

Leslie Nelson's step-by-step grooming guide.

"People forget the horse's skin is an organ," says Leslie Nelson, an amateur jumper rider whose U.S. Pony Club upbringing directs the care of her horses. "Grooming is the daily attention that you must pay to keep the horse clean, to check all over for injuries and skin problems, prevent sores under the tack, and maintain good skin condition and a beautiful coat." She's used to getting complements about her horse Cornetto's shiny coat and being asked what supplements explain it.

"Supplements have something to do with it, but it's really about the work you put into it to make the coat look that way."

A successful 1.2M division jumper competitor, Leslie has a long-time groom, Adolfo Garcia. But she opts to groom her own horse every day, using the systematic approach she learned in her youth. The Pony Club purist recognizes the three grooming phases: the pre-ride "quartering," the post-ride "strapping," and the end-of-the day "set fair" before blanketing. Quartering typically takes 20 minutes for Leslie, an hour for strapping, and just a few minutes for the set-fair.

"I know it's old fashioned, and that not everybody can spend the kind of time that I do on grooming," she acknowledges. "I've done it for so long and, for me, it's the right thing to do."

Leslie grooms with "Coco" secured in the cross-ties, though she sometimes picks hooves in the stall to keep that dirt out of the cross-tie area. Before the after-ride groom, she first takes him to his stall so he can relieve himself and drink water.

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...the horse's body, especially the legs, for the sake of the horse's health, and to help the horse look its best. The horse's body should be groomed from the neck down to the tail, and the legs should be groomed from the knee down to the hoof. The horse's face should be groomed from the forehead down to the chin, and the horse's ears should be cleaned. The horse's coat should be groomed with a brush, and the horse's hair should be trimmed if necessary. The horse's hooves should be cleaned and trimmed regularly. The horse's teeth should be checked and cleaned if necessary. The horse's eyes should be checked and cleaned if necessary. The horse's ears should be checked and cleaned if necessary. The horse's skin should be checked for any signs of irritation or infection. The horse's overall health should be checked and discussed with a veterinarian if necessary.