

choosing your colors.....and your style!

By Linda Johnson

First we need to consider your equine partner, since he/she is much more noticeable in mass, than you are. You are a team, and you'll need to dress as a team. What colors are compatible? Here are some simple guidelines. Sometimes there is a great combination outside of the "rules," but this is a good place to start.

If you have a **Bay, Black, White, Gray, or Blue roan**, consider bright colors such as red, purples & blues.

If you have a **Chestnut, Sorrel, Liver Chestnut, Rose gray, or Dun**, try to stay with earth tones, and then kick it up a notch with your contrast colors.

If you have a neutral horse, such as a **Buckskin, Palomino, or Grulla**, you are pretty much open to anything, depending on the shade of your horse, and your body type or preference.

If you have an **Appaloosa, Paint, or Pinto**, or any horse with a lot of white, you'll need the darker bolder colors so you don't look washed out. Teals, navy, browns, or black with a bold yolk color.

When in doubt, many shades of blues, teals, greens, black, white and gold, will compliment almost any horse color, and rider. Look through your favorite journals, and find colors that speak to you, and designs that knock your socks off, put them together, and see what you think.

If you aren't sure if a color will work on your horse, find a shirt or blanket in the color that you are thinking about, and then drape it over your horse, or hang it over a fence post, then stand back 20-50, or even 100 feet, and see what the judges will see from a distance. What looks good up close, is not always the case from afar. There is a "sea of black" out there, and for a good reason.....black is "stunning," makes all of the other colors "POP" and also hides a multitude of sins....especially after a winter filled with pasta and Ben & Jerry's! You also need to "know" your body shape, and build your wardrobe accordingly. I will get into this a little more later.....

Choosing the right pieces- The first thing you need to do is to check your rule book, and find out what the "guidelines" are for the classes you are showing in. Let's face it, many haven't changed their "rules" for 30 years, so you'll have to find somewhere to put that little "pin" or whatever that is required, but we can dress up the rest of you!!

Every new year, is it the same ole thing? "What am I going to wear this season?" Choosing your new show colors, and contemplating the new style trends, doesn't have to make you reach for the aspirin bottle. With a few tips and tricks, and a little preparation you'll be dressed for "Show-time" in a flash!

There are a lot of "fads" being introduced, and you need to take into consideration your age, and the level that you are showing in. Not every new look is right for everyone, no matter how much you want to be "with it" sometimes you are better leaving it for the youth riders. So let's start there.....

Youth riders can get away with just about anything, and any colors. They look adorable in brights, and they are "age appropriate." A monochromatic look (matching chaps & top, or matching showmanship outfit) is still the best way to go for a youth or adult show person. It gives a nice long line whether you are in the saddle or on the ground, and should be used by everyone. Once youth riders cross over about the age 13 line, they should consider making the transition to a more adult look..... meaning more professional, less 'cute-sy" things, and show the judges that they are serious competitors.



left to right: Melanie Galles, Andrea Balsis, & Katelyn Galles
photo by Meleta Galles

Many of my clients try to get 2 years out of an outfit, and we "plan" for extra length and width here and there. If an outfit is "too small" please accept it, and start with some new pieces. There is little worse than seeing an outfit that

doesn't fit correctly, for a youth, or for an adult. Please remember what your mother said "**First impressions are lasting ones!**" So not only was it true when you went to meet your boyfriends parents for the first time, it is true for your "show presentation" as well. There are many outlets now, especially online, to sell your gently used (quality) youth clothing. As long as you have kept it clean and in good shape, reselling should be a snap!

Adult Outfits: In my opinion, there are 3 basics that must/ should be considered in your show attire.....It must fit you correctly. **It should be age appropriate. It should look professional.** You are a professional! You have spent a lot of time and money in training for this day.....don't let your outfit "blow it" for you!!

OK, how can you get it all? Let's start with the fit.....If you were a size 10 last year, and this year you have to "suck it all in" to get zipped, and buckled, you have 2 choices..... either drop the extra pounds, or bite the bullet, and go to a size 12. This is "so" important. If clothing fits you properly, you have a much nicer, smoother, (and more slender) look. If you zip your show pants, and it squishes a roll out over the top.....let's face it, we need to accentuate the positives, and hide the negatives! We are women! We have had children, stress from our jobs, our kids, and we "eat" when we

are stressed! They say you gain a pound every year after you graduate, so even if we didn't need to exercise when we were young, we change.....and we need to do it now. So, put your clothes on, look in the mirror, get the hand mirror out, and turn around, so that you can see all of the angles everyone else is going to see on you, and then make your choice of action.

Next in line is "age appropriate-ness." One of the hot new looks are the lycra Western Pleasure shirts, you know, with the movie star collar & french cuffs? The good news is, everyone can wear one.....the bad news is, some of us need to wear them "under" a vest! This again, by itself, is a great youth look, or a look for a young lady, with a great figure. If you do not have a small perky bust line, please add to your new look with a well fitting, coordinating vest. You can still be "in" without showing it all! If you have a tummy roll, wear a vest. If you are well endowed, wear a vest. Yes, the Western Pleasure shirts are comfortable, and cooler to wear, but look in the mirror before you put it all out there for the world to see!

While we are on the "top" issue, please choose the appropriate under-garments. If you require a "no-jiggle" bra, please invest in one. It can make all the difference in the world in your presentation.

Chaps: This one is really quite simple. You "need" to have well fitting, quality show chaps! Chaps cover two thirds of your total "look." If you try to skimp here, it will show! A good fit for chaps is critical, to avoid the "gapping" so often seen in the front tummy area where they meet your thighs. You know, when they "bow" out? That isn't you. You don't "bow out" why should your chaps? Your chaps also **need to be** long enough to cover your heel. It is nearly impossible to correctly alter a pair of chaps, since the main part of each chap leg is one piece. If it is not cut to your measurements, it will not lay correctly, giving you the smooth lines you desire. If you are going to invest in something custom made, this would be the main piece I would suggest. Chaps can be made of a variety of leathers, or suedes, even ultrasuede, and they each have their own assets, or drawbacks. I have my own preferences, as you probably do too. Things to look for in quality chaps would be "Do they have double yolks?" Thicker yolks, both top and bottom add weight, and stability to your chaps. On the top, they prevent that "tugging" look in the front when you buckle them tightly, and won't show any lumps and bumps from you, or your show pants underneath. On the bottom, it adds weight so your chaps lay nicely over your boots, and don't twist around. Look for reinforced seams where the top of your zippers end, as this is a very stressed area. In addition, an

extra piece of leather around the upper thigh area will keep the thighs from stretching, and gapping.

Looking professional- This is a must! You are a professional, and you need to present yourself that way. The judges will calculate your score, as a total package, you the show person, as well as your horse, and how well you work together. Once again, you only get one chance to make a great first impression!! When you see a great lady walking down the street, and she isn't dressed overly formal, you can't quite figure out why she looks so good? Chances are she is dressed in all one color, using her accessories for color, and pulling the whole look together. Your best bet is to try and do the same thing, whether you are in the saddle, or on the ground. A monochromatic look, with great contrast either on the yolk, or the design, will always give you a clean, crisp, and professional look. Look around the arena at your next show, or even attend a show that you are not in, and just look at the outfits. You will be able to pick out the "most put together" person there, and it shows! It shows in a "good" way.....you can't stop watching her, and neither can the judges. Have you ever seen a poorly mismatched, or sloppy person win? No, I don't think you have.....it just doesn't happen.

I mentioned earlier that I would get into the "black" issue, and knowing your body shape. Black is so widely used because it can hide many issues that we may have as women. Lets say you are a typical "pear" shape....small on the top, and larger at the hips. If you put a light, or bright color on the top, and keep the darker color on the bottom,

it sort of evens out your whole shape, visually. Once again, if you have no real defined shape, by using a color in the front, and back, with princess seaming, you can use black on the side panels, giving the illusion of broad shoulders, and a narrow waist, even if you don't have one. So from a designers point of view, black is a great basic. If you can't afford to invest a great deal in your wardrobe at one time, I would suggest a black base, meaning chaps or showmanship outfit, and then it's easy to "build" your wardrobe over time, because you

know it will all "go" together. The other plus to black, is that all colors POP on black! When you are 50 feet away from the judge, you need to have a design that will still stand out on it's own. Something with embroidery on it, may be very beautiful at up close, but from a distance, all you will see is the base color. If you want to have a total package look, you'll need to start looking at your clothing from a distance, and see how it measures up.



Amanda Watson with Max
photo by Carolyn Watson



Eileen Hughes
photo courtesy of Horse News

There are many other new colors making their way into the show pens, and some will be suitable for you, some will not. Once you know your body type, and consider where you should put the lights, and where you should put the darker colors, choosing your new outfits will be a breeze!

Winning is in the details- Now we have our new outfits, but we're not finished yet! You need to check all of your accessories you plan to wear with it. Choose small silver or gold (depending on your outfit) button type earrings. If you are not planning to wear gloves with your outfit, please have your nails and hands nicely manicured. Also, be sure that your lipstick color does not clash with your outfit. If you are in the saddle, make sure your blanket picks up your outfit or contrast colors, and pulls the look together for both of you. My biggest pet peeve.....Make sure that your show pants 'match" your chaps!! This is "so" important for a complete package look. Contrasting or mismatched pants look "so bad" and can ruin an otherwise great outfit.

Hats- Hats are important! Please make sure yours is clean and well blocked. You need to carry the crisp and sharp look into every detail of your look. Also, the hats are starting to come out with shorter brims, "Yea!" You might even be able to see some faces now! Lighter hats always draw the eye up, and give you an all over lighter "look," but see what will go best with the outfit you have chosen.

In closing, I have tried to give you some insight for what to think about when choosing your new show clothing, or deciding to change colors. It's not always elementary, but it doesn't have to be too nerve wracking either. If you are planning for a custom outfit, my suggestion would be to make contact with your clothing maker at least 8-12 months ahead of time. I get so many people wanting new outfits for a show next month, and I am booked for 8 months ahead. So now you have your recipe for a "total knock-out look" Go have some fun!! Get some new clothes!!and most of all Bring home some "blues!"



LJ Designs Custom Show
Clothing is all about
making your dreams come
true.....

I strive to give all of my clients
their own "unique" look,
whether that means you want
a conservative outfit, you want
to take a walk on the wild side, or somewhere in
between. I love creating new looks, playing with
fabric, leather, and color, so 'work" is fun for me
every single day.....and I am grateful to all of you
that keep allowing me to do what I enjoy most.

Linda Johnson
www.ljdesigns.org