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VOL. 39

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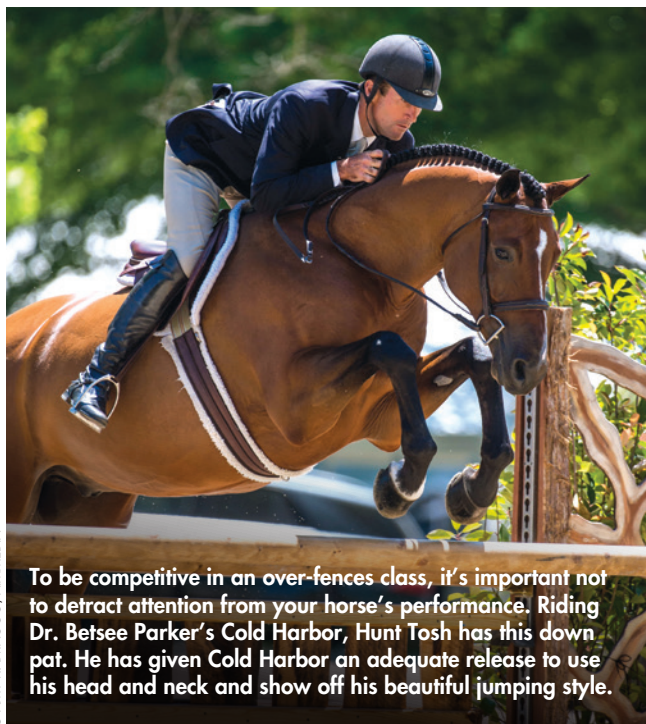
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To be competitive in an over-fences class, it's important not to detract attention from your horse's performance. Riding Dr. Betsee Parker's Cold Harbor, Hunt Tosh has this down pat. He has given Cold Harbor an adequate release to use his head and neck and show off his beautiful jumping style.

Two USEF 'R' judges offer tips on how to ride a winning hunter round.

By Elizabeth Iliff Prax

Winning an over-fences hunter class requires a combination of natural talent, excellent execution, enthusiasm and confidence, plus a little bit of luck. USEF 'R' judge Patrick Rodes, who has officiated at top shows such as the Washington International, the Capital Challenge, Palm Beach, the Pennsylvania National in Harrisburg and the USHJA International Hunter Derby Championship, says this formula has been the same for decades, but the competitiveness of horses and riders has improved dramatically. "Horses are so well trained and riders are so much better these days. It blows my mind how good some of these Juniors and even kids on ponies are. They have a great feel."

As a consequence, it's often subtle differences that put one horse-and-rider combination over another in the final placings. So your job is to squeeze the most points out of

your round. Before you step into the ring, though, understand that the judges are rooting for you. USEF 'R' judge Chris Wynne, who has officiated at major shows such as Devon, Washington, the Derby Championship and the Pennsylvania National, explains, "I'm not trying to find what you've done wrong. I'm trying to find something you and your horse have done well, even if that's just a beautiful hunter circle at the end of your round." A judge's job isn't to be a scorekeeper, he says, counting negatives, like rubs. "We recognize the mistakes, but reward the positives."

It Starts with the Horse

The biggest factor in a winning round is the quality of the horse. Both Chris and Patrick want to see a horse with natural athletic talent and presence. "I relate our sport to lots of other sports," says Chris. "Athletes like [basketball star] LeBron James and [football star] Tom Brady have a cockiness about them. I want to see the same in a horse—not a dull, machine-like animal."

"I like horses who are really athletic, spectacular," says Patrick. "If a horse wows me with quality move-

▶▶▶ **TIP**

Over-fences winners don't have to move as well as under-saddle winners, but they do need enough stride to get down the distances without hurrying.



One of Patrick Rodes's favorite horse-and-rider combinations was Tori Colvin and Dr. Betsee Parker's now-retired champion hunter Way Cool. Patrick says he gave the pair a score of 98—his highest ever given.

legs and speed-bumping over them. They stay round in the air, follow through with their hind ends [flexing the joints in their hind legs] and land in the same balance and rhythm they had on takeoff."

Quality of movement is important, but not as influential as jumping style. Patrick says that over-fences winners don't have to move as well as under-saddle winners, but they do need enough stride to get down the distances without hurrying. He rewards horses who have "a nice, soft canter, stay in balance and look fun and comfortable to ride." Additionally, he wants to see "a balanced horse who wears his head and neck out softly and goes around the ring in a nice, soft feel, not pulling on the bridle."

Another quality judges are looking for is expression. "I love a horse that pricks his ears up and wears them all around the course, looking like he likes his job," says Patrick.

If that enthusiasm goes a little over the top sometimes, adds Chris, that's often forgivable. "They don't have to be robots." Say the crowd goes wild after an especially good round and the horse reacts with a playful head toss. "I'm OK with that. I'm excited

ment and jumping style, I'll overlook some mistakes and pick it over a horse that goes around and doesn't make any mistakes but is a little flat and plain."

In over-fences classes, jumping style is the most important quality. "A tie goes to the better jumper, not the prettier horse or better mover," says Chris.

Talented hunters slow down on takeoff to jump up and around the fences, says Patrick, rather than "just picking up their

Make a Great First Impression

Regardless of how fancy your horse is, give him the best chance at a ribbon by maximizing his strengths—starting with a terrific first impression. By all means, get to the ring on time. "Most of our days are fairly long," says Patrick. "We know people are busy, but we don't want to get to the end of the class and have to wait on somebody."

How well you care for and groom your horse can give you an edge from the moment you step into the ring. Chris explains, "A beautiful horse—not necessarily conformationally, but his coat, his weight, his turnout—makes a big difference."

Judges look at the whole picture, says Patrick. "Is your horse turned out well? Are your boots polished? Does your coat fit? If the overall look and appearance is happy and balanced and the horse has a certain presence, I get excited to watch your round."

What you do next sets the tone for the judge. Chris and Patrick like to see a rider start the round efficiently and confidently with an "I got this!" attitude. "Pick up a nice gallop in a rhythm and pace that suits your horse, then go straight to the first jump," advises Patrick. "Don't tour the whole ring."

If your horse is spooky, try not to over-react, says Chris. "If you need to show him everything in the ring before you start, that's not exuding confidence. It draws the judges' attention to the issue and makes us look for the spookiness throughout the rest of the round."

too!" He doesn't mind horses celebrating, for example, after a big effort over an oxer so long as their exuberance doesn't break up the flow of the round or pose a danger for the rider. This also depends on the division. "If it's an Adult Amateur division and that playfulness could be unsafe for that particular rider, I have to penalize it."

When it comes to gauging the highest-quality horses, judges have realistic expectations, he adds. "Every show is not Devon. If I'm at a 4-H show, I may judge a little on a curve. If you just had the trip of your life on a 15.1-hand Quarter Horse, I will reward you for that. In his own environment, he's a contender."



COURTESY, CHRIS WYNNE

"I'm not trying to find what you've done wrong. I'm trying to find something you and your horse have done well, even if that's just a beautiful hunter circle at the end of your round," USEF 'R' judge Chris Wynne says.

TIP

Riders who are more comfortable keeping pace around the turns and all the way to the jumps usually score higher than cautious people who slow down to find their distances, are too careful around the corners, add strides out of the turn and try not to make mistakes.



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Execute—with Pace!

Throughout your round, focus on three things: pace, rhythm and track. A good pace is the best way to show off your horse's jumping style, says Chris. "Riders who are more comfortable keeping pace around the turns and all the way to the jumps usually score higher than cautious people who slow down to find their distances, are too careful around the corners, add strides out of the turn and try not to make mistakes."

Patrick agrees. "I like to see people stay on a better lick." So long as the horse is in balance, he says, he'd rather see riders a touch forward to the jumps than underpaced.

However, the pace must be even and under control, cautions Chris. "The best riders start and finish the course at the same speed and rhythm. There are variations along the way—but no *great* variations." He teaches his students to think of their show pace as their third gear. "If you need to change that to second or fourth every once in a while, that's OK. But always go back to third gear. And never skip a gear—going from third to fifth or third to first."

Unless you're riding in a handy class, he adds, choose the smoothest track possible, using the entire ring. "Turns are there for you to reorganize yourself. Take the time to use them. Don't take inside turns or short approaches. Use your pace to make up the difference instead of making the ring smaller."

As you plan your track, be very conscious of your straightness. "I like a horse to stay very straight," says Patrick. "I definitely have to deduct points for a horse drifting to one side on takeoff."

Stay Out of Your Horse's Way

Both judges agree that anything a rider does to distract their attention from the horse can potentially bring down the score.

ABOVE: John French, here riding Meadow Farm LLC's Solider, is a great example of a rider who has a balanced, flowing style that enables his mounts to jump well, says Chris.

RIGHT: The biggest determining factor in a winning round is the quality of the horse. Judges like to see a horse with natural athletic talent, and a good presence and



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"We're judging the horse," says Chris. "If you're tall, short, heavy, thin, that really doesn't affect me. But if you're unbalanced, sooner or later that will throw your horse's balance off and affect his jump." Judges aren't looking for perfect equitation in the hunter ring, he says, but they do reward riders whose balanced, flowing style enables their mounts to jump in their best-possible form. Three great examples, he says, are professionals Liza Boyd, John French and Hunt Tosh.

One of Patrick's favorite horse-and-rider combinations was Tori Colvin and Dr. Betsee Parker's now-retired champion hunter Way Cool. "Tori has a great soft feel for hunters," he says. "Once, at Hampton Classic, I gave them a score of 98—my highest ever given." Tori and Way Cool even scored a perfect 100 in a Junior Handy Hunter class at the 2015 Upperville Colt and Horse Show in Virginia.

A rider who gives a release over the jumps that allows the



Maximize your horse's strengths to squeeze the most possible points out of your round and take home the blue ribbon.

horse to use his head and neck in beautiful style will be rewarded. In contrast, Chris says, "I'll deduct for a rider who otherwise looks correct in the saddle but has a stiff arm and an inadequate release that inhibits or restricts the horse's style."

Judges also reward rounds that are executed especially smoothly. That means you have to know your horse well. For example, some horses perform flying changes best immediately after a jump. Others have been trained to slow down and organize to make the change. "Where you do it doesn't matter," says Chris, "so long as you execute it smoothly before you actually change your direction." On the other hand, he penalizes riders who pull their horses' heads dramatically to the side to force a rough change. "Anytime you make a big production for something to happen, that's a deduction."

This rule holds true for any mistake on course, be it major or minor. If you handle small things—like a rub, stumble or small spook—calmly, you're still in the hunt, Chris says. But if you panic and overreact, "that kills your score. The more times your actions tell me, 'I'm having a problem,' the lower your score is going to be." There are different degrees of mistakes,

of course, but regardless of what problems arise, be aware that your reaction to them can further affect your score by as many as 10 or 15 points.

Luck and Human Factors

Theoretically, everything that happens during your round will affect your score. "I try to keep

sitting at different locations—and thus seeing the course from different angles—might give your round dissimilar scores.

Although most judges agree on what horses are exceptionally athletic and what rounds are well executed, their personal preferences do come into play as well. For example, says Patrick, "If I had two equal rounds, I'd pick the more refined, classic Thoroughbred look to heavier-boned types." He has a special soft spot for mares. "If you have an athletic 15.3-hand chestnut mare who pricks her ears around the course, bring it on!"

One mare who Chris says epitomizes this classic hunter look is Surely, Chelsea Ireland's winning mount in the \$10,000 North American League Adult Hunter Finals at the 2014 Pennsylvania National Horse Show.

Judges also draw on their own personal riding experiences, says Chris. "If I see a horse do something and think, 'I hate it when horses do that,' I'll penalize it because I know I would find that uncomfortable as a rider." Since everybody's experiences are different, judges don't all zero in on the same things. "We're harder on things that have been a big deal to us personally."

Even small details can influence a judge's opinion, says Patrick. "I like more traditional clothing—not a lot of sparkles on the helmet. I'm not in love with the new shorter-cut jackets or breeches with logos on them. I prefer navy or dark green jackets, no loud colors or extra piping."

However factors like these influence your score in the end, remember that the judge's focus is still going to be primarily on your horse, says Chris. "I'm always going to go back to the horse to make my decision." 🐾

my eye on the horse from the time he walks in until the time he leaves," says Chris. At some point, though, all judges have to glance down at their cards. "And we can't punish something that we didn't see. That's not fair." So keep that in mind if you or your horse makes a mistake on course. If you can, carry on as if nothing happened—just in case the judge missed it!

Meanwhile, accept that some factors are completely out of your control. For example, where judges are positioned around the ring can influence their decisions. Two judges



COURTESY, PATRICK RODES

"If a horse wows me with quality movement and jumping style, I'll overlook some mistakes and pick it over a horse that goes around and doesn't make any mistakes but is a little flat and plain," says USEF 'R' judge Patrick Rodes.

TIP

If you or your horse makes a mistake on course, carry on as if nothing happened—just in case the judge missed it!

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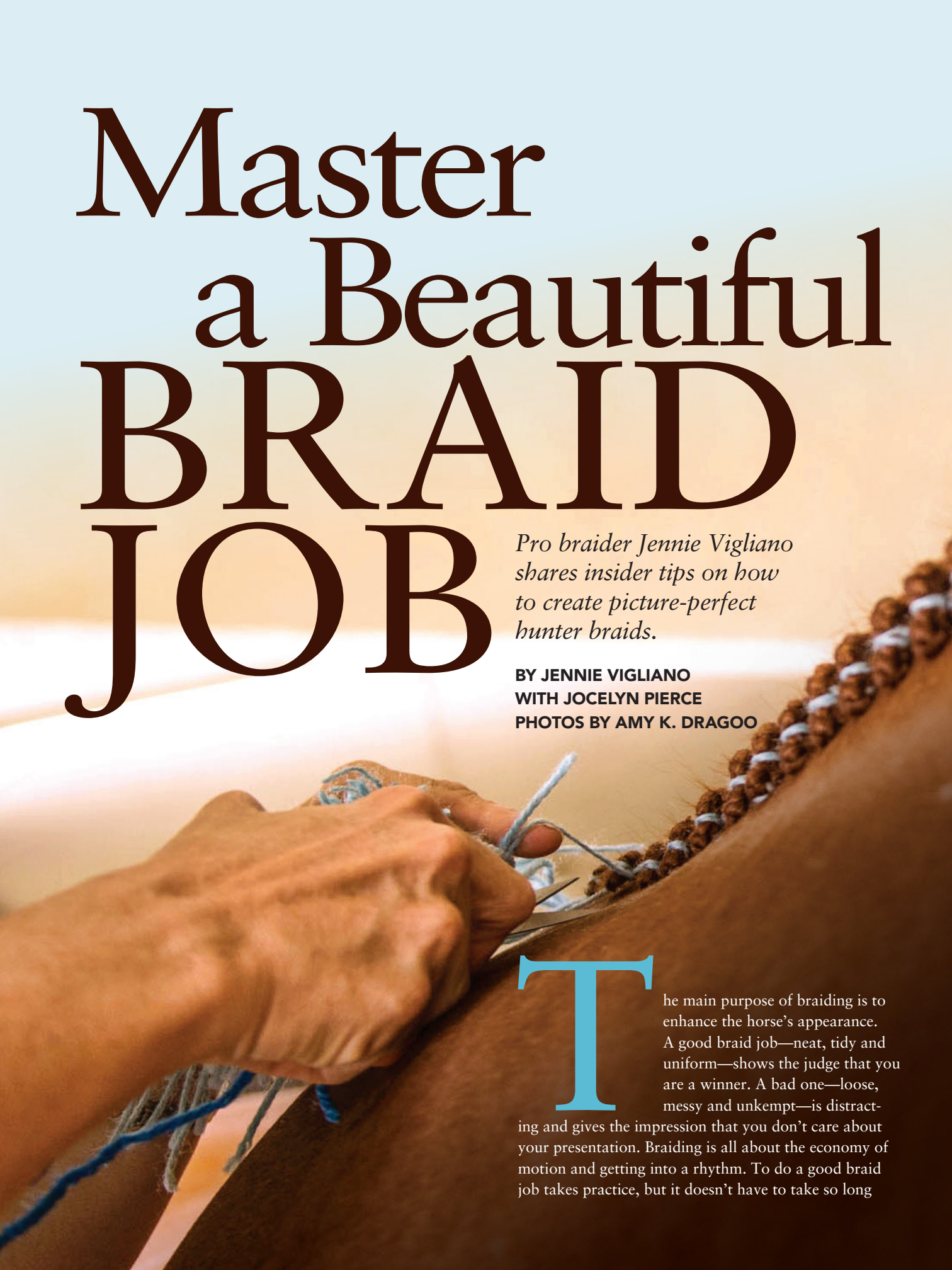
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Master a Beautiful BRAID JOB

Pro braider Jennie Vigliano shares insider tips on how to create picture-perfect hunter braids.

**BY JENNIE VIGLIANO
WITH JOCELYN PIERCE
PHOTOS BY AMY K. DRAGOO**



The main purpose of braiding is to enhance the horse's appearance. A good braid job—neat, tidy and uniform—shows the judge that you are a winner. A bad one—loose, messy and unkempt—is distracting and gives the impression that you don't care about your presentation. Braiding is all about the economy of motion and getting into a rhythm. To do a good braid job takes practice, but it doesn't have to take so long

that you're tired and frustrated by the end of it. Instead, it's about having a sensible and effective system that doesn't wear you out. Eventually, your muscle memory will take over and braiding will become instinctual. In this article, I'll explain not only how to make beautiful mane and forelock braids for the hunter ring but how to do so methodically and efficiently.

Preparing to Braid

Before you braid, measure and cut your yarn. Roughly, the yarn should be 18–22 inches in length. The number of pieces of yarn you will need will depend on the thickness of your horse's mane. The thicker it is, the more pieces of yarn you will need. I usually cut a skein of yarn all at once, storing any pieces I don't use for another time. Whether you decide to cut

What You Need

- **YARN:** It's important to use 100 percent acrylic yarn because it won't snap. Thicker natural fibers like wool will separate and break more easily, so stay away from those. I typically use Trait Tex® acrylic yarn. I get it from former braider Kelly Ward of All Dressed Up. You can email her at alldressedupstyle@gmail.com. Don't be afraid to use color, but keep in mind using color draws attention to the mane and can highlight mistakes. If you aren't confident about your braid job just yet, use a color that closely matches the color of your horse's mane.
- **COMB:** You don't need anything fancy. A 7-inch plastic comb for \$2 to \$3 that does not have sharp teeth works well. I like getting my combs from Sally's Beauty Supply because they tend not to break easily. It's best to get one with a colorful handle so you can see it if you drop it in a stall.
- **CLIPPER BLADE:** A large old-fashioned clipper blade is helpful for evening out or shortening a mane without thinning it.
- **SCISSORS:** Scissors with a sharp blade are a necessity to cut the yarn with precision. I attach them to a long string of yarn or horse show number string and put it around my neck.
- **SHOESTRING:** I tie a shoestring around the center of my cut yarn and tie the shoestring to my belt or belt loop so I can easily grab yarn as I need it while I'm braiding.
- **STEP LADDER:** You can find affordable, portable step ladders at stores like Home Depot. I like using a ladder with different level steps so I can keep a consistent eye line as I'm braiding. I don't want to be stooped over the neck. I want to be able to look up at the braids a bit.
- **SPONGE AND/OR SPRAY BOTTLE:** Some people prefer one over the other to wet the mane. Use what works for you and your horse. If your horse is afraid of the noise that spray bottles make, obviously a sponge is the way to go.
- **LATCH HOOK:** Available at tack or craft stores, this tool pulls the bottom of the braid up through the top of the braid (see photo 11, page 78). It's always good to have a backup, as they are easy to lose and break fairly often. I also suggest putting brightly colored duct tape on the handle so it is easier to find if you drop it.
- **BRAIDING NEEDLE:** This tool is handy for pulling up thick forelocks, but a latch hook may also work if the forelock is very thin and small. You can order the braiding needles and latch hooks I use from Kelly Ward. I put them on a lanyard around my neck.
- **SEAM RIPPER:** Used for taking braids out, the seam ripper cuts through the yarn without cutting the hair.
- **THUMB PROTECTORS:** I buy 6 millimeter rubber mechanic gloves and cut off the fingers. Discarding the palm part of the gloves, I use those fingers to cover my thumbs to protect myself from abscesses under my fingernails. They also protect you if you get a cut or have a broken nail and will stay on better than a Band-Aid®.
- **HEADLAMP:** Helpful even during the daylight, a headlamp makes a huge difference in seeing what you're doing. Just make sure that if you are braiding your horse, you don't startle him by suddenly turning it on while standing over his neck braiding.
- **RADIO:** I listen to music while I braid because it's relaxing, and I believe it helps with patience and the whole braiding process. I also make playlists as a gentle way to time myself without any pressure of a timer or alarm.
- **JAMMIES HOOD** (*stretchy hood used for protecting/covering the neck and braids*): When you finish your braids, you will want to protect them by covering them. I use Jammies brand only, but they tend to be too long and get close to the horse's nostrils. I roll it up one or two times so it sits just below the horse's cheekbone.

TIP

You want to try and make all the braids the same thickness by making the sections of the braids a consistent size.

all your yarn at once or not, you need to cut at least 50 pieces so you won't need to stop in the middle of your braid job to cut more. I have found that an 8-by-6-inch notepad works well as a measurement guideline. A three-ring binder or planner works, too. I wrap the yarn around the notepad or binder several times, then pull it off so it's one big loop of several strands of yarn. Then, I grasp one end so my hand is holding the multiple strands of yarn and I cut the strands at the other end of

the loop so I have several long pieces of yarn. I then tie a shoestring around the center of my cut yarn and tie the shoestring to my belt or belt loop.

I gather all my tools—clipper blade, comb, sponge or spray bottle, latch hook, braiding needle, scissors, yarn, stool and radio—before starting.

Make sure the horse is standing on flat ground and keep his head up high by putting him on cross-ties or tying him. If you let him stretch his neck forward and downward, the scalp stretches and when he brings his neck back up, the braids will squish together. If you tie him, first put two to three pieces of yarn on the ring of his halter and clip his lead rope to the yarn so that he will be released if he pulls back hard.

If you're braiding a difficult horse, ask a friend to hold him for you or try braiding him in a space where you know he is comfortable. For example, a horse who always stands with his head in the back corner of his stall may be more comfortable being braided there. It's also OK to not finish your braiding job all at once. If you're working with a restless horse, take a break and then come back later to finish.

Before starting, make sure your horse's mane is clean. Use any regular shampoo but avoid conditioners or shampoos with essential oils or the mane may be too slippery to braid. Then check to be sure the horse's mane is even in thickness by running your hands through it. A thinner mane should be shorter than a thicker mane. A thin mane gets too spindly if you let the mane get long. With a thick mane, you have to remember that sometimes the scalp is 3 to 4 inches wide, so the scalp itself takes up some of the length.

Braiding the Mane

The number of braids in the mane depends on the individual horse. A daintier horse with a thin scalp—where the hair meets the skin—and fine hair should have smaller braids to match his neck and stature, and vice versa—a big thick mane needs bigger braids. You wouldn't want to put tiny braids on



Braiding Should Be Fun

I'm a firm believer that people should try to have fun with braiding and do what they like. Don't be afraid to use color! But keep in mind using color is a bit more advanced because it draws a lot of attention to the mane and can highlight mistakes. Navy blue yarn is a staple in my arsenal, even for conservative classes, as is slate blue yarn, which is a must-have for white manes. I like to help my clients stand out by braiding with brightly colored yarn for themes or holidays, and I even add glittery ribbon or buttons to add a tasteful sparkle when appropriate. I usually like putting these embellishments in the top third of the mane.

a big horse with a thick mane—they would look like raisins! If a horse has coarse mane, each hair diameter is thicker and wider, so the braids need to be bigger. Using wider sections of hair will make the braid thicker. You want to try to make all the braids the same thickness by making the sections of the braids a consistent size. I braid everything I can. I don't believe in having a bridle path because it ends up getting longer and longer every time the horse is trimmed and then the first braid starts too far back. I braid close to the withers, too.

It's also important to stay right in front of what you're doing. As you braid, be careful you aren't leaning to the side because unconsciously, you will make the braid crooked. Horses are always moving. It's important that you move with them by moving your step ladder, not only to keep your braids straight but also so you aren't putting unneeded strain on your own body, especially your back. Remember, braiding is all about practice. It might take many repetitions to get the feel for it.



BRAIDING THE MANE

1 I use the clipper blade to shorten the ends of the mane—just a centimeter or so at the bottom as needed. Because the teeth are serrated, it doesn't give the hair a blunt edge like scissors. I am always very careful not to be hasty when pulling a mane. It's always better to err on the side of caution and not make the mane too short. You can always take more hair out, but you can't add more in.

2 The mane should be thinner and shorter near the poll and withers and thicker in the middle. This is because the horse's scalp is naturally narrower at the top and bottom and wider in the middle of the neck—and you want the mane to mirror that.

3 I'm using a light blue yarn so you can see it more easily in the photos, though ordinarily, I wouldn't use this color on a chestnut mane. I start at the horse's poll and work my way down to the withers. I've started this mane, but the photos of me halfway down the neck illustrate the braiding process the best. First, I use a wet sponge to make the mane tacky so I can hold it easily and wet sections of the mane as I go. Be careful there's not so much water that it's dripping down the horse's neck. This might cause him to shake his head and neck, which will make it harder to braid him.

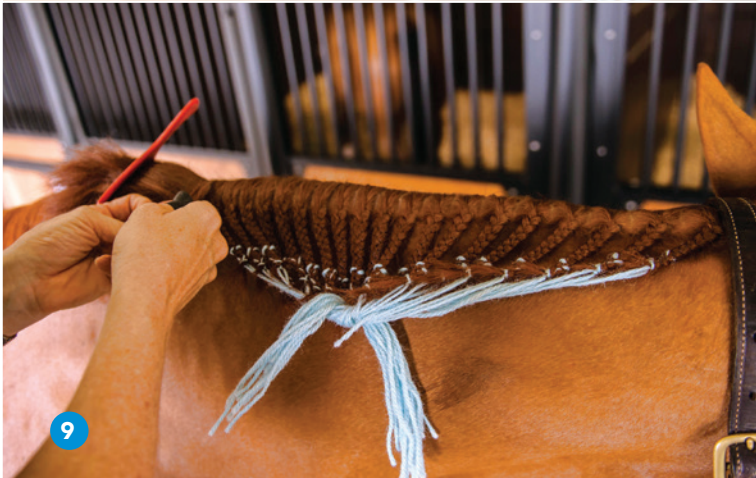
4 Since I am right-handed, I section off a piece of mane to braid with the comb in my right hand while holding the bottom of the mane in my left. Then I stick the comb in the excess mane to hold it out of my way. I divide the section into three even pieces, holding the right piece between my right thumb and the side of my forefinger and the left piece between my left thumb and the side of my forefinger. I hold the middle section out of the way with my right middle finger.

5 I cross the right piece over the middle piece for my first twist, so the right piece is now the middle piece and the previous middle piece is now the right piece. Then I grasp the new right piece of hair with my right hand, and cross the left piece over the new middle piece for my second twist. Now that left piece is the new middle piece. As I braid, I use my thumb to flatten or smooth the top of the most recently braided part of the mane. For the first two twists, I just lay the pieces of the braid over. There needs to be some tension, but not so tight that it will pull on the scalp. If you haven't made your sections of mane even, it will be obvious within two twists. A typical braid averages about 23 twists from top to bottom, but it varies depending on the mane.



6 About two-thirds of the way down the braid, or around the 13th twist, I add in the yarn. I wait to add the yarn until the 13th twist because I only want to see it at the top center of the finished braid, which will create a straight line down the neck. To add the yarn, I hold the braid with my left hand, and taking the yarn with my right, add it on the underside of the braid. So to start, the yarn will become part of the right and left pieces of hair. This tends to be a tricky part for many people because they don't realize that the yarn just becomes part of the hair. They want to try to hold it in. That's not necessary. The twisting is what makes the yarn part of the braid—gripping it tightly does not. This may take some practice. Just be patient and work on getting a feel for it.

7 Around the 23rd twist, stop braiding. You should be close to the bottom of the mane. If you still have a lot of mane left, you need to unbraid it and shorten the mane, but again, never cut it. Once I get to the bottom, I make a loop on the right side (because I'm right-handed, a left-handed person would loop the left side). I lay the right-hand piece of yarn across the braid and circle the underside of the braid with this piece, making a knot with it around the bottom of the braid.



8 Then I knot both pieces of yarn together at the bottom, like I'm tying a shoe. I do this with every braid. The knot at the bottom will eventually be pulled through and peek out on the top of the braid.

9 As a personal preference, as I'm braiding, I wrap the yarn hanging off the finished braids under the halter or tie them together loosely so the yarn doesn't annoy the horse and keeps it out of my way. It takes an extra second or two, but it's much less bothersome for a sensitive horse.



10 Be sure to braid as close to the withers as possible. Many people leave this part unbraided. I think it's important to braid the mane in its entirety for a polished look.

11 Once you have braided your horse's entire mane, it is time to pull up the braids. A "v" should be visible at the top of each braid. First, I stick the latch hook in the top of the "v" toward the neck and slip the two pieces of yarn from the bottom of the braid in the loop of the latch hook. From the top of the braid, I slide the hook through this "v" to ensure the braid will be straight. I pull the yarn and knot through the underside of the top of the braid, but not any farther. If you feel the latch hook get caught in or snag the braid, you aren't in the "v"—you're off to the side. If you have to force it, pull it out and try to pull through again so it slides freely.

12 Note my single knot at the bottom of the braid, visible here in the center of the "v."

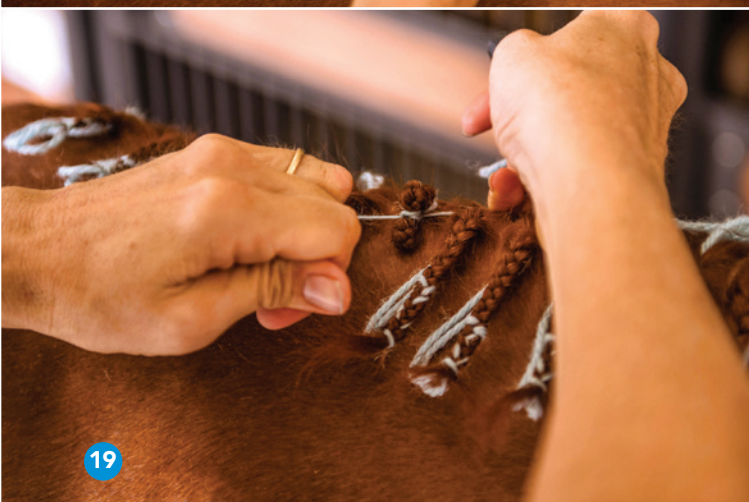
13 I pull the yarn up with my latch hook on the entire mane before moving on.

14 Taking hold of the yarn that is peeking out the "v" at the top, I pull up my braid. Then I lay both pieces of yarn on either side of the braid.

15 Next, I crisscross the two pieces of yarn under the braid, catching extra fluff or wisps of hair.

16 My fingers are pointing to where I want my next knot to lay: in the center of the braid, fitting right into the "v" of the twist.

17 Looking straight at the face of the braid, I bring the two pieces of yarn to the front of the braid, start to make the knot, let the yarn settle into a "v" and pull in until it rests in the center of the braid, in the "v."



18 At this point it's OK to make the knot around the braid tight because it doesn't pull against the scalp. I pull the two pieces of yarn in opposite directions to tighten the knot. As I do so, I use my thumb to position the yarn in the "v" of the twist and push the bottom of the braid toward the neck.

19 Then I bring the two pieces of yarn to the back of the braid and make another knot, pulling diagonally across the braid to tighten it. I then make a second knot for security. Again, at this point, you want it to be tight. Don't

worry—it won't pull on the horse's scalp or be uncomfortable to him.

20 Now I cut the excess yarn off the finished braids with my scissors with the super-sharp blade, making sure to keep tension on the yarn as I'm cutting. Cut close to the knot, but not so close that the yarn unravels. Finally, I trim any flyaways in the mane. This would be very few hairs—ideally no more than five strands of hair per braid, but if you have to do a little more, that's OK too. This is the only time it's OK to cut the mane.



BRAIDING THE FORELOCK

Braiding the forelock is a lot like braiding the mane. The main difference is this time, you'll make a French braid. If your horse doesn't hold his head still, ask a friend to hold him or attach a lead rope to his halter and put it between your knees to steady him.

1 First, I wet the forelock the same way I wet the mane and then make a horizontal part at the top of the forelock. The size of each section of forelock on either side of the part will depend on the thickness of the forelock (some are tiny like a postage stamp, some are huge like a banana). Make a small section for a small forelock and a big section for a big, thick forelock.

TIP

Make sure you don't pull the braid too far up because it will be difficult to take it out later. Leave yourself something to grab.

2 Next, I separate this piece of mane into three sections. Then, just like regular braiding, make the first twist by crossing the right piece over the middle piece and then make the second twist by crossing the left piece over the middle. Then, on the third twist, I start incorporating loose hair from the bottom section

of the forelock, taking a small piece of hair from the right side and weaving it into the braid, then a small piece of hair from the left side, weaving that into the braid.

3 Once all the loose pieces are incorporated, finish it like a normal braid, adding yarn under the braid two-thirds of the way down. At the end of the braid, loop the right piece of yarn around the underside of the braid and pull it tight. Then, with both pieces of yarn, tie a knot at the bottom, just as you did for the mane.

4 Instead of using a latch hook to pull up the forelock braid like I did for the mane, I use the braiding needle. If your horse has a tiny forelock, a latch hook might work, but sometimes it catches, whereas a braiding needle doesn't catch and stays straight. Just like with the mane, find the "v" at the top of the braid. Working from the top, slide the braiding needle into the "v" and under the braid with the eye facing down. There shouldn't be any resistance—if there is, it's wrong.

5 I thread the yarn through the eye of the needle.

6 Then I slowly pull up the needle, bringing the braid up gently until the needle is totally out and the yarn is no longer in the eye of the needle. Two pieces of yarn will be



hanging out of the top of the “v.” Make sure you don’t pull the braid too far up because it will be difficult to take it out later. Leave yourself something to grab.

7 Next, I poke the needle through the top of the braid horizontally from the left ear to the right ear. The eye should be sticking out toward the right ear.

8 Then I take the left piece of yarn, lay it in the eye of the needle and pull the needle back out the same way it went in to anchor the braid. For symmetry’s sake, you could do the

same on the right side, but I usually just do the left.

9 I then tie three visible knots on top tightly. I make three knots so that I can cut the yarn closely to the braid without worrying that the braid will come out and there isn’t excess yarn at the top.

10 Once I’m finished braiding, I always use a Jammies brand hood to protect the braids. I also roll up the part of the Jammies hood that’s by the horse’s mouth and nostril to right below the cheekbone.



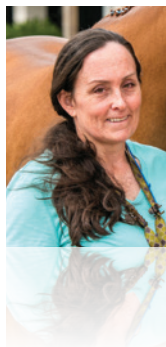
TAKING OUT THE BRAIDS

Just like when you braided your horse, make sure he is standing on even ground and use your step ladder. Looking at your horse's mane, you should only be able to see the yarn at the very top of the braid and in the center of the braid.

1 Using the seam ripper, I make two cuts in the yarn. First, I pull the braid up a little to cut the side of the braid (you don't want to cut from the front). Then I unfold the braid so it's hanging down and cut the knot at the bottom, being careful not to slice the hair.

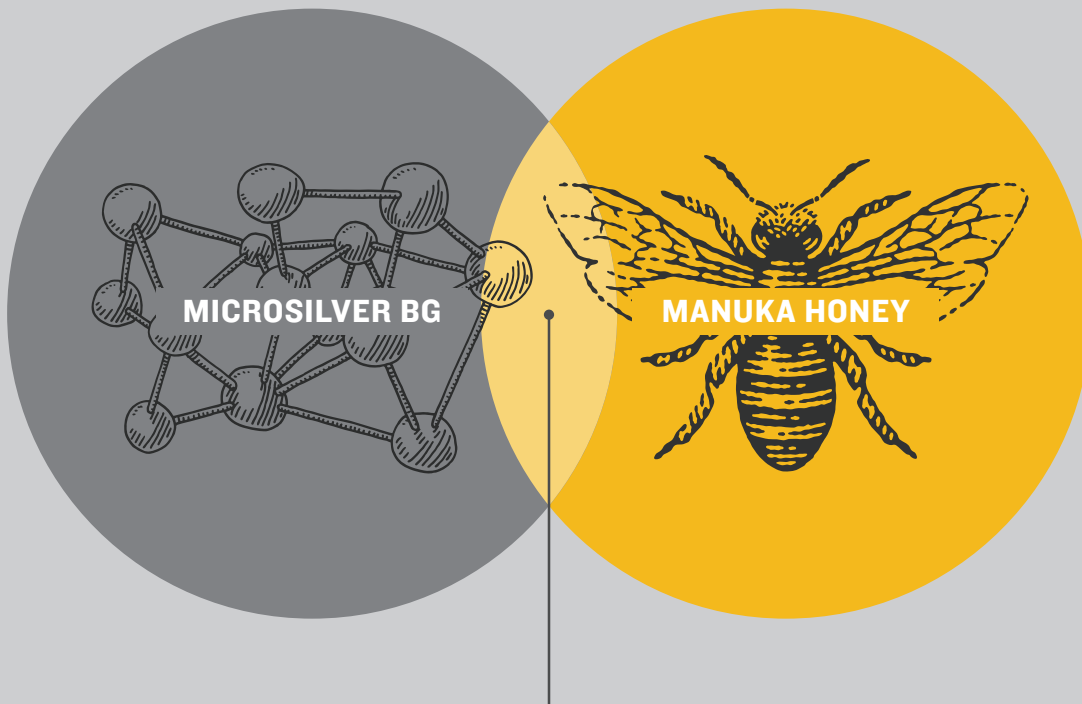
2 Next, get the mane very wet with the sponge so that it won't be kinky and the yarn will come out easily. The whole key is to not damage the hair.

3 I use my fingers to comb out the yarn in the mane. I do the forelock the same way. 🐾



ABOUT JENNIE VIGLIANO

Jennie Vigliano has been a professional braider on the A-circuit for over 25 years. She braids for top trainers including Scott Stewart, Jennifer Bauersachs, Anne Kursinski and Ralph Caristo, among others. Vigliano has won the Braider's Award at the Alltech National Horse Show in Kentucky three times and at the Brandywine Horse Show in Pennsylvania twice.



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