

Clean

*To shine,
your horse
needs to
be*

story and photos by Doreen Shumpert

Whether you are showing or selling a horse, cleanliness counts. It can mean wins and it can mean more money.

There are many aspects to preparing a horse to show: initial training, daily riding and practice, farrier and health upkeep, and grooming and bathing for that showring shine.

Bathing is of particular interest to halter and showmanship competitors, since there is a huge emphasis on cleanliness in those classes.

Performance horses also need to be clean—even reiners and cutters—to give that overall polished look to their runs and to make a lasting impression on the judges.

Let's talk money. More than one horse has been sold for a maximum price because of a shiny, clean hair coat. Even if you don't enter the showring, use these techniques to make your horse more appealing to a potential buyer.

RIDE spent some time with the brother and sister team of Margo and Tom Ball of Ball Quarter Horses in Fort Collins, Colo. This duo knows about finishing touches on championship horses—Tom serves as the breeding manager, and Margo is a veteran AQHA judge, who has also shown several world and reserve champion palomino horses, as well as top 10 finishers at the AQHA World Show and Congress.

Here are some bathing tips that should help you “clean up.”

Products

Before bathing any horse, the Balls recommend scrubbing him all over with a rubber currycomb to loosen the deep dirt in his coat. Next, if you have one available, they recommend a vacuum to remove most of the dirt before you ever head to the wash rack. However, realizing many folks don't have access to a good grooming vacuum, Tom says it's fine to just head for the bath after using the rubber currycomb.

MVP products are among their favorites to use for both bathing and daily grooming. For info on MVP products go to <http://products.mvpcare.com/category.cfm>.

For daily grooming use, or as a finishing spray, they highly recommend MVP's Equifuse for manes and tails, and MVP's Daily Coat Regimen for the body (photo 1). They are non-oily, and don't attract dust and dirt.

“Often, oil-based products will burn the coat when the horse is outside,” Margo said. “It's sort of like sunbathing with baby oil. Be really careful to not overuse oil-based products.”



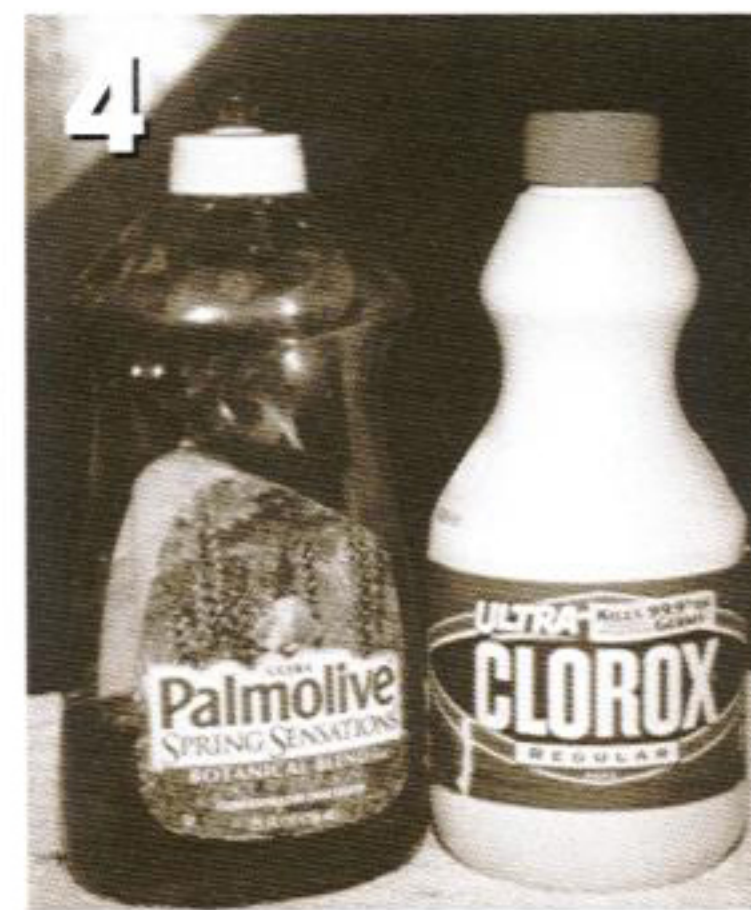
Ball Quarter Horses highly recommends MVP products for both daily grooming use and bathing.



When properly used and rinsed out, MVP Conditioning Shampoo and Intensive Hair Treatment conditioner leave the horse's coat in excellent condition.



Tom and Margo Ball never go without Green Spot Remover for last-minute touch-ups.



Everyday products such as Palmolive dish soap and Clorox bleach are among their favorite bathing products for horses.

As for these products, Tom added that they can be used on riding horses, and the sweat marks will just rinse off. You can also use the Daily Coat Regimen under the saddle without worrying about it slipping.

Other MVP Products they constantly use are MVP Conditioning Shampoo and MVP Intensive Hair Treatment conditioner (photo 2). For emergencies, they also stash some Cowboy Magic Green Spot Remover in the grooming cart (photo 3).

"This is a product we don't go without, no matter what color of horse," Tom said. "It is great for last-minute touch-ups before you enter the ring. However, the more MVP products we use, the less Green Spot Remover we use. Those products repel dirt so well that you can almost take a brush and just brush the green spots away."

Margo added that some everyday products work just as well as name-brand horse products.

"Whisk or Cheer are good for manes and tails, and purple Palmolive (photo 4) can work as well as name-brand shampoos. The purple-colored products always work well for white points," she added. She also mentioned that dish soap can work really well for removing neck-sweat products that are often hard to wash out.

The Balls also recommend using some bleach on any color of horse (photo 4)—just don't overuse it.

Finally, the Balls said to get yourself a bucket, medium-soft brush, a good squeegee, and a towel, and then you're ready to head your horse to the wash rack.

Procedure

First, Tom said to always start on the legs of the horse to introduce him to the water (photo 5). This is especially important if you only have access to cold water. He warned that squirting cold water directly on the chest of a hot horse can have severe consequences, and said it's always smartest to use tepid water.

"The secret to bathing and especially rinsing is lots and lots of water," he said. "Just when you think they are wet enough, go back over them a second time. If you happen to get any soap in a dry spot, it will cake in there."

To begin the actual bath, Tom said to mix the soap and bleach together in your bucket, then add water.

"About one-fourth cup of bleach for this bucket (one cup for three gallons) and a good squirt of dish soap are all you need, since it's so sudsy," he explained. "We go ahead and mix it with water—we don't put a concentration on the horse, as it can be hard to rinse out and dull the coat in those areas," Tom explained. He also warned that too much soap will wash out the natural oils and leave your horse with dry hair.

After you have your mixture, Tom said to begin with the tail. He simply soaks it in the bucket and agitates it (photo 6).

"Just make sure you get down in the base of the tail and make sure that's really wet," he advised. "The bleach will actually untangle the tail. As you start washing it, you can run your fingers through it and untangle it."

After he bathes the tail, he starts on the legs.

"You have to scrub the legs with your brush (photo 7)," he said. "Performance horses build up a lot of crud on the insides of their cannon bones."

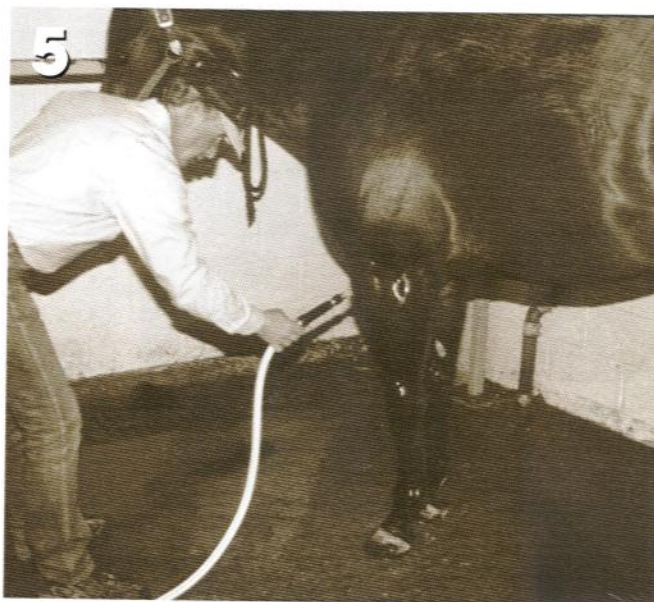
But as you move on to bathing the body, he recommended just brushing in the direction of the horse's hair (photo 8). Don't

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When in doubt, be cautious

Although you'll probably like the results you will see in your horse's coat if you try using the bleach, be sure to use the proper dilutions mentioned in the article. Be sure not to overuse it, as it can dull the coat or turn white areas purple (as will bluing) if overused or left on the horse too long.

Also, be sure to use common sense and avoid the eyes and other areas more susceptible to burning. Be sure to thoroughly rinse your horse as soon as possible after application. As Tom says, "You can never use enough water."



When starting the bath, Ball recommends beginning with the legs to get the horse used to the water. He warned to never squirt cold water on the chest of a warm horse.



Bathe the tail by fully saturating it and agitating it in the bucket. Ball says the bleach will make the tail easy to comb through.

Clean horse

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Use a brush to scrub the lower legs, as Ball says dirt builds up on the insides of the cannon bones on performance horses.



When bathing the body, Ball says to brush in the direction of the hair—don't scrub.



To wash the face, Ball said to kink the hose and just let the water run down the horse's forehead. Don't stand back and squirt him in the face.

scrub—it can damage the coat. However, he said you can scrub the mane.

Last, he bathes the head.

"Don't stand back and squirt his face," Tom said. "If you're that afraid of getting wet, you shouldn't be doing it," he laughed. "Instead, kink the hose and let the water run down the forehead (photo 9). That way, they don't get water in their ears, and they're usually not rearing back with their heads in the air," he explained.

Rinsing and conditioning

The rinsing rule—use lots of water again.

"Where people go wrong is that they don't use enough water," Tom explained. Margo added that the residue from shampoo and conditioner, combined with the overuse of oil-based show sheens, actually dulls the coat.

"I've judged classes where I've seen lots of dull coats on horses that have been bathed improperly," she said.

"To rinse, we start at the head. Because we used bleach, we'll see minimal soapsuds come out because the bleach breaks them

down" (photo 10), Tom explained. "Also, because we feed our horses oil and use the MVP products, the water rolls off like water off a duck's back." The slickness of the bleach and conditioner also help the water roll off without damaging natural oils in the hair.

After he rinses the horse, Tom conditions the coat.

"I'll use the straight stuff on the mane and tail (photo 11) and work it in. If the tail has started to dry, add some water. But for the body, I add water to the conditioner in my bucket. It's thick enough that we can get too heavy of a concentration on the body just squirting it on the horse, similar to the soap," he explained. Rather, he pours it down the back of the horse and works it in with his hands (photo 12) and uses the brush on the legs if needed.

"By the time you've worked it into the body, the mane and tail have had time to soak," he said. "The short body hair doesn't need much time." He also said that conditioner will help dilute any remaining shampoo missed in the first rinse.

Next—lots of rinsing again (photo 13).

"You just can't use enough water," he said. "Use lots and lots of water."

Finally, the Balls recommend stripping the water from your horse with a good squeegee that is flexible enough to be used on the legs as well, and then go over the body with a good towel to soak up remaining excess water.

Both warned that it is important not to overbathe. They said that thanks to the program they use and just described, including the daily grooming, they might only give a horse this type of soap bath occasionally before a major show. Instead, they can just rinse them after each ride or at the end of the day and achieve the same look due to their excellent coat condition.

Editor's note: Thanks to equine model All Too Cool—a 3-year-old halter stallion by Coolest Reflection and out of a Scotch Bar Time mare. He has a combined 48 grand championships and reserve championships, and counting. For information on All Too Cool and other stallions, contact Ball Quarter Horses at 970-484-4148.

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With the use of bleach, there are minimal soapsuds when the horse is rinsed. Ball said the bleach breaks down the suds and makes the horse easier to rinse.



Ball uses straight conditioner on the mane and tail, and scrubs it in. He lets it sit until he has conditioned the body, then rinses it out.



To condition the body, he dilutes the conditioner with water in the bucket and pours it down the back of the horse and works it into the coat with his hands.



Ball stresses that you can never use enough water. When you think you've got all the soap and conditioner out, rinse him again—maybe three times—because residue is one of the main factors of a dull coat.

Your input...

For years I have used a shampoo called Horse & Rider from High Cascade. This is an emu oil-based shampoo. It requires no additional cream rinses. And it leaves no residue, even in cold water! The best I've ever used in 30 years! Also excellent for girth itch, dry scalp (mane & tail), and contains some citronella for fly control.

—Debbie Lochridge

After washing my share of white/grey Arabians that live out in red clay pastures, I have decided that you just can't beat the \$3 rubber horse scrubby mitts (the kind with rubber bumps on one side & soft bristles on the other). Arabians can be very thin skinned, so if they can stand being scrubbed with one of these, any horse can. Also, nothing works as well as "Quik Silver" on removing red stains! Now that I am showing a golden-colored buckskin, I like the Rio Vista color enhancing shampoo for golden coats to bring the real deep gold shine out. I don't like to use goop or slick sprays after I bath a horse, so I want a shampoo that has a little shine in it.

—Sandra Craig

I like to use baby shampoo and conditioner to bathe my horses. It doesn't give them dry skin, and if they have very dry, itchy skin, I add a little iodine shampoo with it. The flies and mosquitos don't like the baby smell too much either. I use a thick sponge to lather with, and if they have real dirty spots that needs scrubbed I use a small soft tire brush. I can't afford lots of horse products anymore and found that the things I use work better than the real things. I have used horse products but like these better. If your horse has white and you can't get it clean, use regular Ivory dish soap. To help with very dry skin after a bath, use a cheap leave-in conditioner. Spray it on, then soft-brush them.

—Tammy Williams

I use Orvus Paste (have had the same container for years, still 1/2 full, lasts & lasts) for shampoo with a medium body brush if horse is real dirty. Next, I use Back To Basics Tea Daily Conditioner (for people) on mane & tail, then follow up with laser sheen or cowboy magic.

—Cynde Cantwell

Make sure you get the sweat off your horse, either by hand-sponging with warm

water during the winter, or rinsing with a hose in the warmer months. Always get the deep dirt out by currying. After you finish brushing, be sure to use a towel to wipe off their coat.

—Sandy Ruggiero

When bathing horses I usually use the medium-priced shampoos and conditioners. I've found that you get the same results as with the expensive stuff. As far as brushes, I use whatever is available—just whatever I need to get my horse clean. To get a shiny coat, I like to put some baby oil in a spray bottle and spray it on the horse and rub it in.

—Brandin Schrader

I use Vetrolin shampoo as a general body wash and for the white areas I use Quick Color. For show days, I use that all over, followed by a quick condition and Vetrolin shine. For tools, I use Grooma products (the red Grooma brush works great as a body scrubber). My horses spend 99% of their time out to pasture, and always look great for the shows.

—Jennie Wiskow

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