

Hype vs. Reputation in the Photo-Show Horse

This month we delve deep into the depths of the human psyche! Grab your flashlights, fellow brain-surgeons, as we explore the question... does hype influence a model horse's showing in the photo show ring?

Behold Subject A: a model horse named "Nine Across"—an extensively remade, repainted, and haired stallion, and a rather costly specimen at that. Does Nine Across know or care about his purchase price or who created him? No. Is he eager to get into the showing? Again, no. He is a sculpted synthesis of Tenite plastic, paint, epoxy, metal, and mohair. As an inanimate object, he cannot think or reason. But neither can he eat, defecate, run up vet bills or someday become dog meat—and isn't that a relief!

Now here's Subject B: the owner of Nine Across, one Tori Tanbark. She at last has the model horse of her dreams, and can't help hoping that Nine Across will take the model showing world by storm!

At this point, anything could happen in the quest for showing success, but let's steer our scenario down the two paths most often followed by model showman. The first is to just plain start showing the horse, and we'll look at that later. The second is much more exciting—the time-honored American tradition of the media blitz!

A Heapin' Helping of Hype

"He's Here!" announces an ad in a hobby publication, as Nine Across heads to the wars in his first show. He brings home a championship, spurring another ad: "Champion in his first show!" Stud ads follow, and the horse's name and likeness become well-known—in large part from the ads, with some help from his showing campaign. Photo show-holders receive entries from Tori Tanbark, and instantly know to expect Nine Across. This media-hyped notoriety adds even more momentum to his show career, and Nine Across has become, both in deed and in the minds of ad readers, a Big Name Horse.

This is a huge thrill for Tori, her dream come true for her favorite horse. She advertises and shows off Nine Across because she's so proud of him, and he's justifying all the hype by competing undeniably well. And, as with any horse in the public eye Nine Across is gaining—on a pumped-up scale—admirers and detractors.

When a "Big Name Horse" arrives at a photo show, many judges can't help but be curious to see what he looks like in full color. Some photo-show judges feel flattered to have well-known models attend their shows. And for entrants, the name of a break-out-the-band Big Name horse popping up in show results can bring sighs of resignation, smoldering resentment, nods of respect, or whoops of joy at having an entry place ahead of the notorious equine.

Have you ever sat down to judge a photo show with a number of "Big Name Horses" competing, and felt your spine tingle as you wonder how this "Clash Of The Titans" will come out?

Did that tingle ever turn to a chill when, in the course of judging a four legged Tenite celebrity, you noticed a serious conformational flaw that had been camouflaged by a superb paint

job or careful photography? Did you dread placing the horse lower, and search for any out to lessen its flaw in your mind? Or was your reaction one of vicious glee ("Ah-ha! Gotcha!!")?

Such is the double-edged sword of hype. Some admirers may hand Nine Across wins on a silver platter, even though he may have a leg put on sideways. Some detractors won't look twice at him although he may be the very picture of perfection, because they're just plain sick of seeing his name everywhere. And some judges will remain impartial, although in the face of hype this requires some real willpower and effort.

Now let's carry the Nine Across case one step further—one step too far, but a step that showers sometimes take. Nine Across' photo arrives at a show, with some of his major past wins listed on the back of the photo. This is not a paid advertisement in a publication—this is in the midst of actual competition. The judge is treated to an overview of how a few other judges have placed the horse and is challenged to go with "the popular choice."

But contrary to Tori's expectations, the list of winnings may well prompt the judge to scrutinize her horse a bit more closely than usual. And if Nine Across can stand up to it, that judge will most likely remember him as a nice enough horse that was saddled with a rather unsportsmanlike owner.

The "Old-Fashioned" Way?

Now let's rewind back to the beginning, and follow Nine Across and his eager owner down the no-frills route. No paid advertising this time, although Tori just can't help the occasional, excited "I got him, and he's really neat!" comment to model-showing friends.

So off goes Nine Across to his first show, and happens to meet up with an accomplished veteran of the same breed. The judge knows the veteran well—perhaps the horse has been hyped, or maybe the judge is familiar with him by seeing his name (and possibly photocopied likeness in scores of show results. But now, out of the blue, comes a challenger that the judge has never heard of before. The competitors line up, and as the class narrows, the decision for the blue comes down to those two—the veteran horse and Nine Across.

This is the first and one of the most formidable hurdles that Nine Across will ever face. Does the judge go with the familiar name, or with the newcomer? With the model that many judges have already lauded as a superior horse, or with the model that few people even knew existed until now? Is the judge malleable enough to worry about possible showers reactions ("Who the heck is this 'Nine Across'? My horse shoulda won! What a rip-off!)? Or does the judge ignore all those pesky trivialities and proceed with deciding which is the better horse to the best of their knowledge of conformation, breed standards, and sex type?

The judge gives the nod to Nine Across. Perhaps his win in this class is a springboard to a championship, or maybe he finishes with the single victory; at any rate, a win is a win, and he's begun his career in fine style! Entrants and their friends scan the show results, scratch their heads, and shrug. "Must be a new one... must

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