

As You Like It Productions

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PREPARING FOR YOUR PHOTO SHOOT

When snapshots taken by friends and family aren't "enough", you contract with a professional equine photographer to schedule a location shoot. In order for the shoot to be successful, both parties must be prepared.

You, the owner of the equine subject to be photographed (you may be part of this photograph - in fact, YOU could be the main focus, with your horse acting as a "prop") should do your homework.

1. Find some photographs in a magazine that appeal to you and share these with the photographer you've selected. Generally, you'd select photos that depicted your breed or discipline - but don't overlook something unusual, especially if the intended use of the photo is for your personal enjoyment rather than advertising. In other words, a dreamy, soft-focus scene of you and your horse in a woodsy setting, with you dressed informally, might be a delightful portrait or senior picture, but it wouldn't be the picture you'd use to advertise your horse for sale.
2. Discuss your ideas and options - and purpose - with the equine photographer you've selected. Your goals will determine a good part of the shoot. You will also need to consider time of year (weather conditions may influence your horse's appearance, as well as the scenery); time of day (the light from straight up noon sun is much harsher than morning or late afternoon light). Feeding time is NOT a good time to schedule a shoot - hearing its buddies getting fed does not lead to a quiet, relaxed session. If your horse is a youngster, you will want to take growth spurts into consideration.
3. Select a couple of possible locations on your farm or your stable that will provide an attractive background. You will want to "play photographer" on this, as the sun should be behind the photographer's back. Therefore, if your ideal spot requires the photographer to face east, an afternoon shoot would be better than an early morning shoot.
4. Ask someone to act as your assistant for the shoot. This person will help with last minute wipes and with positioning of horse and getting its attention. If you are including liberty shots in your photo session, your assistant will help keep the horse moving.

5. Have your horse trimmed and immaculately clean before the photographer arrives. You are paying for professional time – you don't want to pay him/her to sit around and wait for you to groom your horse. Try to ensure that you and your horse are relaxed and happy. Undue stress will reflect in the finished product, and is not likely to be the look you want!
6. If you wish performance photographs, your horse should be warmed up and ready to go. (see “paying for professional time” note above)
7. Have last minute touch-up equipment/materials on hand, just out of the picture frame. These might include fly spray, show sheen, hoof polish, Vaseline or whatever you use to ‘shine’ the horse’s face, mane and tail brush and towel to wipe the horse’s body (or your boots). For yourself, you might want comb or brush and lipstick/ gloss.
8. When you present your horse to the photographer for a portrait shot, your assistant will help position the horse and get its ears up. Most photographers carry props with them to help with this – the catch is to not let the horse see or hear them until everything is set up and the photographer is ready to capture the scene. Patience is a virtue – anyone can take a snapshot; you are paying a professional for his/her skill to see a special moment and create a work of art.
9. If liberty shots are included in your shoot, position yourself and your assistant on either side of the photographer. This will help keep the horse moving in a semi-confined area. Part of your job is to not let the horse run over the photographer! Props for this segment might include a crop or whip with a plastic bag tied on the end or a coffee can with a few pebbles in it. These will help to animate the horse, if this is the look you’re after.

With preparation and attention to details, your time with your equine photographer will go smoothly and calmly. The end product will be a selection of lovely, creative, professional photographs from which to choose.