

How to Look and Feel Like a "Million Bucks" in the Show Ring!

Article By: Tina DeHaan

Pictures Provided By: Lotta Stitches & Jeff Kirkbride



- Your horse is your biggest prop.
- It's important for you to own your look.
- Trust your instincts when choosing a color.
- Dark colors minimize and light colors emphasize.

In this article, we've gathered some helpful tips and hints that we hope will make your show clothing shopping a little less stressful and a little more enjoyable this show season. With the help of Lotta Dages from "Lotta Stitches", a custom show clothing designer in Chandler, Indiana. We've organized some of the key things you should look for when shopping for your next outfit. The goal at "Lotta Stitches" is always to create a signature look for the client, and Lotta says that one of the first things that every exhibitor should consider when choosing an outfit, whether it's for showmanship or rail classes, is the color of the horse they will be showing. "Your horse is your biggest prop", she says, "Your outfit color should flatter your horse". While some colors may be

'in' and some may be 'out', it is important to use a color that complements your horse and that you really like. The color you choose should be one that you are comfortable wearing and gives you the most confidence.

Lotta says it's extremely important for you to 'own' your look, and in order to own it, you need to be comfortable in not only how it makes you look, but also in how it makes you feel. If you're not comfortable wearing a particular color, don't choose an outfit in that color just because it's the 'in' color this year, instead, choose a color that makes you feel confident and complements your horse. Before you purchase an outfit in a particular color, you may want to watch a few classes similar to the ones you will be competing in, to see the type of impression certain colors will make in the ring. The bottom line is to trust your instincts when choosing a color, and if it looks good with your horse and it makes you feel good, you will own your look.

For most women, regardless of your age, trying on clothes is an exercise in humility. No matter what your size, shape, or personality, clothes shopping is nothing less than a reality check. There is nothing more frustrating than trying on a pair of pants in your size only to find they are too tight, or that the shirt you wore last year just doesn't quite zip all the way anymore. There is nothing quite like standing in front of the mirror, trying on clothes that makes us more aware of our body and all of our little imperfections. Whether it's the five extra pounds we put on over the winter, our too short or too long legs, our small bust or sagging middle, trying on clothes reminds us of everything we don't like about our body. There are thousands of doubts and questions that run through your mind as you shop for new clothes, and horse show clothing is no different. In fact, it might be worse yet, because you are choosing an outfit that most likely will be the only one you wear for the next few years, while you are being judged over and over in different classes, by different judges. And of course, we all want to look perfect as we enter the show pen, regardless of our shape or size. Looking and feeling like a million bucks has never been so important. Talk about pressure!

If you aren't sure what color horse you will be showing, or will be showing several different horses, consider going with versatile blue and green colors. Various shades of blue and green will look great on virtually any horse, and will also leave a lasting impression in the



show ring so they make a great choice if you have multiple horses to show or if you haven't decided which horse you will be showing. If you will be showing a red based horse (sorrel, chestnut, red roan, etc.) consider more natural earth tones, such as sand, cream, peach, chocolate or rust. If you will be showing a brown based horse (brown, bay or black) or a white based horse (gray or white) you can choose bright colors like dark purple, royal blue, red and almost any shade of green. The neutral based horses, (grullas, palominos and buckskins) can use any of the above, depending on the horses markings and of course, the riders preference. If you're showing a Paint, Appaloosa, Pinto or POA choosing a color will take a little more effort. You need to look at your horses predominant coat color and pattern when choosing your base color. If your horse is predominantly white, you should choose the brighter colors and if your horse has less white than color, you should use the primary coat color to determine your options.



As a basic rule of fashion, dark colors minimize and light colors emphasize and horse show fashion is no different. To appear taller or thinner, choose lighter colors, smaller patterns or vertical stripes and if you want to appear shorter or broader, go for darker colors, large patterns, and horizontal stripes. If you're a fuller figured exhibitor who would prefer to look less full figured, you might choose a dark base color with bright embellishments strategically placed to amplify your best features, such as at your hips and shoulders along with a light colored hat draw attention to your face and minimize your waist.

If you're top heavy, you'll want to stay away from layers, patterns and colors at your chest and shoulders, and instead opt for these at the waist and go with light colored chaps with a matching hat. If you're bottom heavy, you'll want to choose minimizing black, or another dark color for your chaps, and pair it with a lighter top and lighter hat. To achieve a more elegant, adult style, accessorize by adding a bold earrings, a flashy necklace or even a tie.

The next thing to consider is your body shape and type. Regardless of your body shape, size or figure, there is a style that will flatter your figure and make you look your absolute best. Your clothing should not only fit your figure, it should flatter it as well and according to Lotta, the most crucial part of the outfit, regardless of the style, is the fit. Your shirt should not hang too loose or be too tight, and your entire outfit should accentuate your best features while minimizing your flaws. While custom made pieces are ideal because you can control every detail, from the fabric that is used, to how many and what type of crystals are used, custom outfits can be quite costly. Even if you aren't prepared to purchase a custom outfit, and you plan to purchase off the rack, be prepared to take it to an experienced seamstress or tailor to have it taken in to fit your individual shape. This goes for everything from a showmanship outfit to a basic western shirt. Buying off the rack clothing and having it tailored to fit is an inexpensive way to give your overall presentation in the show pen a more polished look, especially if you're just getting started in showing. If you plan to show often or at larger association or breed level shows, a quality, custom outfit will be a great investment that can be used for several years and if you care for it properly can often be re-sold when you are ready for a new outfit.

While small details such as design, quality and embellishments will shine in a showmanship class, where you are face to face with the judge for inspection, these finer details will be all but lost in a rail class where you will be more than fifty feet away from the judge for the majority of the class. When choosing a showmanship outfit, you'll want to concentrate on the details and finer points of the shirt and accessories. A beautiful pair of earrings, a dazzling necklace and boots that are dyed to match your show pants will really give you a polished look. For a rail shirt or outfit, you should focus less on the details and more on the color and overall look that you will present. The earrings and necklace will definitely be less noticeable on the rail, but matching boots are still a must. Spend wisely when shopping for show clothes, choose your color and design based on the classes that you will be showing. If you will be using the same shirt for both your rail class and your showmanship class, think simplicity. Go for a flattering style with simple lines and bold details that will present a beautiful silhouette and a memorable look from afar, and also be flattering up close.



Speaking of silhouettes, we're going to bring up a part of fashion that most women don't talk about aloud. Some call them shapewear, some call them minimizers. Whatever you call them, don't overlook them as a crucial piece of your wardrobe. They can be found at most department stores or even online, and the purchase price is a small price to pay for the benefits you will see as soon as you put one on. Lightweight and designed to hide under clothes, a quality piece of shapewear will accentuate and flatter your figure, while minimizing the little imperfections we all have. If you have a little extra skin under your arms, or are a little heavy on top, look for a minimizing top. Try a long sleeved shapewear shirt to control under arm jiggle, or a camisole or tank top to lift and hold above the waist without the extra layer on your arms. If your problem is in your hips buttocks or thighs, look for minimizing panties or shorts. If you want to minimize your waist, consider an all over body shaper (sort of like a swimsuit that holds you in) which will help give you the curves that you want. Quality shapewear will help you look and feel better in your show clothes and will give you a firmer, more refined silhouette regardless of your shape or size. Keep in mind though, that shapewear will slightly change your figure and will affect the fit of your show clothes, so we recommend wearing it while you're being fit for or trying on your next outfit. No color, style or piece of shapewear will erase every flaw that you can find with your-self, however careful planning of your show wardrobe will accentuate your positive features, and minimize your weaknesses so that you look and feel your absolute best every time you step in to the show pen.



If you're not sure what colors or styles you like, bring your camera and attend a few shows similar to the ones you will be competing in just to observe. Snap a few photos of what you like, and what you don't. You can also browse breed magazines, watch video of shows online, attend horse fairs and expos or contact a show clothing designer to get more information on what will work best for you. Do your research and buy the best you can afford and you will make a great impression on the judge.

Special thanks to Lotta Dages owner/operator of "Lotta Stitches" for her insight and knowledge of horse show fashion. She has been sewing and designing show clothing for more than twenty five years. Lotta is known for creating one of a kind designs that fit your style and personality and her specialty is custom fitting, such as chaps, pants, rail shirts, showmanship outfits and jackets. Her business was inspired by her daughter Dana's petite frame and unique taste in clothing. Whether she's in the show pen herself, or it's one of her outfits, Lotta loves being out there in front of the judge. Lotta says that being an exhibitor herself really gives her a great perspective on what is needed in the show pen today. All of her custom clothes include generous seams which allow for easy altering and many size changes. She is proud to be sewing for some of her first customer's children who are now entering the show ring. Visit her at www.LottaStitches.com