



Victory in the Show Ring

How Equine Competitors Prepare to Win

What does winning look like to you?

The answer varies among riders of all breeds, disciplines and levels of expertise. Winning can happen when you get the perfect lead change, when you complete a course or when you finally earn a blue ribbon.

Regardless of your definition, winning always depends on behind-the-scenes work, a prepared rider and a horse in optimal health.

Riders and trainers representing various breeds and disciplines from around the country are offering their own unique “winning” tips – insights into the rituals and practices that make them successful competitors:

“Every journey is unique. If you accept the ups and downs of the journey – while bleeding determination, hard work and the desire to learn every day – you’re winning.”

Meghan O'Donoghue
4-Star Event Rider
2014 WEG Alternate
United States Eventing Association

“I keep my older, four-star level horse in top physical and mental shape by incorporating two complete rest days into his schedule during the week of big competitions. No farrier, no riding, no bugging, poking or prodding ... absolutely two days in a row! He always arrives at the competitions with revived energy and excitement to be there.”

Rachel Jurgens
Amateur Thoroughbred Rider

“I always take a few minutes before I compete to get away from all the horse show buzz and find a quiet place to visualize my class. It doesn't matter where – I just need the few minutes to myself to work through my ‘mental transitions’ so we are seamless. This really helps me focus on my horse and all the prep work we have

done to become a team in the arena. He knows his job, so I just have to make sure I stay out of his way and let him do it!"

Kari Kemper

Arabian Western Pleasure Rider

"I do a little every day, in every lesson with a rider, so they enter the show ring prepared. Repetition is also really important to me, so both horse and rider understand the expectations and build enough confidence to execute under pressure. That, along with proper nutrition, grooming, veterinary care and training help bring me success."

Sarah McClintock

Highland Ridge Stables

American Saddlebred Horse Association

"My winning strategy is to simply focus on what I can control. I do not like to think too much about how my competition is doing, who the judges are, etc. I only focus on myself, my horse and our partnership when we go into the show pen, fully trusting in myself and our preparation. If something goes wrong or we do not do as well as we had hoped, at least I know that I've done everything in my power to be prepared and that my horse and I gave it our all together."

Lauren Love

American Quarter Horse Association

Amateur Western Horsemanship

"When you step out in the show ring, just ride exactly how you ride at home. Don't worry about failing, just go out there and give it your all."

Julie Wolfert

4-Star Event Rider

Chaps Equestrian Center

United States Eventing Association

"I always go to bed early the night before my class, even if my class is later the following day. I don't drink, not even a glass of wine, or go out to dinner. We have a coach bus, so I stay there. I feel that no matter how much I have worked at it, my body needs to be hydrated and prepared for the class. Sometimes it's cold and then it can be hot in the show pen, and I like to be physically comfortable and not fatigued. I don't get 'nervous.' I feel that I'm ready to go into my class, and we just do our best. I also think it's important to have some camaraderie with the other people in my class, because we are all doing the same thing and it's fun to meet new people and to connect with old friends."

Marylyn Caliendo

American Paint Horse Association

“Never give up! If your ride isn’t following Plan A, switch to Plan B, and keep showing.”

Kelly Ponce

American Quarter Horse Association

“I try to do all the pre-work right when I arrive. I look at the arena and develop a game plan based on the arena conditions. After that, I try to turn my mind off and just focus on warming my horse up and making sure we are both prepared.”

Carley Richardson

Barrel Racer

“Just before you ride into the pen or begin a pattern, take a deep breath and blow it out as you mentally run through one positive to-do task, such as closing your leg before going to your hand or using your voice command first or sitting on your seat.”

Stephanie Lynn

American Quarter Horse Association

“Right before I walk out to show, I bridle my horse, reach down, pet him and say, ‘We are world champions, the hard part is over! Now let’s go have some fun!’ When I’m riding in the hunter under saddle division, I sing a song that I made up so every time I rise, I sing ‘Point, point, point that toe.’ I know it sounds silly!”

John Zeldenthuis

American Paint Horse Association

“My tip for feeling good, both for people and horses, is to stay hydrated. Drinking water with electrolytes can really make a difference.”

Deanna Searles

Circle S Ranch

American Quarter Horse Association

“Real winners wear helmets! Everyone should protect their head. Crazy, unpredictable things happen on horses – even to the best riders in the world.”

Ellie Johnson, DVM

Woodland Veterinary Hospital

“When you get to a show, trust in your training. It works every time!”

Joni Nelson

Nelson Quarter Horses

American Quarter Horse Association

“Don’t ride faster than your guardian angel can fly. And it’s important to ride smart. In order to do that, you must use your brain, and your brain needs oxygen to think, so you must breathe. Once my riders are on course, I remind them with ‘Oxygen to the brain!’”

*Courtney Hayden-Fromm
Seoul Creek Farm*

“Never give up on your dreams, and never let a bad run steal your joy! Never feel like a failure, because each run is a stepping stone toward your goals. Keep your faith and miracles will happen!”

*Lucchesse Tobias
Youth Barrel Racer*

While these tips can serve riders and their horses well, nothing can take the place of a horse in top physical health, according to Meg Green, DVM, manager, equine and large animal veterinary services, Merial. “No matter the event, the best way to set the stage for success in the ring is to make the horse’s health and condition priority number one.”

Green suggests riders and trainers consult with their veterinarians to make sure their horses are healthy enough to perform their best. This should include preventive equine stomach ulcer care. “Studies have shown that when horses are exposed to stressful situations such as training, traveling and competing, it can lead to equine stomach ulcers, which can be very uncomfortable for horses. In fact, two out of three non-racing, competitive horses have stomach ulcers.¹ That’s why it’s important to be proactive and help prevent them from occurring.”

For stomach ulcer prevention, equine competitors can use ULCERGARD® (omeprazole). It’s the only proven and FDA-approved product to help prevent equine stomach ulcers.²

“The horse and rider are a team, in and out of competition, and it’s the responsibility of each teammate to keep the other safe. It’s all part of winning,” says Green.

For more information, visit TheStomachtoWin.com.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:

ULCERGARD can be used in horses that weigh at least 600 pounds. Safety in pregnant mares has not been determined.

About Merial

Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven animal health company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health and well-being of a wide range of animals. Merial employs 6,100 people and operates in more than 150 countries worldwide with more than €2 billion of sales in 2014.

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¹Mitchell RD. Prevalence of gastric ulcers in hunter/jumper and dressage horses evaluated for poor performance. Association for Equine Sports Medicine, September 2001.

²ULCERGARD product label.