

Preparing for the New Show Season

As the New Year starts off and Christmas is behind us, many start looking forward to the first show of the season. You want to make sure that you get your show season started off on the right foot. Make a plan of all the shows that you want to attend, what you want to achieve at each individualized show and a big year-end goal. You want to make sure you give yourself enough time to get ready, and have a countdown to the first show you plan on attending. Know how much time your horse needs to be in show shape, both mentally and physically. Pushing a horse that is not in good condition in the pen, often results in injury. You don't want to miss the season because of not conditioning early enough in the beginning.

What are your goals? Be realistic, you want to choose something that is achievable to avoid disappointment BUT you still want to place the bar high enough that it pushes you to step up from the previous year. You want to feel like you have shown growth. It's good to have a big goal for the end of the year, for example "year-end high point for your division of your local club," but you need to know the smaller goals along the way that are needed to reach that bigger goal. The goal for your first show could be to stay on pattern and not have any penalties, not necessarily win every class at the show. These will be the building blocks towards the bigger goal. Your goals also need to match your horse's ability. If you have a 70 horse, you cannot have a goal of marking a 74 at your first show and feel successful.

If you haven't had your horse at a Trainer over the winter; not under lights or blanketed, you are going to have to work on getting their condition up and hair shed out. Your horse has to be looking its best to have a great show presence in the pen. Horses need about 16 hours of light to shed out, there are many timers available to purchase for your barn, to help to make sure your horse is getting enough light to be in show condition. I've also seen good results

with different supplements in helping coat condition and enabling faster shed out. If your horse is a finished Reiner, they will most likely need board and conditioning at a Trainer's facility and not full training, this will save on cost.

Once you have your horse legged up, you should take it somewhere to knock the rust off and work on any issues from the previous show season. Getting your horse out in different facilities will help them to settle in faster when they are on the show grounds. A good way to get your horse exposed is to rent an arena close to you; I sometimes do this with some other trainers or customers to save on cost. There are also AQHA or Open shows, that you can go to with low cost and can even show off your trailer as practice for the NRHA shows you may want to attend. This is a good way to get your horse mentally back into the show environment and address any problems that might arise away from home.

Another tip to prepare for a successful show season is to watch your runs from the previous season and decide what you want to work on. You want to keep your strengths strong and improve on the weak areas of your patterns. If you haven't worked

with someone in the past, this would be a good time to start a relationship with a Trainer, or Professional that you trust and respect their program. There are different ways that you can have the support of a Trainer on your side during the show season. Some people will have their horse in training at the Trainer's facility and go and ride there. Other people will have their horse at home, ride them themselves during the week and head to the shows with the Trainer. Either way, have clear cut goals and work hard to achieve them.

The best way to avoid mistakes and disappointment is to be organized and realistic in what you can achieve. Make a plan, stick to it, ask for help when you need it and you will succeed. Take pleasure in the journey; don't let the end goal overshadow the good things happening along the way. Enjoy the ride!

Next month, we will talk about circles.

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Nick Valentine owns Valentine Reining Horses in Lucama, N.C. He focuses on showing, training, sales, coaching and clinics at Francois Gauthier's facility, Sunny Pines Farm go to www.valentinereining.com for more.

Photo courtesy of Valentine Reining



Luckys Starlight & Nick Valentine