



UNITED
SADDLEBRED
ASSOCIATION

HOW, WHAT AND WHY TO DO THINGS WITH
YOUR AMERICAN SADDLEBRED. PART 2.

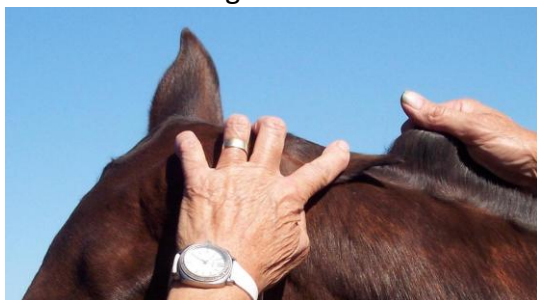


HOW TO ... TRIM AND BRAID THE BRIDLE PATH

The first question to answer is why do we trim and braid our Saddlebreds? Nowhere in the rule book (any rule book) will you read that your horse **MUST** be trimmed and braided, however some rule books will have rules **AGAINST** trimming and braiding – so read them carefully. (For example you cannot show your hunter or western horse with braids). Back in the depths of history, Saddlebreds were shown with their forelocks and the first part of their manes plaited (and left down, not rolled like we do with our riding horses and hunters). The purpose of this was simply to keep their hair from interfering with the double bridle. This subsequently developed into the bridle path being trimmed to make it easier to get the bridle on and off. As shows developed there was a natural competition between horse owners, who soon found ways to adorn their “peacocks of the show ring” – and mane and forelock braiding were introduced. Any colour is acceptable and traditionally reds and maroons dominate in the American show ring. In Australia they have a registry system where barns register their barn colours – and these are the colours their Saddlebreds show under – presumably other barns are not allowed to use their competitors’ colours.

There are different ways of trimming the bridle path of the American Saddlebred Horse – one involves leaving the forelock alone, the other involves thinning the forelock (by trimming the sides off) or removing it completely. Before you decide which suits you best, think about how your horse lives (does he live out most the time and so would benefit from a forelock to keep the flies out of his eyes?) and what else you do with him apart from showing in Saddlebred classes (if you show in other classes, say coloured classes, some of them may have stipulations about whether he can be shown with or without a forelock). Obviously once the hair has been trimmed off, you have to wait till it grows back if you have made a mistake or change your mind.

Correct length for bridle path –
the length of the ear.



Bridle path too long

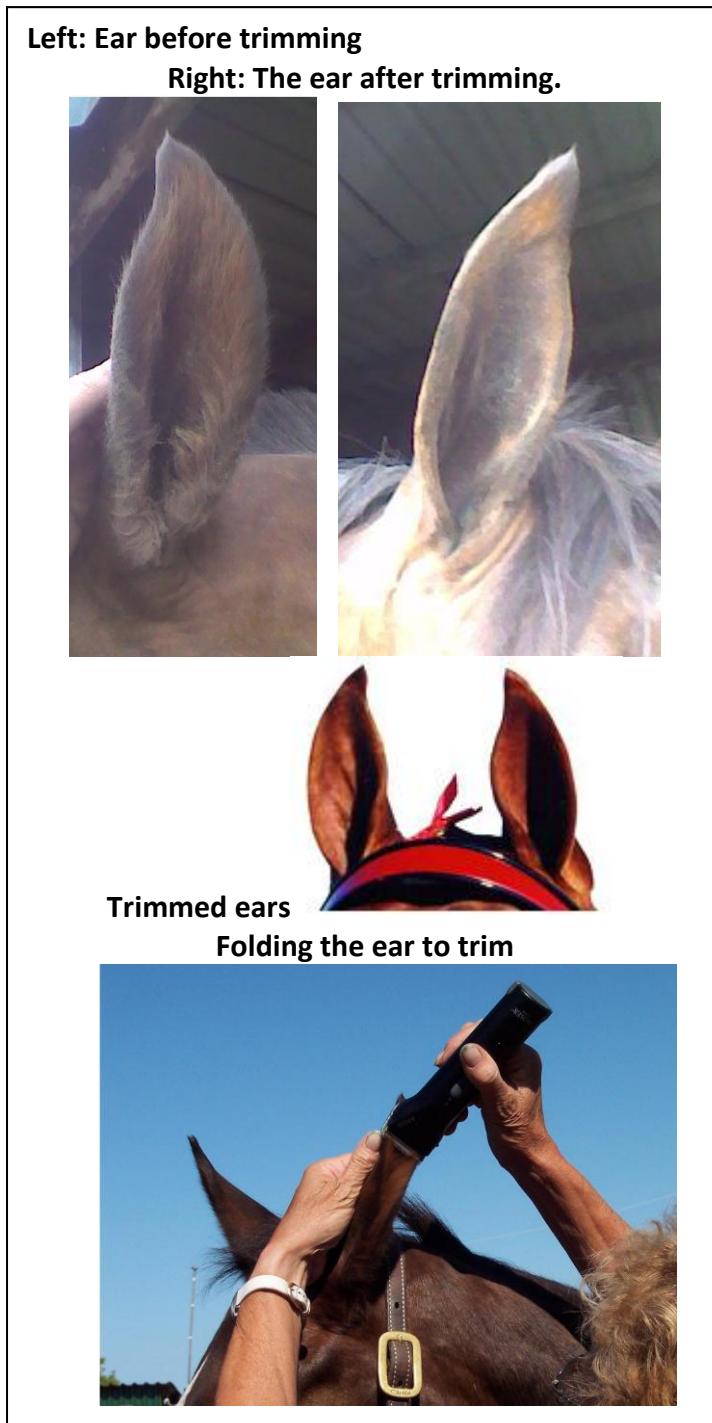


TRIMMING

The first thing to do is to trim the bridle path – as a rule of thumb the amount to take off is dependent on the length of your horse’s ears. Carefully bend your horse’s ears backwards (like he is pinning them back) and where ever the tip of the ear finishes is roughly how much of the mane you want to remove. If your horse is very fine through the throat latch you may want to take off less and if he is very heavy through the throat latch you may want to take a bit more off (to give the impression of a finer throat line) – however beware of taking **TOO** much off, or you end up with hardly any mane. Any trimming should **ENHANCE** your horse, not detract from it.

Onto the forelock – if you have decided to leave it, that is fine. Simply wet the forelock and put a plait in it at shows and connect the front braid to the headpiece of your horse’s noseband (this is explained later on). If you decide to thin it out, then

clip upwards on either side of the forelock, so that a bit is left in the middle for you to braid with.



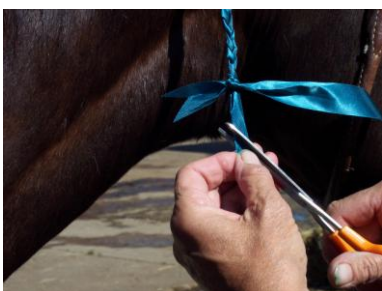
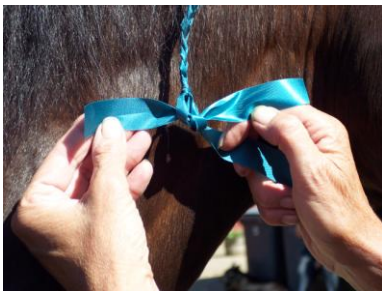
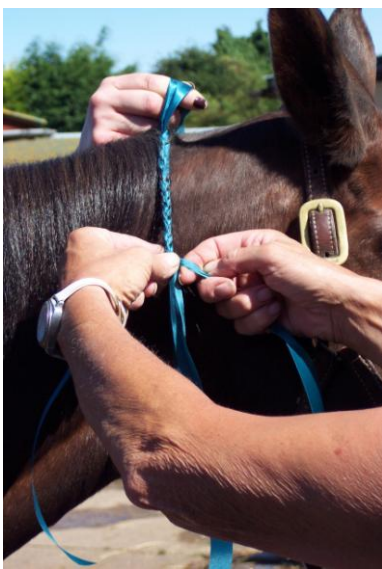
Or, you may want to take it off altogether – again if this is the case you will need to attach the front braid to the headpiece of your horse's noseband.

From experience I have found the thinning of the forelock unsuccessful. No matter how hard you try, you will always lose some hair when you put in and take out your braids, so you eventually end up with hardly any forelock at all. My older horse has no forelock (I trim it off – after years of it being trimmed it simply doesn't grow much anymore, so even though she is retired, she still has her forelock removed), my younger horse I leave the forelock alone.

After you have trimmed the bridle path the next step is to tidy the ears up. Again you have a choice. You can simply close the ear together (cup the back of the ear in your hand and close your hand gently so that the two edges of the ear meet) and trim the excess hair on the outside. This gives a neater look to the horse in the show ring, whilst still affording him some protection from the flies. The other alternative is to do this AND to trim the inside, leaving a small V of unclipped hair at the top of the ear (on the inside) – this accentuates the fineness of the ears and creates an optical illusion that the tips are curling in towards each other (they may well do this naturally anyway, so you are simply accentuating it). Why? It makes the horse look

more alert and interested in his surroundings when his ears are pricked.

I use Wahl Adelar clippers – they are lightweight, portable and above all else QUIET! It is perfectly possible to trim the bridle path and the outside of the ears using scissors. However, whether using scissors or clippers the main thing to have is patience – it is far better to have someone help you (and twitch the horse is necessary) and get the job done without nicking the horse. From experience with both scissors and clippers I know how hard it is to get the job done, when right at the critical moment the horse bobs its head up, or down, or turns it away. To clean the ears after trimming, take a soft cloth with 50% alcohol and 50% baby oil, and gently wipe the inside. This removes any debris (if you use the baby oil on its own it can be too thick – the alcohol helps to evaporate it). It is best NOT to trim your horse's ears immediately before a class – if there are any hairs left inside he may start shaking his head or not wearing his ears (pinning them back). It is best to trim 1-2 days before the show.



BRAIDING – do you use hair ointments? This is really a personal choice – my own choice is that I find it much easier to plait a horse (I use the term plait here to refer to the normal button type plaits that we put on our riding horses) when the hair is, dare I say it, a tad on the dirty side! However, when showing you want your horse to be spick and span, so we will assume his mane is spotless and squeaky clean, which can create a problem! Simple water works well (not a lot) – just dampen the piece of mane that you are about to plait. You don't want it too wet, as this will make the braid wet and the colour may run – not so good on our pinto's with white bits. I personally like the Wahl Detangler as it is not silicone based, so does not leave a residue, nor alcohol based so it does not dry out the hair, plus with all Wahl stuff you can leave it in without it causing any problems (you are actually meant to leave the detangler in). Use whatever works for you, but when braiding the Saddlebred for the show ring you are braiding so little hair, that there really is no need to use anything, other than water to dampen the hair.

To braid, either the mane or the forelock, you simply take 3 pieces of braiding ribbon and plait them together. In the mane you also take a few strands of hair with each piece of ribbon – fold the ribbon over so the hair is in the middle (this protects the hair and ensures the colour of the ribbon is seen) – and then plait. There is no need to tie a knot at the beginning – have someone hold all 3 pieces and stand on the opposite side of the horse that the mane falls on. Separate the mane you are going to plait into 3 pieces (it is useful to clip or band the next bit of mane that you do not want so that it doesn't get in the way). Have the person holding the ribbons lay them over the mane so that they are on the side you are working and start plaiting – one piece of ribbon for each piece of the mane that you have separated. Once you have plaited the first 3 inches or so, then there is no longer any need for the other person to be holding the ribbon at the top. Plait the ribbon – carry on past the mane until you have a couple of inches of ribbon left – then tie it off.

To do this, take one piece of ribbon, wrap it round the plait, then pass it through and tighten. Take the remaining two pieces of ribbon and tie a simple knot. Now you have to tidy up the ends (both at the top of the plait where you started and at the bottom where you have tied it off). Cut each ribbon into a "V" shape, with the bottom of the V always towards the mane.

You braid the forelock exactly the same way. If you are attaching the braid to the bridle you will have to use a knot at the beginning (or if you are super efficient you could stitch all 3 pieces of ribbon together). Two pieces of ribbon pass under the headpiece and one over and then you plait

away. Tie the end off and cut your “Vs” as described before. If you use a braid that is attached to the bridle it is feasible to reuse it for more than one show. For any braid that is plaited with hair, then you will need to unplat it after the show (take care not to pull any hair out) to relax the hair – simply cut the knot off at the bottom end (there should be no hair there) and unplat.

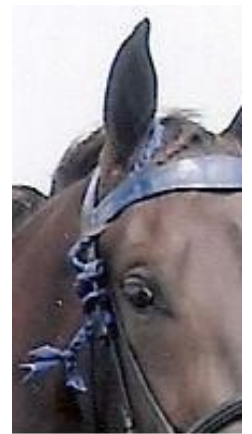


Photo left – bridle path trimmed and all of forelock removed. Forelock braid is attached to the top of the noseband – under the crown piece of the bridle, so that the look is seamless.



Photo right – the horse has a forelock, which has been braided and so is in front of the bridle.

Photo right – forelock left untrimmed, but plaited, separately to the braiding. If it is in the way, the forelock can be taped to the browband to keep it in place (electrical tape, usually black, as it is very easy to remove without tearing the hair out). The excess braid (which you want) is wrapped around the cheek piece of the bridle (on the same side that the mane falls). The trick is to allow enough room at the top for the horse to use his ears (otherwise they will not use them well – looser would have been better than depicted in this photo) and to wrap the braid around the cheek piece. WHY is it wrapped? So that the end bit can be tucked between the keepers, which keeps it in place and stops it coming undone. If it does you can be left with it hanging at worse (not a pretty picture) or annoying the horse, who may then start to shake or toss his head, right as you are doing your pass in front of the judge – again, not what you want.



What colour you use is up to you – all 3 ribbons can be the same colour, or they can be contrasting. What type of ribbon to use? Any type is fine, but the best is the stiff kind that I have only been able to source from America. Normal silk ribbon is generally too soft and flexible (what happens is the “Vs” do not stand upright, they flop over). The closest I can find in the UK is the ribbon that decorates flowers, however the colour tends to bleed and it is a thinner weave so the colour is muted when you plait the hair in it. The ribbon should be around 1 inch in width. Whatever type you use, test run it before the show – cut a little bit off and get it wet and see what happens. If the colour runs, especially if it is a dark colour and you have a light coloured horse, do not use it!

Accessories – yes I use a lot of Wahl products. Their warehouse is up the road from where I stable my horse, so it is easy to get. But, having tried most of the products on the market the ones I have expressed a preference for in this (or any future) article are the ones I believe to be the job best.

Bibliography

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USA-UK Year Book 2010.

HOW TO ... WRAP A TAIL

Why would you want to? To keep it clean and free from dirt and to enable you to grow it long – not a necessity for the show ring, but it does enhance the overall look of the American Saddlebred in saddle seat classes.

There are 3 key points in wrapping a tail – if you remember nothing else, then remember these:

- 1. Do not braid the tail when wet** (if you leave it in when it is wet for any length of time, next time you unwrap it the tail hair will have rotted and it will fall off).
- 2. Do not braid the tail too tight**
- 3. Do not braid too close to the dock** (both these last two points are because if you put too much pressure on the tail hair roots, these can pull the hair out. In worse case scenarios the root can become permanently damaged and the hair will not grow back).

You don't need to have a clean tail to wrap it, but generally, as the tail is left in for a while, it is best to shampoo and condition the tail before wrapping. Make sure the tail is dry and carefully hand pick or brush through the tail removing any tangles and knots.

Hold the tail in one hand (take care when standing behind any horse not to be kicked) and separate out the tail feathers from the top of the tail. Regardless of how long these are, these should not be braided – they are left loose to offer protection.

The remaining tail is divided into 3 equal sections approx. 2-3 inches BELOW the dock (the end of the tail bone). Loosely plait at the start – you can tighten the plait as you progress down the tail.

Once you have plaited the length of the tail the end can be secured with a band, or can be left unsecured – if leaving it unsecured keep hold of it until you have applied the vet wrap or it will unravel.

Fold the plait back on itself, threading it through the top of the plait – depending on how long/thick the hair is you may need to do this a couple of times and secure this in place using vet wrap (the kind that sticks to itself). The vet wrap is placed through the top of the plait so that it hangs down both the front and the back of the plait and then wrapped around the plait so that the hair within is protected and it forms a bang.

This is your horse's tail wrapped – you need do no more to it unless you want to, but for your horse's comfort you may want to add some sort of switch so that they can swish the flies away. The easiest way to make one is from an old sock – make a small hole at the "toe" end and secure from it some string or twine (bailer twine is fine). At the other end (the "leg" end), make a cut lengthways down the sock for about 2-3 inches, so that you have some "tie-tags".

Place the sock over the tail bang (which is now wrapped in vet wrap) so that the string is at the bottom, and cover the wrapped tail. The top end of the sock is secured by putting one end of the "tie-tag" through the top of the plait and tying the two ends in a knot. Cut the hanging twine to a suitable length and you are done.

Starting the tail plait



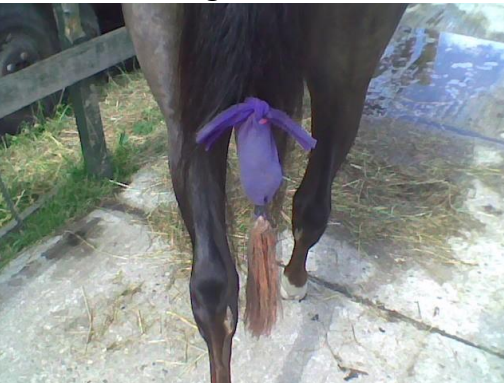
Folding the tail plait



Vet wrap on the tail



Using a tail sock



When you unwrap the tail, if you need to cut away the vet wrap, take care not to cut any of the tail hair too! Unbraid the hair carefully, detangle, brush, wash and condition, dry and re-wrap. Usually you will do this a couple of days before a show. After a show, to travel home, you can loosely plait the tail and secure with a small amount of vet wrap. The tail may well have collected debris from the show ring so it is advisable to wash the tail out after the show before wrapping it up again for any length of time.

Tips: When cleaning the tail, make sure you clean the tail bone well. There should be no gummy, sticky or dirty spots on the tail bone after you have washed it. This may mean cleaning and rinsing the tail more than once. You may want to use a dilute vinegar solution as the last rinse between shampooing and conditioning (approx. 16oz vinegar to a bucket of water) – this helps remove the last residues of shampoo and leaves the tail squeaky clean. You may want to use a hair dryer to dry the hair – with any electrical equipment, take care around horses and water! If using a hair dryer, leave for half an hour before wrapping it, as the heat from the dryer may give the impression that the tail is dry when it is still slightly damp.

What we want as the end result – a long tail!. Ref: www.omegafields.com



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<http://www.omegafields.com> (Accessed 14 December 2010).