

An Ode To Pasture Horses

I've been there. I, like many of you, love to take my horse to clinics. I love the education of clinics, and believe clinics are a huge part of expanding our education. So, what is the purpose of this article? *Pass the wine* This article is dedicated to clinic tips and tricks for those who let their horses live in the pasture. My horse lives in the field his entire life. He thrives out there and is the epitome of living the life of a horse. It benefits his health tenfold, and for that he is always happy to work. So what? This means that when it's winter/fall/spring/summer, he is a total filth ball. He tears any and every blanket labeled indestructible within hours. Nothing survives Rum. So, when it's late fall, or spring, or even summer and I'm trying to go to a clinic, you can imagine the horse I pull out of the field at times. That's right - mud. Pure mud soaking those beautiful white legs of his. Snowballs sometimes clinging to his beautiful full tail. Rain water coating his entire body. Dread fills me as I know in the back of my mind I have to take this fire breathing swamp monster to a clinic that day, knowing without a heated washrack at our farm that the weather will not allow me to bathe. **So now what?** The barn hosting is beautiful and full of lovely, fully clipped horses with no hairs out of place, and I will pull in with the filthiest animal on the planet. Yes, I've been there. More than once. And if this applies to you, I've prepared a few tips that have helped me along the way.

Sheet or blanket for the trailer ride.

Seriously. When you're still at home, give your horse a good groom, getting the mud and big pieces of dirt off. If he/she is wet, I give them a good rub down with a towel to dry the coat. In most cases, especially in the winter or late fall, the horse will still have residual dust on his body under the long hair. Blanketing for the trailer ride settles the hair and dust down, making the horse appear cleaner upon arrival.



If your horse, like mine, has white legs and treasures trashing those beauties at first opportunity, **boot for the clinic.** Using a nice, clean set of polos goes a long way. If you aren't good at polos or comfortable putting polos on correctly, a clean pair of sport boots with bell boots will be totally suitable. Make sure the legs are entirely clean of debri, mud, and clumps before booting. On top of having a nice pair of clean polos on the mud heathen, **clean your tack.** Just because your horse decides to be a total swamp rat, doesn't mean you have to! Having clean tack shows respect for not only the hosting barn, but the clinician as well, and distracts from said swamp rat. I like to have a nice matching pad with my polo wraps to finish the look.

Plan your day. Take the time to know how long it will take you to get to the clinic, and give yourself plenty of time to be there early. This not only gives you some room for error (traffic can be a total buzz kill), but allows your horse time to settle into the new environment, which is important.

Here are a few arena etiquette tips I've prepared as well, in case we have anyone who will be attending their first clinic or is still new to clinics.

Warm up before your clinic slot begins. This will ensure you have plenty of time to focus on the education portion of the clinic, rather than losing some of that time by warming up. That said, there will be times when the clinician wants to see your entire routine, so don't be afraid to ask questions. However, if you do warm up prior to your clinic slot, **be respectful of the rider finishing up their clinics slot.** Be sure not to get in the way of the clinician and the rider during their ride. Pass left shoulder to left shoulder. However, if the clinic rider is committing to a movement, yield to them (whether they are on your left or not).

Ask Questions. Clinicians bring varying opinions and training styles, and not all of them will be 100% clear the first time you hear them! So ask questions if you don't understand and have an open mind!

Clean up after yourself. If your horse leaves a mess in the arena, make sure you clean it after your ride. This goes not only for the arena, but the barn in general. Don't leave trash/grooming supplies/bands or braiding supplies behind. A good rule of thumb is to leave the barn as nice or nicer than you found it.

Know your takeaways. I like to ask 3 key things I should work on at home after each clinic and which exercises will help me achieve those, so that I can prioritize my training schedule and prepare for the next clinic.

Have fun. At the end of the day, the clipped horse and the unclipped horse will benefit from tapping into the knowledge of the clinician, and the amount of hair he/she has will not matter. Yes, the hairy horse aka swamp rat might be sweaty, (which reminds me **bring a cooler to properly allow him to cool down!**), but we are all there to learn. After all, there is nothing better than getting home, unloading Rum after a good workout, and watching him return to his natural state of mud after a good roll.

Happy Riding!

By Connie Otto Conis