



Before you think about clipping your horse you need to establish why and ultimately what sort of clip you need to give your horse. Clipping ensures your horse remains healthy and comfortable. Make sure you know when you should start clipping your horse and continue to maintain his clip for the correct period of time.

Should I consider clipping or trimming?

If your horse gets too hot during exercise, is overheating or is in danger of becoming chilled while waiting to dry in cold weather you should definitely consider clipping. Some horses and ponies will grow very heavy coats all year round and after the smallest amount of work will break out into a sweat - having a heavy coat then makes it incredibly difficult for them to dry out quickly, clipping these sort of horses or ponies is a must.

Reasons for clipping (with clippers):

- For quick drying after exercise.
- So your horse can be exercised rigorously without being uncomfortable.
- To maintain good condition by avoiding excessive sweating.
- Makes grooming easier.
- Maintains a smart looking horse.

If, however, clipping is not necessary, then regular trimming (with scissors) of your horse's head, muzzle, ears and legs will be sufficient.

When should I clip my horse?

September is usually a good time to start thinking about clipping your horse if he has not been clipped during the summer months. Some horses are clipped all year round if they are competing. Older horses are also clipped in the summer months as some do not lose their winter coat properly. Excessive coat growth or retention of the coat during the summer in older animals, especially ponies, should be brought to the attention of your vet, as this may be an indication of certain problems. If you only clip your horse during the winter months, you should do the last clip of the year no later than the first couple of weeks in January when your horse will start to grow his new summer coat.

What sort of clip should I consider for my horse?

Your choice of clip depends on the type of work your horse will be doing over the winter period, taking into account how much he usually sweats. The various clips include the following:

Trace clip

There are two types, the high and the low trace. This clip allows horses and ponies to be exercised without getting too hot. It also allows them to continue being turned-out in the winter. The coat is removed from the belly and up the underside of the neck. Hair is left on the head, the topside of the neck, body and legs for warmth and protection. For a low trace only a small section of hair is removed from the belly and neck. A high trace takes more hair from these areas going further up the horse's flank.

Blanket clip

This type of clip would suit a horse that has regular exercise, is turned-out in the field and does various events at the weekends. The coat is removed completely from the head, neck and flanks, leaving only an area of hair that looks like an exercise sheet over the back and hind-quarters and on the legs. The hair on the legs is left mainly for warmth and protection .

Hunter clip

Used mainly for horses in heavy work, such as hunters. The clip is similar to the blanket except the hair over the hind-quarters is removed leaving only a patch in the saddle area. Again, the leg hair remains for warmth and protection.



Full clip

This is usually given to competition horses that compete in the winter months. The whole of the coat is removed, including body, legs and head. This clip looks very smart but does require careful stable management. Horses with a full clip need to be rugged up at all times and may need to wear stable bandages in very cold weather.

How do I go about clipping my horse for the first time?

Introduce your horse to clippers very carefully. Show them to your horse when they are turned off, rub them over the horses body - talk to your horse all the time in a calming voice, you could also let him have some of his favourite food while you are doing this. Not only will this take his mind off the clippers but he will associate them with good things.

Once you feel confident, turn the clippers on and let your horse become accustomed to the noise they make before you start clipping him. If you have bought a new pair of clippers, they probably won't be that noisy anyway, not like older models.

Make sure you keep your clippers in good condition, oil them regularly and keep the blades sharp. If the clippers are constantly pulling at your horses hair, it will be a much more stressful ordeal for him.

Where do I start?

If you follow these steps you shouldn't have any problems:

- First of all you need to purchase a good quality pair of clippers. There are many different types available depending on the job you need them for.
- Give your horse a bath if he is particularly dirty, if this is not necessary make sure he is groomed thoroughly, getting rid of any dirt and sweat that might clog up the clippers.
- Have a rug ready to put on your horse as you clip him, he will soon notice the difference!
- Have someone on hand to hold your horse and comfort him if he becomes agitated.
- Using chalk to outline the area you are going to clip, particularly if you have not clipped a horse before.
- While clipping the body, the clippers must run flat over the coat, don't use too much pressure otherwise you will create lines known as 'tram-lines'.
- On the other hand, when clipping the legs and face you will need to clip against the hair as it is shorter than the rest of the hair on the horse's body.
- It is probably best to start from the top of the neck and head and then work your way along the rest of the body. You will probably end up creating your own method of clipping which better suits both you and your horse, creating the least amount of stress possible.
- Be firm, but gentle when working around the head. It is probably best to use a pair of finishing trimmers (they make less noise).
- When you have finished, make sure that your horse is rugged up according to what sort of clip you have given him, apply stable bandages if necessary and give him a well deserved treat!
- If all else fails, get an expert to do it for you. It won't cost you very much and it could cut out a lot of stress for both you and your horse.

Problems:

- Some horses/ponies are not happy about being clipped in general or in specific areas, ie head, around ears, under belly. Some can be physically restrained to allow clipping to be carried out, ie bridle, firm handling, twitch, etc, whilst others may require sedation by your vet to allow clipping to be carried out effectively and safely. Consult your vet regarding the various drugs and dosages that are available.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your horse please contact Hampden Veterinary Hospital on 01296 423666 and we will be happy to advise you.