



British Grooms Association Area Representative Kate West is an experienced driving groom...

Kate, pictured, has competed both on the backstep and in the driving seat and she knows how important it is to look well turned out. She has this advice for ensuring you go into the ring gleaming:

What can you do to ensure the horse is looking immaculate?

I get the horses ready in plenty of time. This ensures that the horse doesn't get dirty and messy before putting them in their harness. For those with white socks I put a clean set of travelling boots on to prevent any muck stains magically appearing on their legs. I always get the horse ready in the lorry with no haynet to avoid the horse from getting covered in hay. Also, in the lorry, you have got a good firm surface to get them ready on, so their feet don't get muddy. After I have brushed and plaited them I put a clean sheet and a rug with a neck on them to prevent dust or hay getting on the coat and in the plaits.

When the horse is ready to go into the arena I take a small grooming kit with the essentials down to the ring. Just before the horse goes in I give them a quick going over to remove any sweat stains or dirt. I then wipe them all over with a clean cloth.

How do you keep yourself clean and tidy during an event?

Before I go in the ring I wear a coat, (long rain coats are the best) and thin waterproof trousers over my livery or

oufit. I always carry a spare change of livery in the lorry so I can quickly change if I do get dirty.

How important is it to look well presented?

It's very important as the grooms are also part of the final turn out and we are judged as an overall picture.

Do you have any tips for keeping the horses calm before the event?

I have always had a good connection with the horses, so talking to them in a calm reassuring voice has always worked for me. Never wind them up or shout at them whilst getting them ready. They already know that they are going somewhere when they go in the lorry so the calmer the handler is the more relaxed they will be too as they look to us for comfort and reassurance.

How do you cope with nerves?

I never really get nervous at shows, only HOYS! I would take lots of deep breaths and concentrate on the horses. I just say to myself here it goes, good luck! Attention to detail is paramount in driving, be well prepared before the event and enjoy the experience.

For more information and to join the British Grooms Association visit www.britishgrooms.org.uk or call 0845 331 6039.



BGA members have these top turnout tips:

To clean curb chains, get some bran and Brasso. Rub the chain in the mixture between your hands and leave for about ten minutes. Buff with clean, dry rag and watch it gleam! *Gaynor Care*

Use beeswax furniture spray as you plait manes. It has a slight sticky feeling which is useful when plaiting flyaway manes and holds your plaits in place as well! *Toni Chambers*

When washing white tails use white enhancing clothes conditioner. Leave it in for a few minutes and then rinse - it leaves them whiter than white. *Laura Whaites*

Winter coats can often look a bit dull and greasy - to combat this hot cloth them after brushing. Get a bucket of warm/hot water (not too hot!) and add a cap full of Dettol. Using a clean hand or tea-towel, remove the excess water (so the cloth is damp rather than wet) and wipe the horse all over - paying extra attention to his greasy/scurfy areas - it really lifts the grease out of their coats and leaves them looking nice and shiny. *Louise Gillings*