



Preparing for Horse Show Season

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As the days get shorter, most of us will have at least a short “off-season break” for equine competitions whether that be shows, rodeos, or other events. This is the perfect time of year to give some thought to and make plans for the upcoming competition season. I have shared a few ideas below and resources at the end of this article that may allow you to invest time now so that next year’s competition season runs a little smoother for you and your family.

Off-season horse health care activities

If it will be a couple of months before you begin competition, this is a perfect time to work with your farrier to address remedies for any hoof problems you may be having. Without the stress of competition schedules, deadlines, and show prep riding time, you have some time to explore interventions now that can improve the overall hoof care picture for your horse for the upcoming year. Also, this is a perfect time to discuss with your veterinarian your vaccination and deworming program to see if they recommend changes there. This is also a good time to schedule necessary vet checks or exams that you will need for traveling, such as the Coggins’ test. You can also look at health requirements for upcoming out-of-state shows that may require a health certificate or other documents and get that on your calendar so you are prepared ahead of time. If you haven’t already done so, you can gather all of your updated health records, livestock inspection forms, registration papers, membership cards, competition licenses, emergency telephone numbers, insurance policy requirements, etc. to put into a binder to travel with so that you have that ready for the upcoming season. One point of advice—make sure that you make a duplicate binder with photocopies of everything to leave at home (or in a safe place) in case the original binder is lost or damaged.

Off-season maintenance needs

Just as your horse needs some maintenance to prepare for the upcoming season, so does your truck and trailer. If you plan now to take your truck and trailer in for routine maintenance checks (brakes, wheel bearings, and lights come to mind), this will be your best insurance that you are not left with an equipment failure during the season that disrupts your competition schedule. You can also rest easier that your vehicle has been checked by a professional to insure the safety of you, your family, and your horses. I know that we all get “sticker shock” when it comes to buying a new set of trailer tires, but for me I prefer that to being “broke down on the side of I-25” because I thought “they looked like they could go another year”.

One of my least favorite jobs, although it is vitally important to rider safety, is that of inspecting, cleaning, conditioning, and needed repairs of saddles and other tack. For me, the holiday season is the one time of year that I diligently make time to carefully inspect all of our family’s saddles and “break them down” to clean and

condition all of the parts. By doing so, I know that things are in good repair, and for most of the competition season I can do routine light cleanings and inspections to make sure that everything is safe and ready for show day. I've found that this also gives me the time to train the kids on how to properly care for their expensive tack to make it last. Be sure to remember the bridles and other gear too when you are making those inspections and/or repairs. If you find that something is beyond repair, then you have a good idea of what to ask Santa Claus for under the tree.

Off-season planning

I recommend taking this time to prepare a traveling first aid kit for you and your horse that can be left in the truck/trailer or readily packed. That way you know it is done and you are prepared to "load and go". Along with this, I recommend sitting down and making a "show packing checklist" that is personalized for your needs. With this in hand, you can make a quick inspection of the trailer to make sure that you have everything you will need for the trip and competition weekend.

In this day and age, we are all pulled in different directions with many job demands and other requirements on our free time. One of the most useful planning activities I can recommend is to try to gather the competition dates for the upcoming year for the association activities that you wish to compete in. Then, you can see potential conflicts with work, family commitments, or multiple association events on the same weekend. With this in hand, you can then sit down as a family to discuss, prioritize, and develop a "game plan" on how you will approach the year's competition season. With this game plan in hand, you can then work together to set goals for the year and make a riding/training schedule that will make sure that you are prepared to do your best at the competition dates you have chosen. Finally, this detailed planning can help you look at estimated expenses for the trips you plan, and determine ahead of time how you might have to trim some expenses and/or show weekends to stay in line with the amount of money you have allocated for your horse activities.

Off-season horse riding activities

If you have thought of trying a new class at the shows or changing disciplines, this is the perfect time to get some professional advice and help on how best to prepare you and your horse for that change. With the short days, you may have limited time after work to get much training done. So, you may have to plan routine chores in the evening in order to free up time for riding and training on the weekends. If time is limited for actual riding, you can still work on yourself by gathering patterns for the classes that you do and think ahead on how you will ride those patterns. Another investment made now that pays dividends in the future is to make sure that you have an exercise program that not only keeps your horse "legged-up", but also a program for you that makes sure you retain core strength and flexibility needed to be at the top of your game.

In closing, I hope that you have a blessed holiday season with the time to give thought to the upcoming year. If the weather cooperates, then you will have plenty of valued riding time. If it doesn't, then I think I have provided some ideas for "rainy day" activities that will take your mind off of what you can't do. 😊 I've listed a few resources below that might give you some more specific ideas for your to-do list.

Resources and further reading:

1. “Saddle cleaning tips” in Western Horseman magazine. Retrieved December 10, 2019, from: <https://westernhorseman.com/horsemanship/how-to/4-saddle-cleaning-tips/>
2. Waller, S. 2006. “Trailer Maintenance, Right on Schedule” in The Horse magazine. Retrieved December 10, 2019, from: <https://thehorse.com/130111/trailer-maintenance-right-on-schedule>
3. “How to Make a Portable First-Aid Kit” in The Horse magazine. Retrieved December 10, 2019, from: <https://thehorse.com/154857/how-to-make-a-portable-first-aid-kit/>
4. Harrison, A. 2017. “Best-Ever Show-Day Checklist” in Horse & Rider Magazine. Retrieved December 10, 2019, from: https://horseandrider.com/training/show_checklist_121709
5. American Quarter Horse Association website (aqha.com). If you search “exercises”, then several links to articles for exercises for you and your horse will come up for review.



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