance, don't like being asked to move their front end away from your space; some may also want to stay in your space and crowd you. These are common problems, but you can find solutions through play to make your horse feel that it was all their idea!

left hand on the halter the horse's head will move but the rest of the horse stays still; use your right hand on the shoulder to ask the horse to move and you will find that they will eventually move in a circle away from you. Reward every little effort at the start of this exercise and reward and praise often as the training progresses, with either a soft pat or scratch on the neck or verbal praise; be careful with food rewards as horses that have difficulty respecting your personal

space may take advantage of your nice gesture. If food rewards are given they should be timely, with the horse respecting your space.

Through repetition of this exercise you will reach a point where the horse will turn as you turn, as you lift your energy and turn your shoulders towards them. Secondly the horse needs to understand when to move forward and when to halt and again this is an exercise built on repetition. You are asking for your horse's complete attention with his ear attuned to your breathing. As you breathe in and lift your energy your shoulders will rise slightly and the horse should be waiting and responding as if saying 'what?' As you move your right hand forward slightly with the lead line he should be ready to walk on without hesitation. The opposite breathing aid is given for the halt: breathe out and this action will lower your shoulders slightly, then slow down your stride and when you stop walking he should halt by your side.

Thirdly, standing at halt must be mastered for the line-up: your horse needs to stay calm, straight and square.

If your horse moves, use your body language to correct and straighten. You can do this by looking at the hind quarters to produce a movement for correction: if he moves his quarters to the left look at the hind quarters on the left side to ask him to step away and straighten back to the right.

Finally you need your horse to understand to back-up and move forward. You can achieve this by using a slight pressure cue on the halter –down and back – and you may couple this with a verbal cue in training until the horse understands what you have asked. Again, as with the other movements, with repetition your horse will read your body language as long as it is a clear aid.

These movements are all essential for successful showing: when the judge is moving around the ring you must be able to see the judge at all times without obscuring the view of your horse. You should be able to position the horse, whether forward or back, for the ease and safety of the judge assessing him.

The equipment you choose to use will differ depending on whether it is a breed event or agricultural show, but in either case your bridle or halter should be made of leather and suited to the breed of the horse. You MUST read the rules of the show as they will differ between events: at agricultural shows, for instance, the horses must have a bit in their mouth at halter classes. Stallions in particular should have a suitable

bit for SAFETY reasons. Some breeds have their own rules, for example quarter horses are required to have a leather halter and chain on the lead for stallions, while mares and geldings require a leather lead.

Your presentation needs to be immaculate: groomed to shine, with any white markings made to be pure white. Hooves should be blackened to shine, while any blemishes should be covered appropriately and mane and tail presented as per breed of the horse.

Luckily there are many products available to assist in good presentation, but a good quality shampoo and conditioner is a must; you can also invest in coat shine and tail detangler for a professional finish. For extra shine on the hooves after painting with black apply a shine hairspray. Plaiting spray can help hold plaits and eliminate frizz.

Protection after preparation is also a must: rug immediately after shampooing and place leg wraps on. You can use a skinny hood to protect plaiting, while a cotton bandage to protect tail plaiting is a good idea. Remember preparation is key: do your homework with training, presentation and paperwork, then relax on the day and have some fun.

Chris

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