

How to Properly Fit Your Show Ring Attire

To create a polished-looking show ensemble, begin by selecting breeches, then a show shirt and finally a show coat. Here are some detailed guidelines for putting together an outfit that flatters you on show day.

Choosing Breeches or Jodhpurs

Breeches are athletic apparel that should be comfortable to wear and allow you freedom of movement. For the show ring, you'll want to pay particular attention to the way your breeches fit so that you present a tailored appearance.

Breeches should be snug enough that you do not have wrinkles, gathers or folds of baggy fabric on the legs. Not only would these wrinkles detract from your appearance, they could cause friction rubs on your skin. The legs of the breeches should not be so tight, however, that they pinch or constrain you.

The legs of the pants should end slightly above your ankles, though your personal preference may be to have your breeches slightly longer or shorter. Breeches are available in regular and long lengths, and the standard varies between manufacturers.

A snug fit at the base of the leg helps keep the pants from rising up out of your boot. Some breech styles have hook and loop closures that enable you to control how tightly the pant legs fit around your calf. Others have stretchable panels to secure the fit. Wearing tall, snug socks pulled up over your breeches will also ensure that the pant will not rise up during riding or while putting on your boots.

If you're fitting knee patch breeches, be sure that the patch sits in a comfortable spot over the knee. Some patches seem either long or short, but as long as the patches are in the correct spot, the breech is appropriate.

Children under the age of 13 should wear jodhpurs unless they're directed by their instructors to do otherwise. This style of breech has a cuffed hem with two sewn-in buttons that hold an elastic band to the pant. This elastic band should be slipped over the paddock boot and should come to rest just in front of the heel. This band allows the pant to stay in place during the ride. Paddock boots should be partnered with matching jodhpur knee straps (also called garter straps) worn just below the knee. Ideally, paddock boots and garters are brown.

The rise of the waistband is also a matter of personal preference. Rise refers to the distance from the crotch of the breeches to the waistband. Though low rise breeches are popular for schooling, they should be selected for wear in competition with extreme care. On many people, a regular rise breech creates a more defined and neater-looking waist underneath the show coat, and it can help support the tummy area. Sometimes low-rise waistbands create an unsightly gap at the back of the waistband that you should avoid for the show ring. However, low rise styles may fit short-waisted riders quite well under show coats. Choose a style that you're not only comfortable in but that will give you a clean, polished appearance in the ring.

Note: If your breeches have belt loops, pair them with a conservatively-styled belt.



About Show Shirts

For hunter and equitation classes, choose either a button-down show shirt with a wrapneck or one with a standup collar and choker. Freedom to move is the most important aspect of fitting this type of shirt, and those with built-in stretch and moisture-wicking properties are extremely comfortable. You want ample room across the bust and over the back of the shoulders to allow you to achieve your riding positions. The collar should fit snugly and neatly as well, not too loosely or too tightly.

Note: If you're female, be sure to wear the type of sports bra that you intend to wear during competition. This foundation garment can affect the way your show shirt and coat fall on your body.

Avoid shirts that pucker at the buttons down the front. Sleeves should be long enough to allow you to ride comfortably. Consult with your trainer as to whether you will show one-half inch of cuff at the end of your coat sleeve. Some trainers want to see this touch, yet others strongly oppose it and short sleeves can be worn. Choose a shirt color that coordinates with your coat and is appropriate for your classes, but also one that lies neatly beneath it.

While you can wear a button-down show shirt for dressage, pullover competition shirts with quarter-zip necklines are designed for the purpose. The zippers and accent colors of these popular shirts are meant to be hidden under white stock ties. Competition shirts are usually made of a technical fabric designed for athletic use and provide benefits such as moisture-wicking and breathability. Fitting these shirts is straightforward. Make sure that the shirt you choose can be tucked in neatly to provide a clean appearance beneath your coat.

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Choosing a Show Coat

The most important aspect of your show outfit is your coat. A well-fitting coat can help hide flaws and enhance your appearance in the saddle. It can do more to give you a polished look than any other aspect of your show ensemble. (After that, clean and shiny boots are imperative.)

The desired fit of hunt and dressage coats are essentially similar with the exception of hem length. No matter what type of coat you are fitting, you must try it on while wearing your show shirt (and sports bra if you're female) and breeches. The fabric of the coat will fall differently if you are wearing a jersey than if you are wearing a show shirt. The waist of the coat will fit differently if you are wearing jeans rather than breeches.

Bear in mind that coats are available in regular, short and long/tall torso lengths. Cuts differ between manufacturers, with some boxier in cut than others that are more fitted. The coat that is most appropriate for you will depend on your own body shape.

Fit a show coat to your shoulders and torso first. Sleeve lengths can be altered, and waists can be taken in, but the length of a coat and the hemline are difficult to change for even the most talented tailors.

1 Check the fit of the shoulders.

The seams at the shoulders of the coat should line up with the edges of your shoulders. If the seams are too narrow, then you will have an unsightly pull over the tops of your biceps (which will be uncomfortable when you ride). Shoulders that are too wide can give you a boxy appearance. However, in some instances if all other aspects of the fit are correct, shoulders can usually be taken in successfully by a



Shoulder seams line up with shoulders, lapel lies flat.

skilled tailor. This situation is sometimes the case with women who have broad shoulders or full chest sizes but who are narrow at the waist and hips.

While wearing the coat you should be able to move your arms into riding positions without feeling constrained across your upper back.

2 Check the fit on your torso.

The fabric of the coat should lie flat across your back with no gathers, wrinkles or bulges. The lapels should lie flat against your chest, and fabric should not pucker at the buttons. The waistline should appear to sit on your natural waist to provide you with a crisp outline. For a hunt coat with three buttons, you can use the bottom button as a guide. It should sit just over your belly button. If the third button is at a point far above your belly button, the coat is probably too short.

3 Check the coat's length.

Viewed from behind, the hem of the hunt coat should in general fall at a point where two to three fingers' width of your bottom is visible. However, some people prefer the hem to fall at a slightly lower point.

If the hem appears to be correct, but there is a horizontal bulge of fabric running from hip to hip across your back, then the coat is probably too long. Try a coat in a short length or one from another manufacturer. Conversely, if the coat is too short (you can see most of your bottom) try a coat with a long or tall length.

Most traditional dressage coats have four buttons and hems that are supposed to fall to the thigh when you're sitting in a saddle. To check the length of a dressage coat, let your arms and hands hang at your sides, allowing your fingers to curve naturally. The hem of the dressage coat will sit just inside this natural curve of your fingers (see photo at bottom right).

Traditional dressage coat hem guideline.

Tip: Plan Ahead

Start assembling your show outfit well in advance of your show date to allow for special ordering or alterations.



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4 Check sleeve length.

If the shoulders line up and the length and width of the coat seem correct, the sleeve length is your last concern. Let your arms hang naturally at your sides. The hem of the sleeve should reach or almost reach the knuckle where your thumb begins. This length may seem long, but if you bend your arm into riding position you'll see that the sleeve length appears more appropriate.

Many coats have a little extra fabric in the sleeves that can be taken out to provide you with another half-inch of fabric. A professional can tell you if this is the case with a particular coat.

5 Sit in a saddle.

After you've conducted a fitting assessment while standing, sit in a saddle to see how the coat falls and how it feels. Assume a riding position and make sure that you feel that the coat will not hinder your movements.

A dressage coat will hang lower on your thigh and will flow behind the cantle of the saddle. For a hunt coat, make sure that the hem length won't get caught under your seat as you ride.



A nice length for a hunt coat, the back hem of the coat just barely brushes the saddle.



Sit in a saddle to check how the coat falls and how it feels in your riding position.



6 Consider professional tailoring.

To create your most elegant outline, consult a skilled tailor or seamstress who can alter the waist, shoulders and even the width of the sleeves from armpit to wrist. The cost of alterations is usually minimal on a stock coat.

Finishing Touches for a Polished Look

- Monogram your wrapneck collar or choker in a color that complements your shirt or coat.
- Use safety pins to fasten the ends of your stock tie to your shirt to prevent them from flapping out of your coat lapel.
- Skip wearing earrings or choose subtle, conservatively-styled studs or pearls.
- Use metal polish to shine up your spurs.
- Check for stray strands of hair and tuck them into your hairnet.
- Run a lint brush over your coat and fabric-covered helmet just before mounting your horse.

A coat, helmet and boot bag collection in your stable colors is an attractive way to keep your show ensemble clean for storage and while traveling to a show. Add a monogram for a finished look too!



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