

GROOMING YOUR MINIATURE HORSE FOR SHOW

GENERAL CLIPPING

Equipment: Electric clipper and (sharp) blades in appropriate sizes, lubricant for blades, soft paintbrush to remove hair from blades, brushes to remove loose hair from horse, twitch or meds if needed to subdue the horse.

Cross-tie the horse in a location where it is calm and comfortable. An agitated horse may need Quietex or B-Kalm or a similar product and enough time for it to take effect before starting. Use a twitch only for the amount of time necessary to do ears or other areas that the horse finds objectionable and will not stand still for. If it's taking you a long time, take a break and go back to that area again later.

A #10 blade is the "norm" for equine clipping. Always work against the grain of the hair. See diagram for the directions you will generally be working. Be certain the clipper blade is lying flat against the skin. Tilting the blade or applying too much pressure to dig the teeth into the coat will result in unsightly lines. Work slowly enough to allow the blade to do its job cutting the hair rather than combing through it, which will also leave lines and make you go over the same area several times. In rounded body areas, you may have to go over the same area more than once at a slightly different angle each time. The flanks, chest areas, and throatlatch of the horse will likely have places where the hair grows in swirls and you'll have to approach them from various directions to get a smooth clip. To get hair from underarms, lift the front leg so it is level from the elbow to the knee.

If the horse is agitated with fidgeting and tail swishing, and you do not have someone assisting you, it is helpful to use braiding or hair clips to keep mane and tail out of the way.

DETAILS

MANE

The rule of thumb is that you push an ear back along the bridal path and cut the bridal path from the tip of the ear forward to between the ears where the forelock will start. If your horse has a fairly short neck, you can give the illusion of a longer neck by extending the bridal path lower into the mane. A horse with a heavy crest will have wrinkles where you want to shave, so make the head bend at the poll by pressing the nose back toward the chest and making the neck arch to smooth out the bridal path while you shave it.

Since this is a height breed, be VERY CAREFUL about clipping at the base of the mane. Do not remove any mane hairs. If your horse is close to a measurement cut-off, leave whatever you can that will reasonably look like mane hairs at the base. Let the measurement person sort through the hairs and, hopefully, give you the benefit of the doubt at measurement time.

If your horse has a very heavy mane, you will need to thin it out to make the hair lay flat and give the neck a thinner and more elegant look. Use a thinning blade (available at pet stores or even beauty supply stores) and work from the underside of the mane so that the longer hairs remain intact at the top and can be slicked down for showing. You can also clip into the mane as you work up along the neck but there are a couple of disadvantages to that: 1) once it's done, you'll always have to do it because the shaven mane hairs will not grow out enough even over the winter to reach a length where they will blend back in and 2) there will be a color line if body and mane colors are significantly different.

Some horses have mane hair that grows upward from the neck, and running the clipper blade upward from the base of the neck along the mane will not give you a clean line. In that case, hold the mane over to the side and very carefully clip from the mane line down toward the side of the neck.

The forelock should also be thinned enough to lay flat against the forehead with a bit of hair product added. The hair thinner blades can be used (coming up from the front of the forelock), but on horses with a lot of heavy hair, you may also need to come forward further with the bridal path onto the poll.

Miniatures are shown with natural manes and tails, but a horse with an exceptionally long mane can have the length trimmed back to better show the neck and shoulder of the horse. This should be done with a razor or other device that will leave a natural feathered look rather than a blunt cut.

TAIL

With the exception of Hunter classes where tails may be braided, miniatures are shown with natural tails. Like with the mane, heavy tails can be thinned out if they disrupt a smooth line from the croup into the tail, and should end at ground level using a razor cut as mentioned above. A horse with tail dragging along the ground behind it will not gain you any advantage in conformation classes and the judge may actually consider it to be inadequate grooming.

The current practice in AMHA is to leave a triangle of body hair above the tail so that the tail appears to come to a peak. This started as a ploy to try and camouflage the problem of a horse having a low tail set. It may or may not suit a particular horse, depending on hair color and conformation. In any case, do not try to lengthen it up onto the croup – more is not better.

EARS

Most horses are very sensitive about clipper noise around their ears. See earlier comments about using a twitch or drugs to do this area if necessary. To cut against the grain of the hair, you will be working from the tip of the ear toward the base. You may need to lay the ear against your free hand or hold it by the tip to keep it steady and be able to apply enough pressure for a close clip on the outside. Cup your hand around the ear to do the inside. The outside should be clipped with the same size blade as you are using on the head. Insides can be done with a shorter blade to get a clean clip (#30 or #40). Lately, the “style” has been to leave a tuft of long hair on the tip of the ear so that it appears longer and pointed. Leave this tip unshaven to start and use your clipper blade in the opposite direction to blend from the already clipped lower portion of the ear into the longer hair at the tip, lift the blade away from the ear as you get into the longer hair. Hold the ear steady and work from the tip downward along the outer edges to create the point.

FACE

Normally, the head is clipped with the same #10 blade that was used on the rest of the horse. If you have a dark horse with dark skin, you may choose to use a #15 blade to keep the facial hairs from growing out quite as fast. Do not do this on a horse with light hair over dark skin, as it will make the head look a different color than the body.

The head is undoubtedly the hardest part of the body to clip because of all the rounded areas and crevices, and will take you quite a while to do. If your horse is young and/or short on patience, you may want to do the head first. Or, if you have the luxury of doing the body one day and the head the next, it might make clipping easier on both of you.

The current “style” is to remove all hair on the muzzle and over the eyes so that you have bare skin on which to apply makeup or oil. This will require a #40 or #50 surgical blade. The area on the muzzle should be done up to the point where the halter will cross the nose. Use a #30 blade to blend the no-hair area into the longer hair area. Move the blade from the #40 area toward the longer hair and lifting it up away from the face as you get into the longer hair. Be sure to get all the hair out of the nostrils to make your clipping job look finished.

The goal with the eye is to have a crescent above the eye that can be darkened to make the eye appear bigger. Use the surgical blade to accomplish this. Have the horse close its eye by placing your finger at the front tear duct area. Lay the blade on the eyelid so it is flat where the upper and lower lids come together and just catches the eyelashes on the lower lid. Since the eye is rounded, you’ll have to repeat this several times, moving upward and creating the crescent. Blend into the longer hair same as on the muzzle.

This style of clipping is a personal choice and may not be appropriate for all colors. Keep in mind that removing all hair and eyelashes will eliminate some of the horse’s natural protection from sun damage so be sure to use sun block or give the horse extra protection from the sun until hair grows back, particularly on horses with light skin. And remember, just like us, horses are more prone to sunburn at high altitudes.

SHOW PREPARATION

Bathe the horse as close to show time as possible. Use a good equine shampoo and follow it with a coat conditioner to replace oils in the hair and give it a nice sheen. There are many products on the market to

lighten, whiten, to enhance color so you'll have to experiment and choose what works best for you. Conditioners range from those you rub in and don't need to rinse, to those where you actually apply them and then wrap the horse in plastic for the recommended time. It's your "call" as to how much time and effort you put in vs. the results the product gives you.

Mane and tail hair color can be enhanced with human hair products. "Sun-In" spray with a hair dryer as a heat source works well to lighten and brighten. "Just For Men" beard and mustache color or any brand of temporary spray-in hair color will work to darken hair and offset natural sun bleaching that fades black hair to brown (can also be used to extend dark tail color into lighter body hair color if you've left a V at the top of the tail). BE CAREFUL! If you drip lightener from the mane onto the body or smear black onto buckskin/bay body hair, it is a dead give-away that you've enhanced color and you won't be able to do much about it until the hair grows out so your error can be clipped off.

Use hair gel to "set" the top of the tail and the crest of the mane for a smooth and well-groomed look. It's your choice whether to braid manes and tails until show time. If done while hair is wet, braiding will make the hair wavy and add volume if you need it. The size of the braid will determine whether you end up with short kinks or longer waves. Mane tamers and tail wrap will help to secure hair in place until show time. Use a sheet or blanket to keep the body hair as clean as possible. A vacuum, blower, or soft body brush will be necessary to remove shavings/dust right before show time.

Touch up muzzles and bridle paths as close to show time as possible if you've clipped a few days earlier. Those nose hairs seem to grow overnight!

MAKEUP

Here again, you'll need to experiment with the many products available to find what works best for you and your horse. Baby oil is cheap and easy to use for shine on both bare noses and body coats, but it soaks in pretty quickly. There are equine products in gel, liquid or spray form made especially for these uses. "Shine" products for shaved eyelids and muzzles come in clear and black. A word of caution: these products adding shine will generally also attract dirt, so it's best not to use them on lower legs and tail.

Chalk is sold for hiding small imperfections in areas of white hair.

HOOVES

Equipment: pick, large and small nippers, hoof knife, rasp, fine sand paper

It's best to do hooves ahead of time so that at a show you only have to apply polish:

Lift each hoof and use the pick to remove debris and expose the contours of the hoof. Use a tiny nipper to trim away excess frog material. Use the large nippers to trim away excess hoof wall. Keep the nippers parallel to the hoof and trim only the hoof wall that has grown away from the hoof. If there has been minimal growth since the last trim, a rasp will suffice rather than using the nippers. The hoof knife can be used to cut away dry flaky hoof material so that the foot is left with a clean concave surface.

Every horse has different hooves and you'll simply be striving to make them as close as possible to a standard of perfection. If you've been using hoof trimming to try and correct a fault like knock knees, toeing out, etc., try to make them look as normal as possible for the day of the show and go back to the corrective trimming later.

If needed, prep hooves with fine sand paper or a specialty power buffer to remove loose scaly hoof material before applying polish. Try to find a clean surface out of the wind to apply polish so shavings or other debris doesn't get stuck in your polish. A hair dryer can be used to make it dry faster as long as your horse doesn't object to the dryer.

Unless you are showing a Pinto or Appaloosa in color where you want to use clear hoof polish to show off stripes, use a black polish. Again, choose a product that works best for you. Applicators vary from the "ball on a stick" to a square foam pad like shoe polish. If you can not get a nice line at the top of the hoof with your hoof polish applicator, use a Magic Marker to draw a finishing line. There is also a clear sealer available to spray over the polish to prevent chipping.

In the event you get black polish smeared on light hair, have nail polish remover or Absorbine and a rag handy to scrub it off before it sets.

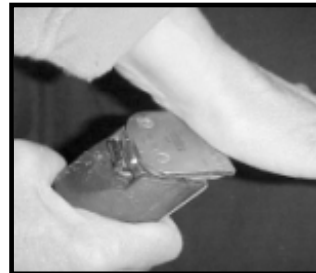
INSTRUCTIONS FOR DETACHABLE BLADES

1. If your clipper unit has been shipped without a blade already attached, the hinge may be in the closed position. Use a flat screwdriver to pry it away from the body of the clipper so it is open and ready to receive the blade.



2. If your clipper has a blade on it, press upward on the thumb release below the base of the blade. This moves the latch hook upward to release the blade from the clipper. Hold the release tab in while grasping the teeth of the blade with your fingers and pulling them away from the body of the clipper. You can then slide the blade up and off the hinge, leaving the hinge in the open position to receive the next blade.

3. Slide the blade you wish to use onto the clipper by inserting the open hinge into the space between the socket and the lower (comb) blade. The top of the blade, with the socket, spring and smaller (cutter) blade will be facing the top of the clipper. Always have your clipper RUNNING (at low speed with a 2-speed or variable speed clipper) when you push the blade toward the clipper to lock it in place. You will likely hear a snap as the latch hook snaps over the socket.



Troubleshooting:

1. Blade does not engage so teeth are moving. Especially with new blades, you may have to apply more pressure to the bottom of the blade when pushing it in toward the clipper.
2. Blade wobbles on the clipper. Remove the blade and check the small hook on your latch to be sure it has not been broken (should have a curve similar to a crochet hook at the end). Breakage can be avoided by always pushing in the thumb release before removing blades.

OR

After blades have been used for a while, the “wings” of the socket may start to spread out against the sides of the spring. Use a pliers to gently squeeze those “wings” back into place. If you go too far, you may have to exert extra pressure when pressing the blade back onto the clipper. Eventually, the sockets may wear out and need replacement.

3. Blades are not cutting properly. Be sure to use a liquid or spray lubricant while using your blades to keep them running smoothly. Blades will need to be sharpened periodically, depending on the amount of use. They will become dull more quickly if the animal being clipped has dirt in its coat. **DO NOT DISASSEMBLE BLADES TO CLEAN** out hair: the gap between the top and bottom blades is very precise for the size and make of that particular blade and, even if sharp, the blade will not cut properly if that gap is not correct. Use a soft paintbrush to remove excess hair, or blow it out with compressed air.