

How to Photograph your Fjord Horse

by Barbara Neufeld

Take a look at the Sales Barn Page, and you will realize how very visual this website can be. A flattering, technically correct, properly exposed picture will sure help by making your sale horse stand out in the crowd. After all, not many people will take your horse seriously if you don't appear to!

Many factors enter into making a nice picture. For example, lighting, composition, expression, posing and of course grooming all contribute to a pleasant representation of our breed.



GROOMING

Before getting out your camera, you need to make an effort to get the horse presentable.

We are all guilty of letting those heavy manes get too long. If it has been leaning over, then you will need to cut it to relieve the weight, wait a week to let it stand up again, and then cut it a second time to get the proper shape.

- Stand back from the horse and look at the natural shape of the neck and figure out the halfway mark between the withers and the back of the ears.
- Make sure that the mark you select keeps the horse looking balanced. You might like to have the highest point of the crest either forward or back of the middle point, and your preference should enhance the shape of the Fjord's neck.
- Use your hand as a measure (4 fingers wide) and make a 2" cut of the white hair at the halfway point to use as your guideline. This mark is the highest part of the crest or top of the arch.
- Starting at the withers, cut towards the middle of the mane to meet the mark. Then, angle down to meet the forelock just behind the ears.
- As you are cutting, maintain the arch to achieve that nice rounded look. Do this on both sides of the mane. Some manes are thin enough that you will be able to cut the whole mane all at once but most manes are so thick and wide that you will have to cut about half of the black hairs and then change over to the other side and repeat the same procedure as before.

Once you have the mane under control, continue to clean up the horse's head. I use clippers, but scissors can be used as well.

- Give the ears a pony clip. A pony clip removes all of the tufts around the base of the ear, and along its sides without removing hair inside or at the tip of the ear.
- A bridle path is not required, but can be a safety feature if your Fjord has a tremendous mane and forelock. The bridle can slip off over the ears, and a small bridle path can serve to seat the bridle firmly on the head. Clip off only as much as you need to seat the width of the halter and

or bridle. Allow the mane to cover it. Take care not to remove too much around the ears. They are to appear small and truncated according to Breed Type.

- You can trim the whiskers around the muzzle to give a clean look. Then continue under the jaw to clean up the chin, the jaw line, and the throatlatch. Keep in mind that the large jaw is desired, and you should clip to emphasize this.
- You will be amazed at how well defined that beautiful fjord head will be if you remove the longer hairs that tend to hide the beauty.
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Once you have the head clean and crisp you will be able to better adjust the halter to fit correctly and snug it up tight for the picture. Try to get the back of the halter behind the jaw. It is important to show the head off as it is so important in determining Breed Type.

SET-UP

Step back, take a critical look, and make sure that that horse is at its best. Now you can prepare for a conformation photo. Spend time now getting 3 or 4 props organized so that you can interchange them. Your horse needs to look bright and attentive. Horses lose interest quickly. My secret prop 'attention getter' is my horse's best buddy that had 'disappeared' earlier that day. Other props could be a mirror, a llama, a broom with a plastic bag, a bundle of old milk jugs, or whatever will brighten the horse up a bit! And you will need helpers - one to have the horse in hand and adjust the wayward hoof, and the other to hold props. You need the prop handler to stand exactly where you want the horse's head turned, take care to keep bodies, hands and shadows out of the picture.

You need to look for level ground and a background to compose the picture so that there will be no distractions, like power poles, fence posts or unsightly buildings. Try to use an open field with a blue sky as a backdrop. Always ensure the background is not cluttered.

LIGHTING

Lighting is also important. You must learn to recognize a "soft" light, rather than a harsh (noon) light that will cast unflattering shadows, on your horse. On a sunny day the best time to shoot is very early morning or late afternoon. I prefer the early morning light, because the evening light is too fleeting. Sunny days are best, but never shoot pictures at noon and watch out for shadows. A catch-light in the horse's eye, will ensure you of good light. The easiest way to photograph may be on an overcast day, but the pictures are dull in comparison. That approach may be alright for wedding parties, but our horses are never so brightly dressed!

Now that you have composed the shot, groomed the horse and caught the right light, you can get your camera out. Be prepared to take a while. You will need patience - with the horse and your helpers - and you will need to be quick to catch the ears - pay attention.

STANCE

The horse's position should be to stand square with the same distance between front feet and back feet and it should be set up in a way that would balance his weight equally on all four feet. Never have it facing downhill. Your horse's head should be up high with an upright neck set and attentive ears. Be sure to watch for shadows at all times. By turning a horse's head or body slightly, you can eliminate most shadows.

Your helpers are there to position the horse and use props in such a way as to insure that the horse's head is turned enough to see the bulge of the opposite eye. His attention is on the prop, which is rather high to help with the upright neck set we want to see. The prop handler should stand exactly where you want the horse's head turned. And this is where lighting becomes important because you do not want a shadow on the head or neck.

In order to determine your best position, study and analyze the horse to determine its best angle. Your position should be such that you never shoot from higher than the horse's eye level and if you want to emphasize the height of the horse than you will kneel down to shoot lower than that. Most full body shots are shot at a low angle. Try lots of angles, lenses, and handling techniques and you should get some good ones. From the girth line, you should be shooting on an angle a little ahead of the girth or from an angle just behind the girth. Be careful with a "quarter horse shot" at a $\frac{3}{4}$ angle. If you try the "quarter horse" pose, with a pocket camera you will end up with all head and neck. You lose proportions and would need to be 30-50 feet away with a telephoto 200mm zoom lens to balance the front end with the back end.

COMMITMENT

After all this work, use the best camera you can get your hands on, take your time, and get some help. Be prepared to take a lot of pictures. Shoot a full roll of 36, or have a clear memory card and a strong battery. Time and perseverance should yield you a few good pictures!

A flattering technically correct, properly exposed picture will sure help by making your sale horse stand out in the crowd. Those that view your conformation picture will see and appreciate the effort and the horse.

If you would like to find out more, try to find Darol Dickensen's older "Photographing Livestock", and look at Robert Vavra's books. There are a couple of Horse Photography books available from Amazon.ca.