



## How to Prepare your mane

Kaitlyn McAleese

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Mane pulling and trimming falls under the category of things most equestrians think they know how to do, while few execute really well. As a braider, a poorly pulled mane is a waste of precious time, either to fix the mane before I can even start, or in the extra time it takes to try and put beautiful braids in an incorrectly prepared mane. Either way, it is not a great way to make friends with your braider and is a detriment to the final product. Similarly, as a show jumping groom, poor trimming skills spells either bringing your horse to the ring with sloppy braids or an unkept looking mane that detracts from the overall picture of your horse. All manes should be trimmed neatly and evenly and trained to lay flat against the neck at all times. Making mane maintenance a priority in your grooming regime speaks volumes of a meticulous care program and sets a tone of professionalism that ultimately makes horses and riders look like winners.

Although a properly trimmed mane will be able to travel between the hunter and jumper rings, there are a few differences in how I typically maintain manes in each of these disciplines. As a cardinal rule, scissors should never touch a hunter's mane, no exceptions. Blunt cut ends make for loose braids that are harder for the braider to pull through and tie-up, not to mention being difficult to train to lie flat when unbraided. Even a thin mane is much better off being trimmed with a large body clipping blade which allows for trimming without thinning when necessary, without the unnatural finish you would get with scissors even if you are holding them perpendicular to the crest.

For hunter mane, a horse with normal to thick hair will need to be pulled first. When I pull manes, I much prefer the wide plastic tail combs to the small metal ones because they are easier on my hands and allow me to pull hair over a wider area. Approaching an area of mane about the width of your hand, separate the longest pieces of hair by running your hand down the length of the hair until only the longest pieces remain. This should not be very much hair. Pulling out large chunks, especially over a small area makes the horse hate having its mane pulled, will lead to uneven thickness, will often result in too much length being taken, and will make an even worse mess when the hair starts to grow back and you have large patches of short unbraidable hair on the underside of the mane to deal with. I tease the hair only enough to get my comb 2 or 3 inches up the length of the hair I am going to pull and I never wrap the hair around the comb. I find that doing so teaches the difficult ones to anticipate the hair being pulled and makes them resist even more. Simply press down on the comb until the hair releases. You should not be violently yanking or having to use very much strength at all. Again, doing so just teaches horses to hate having their mane pulled. It also results in broken hair, rather than hair that has been pulled out at the root, which will make a thick mane even more unmanageable. Once you have removed the hair from your first section, move on to another section. Pulling the hair to the desired length and thickness in one spot at a time, means that if the horse decides it has had enough for the day you have a mane that looks unmistakably unfinished and completely unbraidable. Instead, keep moving across the length of the neck until the entire mane is finished. Hunter manes should be pitched so that the mane is shortest in the middle of the crest, and



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slightly longer towards the ears and withers. Doing so creates the image of a rounder, longer neck which will be visible when the mane is braided as well. For many hunters, pulling is the only step necessary to prepare the mane.

If you find that after pulling the mane to desired thickness, the hair is still too long or you haven't achieved a clean bottom line, you can finish the mane with a large body clipping blade. I do all jumper manes in this fashion, as well as the manes that are too thin to pull in the first place. Using the fine comb blade, tease the hair up exactly the same way as if you were about to pull the mane. Then, press down on the blade to trim the hair. Trimming the hair shorter will thin the mane a bit, but you will still need to go back through the mane an extra time at the end to straighten the bottom line. This is a super method for jumper manes because you can get the mane very straight and even while also thinning it enough to make it suitable for braiding and without having the hair fall in unnatural clumps like it does when using scissors. Pitching a jumper mane like a hunter mane with the top and bottom being slightly longer will create the same effect of a rounder neck, however I usually prefer jumper manes to be 2 to 3 inches longer than a hunter mane. An average hunter mane should be about the length of your hand, if your hand is sitting with your fingers parallel to the crest. A very thick mane can be up to two inches longer than that and a very thin mane can be up to two inches shorter than that, for braiding purposes.

Finally, after preparing your mane beautifully for your braider or for going straight to the show ring you want it to lay flat. Combing the mane every day and wetting it over with a stiff brush before and after riding is a super habit that is conducive to beautiful manes. Furthermore, learning to do effective training braids is the ideal next step. This practice combined with skillful trimming will result in beautifully turned out horses and happy braiders.

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