

## EQUINE PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

### Safety preparation for being around horses

- Rule 1. Always remember the most predictable thing about horses, is that they are unpredictable animals!
- Although horses look massive and intimidating, inside they are rather timid prey animals and as such rely on their basic instincts to keep them safe. They are easily scared by sudden or unpredictable movements.
- Watch their body language. Wide eyes, pricked forward or laid flat back ears, dancing around, swishing their tails are signs they are unhappy with what is going on.
- Don't stand or walk directly behind any horse. They can and do kick.
- If you're unfamiliar with, or feel timid around horses, make sure you are standing with someone who is experienced with them. Even the tamest horse can spook at something silly like a billowing dress or a plastic bag. They are prey animals and can accidentally run over you in an attempt to get away from the perceived danger
- Pack your patience. Because they are unpredictable animals, they may not necessarily cooperate, and do and stand just as you want them to.
- Pay attention for when the horse is just "done" with the session. Eg when they are tired, disinterested or just plain unhappy. When they're done, they're done. We don't want to make a photo session a bad experience for them.
- **Always wear sturdy closed toe shoes.** Ideally boots as opposed to sneakers. Never sandals or flip flops! Horses don't pay attention to what they're stepping on, and they'll never feel your little tiny toe under their big feet. And speaking from experience, it hurts getting your toes smashed flat by 1,000+ pound animals.

### Equipment

- Camera – any good DSLR or mirrorless camera with a variety of lenses
- Lens
  - Wide-angle lenses are not good for photographing horses due to their distortion. Nothing less than 85 mm.
  - Ideally use a lens length of at least 100mm to avoid this distortion effect. Anything below that the horse may end up with a giant head and tiny little legs
  - The standard lens for equine photography is the 70-200mm f/2.8. They are sharp and give good compression.
  - A 105 mm also would work well.
- Tripod not needed as you'll be shooting handheld. You should be mobile and aware of your surroundings at all time, and be ready to get you and your camera out of the way if need be
- Flash could try but generally not really workable in typical horsey outdoors environment
- Extra memory cards and batteries

### Camera Settings

- As low an ISO as possible
- Shutter speed depends on what the horse is doing. If it is standing quietly in a portrait type atmosphere, 1/200 – 1/400 may do if they are standing really still. Better yet, 1/500 if they are moving around at all. For action shots with them galloping around, need at least 1/1000 to 1/1250 to sharply freeze their motion.
- Aperture of f4 to f5.6 should allow for a bit of background softening while still allowing sufficient DOF to get the entire horse in focus. If you are more experienced at shooting horses and know that you can really nail your focus, you can try a more wide open aperture to really get that background blur.
- Have camera set on servo and burst mode for the rapid action shots
- For autofocus have set on animal eye detection

### Shooting tips

- Lighting & Time of Day: Shoot during the "golden hour" (early morning or late afternoon). Avoid midday so you won't end up with harsh, unflattering, or patchy light or shadows. Cloudy days are also ideal for diffused, even lighting.
- For black horses, typically they photograph better with the sun shining directly on them to bring out the highlights in their coat. So try to photograph them with the sun behind you. For still shots, a reflector will help.
- Get Low: don't shoot from eye level, to avoid making the horse's head look too large and legs too short. Shoot from waist height, or could even try from the ground to get a different look altogether.
- Ensure the background is as clean as possible - free of distractions like unsightly equipment, ugly buildings or fences. Avoid having poles or trees or fence posts sticking out of the horses head or back.
- Try to avoid having the horizon cut through the body of the horse. Shoot low so you can get the sky behind them.
- Focus on their eyes
- Look for tall grass, weeds or sagebrush as these can be used to create a soft foreground bokeh when the camera is set down low.
- Shuffle feet to create a dust cloud. Shooting horses through dust can have a particularly dramatic effect, especially at sunset. Can also be useful if have dust cloud to shoot through, in suboptimal high midday light.

### Horse Preparation

- The horse should be clean and shiny, with clean tack on.
- If the horse is wearing a bridle, works best to have a lead rope clipped to the bit, so that the reins are laid out on a natural position over their neck/back. Don't have the handler holding one rein as it will stick out unnaturally and is hard to edit out. And do not remove the reins. As horses are never ridden or handled with a bridle without reins. If the owner is holding the reins as if they were walking the horse, the reins end up exiting the frame and could be distracting on a headshot.
- Ideally you want the horse to have a happy, alert, interested expression and nicely forward facing upright ears.

- They need to be standing “square” so a leg is in each corner without a leg sticking out or cocked/resting. Eg not having relaxed legs with one foot propped. You also don’t want them standing with their hooves too close together or have the horse leaning forward or back.
- Ideally have an assistant to assist in holding them or getting their attention. You want the horse’s ears pricked forward in interest, but not panicked (when they’ll go sideways) or angry (flat back against their heads – not good!). Just like kids or dogs, they tend to have fairly short attention spans.
- A variety of props can be used for getting their attention such as a squeaky dog toy, a waving jacket, rustling paper or plastic, a bucket or can of feed or grain that rattles, carrots that can be snapped apart or horse “cookies” in bags, to get their attention. You can also make noises such as clicks or clucks, shhh noise etc. You can also download apps with horse and animal sounds, but use this sparingly.
- For conformation shots, (Left Side Profile): Position the horse such that the near-side (left) legs are straight up and down, while the right front leg is slightly back and the right back leg slightly forward. This way you can see that the horse has four legs. If the horse is standing totally square and you photograph them from the side, it will look as though they only have two legs.