

Learn To

By Katharine Lark

SHAVE

HORSES with heavy coats can be a real problem to dry after being ridden during the winter, especially on milder days when they are more apt to sweat heavily. Some trainers and exhibitors avoid the problem by using blankets and lights to keep winter coats off their show horses.

But horses can also be clipped—either a complete body clip or a trace clip.

The horse shown here was given a complete body clip. And it was actually done last spring because he is 21 years old and had not shed out. He was beginning to suffer in the 80-degree heat, so he got an all-over haircut.

Start with as clean a coat as possible. If you can vacuum, do so. If not, curry and brush him thoroughly. You can bathe him, but he must be dry to clip.

A horse not used to clippers can be eased into the process by rubbing his body with clippers that are not running. If you have small, quiet clippers, use these first to trim his legs.

Stop and cool your clippers whenever they feel hot. Oil the blades and the oil holes every 15 to 30 minutes, and keep the hair brushed out of the clipper head. The air screen should be kept free of hair, and be careful with the blades. Every eight to ten body clips, grease the bearings in the clippers. Be sure to follow the instructions for your particular model.

If you decide to body clip your horse, do it in the first part of winter. Waiting until late winter when his spring coat is starting to come in will give that shiny new hair a dull look. Also keep in mind that if you body clip a horse, he must be kept blanketed and given some type of shelter from bad weather. In truly bitter cold, he may also need a hood and wraps on his legs. If you don't

Here's how to body-clip your furry horse.

want to give your horse a complete body clip, you can give him a trace clip, removing the winter hair from the areas that sweat the most. You do not clip the top of the neck, the back, loins, or legs. Work from his haunches toward his head.

To do the trace clip, mark off your top perimeter with masking tape so you will not shave too high. Then clip the hair from above each leg up to your tape line, holding the big clippers flat and parallel against the horse's skin, moving *against* the direction the hair grows. Clip in long, smooth sweeps that follow the contours of the body, and clip against the direction of hair growth.

When you have the sweaty areas shaved, you can remove most of the thick hair from the face with the big clippers, then use smaller, fine ones to trim around ears, eyes, etc.

Always tie your horse to a solid object with a quick-release knot. Clip in dry weather on dry ground and stay

aware of your electrical cords, keeping them clear of the horse's legs. Braid his tail, then tie it up out of the way. When you are clipping around the top of his tail, leave some body hair in a V shape; this will keep you from clipping into the tail. When working on his neck, have someone hold his mane out of the clipper path.

With a coat as thick and coarse as Snookie's, you may need to make a first pass in the direction of hair growth to strip off some of the coat, especially on awkward places such as legs, then clip it close and properly a second time.

Touch your horse's body with your free hand between the areas being shaved and his head to reassure him and to steady yourself in case he moves. As your clippers remove hair, creating tufts of loose fluff, you have to rely on feel to follow the contours of his body.

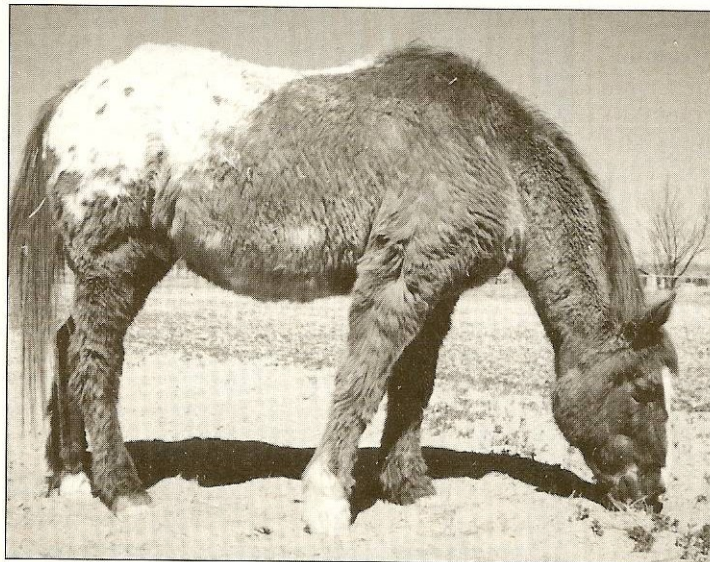
Be very patient. Take lots of breaks to reward your horse and to rest your arm. Walk him around if he is restless. If he is overly concerned about the process, give him a big net of hay to munch on while you shave him.

As the pile of shorn coat at your feet grows, remember that hair is slippery; move carefully. You may want to rake it out of the way occasionally, or move the horse to a new area.

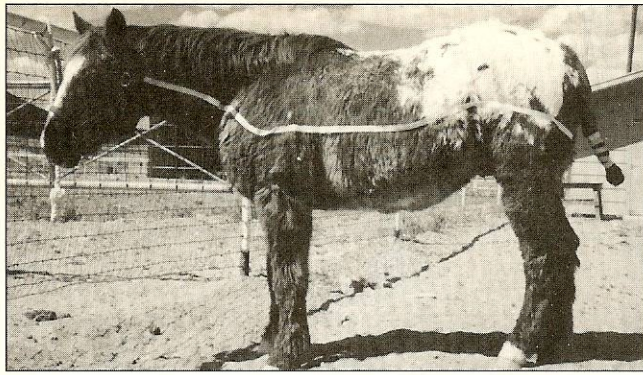
Finish tricky areas with small clippers. The legs below knees and hocks, the elbow area, the inside flank and sheath areas can all be difficult.

With a very hairy horse, you may have to make a last pass over him—maybe a day or two later—to take away the obvious clipper marks and missed tufts. Again, clip against the direction of growth.

Be bold. If you push forward and commit yourself, the job will look smooth. If you are uncer-

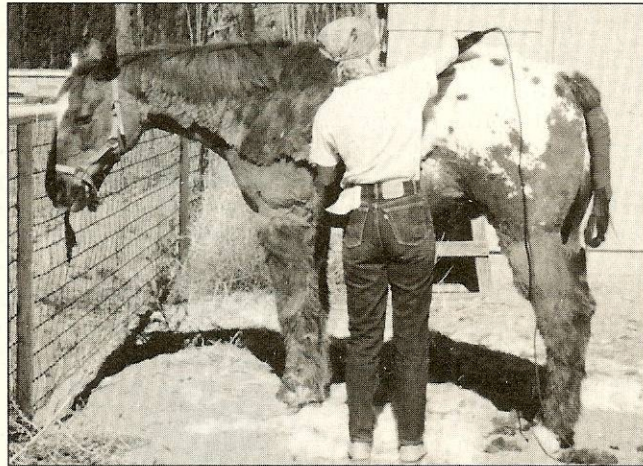
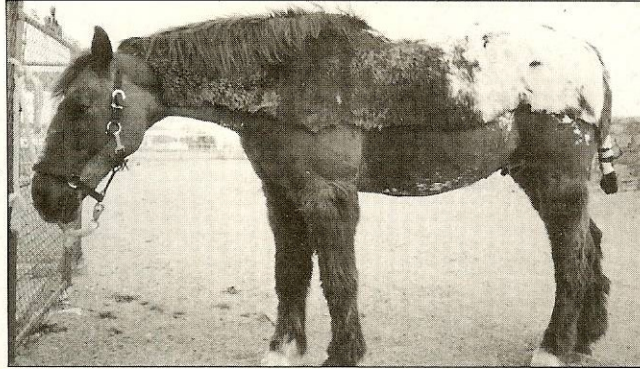


Under the fur coat is a gelding registered as Breath Of Snow.



The masking tape defines the top of the trace clip.

A completed trace clip, sometimes called a hunter clip.



Always be aware of the cord, keeping it clear of the horse's legs.

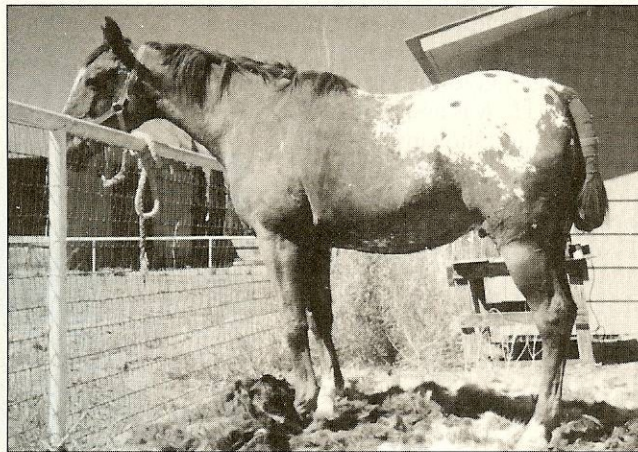
Compare this to the starting picture.

tain and chop at the hair, it will look choppy.

After clipping, brush your horse thoroughly (and now, easily) with a soft brush. Wash his tail and condition it, trimming if needed. Give him a few days of rest after a full body clip.

The haircut was a relief for Snookie. He was cooler, happier, and as the pictures show, fitter than he had appeared to be under his fur coat.

Katharine Lark has owned and ridden horses for more than 30 years.



In addition to writing about horses, she's also taught riding and judged horse shows. She now teaches dressage principles to riders in many disciplines and conducts clinics on communication and horsemanship. Katharine lives in Organ, New Mexico. 🐾