



Dressing For Success

By Sarah Gee

As the saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Nowhere is this truer than in the show ring. While the majority of walking horse classes are judged on the performance of the horse, the appearance of the rider does have an impact. A rider's attire can either add to or detract from the horse's performance. A properly and tastefully attired rider compliments the horse while a garishly or sloppily attired rider draws the

judge's attention away from the horse.

Most every rulebook in our industry lays out the basic requirements for attire. The requirements for English classes usually include an English riding habit, boots, English spurs (optional), underpasses, gloves (usually optional), hats (sometimes optional), and neat hair styled so that the back number can be seen easily. Western requirements usually include a hat, boots, long sleeved shirt, and neat hair,

with chaps, western spurs, and lariat optional. As you can see, the requirements in both divisions are fairly open as to style and taste.

In English classes, a conservative look is usually the best bet. An English riding habit consists of either a two or three-piece suit with Kentucky jodhpurs, vest, and jacket with inverted pleats. Additionally, for a truly finished look the rider should wear a well fitted long sleeved collared

shirt in white or a coordinated pastel color, a four-in-hand tie, English jodhpur type boots, underpasses, a tasteful hat (homburg, derby, snap brim, or helmet), and gloves. Long hair should be pinned up in a bun and no hair should show under the front of the rider's hat. Dangly earrings are never a good idea.

While it is possible to get suits in almost any color and or pattern, most well appointed riders will choose dark colors with or without a light pinstripe. When choosing a suit, you should always consider the color of your horse. Self-expression or individuality can be added in several different ways. First, you may want to choose a tie that adds some contrast and color to your outfit. A patterned tie almost always looks better than a solid one. Second, consider wearing a vest in a contrasting color such as a tan or beige vest with a brown suit or a pale blue vest with a grey suit. Third, think about replacing your standard jacket with a day coat in a contrasting color. Examples might include a light blue coat with grey jods and vest or a red coat with black jods and vest. Last but not least, if you are showing in the evening, especially in a championship class, you may want to consider wearing a semi-formal or tuxedo-type one-button coat. This type of coat requires a formal white wing collar shirt with a bow tie and cummerbund or vest. A top hat or homburg, gloves, patent leather boots, and small boutonniere complete the formal look.

In western classes, opportunities for self-expression and individuality are more obvious. All riders must wear a western hat, boots, and a long sleeved shirt. Jeans with a western belt are appropriate and chaps are always recommended, as are gloves. Choose colors that go well with your horse. A bright shirt, vest, or jacket can compliment a dark hat and dark chaps. If you choose to wear a vest or jacket, make sure it doesn't clash with your shirt. If your shirt is patterned, you'll probably want a solid colored vest or jacket. If your shirt is solid, you might consider a patterned vest or jacket. For a complete look, coordinate your saddle blanket with your outfit.

No matter what division you are showing in, properly fitting attire is a must. Attire that is too baggy or too tight is distracting to both the rider and the judge. Baggy attire wrinkles and billows in the wind. Tight attire is binding and in extreme cases may actually tear as the rider moves with the horse. Always make the effort to ensure that your attire fits properly.

Proper, tasteful attire will only add to your ride. It will complement your horse and complete the picture you present to the judge. Remember, your attire is the one thing that you have full control over in the show ring. 🐾



MONEY SAVING *Attire Tips*

- If you are confident in your sewing abilities consider making your own riding habits. Here are two reliable pattern sources: Suitability (www.suitability.com or 800-207-0256) and Jean Hardy Patterns (www.jeanhardypatterns.com or 714-544-1608).
- Consider buying used riding attire. My Trainers Closet (www.mytrainercloset.com) and Saddleseat Riders Consignment are two consignment shops dedicated to saddle seat attire. E-bay is also a great source for all types of riding attire.