

JOURNAL
THE AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE JOURNAL

HORSE CLIPPING TIPS



Make your show horse shine with a great clipping job.

From the American Quarter Horse Journal library

Clip Like A Pro

Set yourself up for success even if your horse isn't a big fan of getting clipped.

Article and photos by Christine Hamilton

DON'T FRET IF YOUR HORSE DOESN'T YAWN AND DOZE OFF WHILE you clip him for a show. There are a lot of reasons why a horse can be difficult about clipping: he might be sensitive to the feel or to his head being touched; he might be genuinely afraid from a previous bad experience or abuse; or he might just be a newcomer to the process and needs some time to get used to it.

As a trainer of halter horses, AQHA Professional Horseman Randy Jacobs of Dover, Ohio, knows a lot about clipping horses. He has clipped hundreds, from weanlings to stallions to his daughter's old pleasure gelding. Randy has some tried-and-true advice on setting yourself up for clipping success, even if that's not what your horse has in mind.

Have the Right Attitude

IN RANDY'S OPINION, YOU WON'T GET ANYWHERE WITH YOUR

TREATS

"I'm not much on that," Randy says emphatically. Then he reluctantly continues, with a smile, "But some that we've had trouble with in getting the clippers close to their face, I have given them a treat."

His daughter, Molly, is the reason why! "My daughter had a gelding, and he was bad to clip his muzzle. You could clip anything else on this horse, but he did not want his muzzle clipped.

"She started feeding him carrots. So I would do the same, and clip him. And he was fine."

On Tranquilization

"I won't fight a horse. I won't get somebody hurt, and I don't want the horse to get hurt," Randy says. "As a last resort, I will use tranquilizer."

Randy often has foals tranquilized for their first clip. "Just because every good experience eliminates a bad one," he says. "When they're sleepy, you get done quick, and nobody gets hurt. They've gone through the experience, and it wasn't traumatic. Before long, clipping is not a problem at all, and they have no reason to be afraid."

If you'd like to consider using a tranquilizer to aid in clipping your horse, talk to your American Association of Equine Practitioners-member veterinarian for advice.

horse, regardless of his attitude, if *you* don't have the right attitude.

"It takes a lot of patience," he says. "So many people want to rush and get it done in a hurry. Take your time."

If you rush, you increase the chances of having a bad experience. "Avoid bad experiences," Randy says. "Like spooking them or getting a horse hurt. And when I say hurt, I mean just something as small as nicking him with the clippers. It hurts, and he won't want it to happen again.

"Every bad experience only makes the next time worse."

Take Your Time, but not too Much

ODDLY ENOUGH, TAKING TOO MUCH TIME CAN ALSO BE A bad experience.

"You want to take your time," Randy explains, "but you can take too much time. You want to move at a good pace so that you get done at a good pace. Don't drag it out."

Randy recalls a hired hand, who used to help him clip.

"He took too much time, and before long, the horse was mad, and it was over. He wanted to be done."

For Randy, the ideal clip time is 20 minutes, from legs to bridle-path and nose to ears.

Pay Attention to What Your Horse Tells You

WHEN YOU'RE CLIPPING A HORSE THAT is afraid, doesn't like it or is new to clipping, a lot of your success depends on you being able to read your horse.

"If you turn on your clippers and that horse begins to snort and blow, that's an obvious red flag," Randy



With a difficult horse, Randy first spends time rubbing the clippers along the horse's body to get him used to the sound and the feel, without cutting any hair. He does this until the horse relaxes and accepts the noise and feel of the clippers.



Go from easy to difficult, starting with the legs. Be sure to clip from the side and don't put your head in front of the knee.

like children, so you've got to go easy. The first thing people want to do is get forceful and try to grab them and wrestle. You can't do that; you'll lose.

"If a horse comes into my barn, and he acts really afraid, we go slow," Randy says. "We take our time and don't get into

says. "He has had a bad experience with it, and he's scared enough to know what's going on. Some of them associate the noise with the bad experience.

"Babies are especially tough," he adds. "They're afraid of the clippers to begin with and, if you rush at them, you're going to have a fight. They have quick tempers just

IF YOU CAN, CLIP AT HOME

"Unless I'm at the AQHA World Championship Show, and I'm there for two weeks," Randy says, "I clip everything at home. For a weekend show, you can get by for five to six days with a good clip job, and then touch them up with a horse razor at the show.

"I see people pull into a horse show on a Friday afternoon intending to clip their horse at the show that night and show on Saturday," he says, as he shakes his head "no."

"Do it at home where they're used to their surroundings," Randy says. "And where you have a safe place for them."

fight."

It might mean that your clip job goes in stages, each time ending on a good note. You need to be able to tell when your horse has had enough. Give him a break for an hour and come back later, or the next day.

Go From Easy to Difficult

RANDY GOES SLOW WITH A HORSE WHOSE AFRAID OR UNUSED to clipping. "We take the clippers and rub him on his body, not clipping hair, until he relaxes."

Then Randy moves to the legs. "We always clip his legs first, instead of rushing to his face," he says.

"It tickles when you clip the legs, so most of them don't want to stand because it tickles, not because it hurts." Randy periodically rubs the horse's legs to help take away the ticklish feeling.

"Once they get used to that, and they know it's not going to hurt, they're generally good to do the rest of their bodies," he said.

If you work from easy to difficult, you lessen the chances of having a bad experience.

Randy saves the most difficult for last: the ears.

"Rarely will you find a horse that you can clip his ears without a twitch," he says. When he does twitch, Randy uses a standard humane nose twitch.

That's when it's especially important to keep your pace up

MAKING THE FACE EASIER TO HANDLE

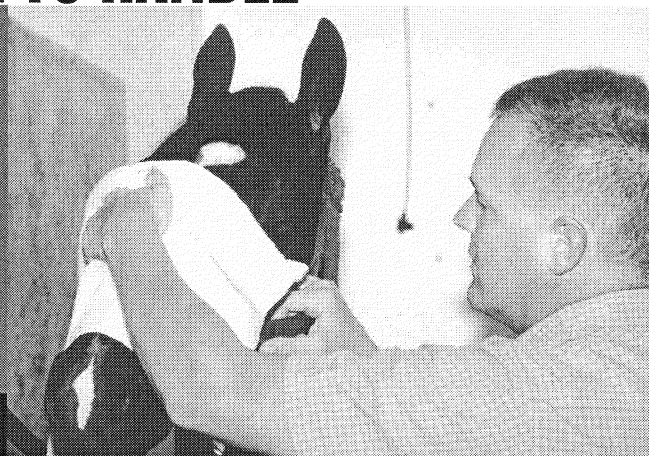
The Jacobs barn has one practice that really helps a horse get used to being touched and worked with around the face. "When we clean up a horse every day after they're worked, we take a wet rag and wash his face," he says. "Rub his mouth, eyes, ears and face."

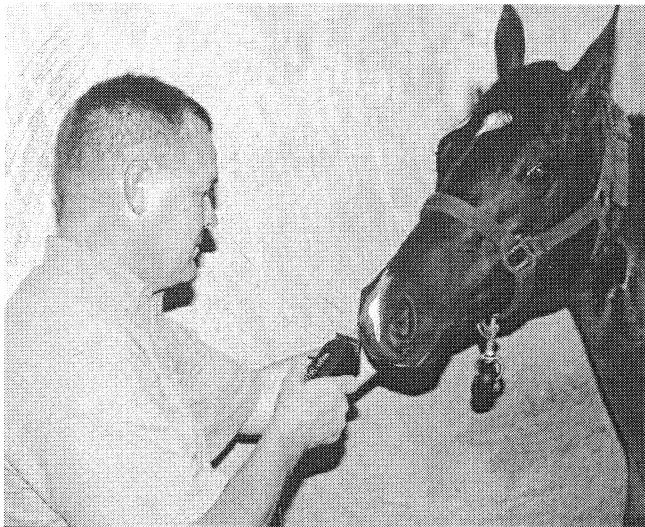
It can really help with foals. "I have one baby that's a real handful. He doesn't like his face touched at all," Randy says. "From Day one, he would paw and strike at you if you touched his face, and this colt had never had a bad experience.

"We have taken towels and rubbed his face, and scratched him," he says. "Now he'll take his head, put it right in your side, and you can bring your hand down his face and rub it.

"It has taken time, but it's worked."

Regularly washing a horse's face with a rag is a good way to gradually desensitize him to the amount of touching clipping requires, especially if he's a young horse.





Standing in front of a horse to clip is a sure way to get struck or run over if a horse gets startled.



Randy always stands to the side while clipping, turning the horse's head toward him. He is out of striking range there, and if a horse decides to walk off, he has the leverage he needs to stop it.

possible. "The longer that twitch is on them, the more likely they are to get very angry, and it becomes a bad experience."

Be Smart About Positioning Yourself

"PEOPLE GET INTO TROUBLE WHEN THEY CLIP STANDING IN FRONT of a horse," Randy points out. "The worst thing a horse can do is rear up and paw you, because he's afraid."

"I'd rather be kicked at any day than have a horse rear and strike," he says. "Babies, especially, because they are so fast." For that reason, it's imperative to stand to a horse's side to clip.

Another common mistake happens when people clip legs. "They'll have their head right in front of the horse's knee," Randy explains. "If the horse picks up its foot, that knee will hit you right in the forehead. I've seen it so many times." **Q**

SUCCESSFUL CLIPPING "MUST-HAVES"

• A safe place to clip

"We clip in a three-walled enclosed area with rubber mats on the floor and smooth walls," Randy says. "You want the area clear, nothing around that they can get into trouble with. And the lighting must be good."

"Choose a quiet area, out of traffic, not in the middle of an aisleway," he adds. "At a horse show, you should do it in a stall."

• The right clippers

"Having the right clippers is very important," Randy says. He recommends an adjustable set that allows you to adjust the blade to cut different hair lengths. You also want to buy the quietest set you can find.

Randy also has an additional smaller set just to use in the ears; those are especially helpful in clipping foal ears.

• Sharp blades

"Don't use dull blades," Randy advises. "So many people will try to do just one more horse, but that horse might be the one that you nick or that takes forever because the blades are dull."

"When you're clipping real fine baby hair, they'll dull in a hurry."

He also recommends having blades sharpened only once. "People will tell you that you can sharpen them many times; I don't," he says. "The next time around, they're a little uneven. When they're done, pitch them and get another set."

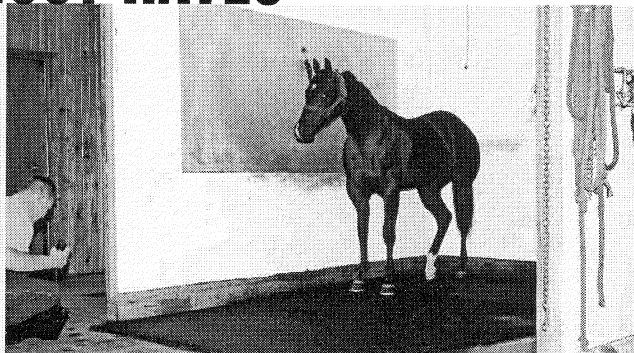
• A clean horse

One of the biggest mistakes Randy sees people make is to clip a dirty horse. "That will kill blades in a hurry," he says.

That doesn't mean your horse needs a full-blown bath. "If we're going to clip tomorrow for a horse show then, today, we wash whatever we're going to clip," Randy says, "legs, mane, face, whatever."

• Enough help

"I don't recommend anyone clipping a horse by themselves without



Rubber mats, smooth walls, an uncluttered and quiet area, and a safety tie make this a safe place to clip our equine model, Sierras Black Miss.

anyone else around," Randy says. "You never know what can happen to you and your horse. Usually, we have a helper hold the horse, especially our babies."

"Some horses you can tie and do yourself," he adds. If you do tie your horse, make sure it's a safe situation.

"I've seen so many wrecks from just simple things that could have been avoided," Randy says. "I've seen people tie their horses to a gate, and the next thing they knew, the horse reared and was hung up over the top of the gate."

"I've seen them wrap a lead rope around something that's going to break, like a bar; the horse pulls the bar off the wall and is loose, running around dangling that bar."

"When we tie them, we use rubber safety ties that give them some leeway, where they can pull and when they release, it moves them forward."