

Melissa's Grooming Tips - Straight From The Annual General Meeting

By Melissa Kreuzer

For those of you who were unable to attend the live session at the AGM meeting on Saturday, June 19th, I have written the key points discussed during the seminar. As I stressed in person, please test new products on your horse for at least 48 hours to make sure an allergy does not exist. Also, I am not trying to pass myself off as THE expert in grooming. I did work as a show groom professionally for 10 years and combined with my natural joy of grooming, I have picked up a lot of tips and want to share them with you. Our Friesians are so naturally beautiful, we are lucky to have such a gorgeous breed. Not much extra primping is needed or desired. (All products mentioned are those used by the author; they're inclusion or other's omission, does not imply an endorsement by THE FRIESIAN or FHANA).

1) Good grooming starts from the inside out. No amount of brushing or expensive products can replace the natural glow our horses have when they are receiving the best nutrition. Certain ingredients seem to lend themselves to coat enhancement (among their other benefits), such as high fat supplements, lysine, flax seed and omega-3 fatty acids. Examples of brands which provide this are Kent Omegatin™ and Purina EquiShine™. Both can be used as a feed by itself or as a top dressing. Liquid supplements are also beneficial, with some of our members relying on corn oil or brands such as Hi-E™.

2) Keeping our horses black is always a top priority! Keeping sheets on at all times helps, in addition to not turning out in direct sunlight for long periods. Supplement-wise, most of us are familiar with coat color enhancing products. From a grooming standpoint, there are products which may enhance blackness (none of which are endorsed by FPS/FHANA for use in an inspection situation, but in exhibition and shows, why not look your best?). Coat enhancing shampoos work pretty well. I use Shapley's EquiTone™ in black - it smells nice too! Spray paints are also available, specifically for horses and work best when used as spot touch ups, like on the mane ends, shoulders and flanks. I like Doc Brannon's Black Magic™ and also use this for blacking hooves. Some members have done the occasional whole-body dye job with black hair dye.

3) Hair! Hair! Hair! It may be that long manes and tails are largely genetic, but why not do everything you can to help out? MOST important: never, never, never comb through the mane and tail with a brush! Use only your fingers to pick through and remove the knots. One product that has been mentioned to me by many members, and I now use it myself, is Shapley's MTG™. This should be used about 2-3 times per week to grow hair, less for maintenance. Massage into the base of mane and tail. It is also great for scurfy dry areas on the body, like behind the elbows. Braiding also helps to keep hair long, but it is a difficult topic to discuss as there are many different ways to put up braids. Braids must be maintained to remain smooth (can't just braid and leave it there) and once in a while, even with best intentions, they can get caught on things and hunks

can get pulled out. If you find your horse is rubbing his mane or tail a lot and losing hair that way, check with a veterinarian. Preparation H™ rubbed into the skin is sometimes effective on itchy sensitive areas.

4) Don't Use. Don't buy products containing either alcohol/isopropyl or silicone. Both produce short term results at best and can create long term serious problems. Alcohol is drying, fades out the coat and is one of the cheapest filler ingredients you'll find. Silicone is extremely popular. It wouldn't be so bad if you had the time to wash it out after every use, but leaving it on the coat robs the hair of its own moisture, causing dullness and breakage of the hair.

5) Do Use. As a finishing product, try this Dutch secret, found in European tack stores - EquiStar™ (aka the 'orange stuff'). It is an acceptable substitute to sheen products with silicone. It can be left in, it detangles, shines and smooths.

6) General Tips. I try not to give many baths with soap, as it strips the coat of natural oils. I do lots of sponging and hosing off with water alone. Letting your sweaty horse dry and brushing him off later is poor grooming. Dried sweat is itchy! When I do bathe my horse, I choose products that have a low sudsing factor. The most important step in bathing is proper rinsing; nearly impossible to do when too sudsy. Shampoos I like to use for the body are Shapley's EquiTone™, Betadine iodine rinse and Cowboy Magic Medicated™. Some of you may own the old-fashioned shedding blade of metal, smooth on one side and with teeth on the other. I don't like it for shedding, but I do like using the teeth-side during bathing. It really pulls out loose hair and squeegees out dirt when used in conjunction with the hose. Friesian manes are so thick it's nearly impossible to get them really clean at the base. A trick is to flip the mane to the off side, wash and rinse, then flip the mane to the correct side and wash and rinse again. Selsun Blue™ dandruff shampoo works great for releasing all the yuck in the feathers. I leave it on for at least 5-10 minutes, then rinse out.

Finally, when discussing good grooming, keep in mind who you are getting tips from. Does their horse look especially well groomed? It should be a consideration.

