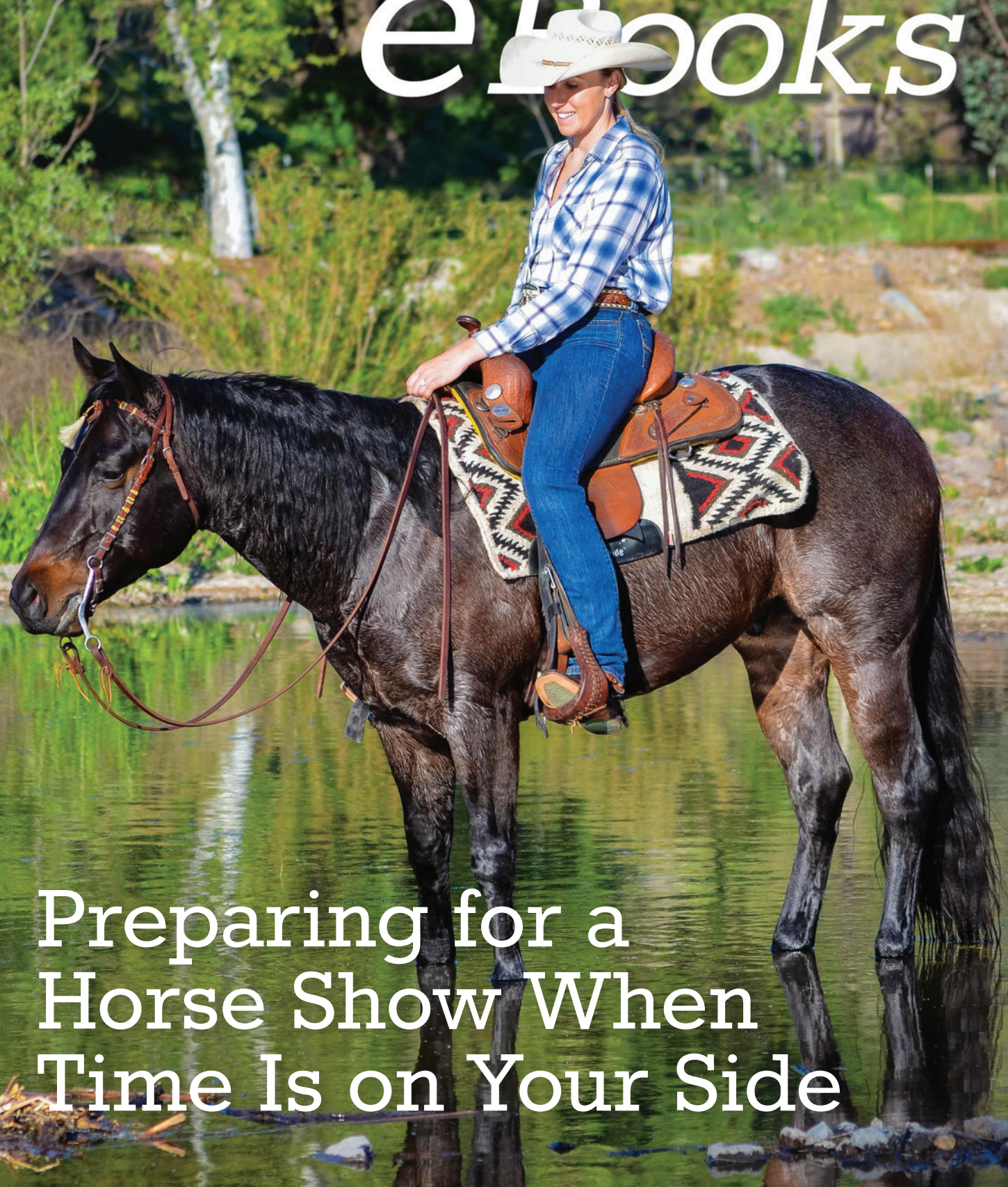


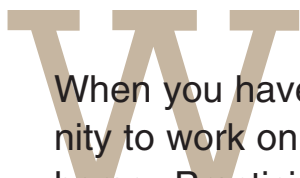
AQHA

eBooks



Preparing for a
Horse Show When
Time Is on Your Side

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When you have plenty of time to prepare for your next show, it's a great opportunity to work on building and strengthening the relationship between you and your horse. Practicing exercises on the ground and on horseback leads to a better human-horse connection and ups the fun level of heading to the barn! In this e-book, you'll read tips on things to do with your horse when shows are not right around the corner.

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Build a Stronger Relationship With Your Horse Through Groundwork

Groundwork is one of the best relationship builders between horse and rider that often gets placed on the back burner, as we are eager to get on our horse's back to practice mounted exercises. When spare time becomes available, spending it working with your horse on the ground can be beneficial in many ways.

Groundwork may not always mean heading to the round pen for focused training sessions. Here are four ways that you can practice groundwork with your horse:

I. Extend Grooming Time

Think about the last time you groomed your horse. Were you rushing through to get your horse clean so that you could continue tacking up and get on to ride? Were you present and in the moment or was your mind elsewhere, thinking about other things you had to get

accomplished that day?

Grooming is one of the most important, yet overlooked, elements of groundwork as it may often be included as part of your tacking up routine. Many horse owners may not take the time to make grooming a true groundwork exercise. Grooming can be a form of groundwork, but only when the person is present in the moment and the intent is to connect and communicate with your horse.

Use this time to go through your brushes. Which brush does your horse seem to prefer? Is the hard brush too hard? Where does he like

to be curried? Does he hesitate or flip his head when you try to brush his face? Take the time to read your horse's body language, and you'll begin to develop a better understanding of how he communicates.

According to AQHA Professional Horsewoman Lynn Palm, grooming is also a great time to get a read on your horse's overall health. "In addition to brushing, you should run your hands over the whole horse," Lynn says. "This will allow you to find any filling, heat, lumps, bumps, nicks or scrapes you might not notice just by looking."

Horses will let you know if you hit a



Practicing trailer loading is meaningful for loading up and going to a show. Did you know trailer loading is a potential obstacle in AQHA Versatility Ranch Horse ranch trail courses?

tender spot – learn to be aware of his reactions to your grooming routine.

2. Trust-Building Exercises

Another great way to bond with your horse is through trust-building exercises, which can also help improve manners. For example, you may want to practice trailer loading.

Whether your horse is a champion at loading or he shies at the mere thought of stepping onto the ramp, a calm and patient attitude

while practicing this skill is a great way to gain your horse’s trust. Here are some tips:

If Your Horse Doesn’t Load Easily

- Spend the time now to make your horse comfortable loading.
- Always stay relaxed and calm, taking deep breaths – even when your horse is attempting to go the other way.
- Use a bucket of grain if you need something to convince him to get

onto the trailer.

- Once he loads and is on the trailer, reward him with praise.
- Unload and try again until it becomes easy and his hesitation is minimal.
- Know when to stop and try again the next day if you did not get the full result you were looking to achieve.
- This should be a positive experience for him, not a negative. Always end your groundwork session on a good note.

If Your Horse Already Loads Easily

- Can you get your horse to load halfway into the trailer and stop? This will show that he's listening to you, which is vital in case of an emergency.
- What about just one leg in the trailer or on the ramp?
- If you have a ramp, will your horse load backwards?

More Trust-Building Exercises to Try

- Standing patiently at the mounting block, even when you're not mounting.
- Walking over ground poles and halting halfway over the pole.
- Walking across a tarp or a show-er curtain.
- Walking around or over tires on the ground.

3. Leading Exercises

Another simple way to continue building a relationship with your horse is by practicing different techniques when walking or jogging him on a lead rope.

The Lead Position

This position, aptly named the

lead position, is when you are walking about 3 feet in front of your horse. Your horse should always be aware of where you are in relation to his space. If you were to stop quickly, your horse would also stop, keeping that distance of 3 feet between the two of you and not entering into your space. This exercise shows your horse that you own your space and you take the lead -- choosing the direction and pace that you are both moving. You can practice this both on and off the lead rope.

The Partner Position

The partner position is where you are shoulder to shoulder with your horse. In this exercise, your horse should be aware of your pace and direction without added pressure on the lead rope. Your horse should be reading your body language and movements to determine direction, pace and halts. Again, this can be practiced both on and off the lead rope.

4. Pressure and Movement: Getting Your Horse to Move on the Ground

Using light pressure in specific

areas on your horse's body to get him to move or bend are groundwork exercises that help build your bond with your horse. Try these movements next time you're at the barn.

Use light pressure:

1. On your horse's leg to pick up each foot, hold for 7 seconds, and place back on the ground.
2. Behind your horse's ears to move the head downward.
3. On the side of your horse's head to move his muzzle toward his flank.
4. On the chest to take a step back.
5. On the left shoulder to take a step to the right and on the right shoulder to take a step to the left.
6. On the right hindquarters to take a step to the left and on the left hindquarters to take a step to the right.
7. Under the belly to lift the back upward.
8. On the corners of the mouth to open your horse's mouth.

Riding Bareback

When you have the time before your next show, riding bareback has a multitude of benefits that will help you become much stronger in the saddle. Riding bareback allows you and your horse to feel each other's every move. When you are off balance, your horse can feel it, and it may cause him to pick up an incorrect lead or even stumble. Overall, it helps both horse and rider communicate better, while also helping you build strength, balance and awareness.

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Next time you're riding bareback, try shifting your weight subtly to ask for a gait transition. Or, slightly turn your pelvis to ask your horse to change direction. Use cues that are consistent with what you do while riding in a saddle and see how your horse reacts.

Strength building is another huge benefit of riding bareback. Without a saddle, you'll be able to feel yourself slipping off to a side, too far back or leaning too far forward. You don't realize how much the saddle holds you in place until you are without it, which forces you to build core strength and leg muscles to stay centered and balanced.



Fine-Tuning Skills

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With extra time between shows, now is the time to fine tune your skills. You may want to use this time to practice your transitions, or maybe a trail or reining pattern. You could trailer your horse over to another local stable and school

their jump course to switch things up. Or you could go back to a previous dressage test and review the comments and pick a few items that you want to work on to try to improve your score next time around.



Working on small movements and signals will improve the connection you have with your horse, and will also improve your performance next time you're in the show ring - no matter what discipline you ride.

Planning Your Show Wardrobe

For the rainy days or maybe a day off for your horse, you can still prepare for your next show by planning your outfit. Whether you have a closet full of attire, you want to create some of your own designs or you are in the market for new gear, use this time to make sure you have the clothes you need for your next show, so that you are not in a last-minute panic when your next show day comes.

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According to Kay Mortensen and Penny Young, owners of Showtime Show Clothing in Purcell, Oklahoma, basic black is the perfect color for beginner's staple items.

"A basic black front zip jacket dotted with crystals will take you from the showmanship class to the riding classes," Kay says. "The jacket should be hip length to pair with black showmanship pants, and to wear out over your chaps for riding classes. The crystals on

the jacket will add sparkle and shine, which will keep you from being too 'dark' in the arena. An Invisibella stretchy undergarment will smooth out the bra lines and make you look sleek and smooth."

Add black boots and a black professionally shaped hat, and you'll be ready to hit the arena. Give your outfit a practice run when you're riding at home to be sure everything is comfortable and stays in place.



Whether your show was postponed, rescheduled or canceled altogether, having the extra time to prepare for your next event can really pay off when it's time to perform. Regardless of discipline, there are many things that can be done to build the relationship we have with our horse, help our riding and prepare for our next show.