

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

By Matthew Mackay-Smith, D.V.M.*

Why do I do what I do? Can't tell you. Why do I wear what I do? That I can share, after years of trial and error developing a streamlined but complete set of gear for me and my horse while competing.

1. ASTM Helmet with harness: save your squash. White, because it's cool, and easier to find; ventilated for cool; detachable visor for shade; nose/eye protection in brush or against flying debris; reflective tape for night visibility to traffic, rescuers, crew or yourself. (Horses must also wear reflectors at night in some states—always a good idea! Either braid or tape into tail, elsewhere.)
2. Dark Glasses to reduce eye fatigue.
3. Bandanna for neck protection from brambles and the sun, also an emergency bandage or sponge, or signaler/marker, or dust mask.
4. Dust Mask: painter's type, for respiratory protection.
5. Camelbak Water Bag: large volume (½ gallon). Stays with you with less bouncing; balanced for carrying; easy hands "free" access; maybe my most important discovery of recent years. Practice with it on!
6. Shirts: long-sleeve for sun and wind protection, comfortable in the widest range of temperatures from rolled up and open front to fully done up; cool, quick-dry fabric (poly or blend). Loose is cooler in the daytime but also is warmer at night. A distinctive color or pattern makes for greater visibility to crew, control, rescuers; it's also easy to find later on in photos. Snap closures for one-handed ease, security because they don't break or fall off, and for looking like a real "cowboy"! In the breast pockets you can carry the rider card, a hankie, a penlight, and chapstick.
7. Riding Gloves to protect your hands from brush, limbs and sun. Warmth at dawn and at night.
8. Belt: an extra security agent against pants loss and inadvertent moons; an extra straps for whatever you might need; it looks mature and is a vehicle to display your former triumphs.
9. Riding Breeches which are built for this purpose and are durable. Find the ones made of cool fabric, and the looser the cut the cooler they will be. A light color is also cooler and provides better visibility to others.
10. Knees-ease: fleece cuffs that go under the breeches at the knees to reduce friction on the knees and protect them from blows.

11. Socks or Half-Chaps to reduce rubs and the wicking of sweat from the horse.
12. Light Hiking Boots: versatile, good in any event, ankle protection, extra-long laces to use for string for any need or repair.
13. Poll-cooler for the horse (only in dry country where evaporation is high). Use a distinctive color so you and your crew can pick out your white (or bay or chestnut) horse in a crowd of 'em, or find your bridle on the ground.
14. Halter-bridle is the most versatile. Synthetic materials are easy to care for and strong. The snap bit removal makes it easier for the horse to eat, drink and go down the trail after the ginger has worn off (the bit can be snapped on your belt loops and carried on your belt area if you think you might need it later). Snap-on reins, extra long, which double as a lead rope or tie rope. (A tailing extension of telephone cord at the center of the reins enables tailing without unhooking the reins and without being in the way of regular riding.)
15. Martingale/breastplate keeps the saddle forward, provides attachment for sponge strap/heart monitor/night light. Snap-ended chin piece (tie-down) helps prevent an "ear sandwich" with an unruly horse or one that is reacting to other horses at the start; acts as a nifty jiffy short lead by unsnapping at the breast, and is a spare strap for whatever.
16. Easyboot (Day-Glo or paint marked): carried on the breastplate for easy and quick access (the horse isn't bothered by its motion); it carries an extra sponge, wet or dry; and a strap for pulling on the boot.
17. Saddle is synthetic, light and comfortable—a good place for heavier riders to save weight if fitted to the horse and rider, and is easy to care for.
18. Seat-saver to save your seat from bruising and chafing.
19. Comfortable Pad to reduce horse and rider fatigue (Cloud Nine is a favorite).
20. Synthetic stirrup "leathers": unbreakable, easy care, durable. Adjusted to a medium height for best balance, greatest adaptability of seat to trail conditions, the best control of the horse if unruly or in hazardous terrain. (Most endurance riders' stirrups are too long, leading to leg and back fatigue and poor control of the horse and self.) The leathers are under the flaps for less pinching and friction. Wide, cushioned stirrups are comfortable, give security and safety in a fall.
21. Pommel Bag is preferred to a cantle bag for accessibility, ease of mounting/dismounting, and weight distribution on the horse. I use a biker's rear-fender bag lashed to the saddle dees and stirrup bars. It has a large compartment with double zipper plus Velcro closure, and a small mesh compartment on the end. It contains,

from bottom to top: trash bag (30 gallon, unused): makes a good raincoat, or cover at night, and has various other uses. Light windbreaker/rain shirt: ditto. Horse electrolytes. Tube of Desitin for any chafe on you or your horse. Sunblock. Night glasses, if needed, in a strong case. Flashlight. Fluorescent light for night light on the trail. Emergency info/numbers, laminated or in a plastic case. Extras, toiletries that you require. Snacks for yourself (gum candies are my fave). Stethoscope, if you carry one. Room for your gloves.

So there you have it! You'll undoubtedly need all of it at some point along the trail, and be very glad you had it with you. Go ride.

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*translated by L.N. with some poetic license.

