

10 Tips for Photographing Your Horse for Sale

By Laura Cotterman, LearnToTakePhotos.com



Having great photos is essential when you are selling your horse. The first impression a potential buyer gets when they look at your ad is your photos. At this point they are making a quick judgment if they are interested enough to contact you so you want to make your horse as appealing as possible.

Here are some tips to get some great photos for your sales ad.

1. Take your pictures when the light is flattering. The best time of day to take pictures is late afternoon about 2 or 3 hours before sunset. The sun is at a lower angle then and the light will be much more flattering. Avoid harsh midday light, it will make your horse's top line look bad and cast ugly shadows on the neck. Morning light is also very nice but tends to change more quickly.

Keep the sun at your back. You want the light falling on the side of the horse.

If the skies are very dark and gray and you can't see your own shadow at all, it is not a good day for photos. Partly cloudy or light overcast days when you can still see your shadow are great for photos too.

2. Groom your horse. Giving the horse a good grooming makes a world of difference. Make sure you take the time to brush out mane, tail and forelock. You don't have to go for show ring clean but there should be no mud or tangles.

3. Have your rider or handler dress appropriately. The rider's appearance matters just as much as the horse. Schooling attire is fine but your rider should be neat and tidy overall.

4. Horses look best shot with long focal lengths. Wide angle lenses distort things by making objects nearest to the camera look bigger and objects farther from the camera look smaller. If you take a picture of a horse from the front with a wide angle lens he will have a great big nose and tiny hindquarters. Most

point and shoot cameras are not going to work for shooting a horse from the front angle. You can take a good photo from the side of the horse but you will have to be careful to stay perpendicular to the horse to avoid distortion. If you have a telephoto zoom lens use the long end of the range. 200mm - 300mm is great if you have it. This means you should physically back up and then zoom in with your lens.

5. Use the right camera settings. Put your camera on Shutter Priority exposure mode. Set your shutter speed to 1/1000. Set your ISO to 400. You will be amazed how much this one simple thing will improve your photos. Using a fast enough shutter speed will give you nice sharp action pictures and eliminate camera shake and motion blur problems. These settings will work great for the bright afternoon light you will be shooting in.

6. Fill the frame with your subject. Your horse should be taking up at least 50% of the photo. You can always fine tune your photos with a little cropping but you don't want your subject to be a small percentage of the picture. You might have to simply walk closer to fill the frame if you have already zoomed to the long end of your telephoto lens.



7. Take your conformation shot first. The horse will be newly groomed and won't have any sweaty saddle marks. Horses also tend to hold themselves a little better and show more presence when they are fresh than after they have finished working. You can take your conformation shots in a show halter or a bridle whichever you prefer but make sure your tack is clean, fits well and has all the tabs tucked in the keepers. **Don't use your everyday stable halter.**

Find a flat spot in front of an uncluttered background. Sometimes the driveway in front of the barn can work well. Stand the horse about 30' or more in front of the background. Try to find a background that compliments your horse. A dark colored horse will disappear against a dark background.



For sporthorses and Quarter horses you want the horse to stand in what is called an open stance. That means the two legs closest to the camera are slightly more open than the two on the opposite side. This stance gives the buyer a view of all 4 legs. Show hunters typically stand with the two front legs even and the hind legs offset slightly, as pictured above.

This is where having an experienced handler is going to come in very handy.

You want the horse to look slightly towards the camera so have a second helper stand on your side of the horse to get the horse's attention.

8. Always shoot from the horse or pony's level.

This means for a conformation shot from the side your camera should be at mid-barrel height. You might have to crouch, bend or kneel to get to the right height. Shooting from a higher angle will make your horse look small and short legged.

When you are shooting a head shot or portrait you should shoot from the horse's eye level. You will want to focus on the nearest eye for a portrait.



9. Take a good trot shot. One of the first questions every potential buyer asks is "Is he a good mover?" To take a good trot shot under saddle or in hand you will stand in the middle of the long side of the ring. Watch the inside front leg. When the inside front leg swings forward, take a picture. You will be able to

take 3 or 4 pictures as the horse travels down the long side of the ring. Don't forget to keep the sun shining over your shoulder. You will need to practice your timing to get the exact moment of the stride you want. For sporthorses, that is typically when the inside front leg is fully extended or just a tiny fraction before. In a sporthorse trot shot you should see the legs form an upside down W. You don't want any photos with legs straight up and down or where the horse is heavy on the front end. Take lots of trot shots and look at the back of your camera to check your timing.



One more little tip is to **make sure your rider is showing, not training**, the horse while you are shooting. You want pleasant expressions and attitudes in your sales photos. Have a little chat with your rider before you get started to make sure everyone is on the same page.

10. Be patient. A little planning and preparation will help your photo shoot go smoothly. Schedule a time when you won't be rushed or stressed.

Great sales photos will help you make that all important first impression and get the phone to ring so you have an opportunity to show your horse to more potential buyers.

About Learn To Take Photos

Learn To Take Photos is an online photography school taught by well known horse photographers Christina Handley and Laura Cotterman. Students learn photography, get to know new people and share ideas in a fun, encouraging and supportive environment.

Learn to Take Photos offers series of courses covering horse photography topics. Students learn how to take pro quality photos using the same tips and techniques that the pros use. Students learn which settings to use and when to use them, all explained in easy to understand plain language.

Free short courses are offered each session for new students.

Go to www.learntotakephotos.com for the courses and available coupons.