

Australasian Gypsy Horse Society

Show Preparation

Every Champion was once a
contender that refused to
give up.



Show Ring Secrets: A Head-to-Feather guide on preparing for show - By Belinda Leonard

Prior Preparation for Pristine Presentation

Obviously the more work you put into keeping your Cob/Drum clean before the show, the better. Depending on your situation and workload, this can be anything from simply keeping it rugged to oiling the feather, mane and tail daily.

Several days before show it's important to fully wash your cob if you can (although I have been known to take a mud monster straight to the wash bay at a show!). After this, you can oil and sulphur the feather. This will keep the feather from drying out and balance the ph after all the shampooing and scrubbing. Anecdotally, this also is said to remove some yellow staining from the feather.

Building the Body

The body, fortunately, is the easiest part of the Cob or Drum to wash and prepare for show, the hair is short and relatively clean if the horse is normally kept rugged.

A good shampoo, such as 'Orvus', a high-lathering quality shampoo widely used internationally, including by the 'Budweiser' team. It proves incredibly effective, but can be drying, so be sure to wash out thoroughly and condition well afterwards. As it does lather so well, only a tiny amount is needed. Other recommended products include the Eqyss range and 'Hoss Gloss'.

Regardless of the shampoo you need to work it into the coat to get an effective clean. A 'Magic Brush' or the 'handmitt' brushes work well for this and saves some elbow grease! After scrubbing leave the shampoo sit and 'work' for several minutes before thoroughly rinsing off as leftover shampoo can irritate the skin.

If your cob has large areas of white you can use a 'bluing' shampoo to help whiten these. 'Livamol Blue' comes highly recommend and is my personal favourite, as well as 'Mighty Bright'. Follow the directions to make sure you don't end up with a purple horse!

When rinsing the shampoo out, pressure is everything. Some Shire owners in England go to the extent of breaking out the Karcher, but it's not advised! Check the pressure of the hose on your own skin, you should be able to feel the pressure but you do not want it to feel sharp or painful.

Traumatised Tails

Anyone with a mare with a white tail will be well aware of the frustrations of getting staining out. While temporary solutions can be effective, when it comes to getting white tails, persistence and repetition pays.

With a horse out of the paddock that has a badly stained tail, begin with a bi-carb scrub, or else skip to the vinegar rinse. To do the Bi-Carb scrub mix a cup of Bi-Carb soda and half a bucket of water as hot as you can put your hand in and soak the tail. Swirl and scrub the tail in the bucket. Leave this to soak for a few minutes and this will swell and open up the hair shaft to allow for easier stain removal.

This is followed by the tried and true favourite of the white vinegar rinse. Put one part warm water to one part white vinegar into a bucket and dunk as much of the tail in there as you can. Then it's just a matter of standing there swishing the tail around for around 10 mins. Warm water is the key to this, and for that matter to increase the efficacy of any shampoo or conditioner. Start several weeks out from show and braid the tail afterwards. You can also bag the tail if necessary to avoid further staining. From experience I would suggest a waterproof fabric to avoid 'marinating' the tail.

If this fails there are a couple of options. An American colleague with a highly successful show team full of mares swears by 'Steradent' denture tablets. She recommends dissolving 8-9 in 4 or 5 litres of water and soaking the tail as above. For this procedure I would recommend not soaking the dock of the tail and of course condition afterwards.

Several breeders have recommended Napi-San Oxy Action below the dock or 'white' hair dyes. I would be hesitant to use these products personally, but if used sparingly and with care they should present no long term problems. Perhaps save them for the 'Royal' shows when it's strictly necessary.

Despite the temptation, don't use whitening shampoos before the show—they leave the hair brittle and more susceptible to picking up stains. After all your hard work it's best to protect it with a detangler or shiner, like 'Show Sheen', to stop stains collecting in the days leading up to show.

Flying Feather

Once again, the more preparation you can do, the better. Ideally the feather should be oiled in the weeks leading up to show, if not months. This will stop stains building up as well as promote feather growth and prevent mites and itching. If the feather is incredibly stained you can use Orvus or your chosen shampoo and scrub as well and as thoroughly as your horse will allow. You cannot afford to be gentle when cleaning feather, you need to work the shampoo in thoroughly and rinse out just as thoroughly. The same vinegar wash used on the tail can be put in a spray bottle and combed through the outside feather as well.

In my experience showing feathered breeds no one goes to show content with the amount of feather there horse has and laments breakage and bog burn even on horses with feather scraping the ground. Every breeder, even those looked at by envious eyes, wants to present their feather to its fullest, flying best. But what's the best way?

Unfortunately there are no shortcuts for the best feather at the show. Whether you have all the mod cons, or you're washing in the River Eden, scrubbing the feather is an essential and time consuming process.

The day before show scrub wash and scrub the feather, rinse and repeat as much as you can.

With showing in hand Shires this can frequently take hours, and the Gypsy's and Drums have considerably more feather in most cases. Once the feather is rinsed for the final time, condition and cover with 'Show Sheen', 'Magic Tails Shine Serum' or similar detangler to prevent overnight stains. Very early on the morning of show wash the feather again and dry with wood-flour. Wood flour is the single greatest 'show secret' you will find for amazing feather. Not only will it dry the feather quickly for show, it will produce natural looking feather with great body. Wood flour is very fine, white-ish sawdust that's a by-product of milling. While it can be very, very hard to find we are lucky

enough to have Harry Howarth (an AGHS member), that is able to supply it. His website is heavyhorsesupplies.com.au.

Using wood-flour is fairly simple, once the feather is wet stand the hoof on a hessian sack, or in a bucket and run the wood-flour up the leg, under the feather. Work in as much as you can and the excess will fall back into the bucket, or onto the sack. Once you've applied the wood-flour and the feather is dry, applying a dusting of talcum powder lightly dusted over the outside of the feather and lightly dusted off will complete the 'pristine' look. The final touch for the feather is to apply 'Show Sheen' or light show oil to the outside of the feather. To protect your hard labour ensure the horse stands on concrete or a clean dry area until dry as oils will act as a magnet to dirt until dry.

Finishing Finesse

To finish off the horse lightly mist show oil over the body, mane and tail. Comb through the mane and tail (don't use your hands, you don't want the lead slipping out of your oiled hands at an inopportune moment!). You can then wipe over the horse with a sheepskin pad, which are sold as car buffers in auto stores. Sheepskin works best to bring out the shine and not soak up the oils, however microfiber cloths will do in a pinch. After years of practice, you might even get two spare minutes after this to frantically throw on show clothes and comb your own hair!

Presentation standards of the Gypsy cob and Drum horse

Trimming of the Gypsy cob and Drum horse can be a controversial practice, because the beards, moustaches, feather and full, luxurious manes and tails are breed characteristics of these horses.

- ❖ The Gypsy cob and Drum horse is generally shown untrimmed and unplaited including the head and face, mane and tail, however exhibitors should not be penalised for trimming or plaiting.
- ❖ Some trimming of the bridle path is accepted, especially for the ridden section.
- ❖ Manes and tails should be full and flowing. Feather should be full, curtaining the coronets and hooves. 'Consideration should be given when harsh Australian conditions cause unavoidable feather breakage - especially in hotter, drier climates.'
- ❖ Long hairs under the jaw and those protruding from the ears may be trimmed but exhibitors should not be penalised for not doing so.
- ❖ Whiskers should not be trimmed.
- ❖ The tail may be trimmed at the bottom if excessively long.
- ❖ No false hair, artificial colouring or make-up should be used.

Most importantly smile, have fun and enjoy yourself.