

A HORSE AND RIDER SUPPLEMENT

CLIPS **& CLIPPING**

BY JANE VAN IENNIP MSc

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As winter approaches and horses start to develop their thick winter coats, many owners will be thinking about clipping. This involves removing some, or even all, of the horse's coat, using a clipping machine. Most of the length of the hair is removed, leaving a short stubble of hair. A 'clip' is not as close as a shave, which would remove the entire length of the hair, leaving bare skin.

WHY ARE HORSES CLIPPED?

1. The most usual reason for clipping is to enable the horse to work comfortably and without undue sweating in the winter months. Unclipped horses in work can lose condition.

A horse with a full winter coat will sweat if it's worked. This mechanism cools the horse, but if it doesn't do so sufficiently, the body temperature will rise and the horse may even collapse. When the horse stops work, it will cease sweating, but will by now be wet.

This moisture will gradually evaporate and the horse dries off. Gentle walking, sufficient to keep the horse warm, but not so vigorous as to cause further sweating, hastens the drying off. In order for water to evaporate, it needs energy in the form of warmth, which it takes from the horse. This robs the horse of condition and can cause chilling, even to the point of hypothermia. The chilled horse will shiver in an effort to maintain its body temperature, which in itself further depletes energy and body condition.

2. It would be comforting to think that all clipping

was done purely to save the horse all this discomfort and to keep it healthy. Sadly, the actual truth is not so straightforward.

Many horses are clipped because their owners think they look smarter that way. However, it is important that the horse's best interests are put first. Our vanity is best left aside.

3. Occasionally, horses in prolonged work may need clipping in the summer.

4. Sometimes, clipping is necessary to treat skin disorders, but this would be performed under veterinary direction.

Although a clipped horse can work better and more comfortably and perhaps maintain its condition more satisfactorily when working, the rest of the time it is denied the protection the coat affords against cold, wet weather, flies, sun and minor injuries. Clipped horses suffer more from saddle sores and rug rubs as well as grazes.



THICK WINTER COATS

The horse evolved on the wide open grassy plains and steppes of Central Asia. Summers were warm and generally dry, but in the winter, the weather became extremely harsh, with cold, biting winds, sub-zero temperatures and snow. With no natural shelter, it was obvious that no horse could survive such conditions without making an effective, thick winter coat—which is why horses' summer and winter coats are so very different from one another.

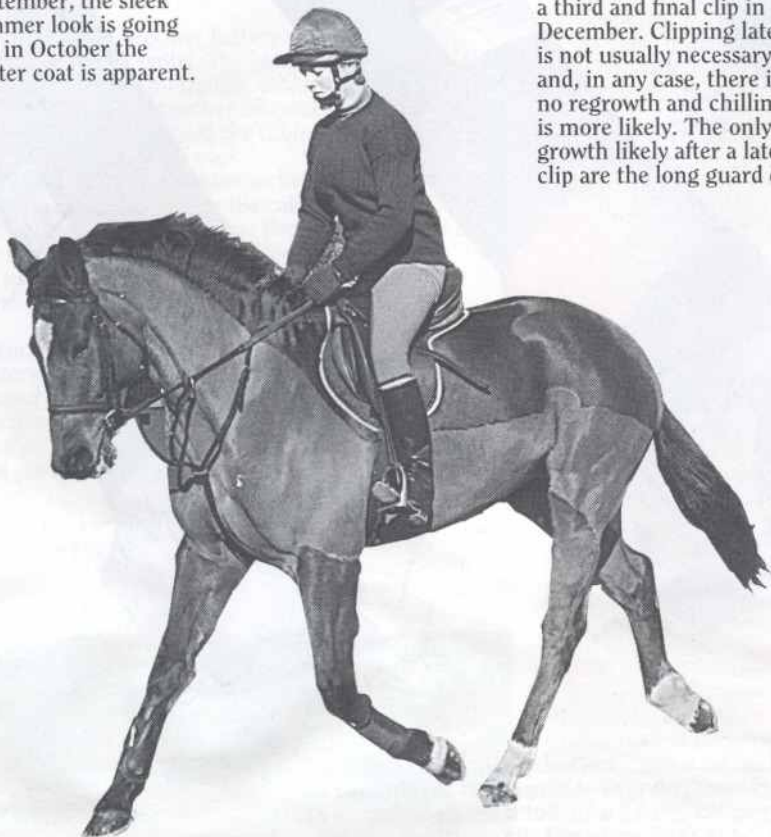
The bulk of the horse's winter coat is dense and insulating. About one in a hundred of these hairs are longer, silkier hairs which shed water and snow.

The long hairs of the feathers act as drain pipes, directing water flowing down the legs away from the vulnerable heels.

The long mane ensures that water runs off the top of the neck. An erect mane is not useful in wet conditions, as rain water will lodge in it and could lead to infection developing and the hair rotting.

WHEN TO CLIP

The winter coat starts to form (in the UK) in the second half of August. In September, the sleek summer look is going and in October the winter coat is apparent.



It continues to grow until the year's end. Generally, the first clip is done in early October, second in November and a third and final clip in December. Clipping later is not usually necessary and, in any case, there is no regrowth and chilling is more likely. The only growth likely after a late clip are the long guard or

cat hairs, which do not offer much warmth but are simply an indicator of a cold horse.

As the winter progresses, you may find you do less riding due to the long nights, short days and poor weather. The second clip may therefore be less extensive than the first one.

WHEN NOT TO CLIP

Never clip a horse which does not need to be clipped. Generally, horses that are not in work don't need clipping. The same goes for young horses too.

The appalling practice of clipping foals for the show ring is an unnecessary abuse which appears to be on the increase. Whilst there

may conceivably be the odd occasion in an exceptionally hot summer when an exceptionally furry foal may be getting overheated and need a little help, there can be no justification whatever in clipping foals right out.

Foals should be kept out as much as possible, on the very best grass available. Their natural coat is their very best protection against cool nights, flies, hot sun and the inevitable knocks which would otherwise injure their fine and tender skin.

Some horses are genuinely terrified of being clipped or so dangerous that they could injure themselves or their handlers. Such horses are better not clipped on safety grounds.

The whole range of Lister clippers, blades and accessories is available from leading equestrian distributors Westgate of Newchurch. Ask your saddler to order from them.

CHOOSING A SET OF CLIPPERS

Clippers can be divided into three main categories:-



● Very powerful machines which go all day but can be heavy and noisy. These are usually designed to shear sheep but can also be used, with a different head, to clip horses and cattle. The Lister Laser is in this category, but is not heavy and noisy to use. It's available in 240 volt option or with a 12 volt motor for working from a car battery.

● Lighter weight, less noisy mains operated machines. This type of clipper had a reputation for getting hot if used a lot, but these days clippers like the Lister Stablemate will clip effortlessly all day.

● Battery operated clippers which are very quiet (and hence good for nervous horses) and useful for awkward places. Full-size battery-operated clippers like the Lister Showman have similar power as mains-operated clippers. The Lister Showman has two power options:

1. A rechargeable power battery which lasts about three hours of clipping. The battery is attached to the waist so there are no trailing cables to keep out of the way of your horse. Another advantage is that the hand you'd usually use to hold the cable is left free to pat the horse or push him over.

2. A vehicle battery or cigar socket cable. Bring a car up close to the horse, clip the cables to the car battery and turn on the clippers. You don't need to leave the car running—you can keep clipping for up to 20 hours, depending of course on battery size and condition, before the battery goes flat!

You can also buy small 'barber' clippers which are battery-operated and used to clip small areas, such as around the head. When deciding on the type of clipper you need, bear in mind who will be using them. A smaller person will find it much easier to use clippers that are not too big and bulky.

NOTE: Don't be misled into thinking that a higher wattage necessarily means more power to clip. The wattage on the clipper purely refers to the amount of electricity used. Some clippers, including the Lister range, are more efficient in their usage of electricity than others and are just as powerful as others with higher wattage values.

CLIPPER BLADES

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BLADES

Clipper blades vary from the more coarse blades (mainly used on cattle and perhaps on horses' legs) to medium and, for a closer clip, fine blades. The teeth on medium and fine blades are quite fragile.

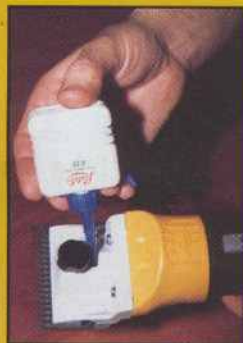
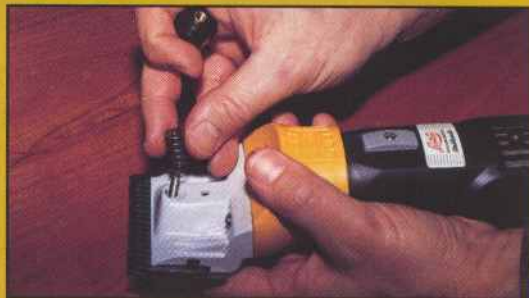
New blades last up to 10 horses, though a lot depends on the horse, its coat, the type of clip and how the machine is used. Always get a clipper specialist to re-grind the blades.

FITTING THE BLADES

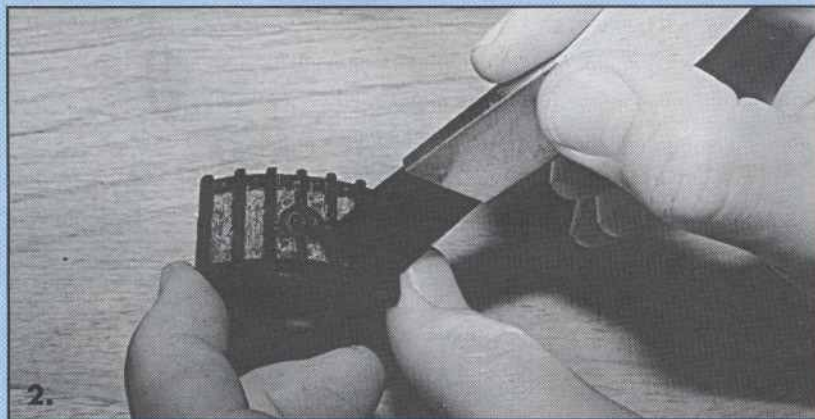
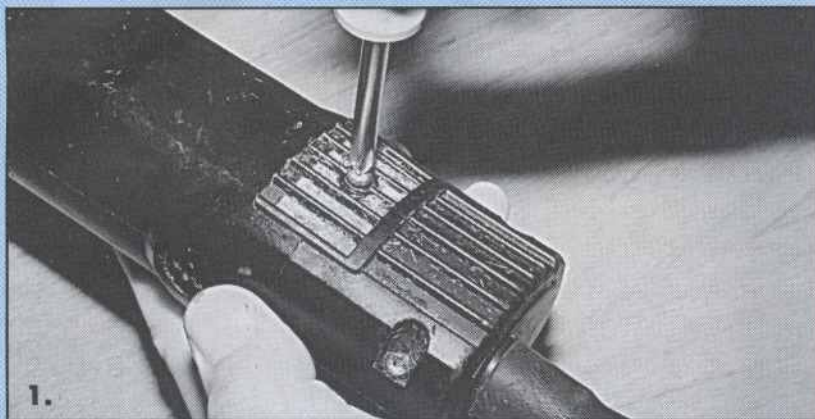
Always follow the supplier's instructions. With Lister clippers, fit the blades and tension the bolt spring and nut. To get the right tension, turn the nut down firmly until it will not go any further. Then turn it back by one-and-a-half turns, using the marker.

Oil the blades well with oil supplied by the manufacturer. N.B. Some aerosols don't work properly because the oil evaporates before it gets in to the blades, and leaves them dry.

Oil liberally between the teeth, the blades at the back and guide blocks at the back. Oil all the other little holes and wipe off any excess from the bottom blade.



CLIPPER CARE



CLIPPER CARE

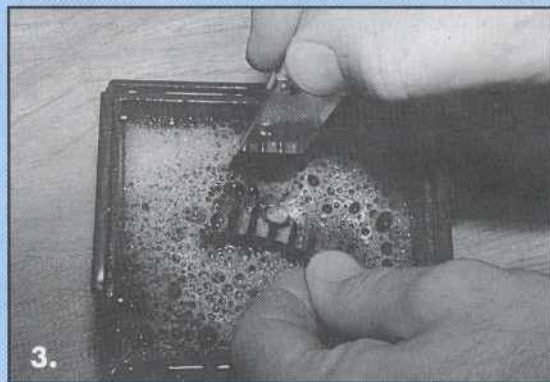
However good the machine, it will only remain effective if properly cared for. At the end of the clipping season, return the clippers to a specialist to check them over and service them. Always store them in a dry place (make sure they're clean!). The blades should be removed and sharpened before being stored in an oily rag.

Each time you clip, inspect the clippers and check that they are in a fit state to be used next time round.

- Give them a general all-over clean-up. Remove the blades and check the teeth are OK. Always have at least one spare pair of blades.

- Check that the cable is not damaged.

- Clean the air filters if fitted. Unscrew them (1), remove and brush both sides to remove the hair (2). (A brush is supplied with Lister clippers). Look through to see that the gauze in the filters is clear. If necessary, wash in detergent (3). Dry and replace.



CLIP HAPPY!

CHOOSING A DAY TO CLIP

Before clipping, the horse should be clean, and you should have suitable rugs ready. Check the clippers and make sure there are spare blades to hand. Clipping on a mild day is kinder than on a cold day. If it is really bitter, forget it! It is just too unkind to clip in such conditions. Never be rushed, so have plenty of time, together with a helper.

WHERE TO CLIP

A large, well-lit stable with a non-slip floor is ideal. Remove all obstructions such as water buckets, haynets and bedding. Most clippers are mains operated, so a power supply is needed and a circuit breaker. Avoid using extension leads if possible but, if unavoidable, remember to unwind all the cable from the reel. Excess cable should be kept well

away from the clipping area. If wires etc can be kept off the floor, so much the better. Sockets in any case should be positioned high on the wall for safety. Use a circuit breaker whenever possible.

CLIPPING CLOTHES

Rubber soled boots or shoes are a good idea. With many clippers, clipped hair gets everywhere, so don't wear anything knitted and cover up as much as possible. A boiler suit is good, or even lightweight waterproofs. Tie long hair back. A hard hat is a sensible precaution. Rubber bands over the wrists of the overalls help stop hair getting up the sleeves. A box of moist

wipes can be used to remove hair and dust from the face.

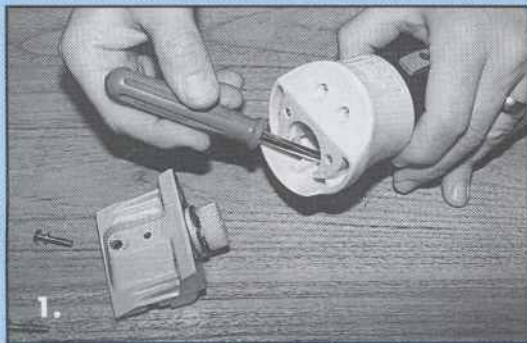
Lister clippers have a special feature—a ventilated clipper head—which ensures clipped hair is kept off your face. It keeps the clipper and blades cool as well as directing cooling air away from your face.

DIFFICULT HORSES

If the horse dislikes being clipped, you have three options:

1. Confine your clipping to areas which the horse will tolerate.
2. Talk to your vet about sedation.
3. Stable at night from mid August and rug from early September to suppress the growth of the winter coat.

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● About once or twice a year, remove the head, clean hair etc from the gears (1) and apply grease (2). It's very important that you use the right type of grease as recommended by the manufacturer. The wrong type can conduct electricity through the clipper to the blades.

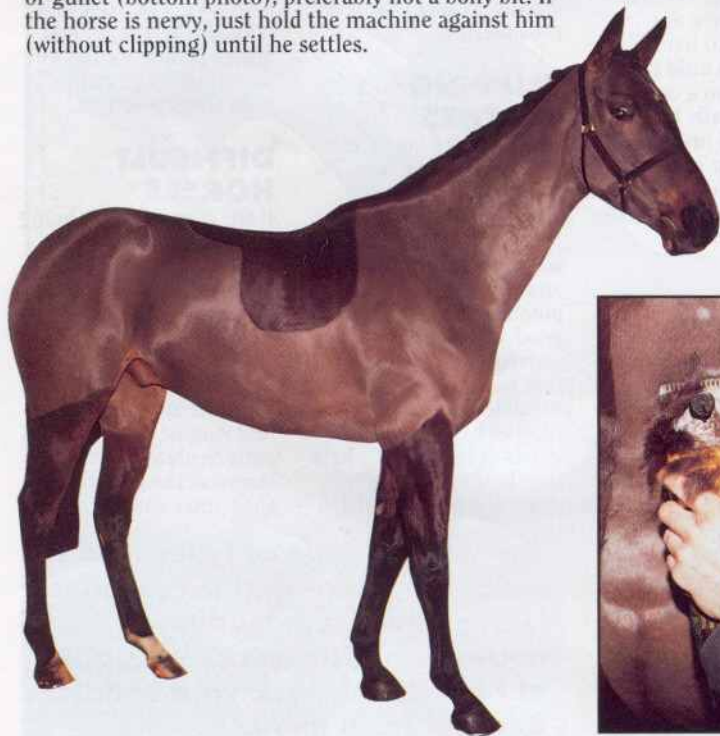
CLIPPING TIPS

It's best to clip when you and the horse are calm. Avoid feed times and turning out time. The horse should be exercised, clean and dry.

Have suitable rugs ready, mark the edges of the clip with a piece of damp saddle soap, a cattle marker or tailor's chalk.

Let the machine run a bit first, to let the horse get used to it. Check the tension, make sure the switches and circuit breaker work. Be firm and confident.

Depending on the clip, start on the shoulder, neck or gullet (bottom photo), preferably not a bony bit. If the horse is nery, just hold the machine against him (without clipping) until he settles.



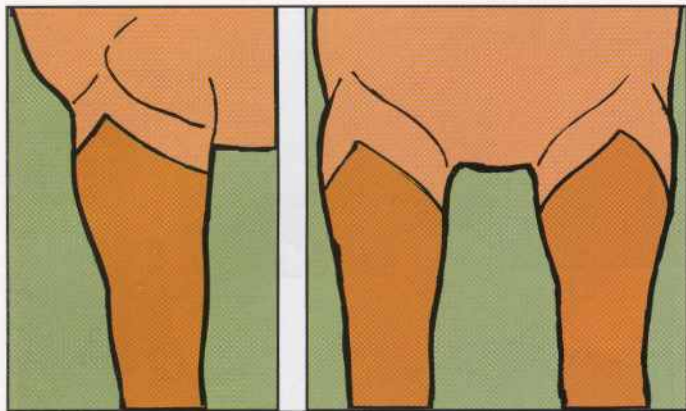
Mark the edges of the clip with a piece of damp saddle soap or chalk.



Clip with firm pressure, against the lie of the coat, keeping the tips of blades against the skin. Go steadily and overlap each run by 50 per cent for a neat finish.

Get the assistant to hold the forelegs forward in order to stretch the skin in the girth area. Don't clip folds or wrinkles—you'll cut the horse.

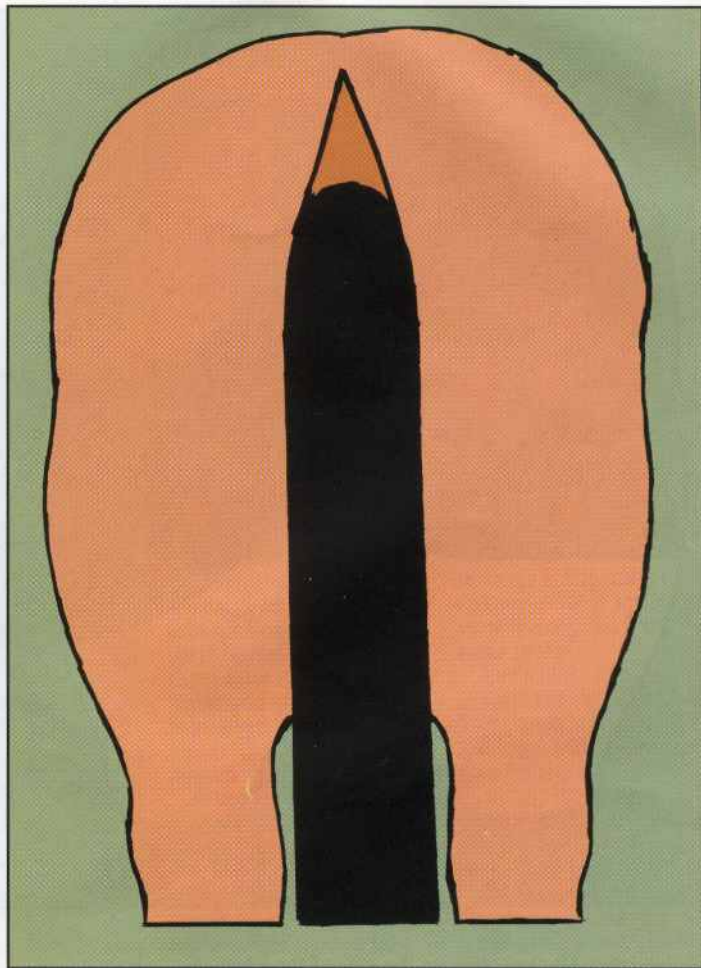
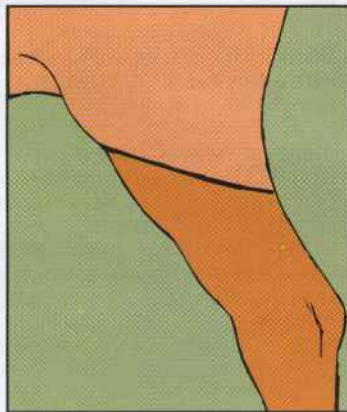
Oil the blades liberally and regularly throughout.

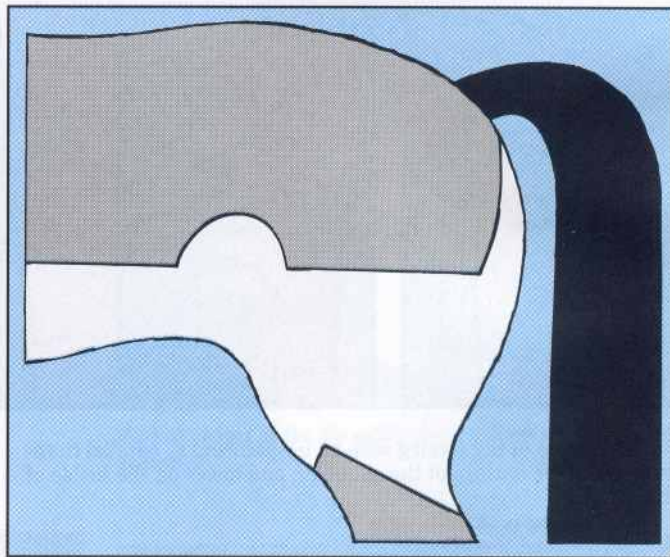
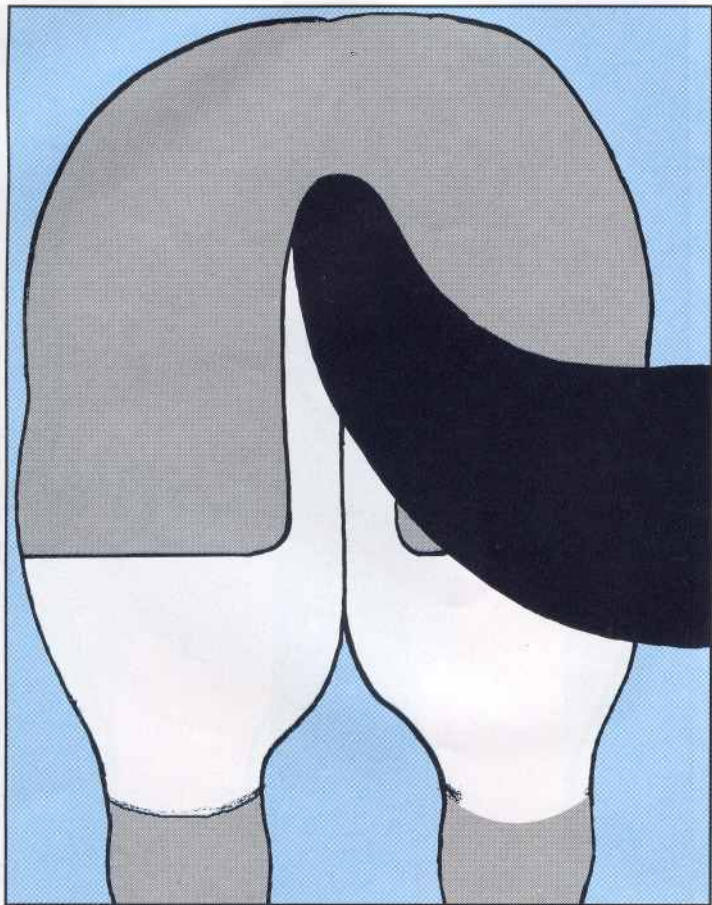


Finish the top of the foreleg with an up-pointing V, parallel to the muscles at the bottom of the shoulder, and lower on the inside of the leg.

The hind leg is similar, with the point facing towards the stifle. The lowest point is half way down the gaskin at the back, right.

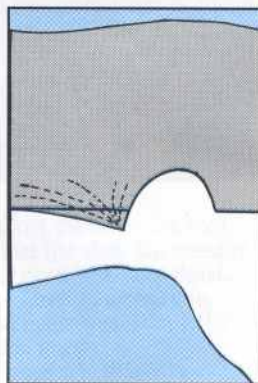
Leave a point over the tail (hunter or full clips only), far right.





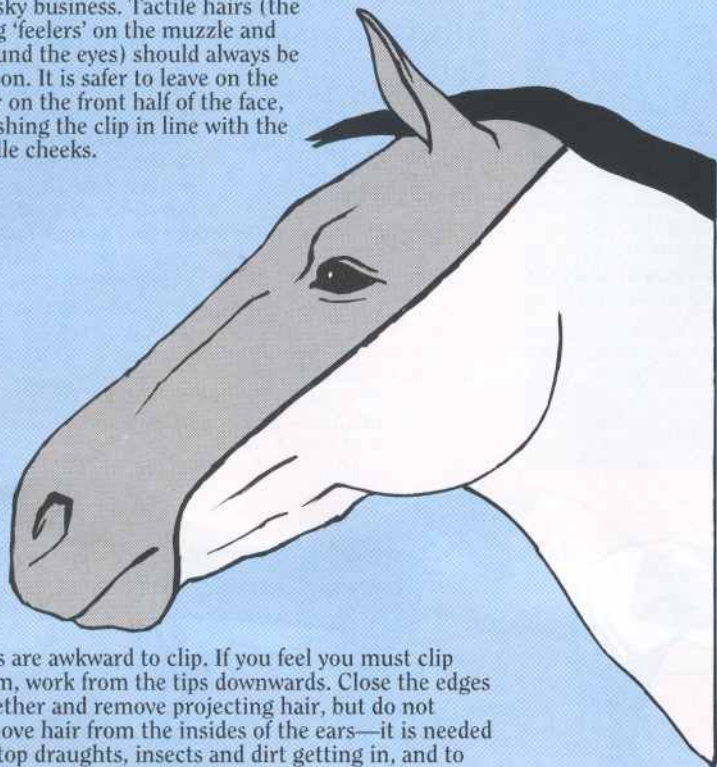
Blanket/chaser/trace clips look better with a curve at the flank where the hair changes direction.

Along the sides of the horse, a straight clip line does not leave the coat in a straight line if the coat is very long. This is because where it changes direction it 'overhangs' the clip—turn the clippers sideways and level this off.



Finish trace/blanket clips up the side of the buttock.

Clipping the horse's head is always a risky business. Tactile hairs (the long 'feelers' on the muzzle and around the eyes) should always be left on. It is safer to leave on the hair on the front half of the face, finishing the clip in line with the bridle cheeks.



Ears are awkward to clip. If you feel you must clip them, work from the tips downwards. Close the edges together and remove projecting hair, but do not remove hair from the insides of the ears—it is needed to stop draughts, insects and dirt getting in, and to wick wax out.

When clipping next to the mane, be very careful not to clip any mane hairs—when they re-grow they will stick up in the air and look very ugly.

OTHER USES FOR CLIPPERS

HOGGING

This is the removal of the mane by clipping. Show cobs and polo ponies are hogged. You can also hog sweet-itch sufferers to make them look tidy after a summer of rubbing their manes. It is sometimes done in such cases in the autumn or winter, should the sufferer be sold, as an attempt dishonestly to disguise the fact that it gets sweet-itch. So, watch out!

Cobby-type animals with very thick, unruly manes can be hogged to smarten their appearance. Some riding schools hog many of their horses to make them look smart at all times and also because it is quicker, and requires less skill, than pulling manes.

A hogged horse may look smart but is denied the protection its mane would afford. It can only be humane to leave the forelock on, as protection against flies around the ears and eyes.

TAIL CLIPPING

Since docking was made illegal heavy horses have their tail hair, or most of it, clipped off.

Unfortunately, this means that the horse has no tail to swish away flies or protect its hindquarters.

Many show ponies and show jumpers have the top part of the tail clipped. This is better, and safer, than pulling the tail of a sensitive horse or pony, and can help a coarse tail to look finer.

HEEL CLIPPING

Very shaggy heels can predispose a horse to greasy heels. In many cases, removal of the feathers is the only answer—but if you show your horse, check the rules first!

For a close clip, go against the lie of the hair. For a more natural look leaving a little more hair, go with the lie of the coat, but it is hard to get an even finish this way! For the neatest and most natural looking finish there is nothing to beat clipping the heels by hand using good, sharp scissors and a comb.

TYPES OF CLIP

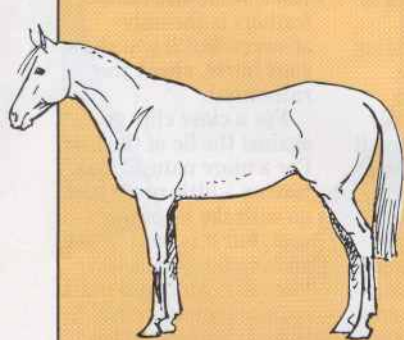
FULL CLIP All the coat is removed from the entire horse, leaving only the mane and tail on. Not recommended and usually only seen on show horses where lines would detract from the appearance or draw attention to the fact that the horse has been clipped.

HUNTER CLIP As the name would suggest, for hunting! The saddle area is left on to reduce the risk of saddle sores, and the legs are left on to protect them from thorns, scratches, mud fever and undue chilling.

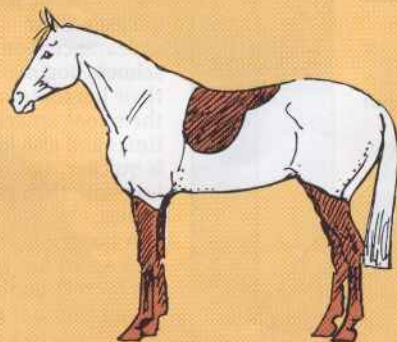
TRACE CLIP OR TRACE HIGH CLIP The hair below the trace line is removed, and from the lower neck and jaw. Very useful clip for horses and ponies left out during the day (a New Zealand rug is usually needed) and doing moderate work.

HUNTER/CHASER CLIP Like a blanket clip, but with the upper part of the neck left on. Sometimes cut higher than the traditional blanket clip.

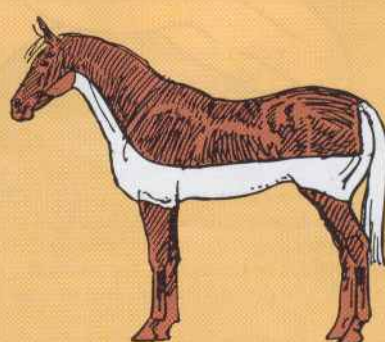
IRISH CLIP The hair in front of a diagonal line from poll to stifle is removed. Useful for the horse that kicks or works harder in front than behind. This clip would not suit purists who demand as much work (and sweat) from the hindquarters as the forehand. Popular with show jumpers.



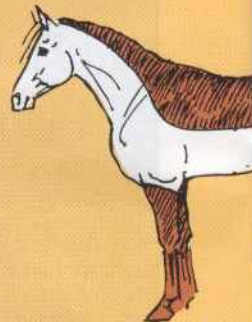
FULL CLIP



HUNTER



TRACE



HUNTER/CHASER

CLIPPING PLANS FOR DIFFERENT HORSES

BLANKET CLIP

Actually, a more appropriate clip for a hunter! The hair is left on the upper half of the trunk protecting the loins and hind quarters and acting as a natural exercise blanket.

BIB CLIP Gullet and chest only are clipped. For horses and ponies in light work and living out.

Every type of clip will include at least the gullet. This allows heat to escape from an area where there is a large blood supply near to the surface. However, major muscles cannot become chilled and the horse will not lose significant amounts of warmth (ie energy) when not working. The bib clip is the equivalent almost of pushing your sleeves up your arms a bit—you keep warm, but let out the excess heat.

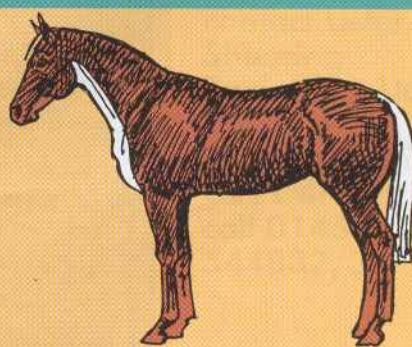
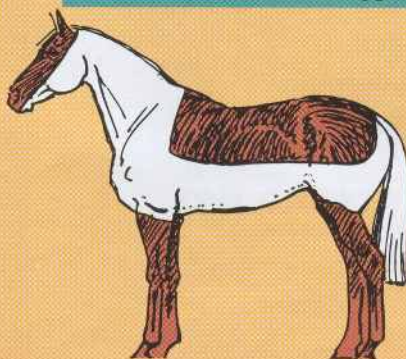
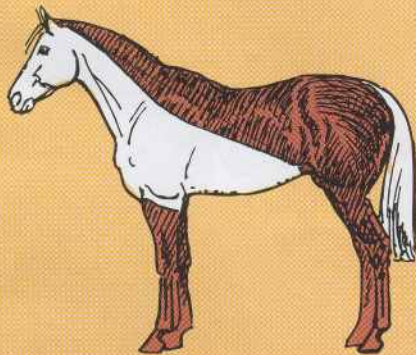
Native type, out all year: an apron clip (like a trace clip, but with hair left on from behind the girth) in early October will prolong the riding season. A bib clip no later than mid November will probably allow some hacking until Christmas time without raising too much sweat. Without any clipping, there may be problems with excessive sweating. This system gives two or three months extra riding.

Hairy horse or cob in regular work: this may be the family's cob or a riding school stalwart. The first clip may well be a full clip with the exception of the saddle area. The second, a trace or blanket clip. Thus, the legs and head are not as horribly hairy as they would be, but nevertheless, the regrowth on the legs offers good protection.

Pleasure horse/riding club type: weekend hacks

and mid-week 'tick overs' do not require a huge amount of clipping. Well-bred types are fine with an apron clip, and less well-bred types with a trace clip.

Hunter, eventer etc: horses in hard, fast work need more clipping, but their vulnerable loins also need protecting from the risks of azoturia. A hunter/chaser clip or a high cut blanket clip is better than the traditional hunter clip.



CHASER

IRISH

BLANKET

BIB

TROUBLE SHOOTING

MACHINE STOPS

1. Check to see if the overload button, if fitted, has popped out. If so, check the clipper over to see if the filter has blocked, the blades are dry or clogged, and correct any problem before pushing the overload button back in with a biro or pointed object, right. If it releases again, take the clippers to a specialist to check.
2. The fuse may have 'blown'. Check clipper over as above before replacing fuse, below.

MOTOR SLOWS DOWN

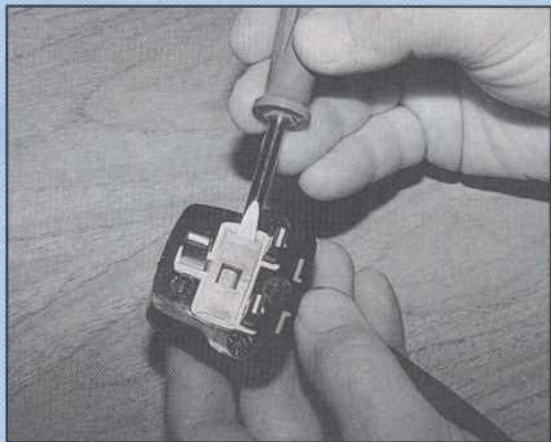
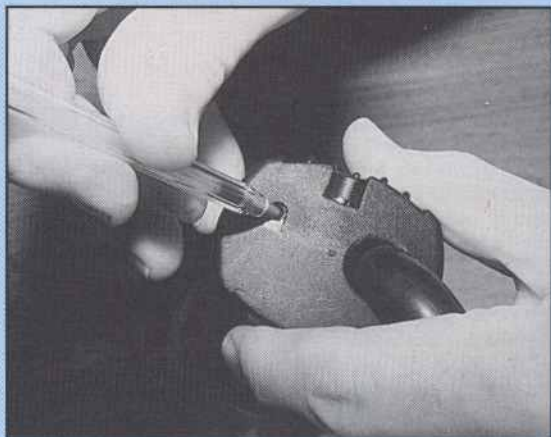
1. Insufficient oil. (Every time you hear the clipper begin to slow down, it's essential that you use more oil as a matter of course.)
2. Blades blunt and need re-grinding.

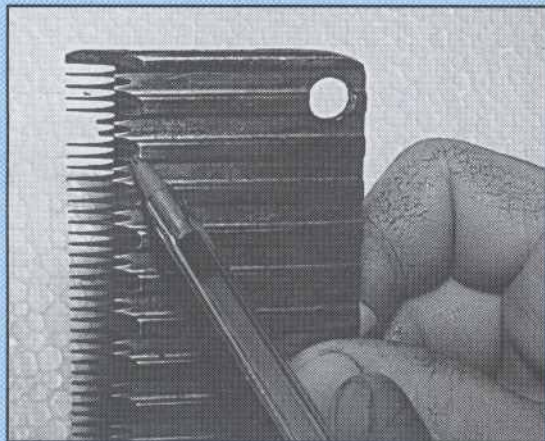
BLADES WON'T CUT

1. Hair between blades. Remove and clean.
2. Blades blunt—replace.
3. Tension too slack—re-tension.
4. Horse damp—try again later.

MACHINE GETTING HOT

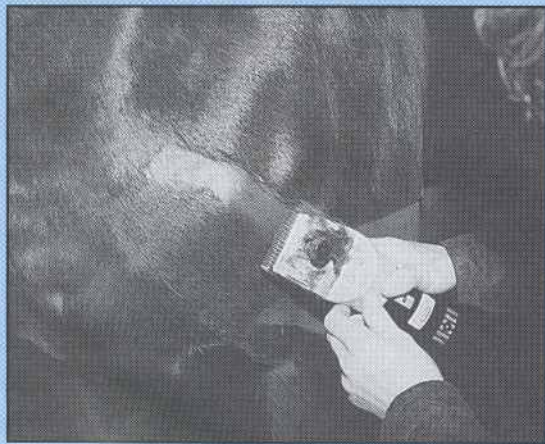
1. Blades too tight—retension.
2. Poor hold—hand is covering vents.
3. Motor needs servicing/greasing.
4. Insufficient oil on blades.
5. Air vents choked with hairs and/or dirt.





LINES SHOWING ON HORSE

1. Uneven pressure on clippers—adjust hold.
2. Tooth missing on one blade, left.
3. Insufficient overlap between one run and the next.
4. Clippers not being used directly against line of hair.
5. Corners of bottom blade are too sharp and scratch the horse which gives the impression of a line. (Lister blades are designed to prevent this from happening.)
6. Blades are too coarse, or design of teeth on bottom blade allows blades to 'ride' over the hair. (The backs of the teeth on Lister blades are thinned down to prevent this problem occurring.)



HORSE LOOKS MOTH-EATEN

1. Uneven pressure.
2. Clipping done in short 'stabs' rather than in long sweeps. Keep tips of bottom blade against skin.
3. Blades getting blunt.
4. Horse was dirty or damp.
5. Blades not being used directly against the line of the hair.

HORSE BLEEDING

1. You should hold loose skin flat and taut.
2. Damaged blade.
3. Take more care!

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For more information on Lister clippers contact Lister Shearing Equipment Ltd, Dursley, Gloucestershire GL11 4HR or call 01453 544832/3.

CLIP WITH CONFIDENCE

WITH



Lister
SHEARING

Use Lister
clippers to be
sure of giving
your horse the
very best clip

possible. Lister clippers have a
whole range of special features
to put them ahead of the rest...

● They're incredibly quiet to use due to their efficient motors and gearbox design. The plastic components used to locate the blades also make Lister clippers less noisy.

● Lister's unique, patented self-clearing blades prevent the problem of blades failing to cut because hairs have become trapped between the blades. Any hair that gets between the blades is immediately swept to the gaps in the top blades.

● Lister clippers stay cool throughout operation. Some models feature a ventilated clipper head which directs cooling air away from the operator's face and keep blades cool.

● They're lightweight and small to hold which makes clipping much easier.

