



Grooming Stall Messes

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GROOMING STALL MESSES: THE SECRET REASON YOU AREN'T WINNING

Being a forgetful groom is kind of like being a surgeon with unsteady hands: less than ideal, to put it mildly. Yet I myself, as an experienced show groom, identify as a forgetful person on a good day, and a victim of temporary, randomly occurring amnesia on a bad day. I leave car keys scattered across the province of Alberta, I routinely pay for my coffee and leave without waiting for it, I have left three cell phones on the roof of my car and driven away in the last two years, and most recently, I forgot which pedal was the gas and which was the brake, effectively remodeling a brand new Nissan. In a bad way.

However, before you ask if I am an experienced and *unemployed* show groom, despite this debilitating condition I happen to be quite good at my job, if I do say so myself. The difference between my personal life, that exists on the constant brink of disaster, and my professional life, is that my bedroom and car look like a post-apocalyptic wasteland while my barn aisle looks like the gardens at Versailles. The imagery is a little over the top, but you get the point. Pristinely organized, neat, and symmetrical. Everything has a place, and that place makes perfect sense in conjunction with an efficient daily routine. So, before you take off that blanket and throw it in a heap on the floor, consider how clutter is slowing you down back at the barn and all the way to the in gate.

Show mornings are already stressful enough without having to worry whether you will be okay without that forgotten pair of spurs, or whether you read the schedule correctly. Being a good groom or rider is all about planning ahead and being organized. When setting up your stalls at the horse show or packing your trailer to ship-in, you need to know where everything is, and you want it to be easily accessible. My grooming stall always has a bridle rack on one side that is labeled with all my horses' names. The tack gets locked up at night, but first thing in the morning all the tack is hung on the rack so I can see it, be confident that it is all there, and then reach for it and put it on the horses quickly. There is nothing worse than rooting through a trunk looking for a breastplate that you didn't realize you forgot until ten minutes before a class. Learning that lesson the hard way is not an experience I wish upon anybody.

Grooming horses for the show can be simplified by having all your brushes and supplies on one shelf in your grooming stall or in a single box in your trailer. Pads and bandages should all be folded neatly and stored somewhere you can see them, so you never have to dig through anything to find them and can easily identify and pull out a specific item quickly. A white board is very useful for writing down your plan. Having a list of which horses are showing, which are just flatting, who needs to be hand-walked, and in what order you are going to need to do things, makes the day go so much smoother even when the plan is apt to change. Having a general idea of everything that needs to be done before the day is through helps keep you on track and moving quickly. Moreover, having a place to write down things you need to remember also helps alleviate horse show stress. For example, "I am taking care of six horses and these are their names..." Just kidding. Mostly...

The organization and neatness of your grooming stall is crucial, but I think the overall picture of the aisle is just as important. Blankets should be hung neatly and on a rubber stall guard or metal blanket rack in exactly the same fashion on each stall door. The heaviest blankets should be on the bottom and sheets on top so they are in the order you would put them on the horse. Your halters can all be hung from the stall guard with a double ended snap or on a hook, in a symmetrical manner with matching lead ropes for every horse. In addition to looking professional, having



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halters and leads on every horse's door is a safety precaution because in an emergency you would never want to have to look for a halter or rope to get a horse to safety quickly.

No matter how you decide to organize your equipment, it is important that everything has a place and that you are committed to putting everything back in its place immediately. When you see an aisle that is extremely organized and neat, there is more value to that barn's system than its aesthetic merits. An organized aisle enables the grooms to fall into a rhythm while tacking up and putting away horses because it is the exact same process being repeated over and over again. Working like a well-oiled machine is far more efficient than wasting time looking for things or rifling through messes that you made earlier in the day. It makes the work seem easier, the days seem shorter, keeps the horses, trainers and riders happy, and perhaps most importantly, keeps disasters at bay. As many-a-groom before me has said; work smarter, not harder!