

Your First Hunter Show

So, you have decided to try showing in the hunter ring. If this is your first show you probably have a lot of questions about how a show is run. It is my hope that this guide will ease your worries and allow you to have a pleasant experience.

The first thing you need to do is find a show that is suited to your level of riding and the quality of your horse. Not all horse shows are the same. Unless you are riding with a good coach who will guide you through the process and have a horse who is experienced in the ring, your best bet is to start at a schooling show.

Schooling shows are usually run by riding schools in your general area. They may be closed to students from the riding school only, but many accept outside horses and riders. Call the barn before the show to find out what their policy is. They may have a small ship-in fee for outside horses, but most welcome any new participants. There are also shows at the schooling level that are held by local riding clubs. These are generally open to horses and riders from any barn but may require that you are a club member.

Hunter shows generally can be entered the day of the show. Some shows will have pre-entries, which can cut your costs somewhat. Others only allow entries the morning of the show. When looking at the list of classes available take into consideration the level of your horse and your own riding level. You should generally enter classes that are at or slightly below your current training level. For example, if you are jumping 3' at home, you might want to try a 2'6" or 2'9" division rather than pushing your horse to the maximum you have been training at. This makes the show less stressful and will maximize the chance of having a positive first experience.

There are often classes in a range of levels available. Many shows will allow cross-entering from one level to another, but will limit how big the range of ability is. For example, you might be able to enter a 2'6" division and a 2'9" division, but would not be allowed to enter the 3' division. This is to make it fair for all the riders involved and prevent high-level riders from sweeping the ribbons in the low level classes.

Many shows have actual divisions of classes that include 2-3 over fences classes and 1-2 flat classes. Lower level divisions are likely to have more flat classes, while higher level divisions will have more over fences classes. Each over fences class will usually have a different course to learn, but some beginning divisions or green divisions will offer a schooling class that is the same as a later class, or not vary the courses very much to keep things simple for the riders.

When selecting the classes you want to enter keep in mind that the show day can get very long and it isn't fair to put your horse into more classes that he can handle. Many horses can't manage more than 4-5 classes in a day. Others who are very fit can manage more. If you do enter a lot of classes make sure that there are some breaks in between so you are not on your horse all day long.

After entering your classes take some time to study the courses. Usually there will be papers with the courses written on them placed somewhere near the arena. You should be able to study the course while looking at the actual ring and fences so that you will be familiar with what the course looks like. It is very important to memorize these courses and refresh yourself before going into the ring as going off course will get you disqualified. Sometimes it is easiest to memorize your course just before the class so that you don't get the different patterns mixed up in your head.

When your division begins you may be presented with an order of go. This tells you which horses are expected to enter the ring in what order. Other schooling shows just accept horses into the ring when the riders are ready. If at all possible watch a couple of horses and riders around the course before your turn so that you see how the course rides and where potential trouble may lie.

The flat classes are generally held either at the beginning or the end of a division. In a flat class all the horses are brought into the ring at once. They are asked to walk and trot on the rail in each direction. The canter may be asked for as a group, but if the class is large or the level is low the judge will often split the class into two groups, each one having a turn on the rail to show off their canter. After the class is finished the judge will ask you to line up in a row facing one direction. You might be asked to back your horse, but usually the judge merely looks over each horse and rider a final time before handing in the judging card.

Remember that showing your horse should be able gaining better experience and improving your riding skills. While ribbons are nice they should not be your top priority. Most shows pin to 6th place but some will offer ribbons to 8th or even 10th place. There is rarely prize money at the schooling level.

Hopefully you now have a better idea of what to expect when attending your first hunter show. If possible bring a knowledgeable friend or coach to help walk you through the process and give you an extra set of hands. Remember, showing should be fun, so don't get too worked up about it. If you

relax and take your time your first showing experience can be a great one.

About the Author

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