

# Achieving Optimal Sleekness!

*Shine on!*  
Nadine Van Zomeren,  
of Timber Hills Farm  
shows us how it's done!



Howard Schaffers

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You're at a horse show, surrounded by horses groomed, clipped and show ready, prepared to catch the eye of a judge. Suddenly, you spot a horse that *commands* your attention—like a fly drawn to light. The coat is literally glistening; you have to resist the urge to run over to the sleek show horse and run your hands over it.

If you've been to shows, or various horse  
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farms, I'm sure you've seen horses such as this, and it may have crossed your mind as to how to get your horse's coat as sleek as that. After all, yeah, there's World Champion Pepi, but that can only do so much! Follow these tips, and not only will you have a sleeker horse to show for it, but pre-show prep will become so much easier. Good grooming and a polished coat start at home.

You may have heard the phrase that grooming begins from the inside out—well it's true! Although you would find various tips and opinions thrown at you by professionals, all agree that good health care affects the hair coat of a horse. A horse infested by worms suffers in several ways, especially by having a lackluster coat. Regular de-worming is especially important to keeping your horse sleek.

Nutrition also plays a role in having your equine companion's coat glow. Mark and Renae Van Zomeren, of Timber Hills Farm, recommend feeding a good quality grain.

Their champion level American Saddlebred horses have the hair coats to match their superb achievements, and not without careful grooming and hard work. Mark instructs to pay close attention to feed labels, avoiding the feeds that contain grain by-products. There are many supplements geared toward improving a horse's coat, but these aren't *always* needed when your horse has a balanced diet and is healthy. Another common method geared toward making the coat really shine, is adding corn or vegetable oil to a horse's feed. Substances with fat can lead to a shinier and sleeker coat.

An additional un-debated essential ingredient for top level shine is constant elbow grease. This activity involves your physical energy being expended into frequent grooming sessions for your horse. Top grooms and show horses may be groomed as often as three times a day! Regardless, it is important to engage

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in grooming daily. When a horse is brushed vigorously, it stimulates the sebaceous glands to excrete the natural oils, called sebum, on a horse's coat. Those natural oils play a large role in what makes a horse look so sleek.

When it comes to a vigorous grooming session, order does matter. In general, you should start with a rubber curry comb. Use the curry comb to loosen mud and dirt off of your horse's coat. Next, a stiff brush can be used to brush off the debris that was previously loosened by your curry comb. The soft brush is the next step, followed by a rub rag to shine up the coat and distribute the oils. Remember to only use a very soft brush, or a soft rubber face curry, for the delicate features such as a horse's head. Carl and Kelly Schuring, of Schuring Quarter Horses in Otley, Iowa, know all about grooming to win. Carl explains the importance of a hearty grooming session, "Since horses are always shedding, it is important to brush off loose hair to achieve a sleek and short coat. Dirt, dust and debris also are removed through grooming, helping the coat to be clean, while stimulating the oils on the coat."

On the market today, there are many products to make grooming easier, more efficient, and effective. Some barns use vacuums to remove loose debris from their horse's coats. Although vacuums are effective, they cannot replace a good brushing. Also, a visit to your tack store or a flip through a catalog can show an overwhelming amount of show sheens and hair polishes that are



Tardees Mr. Skip, Champion stallion standing at Schuring Quarter Horses

available for horses. These do enhance the coat and are handy to have, but will never replace vigorous and daily grooming.

Another important tip to getting a desired show glow is to cut down on the suds! Shampooing your horse's hair coat can deplete the natural oils on the coat. When and if you are to shampoo, it should be rare. At Timber Hills Farm in Pella, Iowa, shampooing is avoided all together, with the exception of the horses' tails. Mark explains, "This helps our horses' coats to be naturally shiny, because they are not ever stripped of their natural oils from shampooing. Instead, the skin is only stimulated by frequent grooming."

For horses that may occasionally be in really muddy situations, occasional shampooing can only be practical to get a head start on the grooming routine. Some barns recommend sponge baths, and some opt to rinse down their horse with water, especially in hot weather and

sweaty situations. Timber Hills Farm gives their horses a sponge bath with a mixture of water and liniment after workouts in hot weather.

Another important thing to take into consideration for optimum shine is UV Rays. The sun can have damaging effects on the horse's hair coat. Mark Van Zomeren warns that sun will bleach the hair and can make it more coarse—the opposite of what you want! Most top horses are kept indoors; however, this is not feasible for everyone. If your horse is to be turned out, consider a method that

will 'kill two birds with one stone'. Turn your horse out in a fly scrim sheet, especially during the buggy months. This choice fights UV rays and insects! Another option, if realistic, is to limit turn out time to only at night, when the sun is down. As always, make sure your horse has shelter available, to get away from elements of the weather.

Furthermore, keeping your horse under lights 16 hours a day, even in the summer months, helps the hair to be kept short, resulting in a sleeker coat. If this is an option for you, use a two hundred and fifty watt bulb in your horse's stall.

No doubt, your horse will feel like a model with all of this time being expended into creating a dramatic head-turning shine. Sound like a horse hair infomercial yet? Well, it *kind* of is—it's just information based on logic, evidence, labor and scientific facts. No need to be skeptical; the information is straight forward, used by professionals, and it works. With these tips, you could be the one turning heads at your horse's next outing!