



TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING HORSES
by
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EQUIPMENT

Film or digital SLR

Telephoto lens - 70 to 200 is ideal

Flash

Small plastic bottle with rocks inside (helpful in posed portraits)

SETTINGS

Start with an iso of 400

I use around F8-F11 to get an adequate depth of field when photographing horses from the front and using a telephoto lens

You may prefer a wider aperture (F5.6) to separate horse from background but you may end up with part of subject out of focus.

When photographing horses in action the emphasis is on shutter speed 500th of a second or faster depending on how fast the horse is moving

You will get a vastly different exposure reading depending on whether the horse has a dark or light coat. So I shoot on manual and take a light reading from grass or the palm of my hand that is in the same light as the horse.

TIPS

Most horses look best photographed in full sun to emphasise the coat colour
You may need to use fill flash to reduce face shadows on both horse and rider
Grey or white horses are okay in shade. Have the sun on the other side of the horse so as not to be affected by dappled light. This means you will face the sun so a lens hood is a good idea.

If photographing dark colored horses in shade a bit of fill flash will add shine to the coat



**MOST IMPORTANT
DO NOT USE A WIDE ANGLE LENS**



WIDE ANGLE MAKES THE HORSE'S HEAD LOOK HUGE AND OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE BODY



THE PREFERRED LENS IS 200mm

This keeps the horse in correct proportion.
If you go for a longer lens you will get the hindquarters too big in relation to the head.



If the legs are spaced equally it looks balanced and the view is slightly to the side rather than front on. As this was a demonstration on posing I wasn't worried about the background. However a clear background is usually better and would avoid the horse's ears disappearing as they have here.



Try to get an image when both ears are forward. It helps to have an assistant make noises or do something to get the horse's attention.



This is much more appealing. If working by myself I will have a small plastic bottle with a few small rocks inside. I can throw them towards the horse. I have the camera ready and click in the brief instance that the ears come forward. The head is nicest when on an angle as demonstrated. Not side on and not front on. A less distracting background would be preferred.



Those ears need to be forward
Unfortunately riding caps and hats shade the rider's face.
Fill flash can help but there will still be some shadow.
Usually show horses are best photographed in full sun
so this is always a problem



Ears forward - much nicer.
A white horse is fine against a darker background



Placing horse and rider in the shade and with their back to the sun has created a pleasing effect and you can clearly see the rider's face. You will be using a wider aperture so may have to decide where to focus. In this image the focus is is on the pony and the child is slightly soft



Back lighting/shade has removed the hat shadow. The shade has made the horse look a dull chestnut. His coat looked gorgeous in the sun but the rider's face was lost in shadow and she would also squint in the bright light.



A little fill flash has added some colour and gloss to the horse's coat. I have also zoomed in a little closer than in the previous image which looks better than having part of the horse's legs showing.



When photographing horses from the side the legs closest to the camera (shown in red) are straight.

The other two legs are slightly inside and usually equally separated as shown here. If the horse stands as he did for the front posed photograph he will look as if he only has two legs instead of four

With some horse breeds (such as Arabians) the hind leg closest to the camera is stretched further back. However with most breeds, such as this quarter horse the balanced look is preferred.

It would be preferred if the reins weren't separated as in this photo



In this photograph the rider has balanced the reins which looks much neater.

She has also tilted the horse's head slightly towards the camera. This horse has a lovely head but a horse with a plainer head will look much better if the head is turned a bit towards the camera



A nice side profile of this horse
If photographing a horse at a show I would tidy the mane
Compare this photograph with the next one to see how much difference
a change of angle makes



If this horse had an ugly head (he doesn't) or a pronounced Roman nose turning his face towards the camera would disguise it and make him much prettier. Note how his face looks wider and shorter in this image as compared to the previous one Ideally I would ask the rider to have the reins hanging the same both sides. Loose or collected is fine but both the same is preferred



You will need a faster shutter speed for action.

Put the camera on continuous focus and half press the shutter as you track the action then press the shutter to capture the decisive moment.

When photographing a trotting horse the legs need to be extended. However if you wait until that moment to click the result will be a horse that looks like he is falling forward. If you click the shutter when the front leg (in red) closest to the camera is bent as in this image you will capture the correct extension of the legs.

Even if the legs are correct I would redo a photo where the tail is messy as here



By following the previous instructions the resulting image will have the front foot in a nice position as here. The tail is also looking good.

Most breeds will have a higher head carriage however the lower head carriage here is normal in western breeds such as the quarter horse. Where possible I would have the horse move around me in a circle. This way they will always be perfectly side on to me. I just wait until they are fully sunlit and then click when the legs are right.



When a horse is cantering or loping you want the hind leg closest to the camera to be under the horse's body as here and the front leg closest to the camera extended out in front. Once again focus track and press the shutter as that closest hind leg comes forward. Don't try and watch the front leg.



This is the horse's leg position where you would press the shutter
However I would wait until the horse has lowered his head and
collected onto the bit



A beautiful collected extended trot with the legs perfectly placed. When the rider is working on the circle you have the front leg closest to the camera extended forward. The other benefit is the rider will be rising to the trot when the other leg is forward and sitting deep in the saddle when you click. The horse is nicely collected and his face is vertical which is perfect.



Now is the time to fine tune what is right and wrong so you can work or the perfect horse in action photo.

Here the horse's legs are great. The rider has a nice straight back. However she is rising to the trot on the wrong lead so is out of the saddle instead of sitting nice and deep. Her hands are placed unevenly and the reins are too loose which has allowed the pony to poke his nose out.



Here the horse's legs are pretty good though the front leg could be extended a little more. The rider is sitting into the saddle which is good but she is leaning too far forward. The reins are collected and even but the pony is just a little over bent (Face inside the vertical)



You can photograph horses jumping from semi front as here or side on.

Maurice has some nice side on examples on his web site.

The ideal position of the front legs, regardless of the jump height, is for them to be collected under the horse's body.

When the jumps are only small as here the horse would be better to still have his hind feet on the ground. This image

was taken a little too late and the front feet are starting to drop.

This also makes the jump look very small and the horse not jumping very high



Here the horse's front legs are up a bit higher than the previous image so he appears to be jumping higher.



Here the pony has been captured at the perfect moment so his legs are nicely tucked. He actually looks as if he is jumping higher than the previous horse even though the jump is lower. Because the jumps are very low the hind legs are still on the ground. When the jumps are higher all 4 feet will be nicely collected I was crouching down when taking this which will also help make the jump look higher than it is.



If photographing more than one horse and/or rider position one horse slightly back so that both can be clearly seen. Naturally the smaller animal should be closest to the camera. Ideally both riders should be looking in the same direction.



A few natural candid showing rapport between horse and rider is always nice