

Shire Horse Society Australia Inc

Showing Shire Horses



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Why do we show Shire Horses

All breeds of animals are man-made. They have developed over many years by selecting animals that most closely resemble the type that interested breeders are looking for, and then mating those types to each other, and selecting the best types again, over and over. By breeding the best types of a breed to each other over and over, those characteristics that are desired are becoming set by genetics into that breed. This is what is called imprinting certain genetic features into a breed. However, if the best types for those breed features are not selected generation by generation, all of those characteristics can be lost within a generation or two, and the animals quickly revert to the base animal.

A stud book is only a collection of horses that have been selected over time because they displayed the desired characteristics and are then bred to each other. In case of Shires, selective breeding for a type had been going on for 200 years at least before the first stud book was started in 1882. The stud book was designed to make it easier for breeders to locate and name desired Shires, especially stallions, and well before the internet of course.

In the case of Shire horses, without selective breeding, they will return to a natural light horse, without the feather, size, hind leg set and other features which make up the type of the Shire Horse. Shire Horses' breed features today are primarily visible in their conformation, colour, feather, and action, as against working breeds which are selected for performance in their speed, agility, jumping ability, or sporting ability etc. However with the increase in the riding of Shires, movement is becoming more important as well.

Selecting the best examples of the breed in the show ring, then, plays a very important role in maintaining the Shire Breed. Amazingly, the earliest recorded example of showing the very early Shire Horse to knowledgeable horse people and prospective buyers, is from 1171, over 800 years ago!! At the horse sale at Smithfield London, horses were paraded up and down, first at the walk, then at the trot, and they were rewarded with more, or less, applause by the people present according to how they were assessed by those horsemen. The ones considered the best, generally got the best prices at the auction. At this time those horses were primarily bought for knights to ride.

Today, the job of the knowledgeable Judge in the show ring is to impartially award the top placings in the ring to the best examples of the Breed according to the current breed standard, as he or she sees it on that day. Breeders and the public can then see what the best examples of the breed are, and the top horses should be hopefully bred in order to keep on imprinting those characteristics.

A show is also where the Shire Breed is presented to the broader horse community and the public, in all their finery so to speak, whether it be in the breed classes, harness, working or ridden classes. It is a way of promoting the breed, because without a market for any breed, they will not survive. Therefore a show is an impressive spectacle and display, put on for the public. This is exactly the same as it was at Smithfield as mentioned above in 1171. Shire Horses should be presented in an impressive way, washed and clean, plaited and decorated, in very good body score condition, well behaved, and with their feet trimmed if not shod. The handler should also be dressed to a high standard.

Showing Shires is also a good day out and a chance to catch up with other horse lovers in general. And who does not enjoy showing their Shire to the world, even if you are not at the top of the class in the ring.

Good Show Preparation begins a long time before the Show.

It is impossible to cover every aspect of showing in these notes. When you go to a show, watch what successful Shire exhibitors do.

There is nothing wrong in doing all that you can to enhance your Shire Horse for the show ring and a good judge will take into account both conformation and presentation. A show is a show, and although you cannot change your horses' basic conformation, you can present your horse in the best possible light to the Judge, the same as horses are prepared for auction. All decorations and show shoeing are designed to enhance certain features of the horse which adds to the overall view of the horse as he or she appears before the Judge.

The preparation and presentation of your horse for show is the one part of showing which you have total control over. You cannot change your horse's conformation etc, but you can turn your horse out to look his or her very best, and presentation is a very important aspect of showing. It is a show after all. The preparation of Shires for the show ring begins at home, long before the show, and involves feeding, maintenance and handling.

Feeding and maintenance

Shires are traditionally shown in very good condition. They need plenty of bulk feed in the way of hay and/or chaff plus some good conditioning feeds, in the lead up to the show. The bulk of the diet should be hay or chaff. Many people new to heavy horses are unaware of just how much hay is enough. To fill the gut of an entirely handfed heavy horse (weighing between 750-1,000 kg) requires roughly three quarters to one full bale of hay a day. For show preparation it might mean ad lib hay for a couple of months. A Shire carrying a lot of weight will appeal more as a heavy horse type than a Shire in light condition.

Heavy horses in general do better on cool and oily energy supplementary feeds such as rice bran based feeds, sunflower seeds and other such mixes. High protein/high energy feeds for breeding and performance horses are best left to the horses they are formulated for, which are brood mares in the latter stages of pregnancy or lactating mares and young, vigorously growing foals where everything goes into growth. It is a mistake to think that because a horse is used in a cart every so often, or is ridden every so often, that it is a performance horse. However, if your horse is being worked or ridden regularly, you will need to increase the feed so as to maintain condition.

All horses will benefit from a mineral supplement, which helps with general health, a glowing coat, and healthy water intake.

To put a good, well shod foot on a heavy horse requires at least 8-10 weeks and two shoeings. Always remember that the foot can make or break a Shire's prospects for a successful show career. Show shoes, or scotch bottom shoes, are often used to enhance the size of the Shires' feet but they take a couple of shoeings to prepare the feet for them. And heavy horse feet generally should be allowed to grow out more than a light horse's feet. Many farriers today do not understand that a

Shire's feet are broader, more like a dinner plate than a teacup. They should not be too tight at the back but shod wider at the back than a light horse. If your farrier does not understand this, you may need to explain it.

It is sometimes possible to buy show shoes for Shires from the US. Some farriers do know how to make them and to prepare the feet for them. If you are serious about showing, it is worth finding out more about show shoes, and how they work. They are a cosmetic way to enhance the appearance of your horse to the Judge.

A well shod foot will present better to the judge in the show ring than an unshod horse, but for an occasional local show you may decide that it's not worth shoeing. It all depends as to what standard you want to show.

Rugging a Shire in the lead up to a show, can be helpful to bring out the colour in the horse, especially in blacks, and to shine the coat up.

Care of the Shire's Feather (Long hair on lower leg)

Feather on the lower legs is a key and very attractive feature of the Shire. Time and effort is required to make a Shire's feathers as clean, soft and beautiful as possible.

The Judge wants to see a Shire's fetlock and pasterns because good sloping pasterns, and clean joints, are a desired feature of the breed. Some Shires have more feather than others. If your Shire has a lot of feather, you can pluck out some of the feather down the front of their lower leg with your fingers in short sharp snaps, so as to show the pasterns and joints. It is possible to use a comb scissor which is less work, but it requires skill to make it look natural. Compare the legs in the photo below to see the effect of plucking, the left leg is plucked and neatened to show the joints while the right leg isn't. This is obviously before washing etc.



To have the horse's feather looking as good as possible at the show, wash the feather thoroughly some weeks before the show in hot water and a good detergent/shampoo. Dry it with a towel and let it dry completely. Then put some sort of harmless oil into the feathers, before letting the horse go into its paddock. Make sure that you put oil in the hind part of the feathers, behind the fetlock. Then keep putting more oil into the feathers once or twice a week. This helps prevent the hair from breaking off, keeps the hair soft, and also

keeps the dirt and mud out, so that when you go to wash the feathers for the show, they are already cleaner and softer than they would otherwise be.

Start washing the feathers out at least the day before the show in hot water with detergent to get the oil out. Then do it again on the day of the show, so that the white feathers are as brilliantly white as possible. You can use any number of very effective whitening shampoos and highlighters. You can comb through a little conditioner as well and then rinse it out if you like.

Damp feathers can be both dried and given extra body before entering the ring, by generously dousing the feathers in wood flour which has been placed on a mat, or in a bucket, under the legs. Lift the wood flour up into the feather with your hands and fingers. Then comb them out with a fine comb.

When the feathers are dry, some talcum powder can be dusted into the white feathers just before the Shire goes into the ring. Keep tidying up your horse, and gently combing the feathers, right up until you enter the ring.

Handling

Your horse needs to be under control and obedient at home and, hopefully, in the show ring. The essential basic skills are:

1) Tying up safely

Train your horse to tie up. A horse trained to tie up correctly will not pull back. Even if startled or alarmed he should not pull back. Do not tie a horse where he might get away. A loose horse running around a showground is a recipe for disaster.

2) Being taught to stand still on a lead

Train your horse to halt. When asked to halt and stand still on a lead means that the horse has four legs planted on the ground with no shuffling or pushing the handler around. This also means that the judge or a ring steward must be able to approach the horse without him moving away. He must allow his legs to be handled and picked up. Nor should the horse be shy around the head and mouth.

At the same time, practise at home asking your horse to stand with his/her hind legs close behind so that the judge will be able to assess the horse's hind leg set.

3) Lead willingly and calmly at both a walk and trot

Train your horse to lead correctly. He must walk beside you willingly and lightly in hand. He should move off promptly at your command, and stop the same way. On your instructions he should halt, walk and trot. Do not allow him to hang back and drag on the lead, or lay against you. Teach him also to respect your space. **To**

achieve this, practice regularly at home. Every time you lead your horse at home, make him do it correctly. Then it will become second nature in the show ring.

4) Loading on a truck/float

Train your horse to load before you take him out. If he's only so-so loading at home, he will probably not load to go back home! Nothing is more stressful than trying to load an unwilling horse at a show, with onlookers offering advice and assistance, or just thanking God that they are not in your shoes.

All of the above means a good education and regular practice when at home. Allowances will often be made for foals or yearlings at their first outing, with the expectation of increasingly better behaviour as they gain experience and maturity. Often young horses will be good at home but the distractions of a show means they may play up out of fear or an overload of strange sights and sounds. Do not show a youngster with a rope around his hindquarters. You do not train to lead at a show. If he will not work out at his first show practice more at home and rest assured he will do better the next time.

Shire judges are intolerant of an older horse that plays up, whether it's his first show or not. By the time a horse is 3—5 years he should be well-handled, educated and possibly broken in. He should also be mature enough mentally to be well behaved. If an older horse is playing up badly at a show he shouldn't be there. He is presented a negative picture of the breed to the public and can be dangerous as well. You need to take him home and give him more education.

Plan for show day

Be prepared and be on time. Work out the logistics of getting there and allow plenty of time to get ready for your first class – do not be late for your classes. Many arguments are caused by late arrivals who want to be judged after the class has started or is even over. If the show is close to home, grooming and preparation can be done at home. Factor in enough time at the show to complete the preparation/presentation of your horse and visit the secretary's office as necessary for programs, class tickets, entry fee payments etc.

Show day is where your homework pays off:

- Tie up safely for grooming and preparation? ✓
- Lead to the ring without problems? ✓
- Stand quietly at ringside awaiting your class? ✓
- Lead well and work out well in the class? ✓
- Stand quietly while the judge examines the horse? ✓

SHOW RING ATTITUDE AND COURTESY

Courtesy of the Handler

Always remember there is just one winner in every class. If you lose – be a good loser. If you win – be gracious. If you go away feeling disappointed with an outcome in the ring, please remember that others may be feeling the same way. Everyone has the same rights and expectations as you. If you cannot be gracious and well-mannered whatever the outcome, take your horse home and enjoy him there. Showing is not for you.

Developing Knowledge of the Breed Standard

What you paid for your horse may or may not be reflected in how successful he might be in the show ring. In addition, just because you love the foal you have bred does not necessarily make it a champion. Led classes are about having the best horse, according to the judge on the day. If you haven't developed a discerning eye for good conformation and don't have much experience, be guided by two things:

1. **Your usual place in the classes.** If you are regularly near the top of the class under official heavy horse judges, you probably have a good horse. If you are regularly near the bottom end perhaps you need to understand that your horse may be your best mate, and greatly loved, but he probably doesn't have what it takes to be a show ring prospect. But he can still bring you much pleasure.
2. **Get advice from the right people AND LISTEN TO THEM.** The right people have been there for quite some time and doing well year after year. Also ensure that the success of the people you seek advice from isn't based on just one horse over a couple of years. What is important is consistency of good stock over many years, called "performance on the board".

Don't take too seriously advice from 'Joe Blogs' outside of the ring. If he doesn't have performance, ie a successful show record himself, his advice is probably not worth much. Be polite and walk away. Newcomers often get confused by contradictory information. Be discerning about your sources.

Another point is getting honest advice about your horse's show ring prospects. Never ask for an "honest opinion" if you can't take the truth. This is a truly loaded question and many judges and knowledgeable people may be evasive, based on self-preservation. "Has a lovely mane and tail" is one tongue-in-cheek evasion that comes to mind. Many capable, honest people have never been forgiven for pointing out a horses' faults when requested to do so.

We all tend to be stable blind to our horses' faults, and this is a very good reason to hold led classes. Your horse is being assessed by the judge, and he is also being assessed privately by other exhibitors. It is your opportunity to assess him too, against his peers in the ring. Perhaps he may have seemed well-grown at home but in the line-up in the ring you find that he's only average. This may be disappointing but it's a valuable lesson in developing your eye and critically assessing your horse.

Developing a Discerning Eye

Learn the Shire Breed Standard (<http://www.shirehorsesociety.com.au/documents/standard.pdf>) and the features that the judge is looking for, which you will find in the Notes: "What the Judge is Looking For" in the "Judges" section of our web site. Objectively assess your horse against that criteria. Look at the complete picture of your horse and also of other Shires, as this is important in the Shire Horse judging process. It is also helpful to watch the judging of other breeds, even light horse breeds, to learn to discern horse conformation and movement generally. See the appendix to this document which has excellent diagrams of the Ideal Shire and the "Correct Hind Leg Set", as it is called in Shires.

THE SHOW RING

There are many things you can do to help make the judge's job easier, and enhance your horse's prospects. This is called 'ring craft'.

Presentation of the Handler and Handler Attire

The presentation of the handler is another area where you have total control of the end result. Being appropriately dressed, courteous and well-mannered is a part of showing and is a part of that complete picture which is created of horse and handler for the judge.

While your standard of dress may change for different levels of showing (for example, you may dress more formally for a Royal Show, compared to your local gymkhana), at a minimum you should always be turned out in a neat and tidy manner, in smart casual clothes with footwear appropriate to horse handling (ie, closed toed shoes) and a hat. Moleskins, a collared shirt, tie, hat and boots are very common and acceptable in any show ring.

It is advisable to carry a stallion cane, or short whip in order to:

- help keep control of your horse
- make sure that he stays out of your space
- encourage him to keep his head up
- use as an aid to help get your horse to stand close behind, when standing in the line-up, so that the judge can see his hind leg set. See more information on this later.

Shire Horse Turnout (Figure 1 – Mrs. Joyce Lady Jasmine & Figure 2 Molly)

The Shire breed has a long tradition of a high standard of turnout. At a show, your horse should always be clean, mane and tail brushed and in good condition and the feather clean and white. While not compulsory, mature Shires are expected to be shown with their manes and tails plaited, with a flight every second plait, and decorated and with a neck ribbon (see Figure 8). Do not use silicon type conditioners to the mane or tail or you will have a lot of trouble plaiting.

Attach the neck ribbon, by tying or plaiting in, to the base of the mane and it should sit on the collar bed. This enhances the horse's neck length, collar bed and overall appearance. Adding decorations to Shires is part of enhancing features of the horse as well as showing the horse off. This is something that is learned by asking the experienced Shire show people.

In order to become proficient at plaiting, there is no substitute for practice. It is well worth the while to practise at home, and then have the satisfaction of seeing your horse turned out beautifully. There are some plaiting instructions at the end of these notes and a video is available from the UK at <http://www.heavyhorseworld.co.uk/index.php/online-shop/dvds-pal-uk/plaiting-the-heavy-horse-for-showing-detail>.



Figure 3 – Providence Lady Jasmine. Champion Mare, National Shire Show UK, 2010



Metherrington Upton Hamlet being shown in his stallion roller, side reins, flights, plaits, neck ribbon and tail plait and decorations. This is an extremely high standard of presentation.

It is acceptable for a foal to have only their tail plaited and their manes loose, but from a yearling onwards it is standard for the mane to be plaited as well, for both males and females. A Shire colt or stallion is traditionally shown in a roller from one year of age. The Shire roller sits flatter on the back saddle than other heavy horse breeds, and it has a crupper. Shire stallions also have side reins which run through a ring on the roller. Showing with a cane is acceptable for a Shire of any age.

Shire specific show bridles and rollers are often custom made and can be expensive, so it is not expected that every competitor have this level of equipment. As long as your halter/bridle or roller fits properly and is safe, as well as being neat, tidy, clean and well cared for, it is acceptable for the show ring. Please remember that many shows require horses to be shown in a bit when over a certain age, especially colts and stallions.

The walk

You have been called into the ring for your first class. Enter the ring with confidence and hold your horse's head up high. You are proud of your horse and are showing him or her off! You may feel a bit odd holding the head up, but this does pay off in the ring. It is all part of showmanship. Do not relax doing this until you leave the ring.

Firstly, you are requested to walk around the ring with the other competitors in a large circle (usually anticlockwise but possibly clockwise, depending on the judge's preferences). During this time the judge will assess each horse, looking for the stamp of the Shire and the picture that each horse creates. He will be observing his walking ability, note the overall proportions of each animal, or balance in other words. He is looking for a free moving, long striding horse with good carriage and an alert and interested manner. He's also looking for possible lameness, which will be penalised.

At the walk, the horses' hind foot should be placed in or in front of the spot their front foot just vacated. You can see this by keeping an eye on the ground where the front foot has been and wait until the hind foot is placed down. Young horses will naturally over-step due to their proportionately longer legs. Walk your horse out well but not so fast he breaks into a jog. If someone in front is too slow you can walk around them, to the outside of the circle. At all times be aware of your horse while keeping one eye on the judge and ring steward so that you are ready when called into the ring.

The Line-up

After walking around the ring you will be called in for the 'line-up'. Walk and line up following the steward's directions. You may be called to line up in place for initial assessment or in no particular order, depending on the judge's preference. The line-up is not considered the final decision.

In the line-up, face your horse and stand him up for the judge. This means four feet squarely on the ground, neither standing under himself nor camped out behind. The front legs should be square and level, not one in front of the other. The hind legs should be set close together with the back feet even. A well-conformed horse should want to stand correctly, close at the hocks with the canons close set and parallel down to the fetlocks. The point of the hocks should be turned in a little towards each other and the hind feet turned out a little. This correct hind leg stance is called the "set".

To ensure your horse keeps this stance you **must stand facing him**, in front of his head and just off to the near side. Do not stand in the line-up in a leading position, at the shoulder facing forward. Facing the horse means you can see how well he is standing, and he's less likely to move. If all is not perfect you are in the right place to "set" him correctly. (You may even pick up and place a foot to set it perfectly.)

Once your horse is standing well and settled, keep one eye on him and one on the judge. Don't use the line-up to chat to your neighbours, but stay focussed on your own horse and how he is standing, especially trying to keep his hind legs in the right position (hind leg set). If you don't pay attention to your horse, he may grab the chance to move around. You may also miss directions from the judge or steward. Also, you never know when, at any time, the judge may glance back at your horse while comparing each horse's workout and assessment, so keep him standing up correctly, head up, all the time if you can. Do not let him graze at all from the moment that you enter the ring till you leave.

In the meantime, the judge will take this opportunity to stand back and view all the horses together to assess the relative proportions, breed characteristics, comparative hock heights, etc. He will then assess each horse individually. Each judge has his own preferences for order of assessment.

How the judge then assesses each individual horse

A common method is to start at the front, checking eyes and teeth, front legs, feet and chest. This is not in order of importance but rather moving from top to bottom of the horse without going backwards and forwards.

The judge usually starts with the head, often passing his hand across the eyes to note a blink reflex, indicating adequate sight. A thumb may be inserted between the lips in the front of the mouth to check that upper and lower teeth are level, not under or overshot. Undershot or overshot mouths mean a horse cannot crop feed effectively and may be unthrifty (a poor do-er), depending on the severity of the condition. This is highly hereditary and must be penalised, especially in a breeding animal. Travelling down the nearside, height is assessed and the judge may ask some general questions from the handlers such as the horse's age, and whether he is broken in and works. The front leg and foot on that side will be evaluated, both visually and by feel.

At this time, the judge may feel for any lumps or bumps on the canons and pasterns and will press firmly down in the region of the lateral cartilage of the foot. The judge is looking for faults but especially unsoundness which cannot be clearly seen.

Depending on the horse's manners, time constraints and the judges' preference, the foot may be picked up to assess it completely. If the horse is mature the judge will usually feel for unsoundness at the pastern and the hoof head.

Moving on towards the rear, the front and inner aspects of the hind legs are checked, visually assessing bone, hocks and hind feet. Again, depending on time constraints and manners, the judge may or may not pick up a hind leg to examine the foot, and feel around the inside of the hock, pastern and hoof head, once again looking for unsoundness.

The judge may then then move away from the horse to view the whole animal from the side, before moving on behind him. From the side view the judge assesses overall conformation, but particularly that of the legs, front and back.

From behind the judge will look at the width at the hips, overall set of the hind legs, hock height and length and muscling of the gaskins is assessed. If the horse is not standing well now is a good time to attempt to stand the horse up correctly. In fact, you should be constantly concentrating on your horse, getting him or her to stand with hind legs close behind and all 4 feet square. This should be practised at home as well. Here your stallion cane comes in handy, to lightly tap feet to help with standing square.

Moving to the offside, the judge will look for anything that may be different from the nearside, following a similar procedure but from back to front. This side is often quicker to assess as many aspects are the same on both sides.

Once the judge is finished assessing the horse, we move on to the workout.

Workout

Generally this involves a walk out and back, and a trot out and back. Some judges will ask for a workout in a triangular shape so as to assess the sideways view of his movement. The workout will often include asking the horse to back a few steps or turn in a tight circle (practice both of these at home), and then line up once again.

Your horse's movement at the walk and the trot can make the difference to his placing in the ring. Practice at home getting your horse to keep his head up and to move actively, particularly at the trot. Shire always were cart horses and should move with good presence and action so the judge will be looking for this.

When a horse is asked to work out in a class, the judge is viewing the walk and trot from behind and then from the front. From behind, the judge is looking for close set hind legs with elevation of the stride at both walk and trot. He also wants to see the soles of the feet, front and back, indicating an elevated lift and clean, high action at each step. When coming back, the judge is again looking for high elevation in front and straight action without winging or paddling (feet moving in a circular direction, rather than straight). If the hind legs are close set they will be clearly visible between the front legs.

Once all horses have been worked out, their relative merits and problems are mentally assessed and compared. Then they are put into their final placings and ribbons awarded. Show ring etiquette calls for congratulations to the winners and placegetters, along with a shaking of hands and/or tipping of hats.

Some judges will offer helpful comments or constructive criticism, others do not. There are good reasons to do so, and good reasons to say nothing, so this depends on the judge and the circumstances.

INSIGHT INTO JUDGES AND JUDGING

Judges of one heavy breed CAN and DO judge other heavy breeds competently.

All draught breeds were bred for essentially the same type of work and are therefore conformed similarly. The differences are mainly cosmetic, such as colour, markings, feather etc. All heavy horses should have large size and substance, a large foot with a broad heel, high clean hocks, flat bone and closely set hind legs. This will be a little bit variable from breed to breed; Clydesdales for example will generally have a little more slope to the pasterns than the other heavy breeds.

Most of the time, the judge on the day will be doing his or her best to assess the horses honestly. A “crooked” judge is quite rare, so please don’t accuse a judge of being dishonest just because you didn’t win.

You will come across the occasional judge who is not competent or consistent. It is not uncommon for a judge of another breed (eg Shetlands or Standardbreds) to judge the Shires at a local show. Be courteous and remember that the judge is trying to do a good job even if he is out of his depth.

There are many variables in judging. No horse is perfect and the judge has to weigh up all of them before arriving at his decision. There is much complexity in determining the positive features of each horse as well as any faults, and the degree to which they exist in a given animal. Judges can’t help but have their own priorities, probably due to past experience.

This means that you may see two horses of similar quality going turn-about for placings under different judges. It does not mean that one judge is right and another wrong. It probably means that the judges’ priorities may vary a little, even though they are all looking for the overall impression and features described in the Breed Standard.

So, to accurately determine your horse’s quality, he needs to be shown on many occasions. Another factor is that winning blue ribbons with the only horse in the class doesn’t mean anything. Very few judges will award the only horse in the class a second ribbon because he’s not up to scratch. A high-end placing in a large class of quality horses is far more worthwhile than a win when you are the only entrant.

Final points

When assessing all of the above the judge is not taking into consideration a pretty head, long eyelashes and cute ears. He is looking for a horse that, exhibits the stamp of the Shire and theoretically, can work without breaking down.

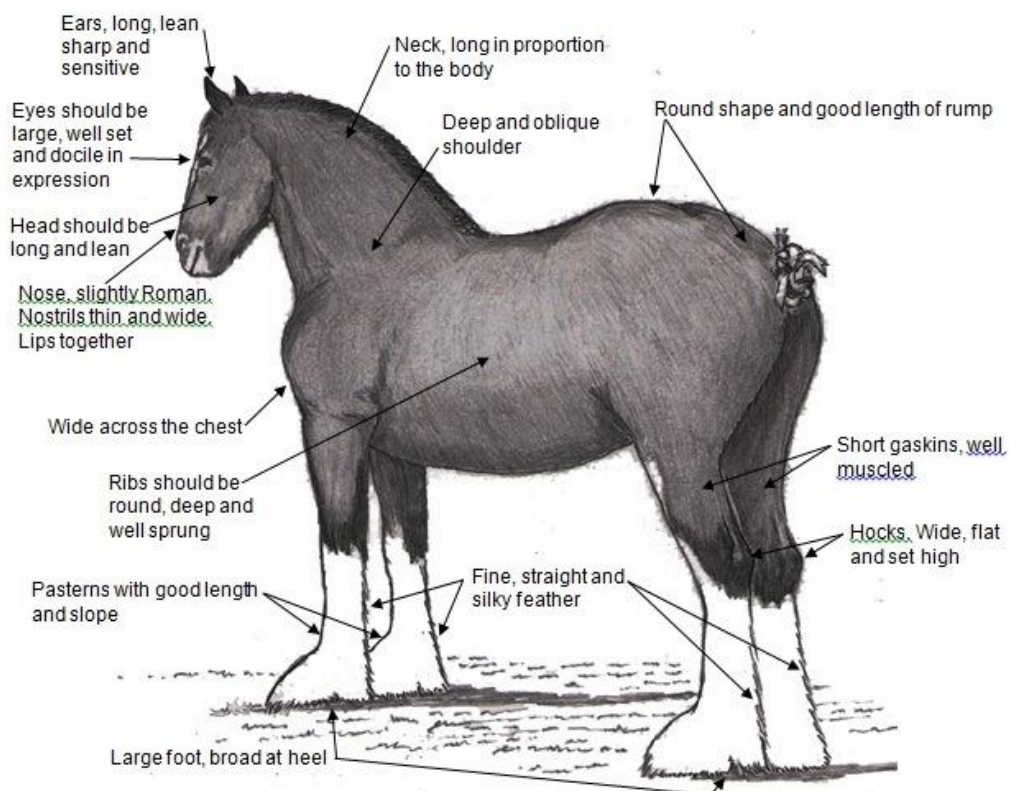
A little leniency may be given to geldings in some areas, but mares and stallions with hereditary faults, because they breed, will be penalised as they will pass on their undesirable characteristics.

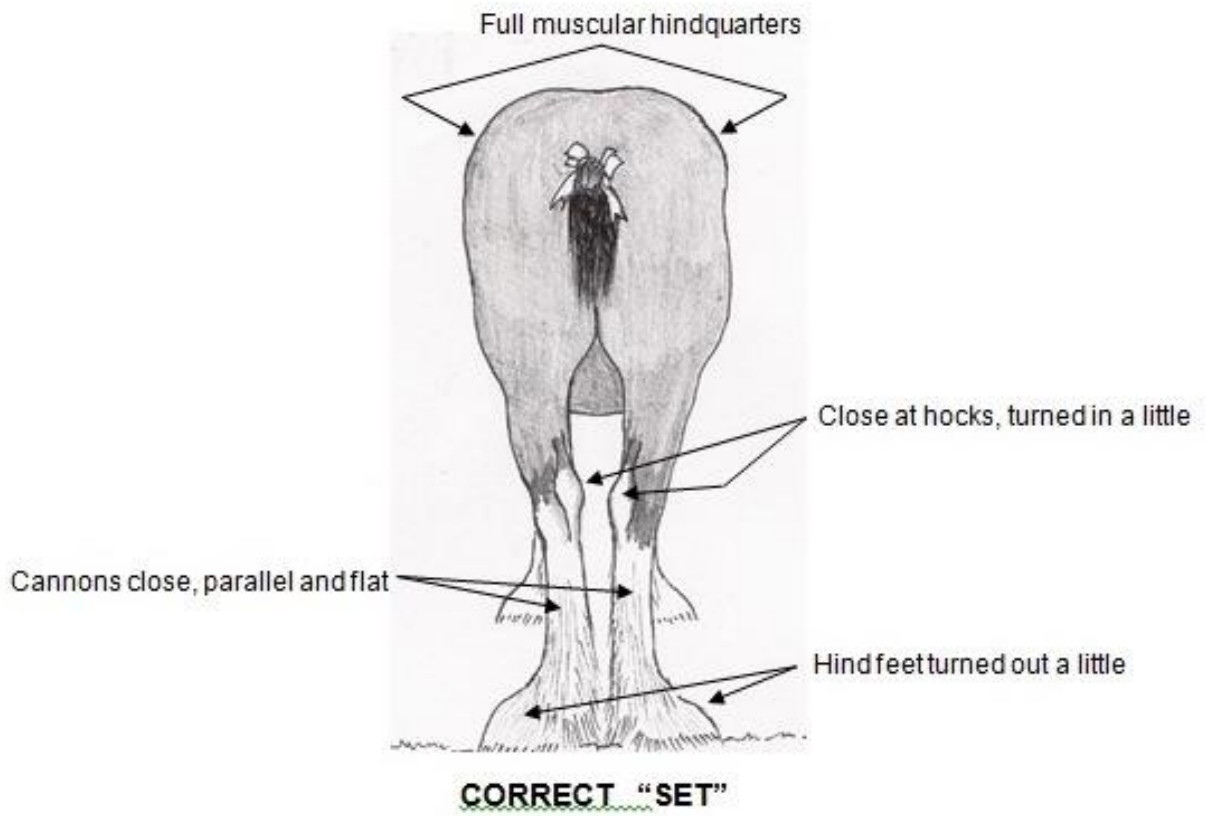
It can be a lot of fun to show led horses and it feeds our competitive natures, but do not forget the main picture.

The best reason for judging stock is to keep a breed as strong and consistent as possible; keeping to type and ensuring the animals are sound. We do this by recognising the best individuals and breeding from them, in preference to animals that do not have as much stamp of the breed and have serious faults. This is how breeds always developed in the past and are, hopefully, being assessed in the show ring today. It is the search for excellence that keeps a breed true to type and on track for the future.

THE IDEAL SHIRE

- Large size and substance
- Alert and interested manner

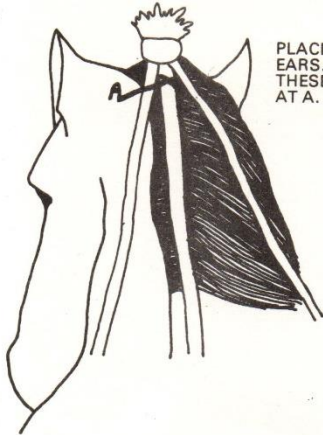




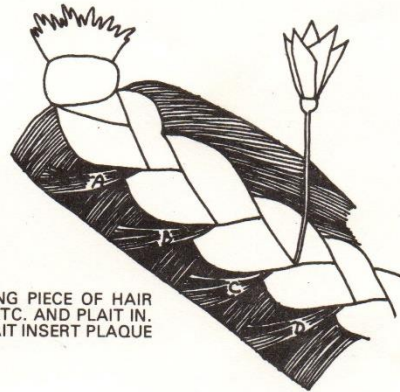
The Shire Horse

a guide to plaiting

THESE NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS GIVE AN INDICATION OF THE BASIC POINTS OF PLAITING.



PLACE PLAIT ON THE MANE JUST BEHIND THE EARS. TAKE TWO PIECES OF HAIR AND, WITH THESE, TIE CENTRE RIBBON OF PLAIT TO MANE AT A.



COMMENCE PLAITING TAKING PIECE OF HAIR FROM MANE AT A, B, C, D, ETC. AND PLAIT IN. EVERY THIRD COMPLETE PLAIT INSERT PLAQUE AND CONTINUE PLAITING.



TO FINISH: TAKE ONE RIBBON AND TIE AROUND COMPLETE PLAIT. LEAVE ENDS HANGING. TRIM ENDS LEVEL.



1.



2.



3.

1. PLAIT TAIL TO WITHIN 6 INCHES OF END, INSERT PIECE OF STRING, CONTINUE PLAITING, TIE.

2. PLACE ENDS OF STRING THROUGH THE HAIR ABOVE THE PLAIT, PULL PLAIT THROUGH PUTTING END BACK THROUGH LOOP MADE BY PLAIT.

3. WIND PLAIT ROUND OUTSIDE OF LOOP, CONTINUE WRAPPING WITH THE STRING KEEPING VERY TIGHT, THEN TIE. INSERT TAIL RING ON THE TOP OF THE BUN AND PLACE RIBBONS AROUND COVERING ALL STRING.

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Why do we show Shire Horses

All breeds of animals are man-made. They have developed over many years by selecting animals that most closely resemble the type that interested breeders are looking for, and then mating those types to each other, and selecting the best types again, over and over. By breeding the best types of a breed to each other over and over, those characteristics that are desired are becoming set by genetics into that breed. This is what is called imprinting certain genetic features into a breed. However, if the best types for those breed features are not selected generation by generation, all of those characteristics can be lost within a generation or two, and the animals quickly revert to the base animal.

In the case of horses, without selective breeding, they will return to a natural light horse, without the feather, size, hind leg set and other features which make up the type of the Shire Horse. Shire Horses' breed features today are primarily visible in their conformation, colour and feather, as against working breeds which are selected for performance in their speed, or agility, or jumping ability.

Selecting the best examples of the breed in the show ring, then, plays a very important role in maintaining the Shire Breed. Amazingly, the earliest recorded example of showing the very early Shire Horse to knowledgeable horse people and prospective buyers, is from 1171, over 800 years ago!! At the horse sale at Smithfield London, horses were paraded up and down, first at the walk, then at the trot, and they were rewarded with more, or less, applause by the people present according to how they were assessed by those horsemen. The ones considered the best, generally got the best prices at the auction. At this time those horses were primarily bought for knights to ride.

Today, the job of the knowledgeable Judge in the show ring is to impartially award the top placings in the ring to the best examples of the Breed according to the current breed standard, as he or she sees it on that day. Breeders and the public can then see what the best examples of the breed are, and the top horses should be hopefully bred in order to keep on imprinting those characteristics.

A show is also where the Shire Breed is presented to the broader horse community and the public, in all their finery so to speak, whether it be in the breed classes, harness, working or ridden classes. It is a way of promoting the breed, because without a market for any breed, they will not survive. Therefore a show is an impressive spectacle and display, put on for the public. This is exactly the same as it was at Smithfield as mentioned above in 1171. Shire Horses should be presented in an impressive way, washed and clean, plaited and decorated, in very good body score condition, well behaved, and with their feet trimmed if not shod. The handler should also be dressed to a high standard.

Showing Shires is also a good day out and a chance to catch up with other horse lovers in general. And who does not enjoy showing their Shire to the world, even if you are not at the top of the class in the ring.



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