

So you want to attend a model horse show?

By Linda Desmarais

Attending a model horse show is a great way to meet new friends and have fun. I've had the pleasure of meeting several first-time showers this year and I'd like to share some advice on getting started in model horse showing. For now we will concentrate on OF halter classes because they are the easiest to start with. I'll discuss performance showing in a later article.

Finding a show:

The most common thing I hear from new showers is: "How do I find out about live shows in my area?" The internet is your best resource for show information. The Breyer website (under "events") and Just About Horses have info on some live shows, but for a more complete list of shows visit the NAMHSA website at www.NAMHSA.org. Click on "Member Shows" and you will find NAMHSA-approved shows listed by state. Be sure to check back regularly as new shows are added every month. If you don't subscribe to your local NAMHSA Yahoo Groups discussion list, you should consider doing so. Your local discussion list is the best way to find out about shows in advance of their posting on the NAMHSA website. To find your regional information, click on "contacts" on the NAMHSA website, find your state from the list of regions, and a link to join your regional discussion list is provided.

So, what exactly is NAMHSA?

NAMHSA stands for North American Model Horse Shows Association. NAMHSA's mission is an organization to promote the model horse hobby. The North American Nationals (NAN) is NAMHSA's annual National Championship Model Horse Show. If a live show is NAMHSA-approved, it means 1st and 2nd place class winners will receive a "NAN card" which allows that model to be shown at the championship NAN show. A live show doesn't have to be NAMHSA-approved to be a good show, but NAMHSA approval ensures the show has a good variety of classes and it typically draws more entrants.

Once you've found a show you'd like to attend, contact the showholder and request a show packet. This will contain information on location, time, fees, rules, and a class list. Some shows have Novice divisions specific for new showers – this is a great way to start as you compete with other newcomers. You will usually need to send in your entry fee in advance to guarantee your spot. Some shows provide leg tags for you, others require you make your own, so check the show packet. Some shows also may also provide lunch, but many people bring a lunch so they don't have to leave the show hall. Contact the showholder directly with any specific questions related to the show. Some halter shows are double judged with two sets of ribbons per class. This means one person judges the class on breed type/conformation while the other person judges the same class based on collectibility and rarity. So while a woodgrain model probably won't place in a Breed class (because of its unrealistic color), it has a good change of placing in collectibility classes.

Choosing your showstring

Look at the classlist and the limits set by the showholder. Many shows limit you to 2-3 models per class, and a maximum amount of models overall. You may be tempted to bring the most models you can but this is NEVER a good idea when you're starting out. Why? Not only will it be very difficult to keep up with all the classes, you will probably not have enough table space for all of your models! Until you know how many models you can handle it's best to limit your showstring to about 20-25 so you can enjoy yourself and not stress out (too much anyway!).

Make sure the models you choose are:

- 1) Free from rubs and scratches. Minor hoof edge rubs and pinpoint ear tip rubs may be overlooked, but other rubs/scratches are a no-no.
- 2) Free from warped legs. This is more of a problem with older models than newer ones, and some minis.
- 3) Clean! I can't stress this enough. Very dusty models may need a wash, otherwise just dust well.
- 4) Appropriate for the breed you show them as. This means color and body type. For example, purebred palomino Arabs do not exist, so if you have one you will need to show it as a part-Arab. Same with dapple grey Clydesdales, etc. Also make sure the model looks like the breed it is supposed to be. If it doesn't or the color is not allowed in the breed registry, it's better to call it a part-bred.
- 5) White markings are clean and crisp, with minimal overspray.

How to pack:

There are many ways to pack models for shows. Any large rigid box or tub will work fine, just make sure there is plenty of padding on the bottom & sides, and between each model. I usually put my models in a clear plastic bag and then a bubble bag (but have been known to use lint-free fabric instead) and lay them flat in the tub, with bubble wrap between layers of models. If your box isn't too deep, you may want to pack models upright with padding between. Towels and t-shirts also make good padding if you don't have bubble wrap. Just be careful - they might leave a lot of lint you'll have to dust off at the show!

What else to bring:

Food – lunch and/or munchies, water, etc.

Duster – soft lint-free cloth or clean makeup (powder) brush

Fabric for table covering

A list of models you're showing (to keep track of placings)

Spending money (optional but you never know what deals you'll find)!

At the show hall:

Plan to arrive early enough (at least 30 minutes) to unpack and arrange your table before the show starts. It's a good idea to bring a large piece of soft fabric to cover the table to protect any models that might tip over (some show halls provide table coverings but I wouldn't count on it). I use inexpensive plate racks as "horse holders" to keep models from falling over (a.k.a. the "domino effect"). If you don't have a "rack system" you'll probably want to lay tippy models down to prevent accidents.

Once all the entrants are unpacked, feel free to walk the show hall and check out everyone's table (you may find some nice items for sale!) It's also a great way to start conversations with the other showers - this is not a time to be shy. If you have trouble starting conversation you can compliment others on their models, or ask a specific question about a model you admire. (Don't ever touch or pick up a model without permission though. If you damage it, you own it!) And make sure you mention that it's your first show – you will find many people are willing to answer questions and help you out!

When the show starts the hostess (or judges) will call each class to specific tables to be judged. Choose a well lit spot, preferably NOT next to the same model/mold/color. After all, you want your model to stand out! Make sure your model is dust free and the best side faces the judge. If you want to take pictures, it's best to do so before the judging begins. When the class is announced as "closed" the judging begins.

NEVER cross in front of, or talk to the judge(s) as they are judging. When the judging is complete and ribbons are placed you will be asked to remove your model(s) from the ring and bring up the next class. Remember to keep track of the placings each model has won. If you have a question about how your model placed, this is the time to ask the judge, while it's fresh on his/her mind. Some shows use "callbacks" to decide champions (your show packet should state this). A "callback" is a mini-class of usually 1st, 2nd, and sometimes 3rd place winners from each class. These models are called to the table with the ribbons they won. Then the class is judged again so the champion(s) are judged the "best of the best". Keep track of your placings, if you have a 1st or 2nd your model may qualify for a championship!

Don't be too concerned about how well (or not well) your models do in the showing. You will learn from watching the placings which models and molds do better than others. Remember too, that individual judges have their own preferences, and a model that wins under one judge may not place at all under a different judge. I usually attend shows not expecting to win anything (that way I'm not let down LOL) and if I do win I consider it a huge bonus. If you go with the intention winning you may be disappointed. If you go with the intention of having fun, then you will!

This information is a general summary of what you can expect from your first show. If live showing still sounds scary, you may want to visit a show without entering, just to see what goes on. Most shows welcome visitors and there is no fee to stop by and watch. Once you see what goes on it won't seem as intimidating. So have fun and give it a try!