

Detail Oriented

Follow these tips to make your overall look - including your saddle pad and number - tidy and balanced.

This flashy colored horse looks nice in a solid pad.

From [The American Quarter Horse Journal](#)



Whether you're a serious competitor, a horse show mom or a trainer, you know it's important to sweat the small stuff at [horse shows](#). Image is everything, and you don't want to overlook the fine points.

"Details are so important," says trainer Dana Hokana of Temecula, California. "That extra finish really matters. In western pleasure, the main thing the judges see is your profile, so make sure it's just right. Double-check everything."

Before you enter the arena, Dana recommends having someone with a knowledgeable eye walk around you and your horse. Notice straps not tucked in, dusty boots or dull silver.

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Also, notice your saddle pad. Is it straight and even on all sides? How about your exhibitor number? Is it well-placed and balanced on the pad?

Saddle Pad Checklist

1. Front and rear views: make sure the same amount of pad shows on each side of the horse. Situate the saddle so it fits squarely over the show pad.
2. If you are showing a futurity horse, it's particularly important that the saddle pad doesn't appear to slant down from the hip to the withers. Young horses might already be higher in the hip than the withers, so be careful that an ill-fitted pad doesn't make the horse appear more "downhill." By lifting the pad up into the cantle, it appears more balanced.
3. Ideally, from the side view, the saddle should sit exactly in the center of the pad. If you cannot place it directly in the center, always put more pad behind the saddle - never more pad in front.

Trim and Slim

Another trick to looking svelte: Trim extra white space off your exhibitor number before pinning it to the saddle pad.

If part of the number is hidden slightly under the saddle's skirt, that's OK - just make sure each numeral will be clear to the judges.

Ideally, the number should be flush across the bottom of the pad and the rear of the saddle.

"The number should line up with the back of the saddle - not the rear of the pad," Dana says.

More Insider Tips

1. Horses with a lot of white are better off with saddle pads with less color," Dana says. "Horses that are plainer-marked look better with a brighter, more decorated pad."
2. The latigo strap and other pieces of loose leather should be nicely contained, not flopping and untidy.
3. Make sure the silver on your bridle, bit and saddle is clean.