

Live Show Quality Guidelines

A Reference For
Identifying Competitive
Workmanship In
Customs and Artist Resins

A Free Publication

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Introduction

The primary mode of competition in model horse showing is the live show where models are exhibited in an up-close, personal inspection and compared against their fellows on the table. In order to compete successfully at such a show, models are expected to be “Live Show Quality” (“LSQ”).

However, there’s a problem with LSQ. On one hand, it’s claimed as an assurance of a required standard but, on the other hand, no such standard actually exists. There’s simply no consensus as to what the term actually means. Consequently, a pervasive confusion about what constitutes “LSQ” typifies the live show experience, a condition that’s become counter-productive. Indeed, the term has become so misused today that many showers, particularly new showers, are inadvertently purchasing or creating work that falls short of the unspoken standard and so don’t find the success they desire. To mediate this problem, this guideline has been compiled to identify and define the points of LSQ to weigh in the creative process, gauge during a purchasing decision, and to be judged at a live show.

To start, let’s define “LSQ.” What is it? Does it have to do with prepping? Sculpting? Painting? The condition of the model being judged? The answer is “yes” to all of that, plus more! And we’ll get to all of it in this guideline. In the meantime, let’s define LSQ as:

Highly skilled technical and creative workmanship that enhances realism when personally inspected.

As we progress through the guidelines you’ll find that each point is described consistently to this definition. In short, everything hinges on quality workmanship that maximizes realism in an inanimate model.

As such, these points are divided into two categories, *The Essentials* and *The Optionals*.

The former are those features that are mandatory while the latter will depend on your own personal opinion.

Finally, please keep in mind that this guideline is intended to apply *only* to Customs and Artist Resins. It isn’t intended to apply to Original Finish models.

The Essentials

The non-negotiable features of LSQ are *The Essentials*. What’s more, the common denominator of *The Essentials* is absolute realism. Why? Because realism is the principal component of LSQ, and the primary goal of showing equine figurines. Without a doubt, the more realistic the piece, the more LSQ it is.

Therefore, the various elements of *The Essentials* are, as follows:

- Anatomy
- Sculpting
- Details
- Prepwork
- Scale
- Proportion
- Custom Corrections
- Finishwork
- Presence or “life”
- Cleanliness

Anatomy: Anatomy entails the physiological structures that define the equine. It’s based on equine biology, evolution and genetics pertaining to the genus Equus. Because realism is the goal, consequently a piece should be as anatomically faithful to equine structure as possible in order to be LSQ. In other words, accurate anatomy is *the first and foremost* priority.

Anatomy includes all the physical structures authentic to a real horse, as follows:

- Technically factual characteristics of the skeleton, musculature, flesh, and hair
- Technically factual biomechanics

- Consistent physics as they affect the body
- Symmetry of the body, particularly with bilateral pairs
- Believable treatment of hair and horn
- Correct rendition of veins, moles, wrinkles and other such details
- Faithfulness to equine behavior
- Accurate secondary sex characteristics (gender differences)
- Consistent age characteristics
- Any other facet of sculpture that would convey a technically factual depiction of the equine

In short, if a real horse has it, so should the model, as accurately as it is with the real horse. Absolutely, no model can be LSQ if it lacks this fundamental technical authenticity *even if* all other points are superior.

Nevertheless, technical realism is a difficult property to describe since it depends upon one's perception and depth of knowledge. These are developed over time with diligent research, analysis, observation, and artistic exercises. Consequently, if you aren't aware of equine anatomy well enough to identify truthful accuracy, it's recommended you engage in independent research or seek the advice of learned fellows before purchasing. Always objectively scrutinize each potential purchase from an anatomical point of view first.

Remember: Factual technical anatomy is the primary basis of LSQ.

Sculpting: Sculpted areas should duplicate the look of what they're representing as technically convincing as possible such as flesh, horn, hair, bone, sinew, etc. There should be no aspect of sculpting that compromises the illusion of a real horse with inferior technique or carelessness.

Sculpting should also be consistent in skill, texture and style; harmony and uniformity are essential. Inappropriate bumps, lumps, pits, divots, scratches, or other careless incongruities diminish LSQ. Indeed, in no aspect should it

appear the artist dropped the ball or fudged it. However, some artistic leeway can be afforded to hair since it's more open to artistic interpretation. Nonetheless, sculpted hair should always be convincing and skillfully rendered.

Now likewise for Customs, it's paramount that altered areas be consistent in style, skill and texture to the untouched original plastic areas and so smoothly executed that it's indistinguishable where the original surface ends and customization begins. Truly, a good customizer is a good mimic, and the more minimal the custom, the more important is mimicry.

Finally, the overall piece must be skillfully designed to avoid any awkwardness or oddness that would "stop the eye" and inhibit a credible and beautiful duplication of a real horse. So, in short, all sculptural work should appear confident, skilled and deliberate, as though the artist meant every step; every feature should appear deliberate and anatomically educated.

Remember: LSQ sculpting or customizing must always an artistic asset to realism, never a liability.

Details: The "devil is in the details" and they do count for LSQ. Details include ligaments, tendons, veins, nerves, capillaries, whisker bumps/moles, chestnuts, ergots, wrinkles, eyelashes, shoes, clenches or any other accentuating aspect of a real horse the artist saw fit to instill in the sculpture. In addition, scars, chipped hooves, knotted manes or other feral touches are welcome as well. Nonetheless, all these details should be accurate, precise, skillful, convincing and reveal the artist's powers of keen observation and duplication.

Beware, however—details can be poorly done such as the following:

- Shoe jobs that are incorrect, such as those that exhibit unawareness of the farrier arts. For instance, glue-on shoes of the wrong size and shape, or shoes not flush with the bottom

of the hoof.

- Nails located on the wrong parts of the hoof wall, being at the quarters rather than towards the toe.
- Veins, capillaries or nerves that do not follow the anatomical blueprint, or don't appear fleshy.
- Wrinkles that are hard looking and clumsy rather than fleshy and soft.
- Whisker bumps located on the wrong areas of the face.
- Chestnuts of the wrong texture or located in the wrong position, or a lack of chestnuts altogether.
- Hide details that fail to be convincing as soft, mercurial flesh.
- Coat characteristics such as clips or shark's teeth that fail to be convincing, or are sloppily rendered.
- Hooves that are clumsily or sloppily painted and fail to appear as actual horn.
- Eyes that are sloppily painted within the eye itself and with the lids.
- Facial shading that fails to appear fleshy and consistent to life, whether natural, clipped, or "oiled."

Remember: If a real horse has specific details, so must a LSQ model.

Prework: Prework is the initial treatment of the sculpture to provide the “canvas” for painting. Being so, it should be absolutely meticulous and diligent. All surface imperfections caused by the molding process or the initial stages of sculpting must be removed so as to appear they never existed in the first place. Prework is the “first line of defense” with realism—and therefore LSQ—because it removes every tidbit that wouldn’t exist on a real horse.

Being so, an LSQ model should lack these issues, as follows:

- Mold flashing: These are raised or depressed edges that outline areas of the body where the mold pieces met to cast the piece.
- Chasing: Often on plastics, the mold seams

have been clumsily cleaned, leaving chatter marks or harsh chasing. Sometimes a prepper will overlook these features or create them as they clean the Custom they’ve created. All seams on plastics should be fully removed in a smooth, even fashion as to become invisible and consistent with the anatomy of the piece.

- Seals: On plastic Customs, this is the manufacturer identification stamp, often found on the inner thigh or groin. However, on Artist Resins, all identifying information, such as signatures, dates, titles, numbering, etc., should remain intact.
- Pinholes: Small pits the size of a pinhead, or smaller, often caused by a molding process.
- Divots: Like pinholes, but larger.
- Bubbles: Air bubbles that have only partially erupted from the surface, and can be small or rather large.
- Gouges, Scratches or Scrapes: Areas that suffered damage from the casting or initial cleaning process.
- Sandpaper marks: Little scratches where inappropriate rough sandpaper was used.
- Pilling: Small bits of material in places of detail or complexity (usually manes and tails), that aren’t consistent to what we’ve find on a real horse. They are either caused by careless sculpting that neglected to smooth them out, or by problematic casting that compromised the mold.
- Pock marks: Areas that bear a patterned texture in the sculpture often caused by problems during the casting process or primer that rippled.
- Mismatched seams: When different mold parts do not meet evenly along their seams, one aspect of the sculpture will be inconsistent to the other. This causes asymmetries, often most obvious in the face. And the more askew the mold seam, the less LSQ the model.
- Channels: A strip of the surface that lies deeper than the surrounding area, often following a mold seam.
- Ripples: Sometimes an artist will coat the original in gesso, which can leave grooves, ridges or ripples on the surface that are

reproduced when cast. Not to be confused with intended fleshy or coat qualities.

- **Swirls:** Sometimes the casting medium behaves strangely, leaving razor thin, swirling grooves randomly over the model.
- **Missing parts:** Sometimes areas do not cast properly and end up missing on the final cast, such as ear tips, hoof parts, mane/tail tendril ends, nostril rims, etc. They need to be recreated so as to match the original intent seamlessly.
- **Tear-outs:** When a mold is damaged internally, an accidental fill at the site of the damage will occur in the castings. These tears usually happen in complicated, tight areas of the sculpture and when cast, often manifest themselves as uncharacteristic blocks of resin. They need to be removed from the casting in such a manner that the corrections are consistent to the rest of the sculpture and duplicate the original intent.
- **Imprinted remnants:** Sometimes accidental artifacts are left on the model, which can get reproduced when cast. Such things include fingerprints, pet hair, dollops of unintended clay or other foreign matter. It should all be removed from the casting or Custom in the prepping stage.
- **Primer flaws:** Primer should be appropriate for the material and be applied smoothly and evenly. Primer flaws include drips, ripples, bubbles, pock marking, wrinkling or anything other than what is smooth and even.
- **Reinforcement wires:** These are often used for resin casting in the legs or hair tendrils and sometimes protrude through the resin surface. If they are not filled over, they can leave an inconsistent patch of smoothness, surrounded by a thin ridge where it meets the resin.
- **Sprue:** A channel through which resin flowed to fill the mold during the casting process. Left intact, they appear as resin branches radiating from the casting and are usually removed in rough cleaning. The most common sprue is on the belly, but a sprue can be particularly deceptive on manes or tails with

complex tendril design, so good prepwork will take care of the original intent of these areas.

- **Cracks:** Cracks are partial breaks and can occur around areas of fill or those that are particularly delicate or vulnerable, often around pressure points or areas of load stress. Those that are repaired should be done so as to be unseen, sturdy and match the original intent.
- **Breaks:** Breaks are when a piece of the model becomes detached from the rest of the body. Those that are repaired should be done so as to be unseen, sturdy and match the original intent.
- **Lifting:** Lifting occurs when the fill material releases its hold on the model's surface and raises up, sometimes in large chunks. This can occur with improper preparation of the model's surface or improper care or storage. Lifting requires repair by an experienced person skilled in such matters, and those that are repaired should be done so as to be unseen, sturdy and match the original intent.
- **Bloating:** If a plastic model is allowed to get hot, the plastic will soften and the air inside can expand, causing it to bloat up. This can be directly linked to lifting.
- **Destruction of Style:** Each artist has a unique sculptural technique so it's essential to remember that good prepwork is invisible, melting into the style and technique of the original artist's sculpting.

Above all, LSQ prepwork is absolutely invisible, leaving not a trace of the cleaning process. It's thoughtful, careful, and precise and exhibits no aspect that would betray the prepping stage.

Remember: If a real horse doesn't have it, neither should the LSQ model.

Scale: The issue of scale is critical to LSQ since it directly speaks to technical authenticity, i.e. realism. What is scale? Well, it's how consistent to proper size each feature of the model is depending on the size of the model. That means each anatomical feature, each stroke of the

sculpting tool, each fleabite, each bit of “ticking” to every detail of the piece from sculpting to painting to hairing should be authentically sized to the scale of the model. In short, no aspect of the LSQ model should be out of scale.

Anatomically, this means structural features should be in scale and precise. This is particularly essential on “minis” which can suffer abnormally large joints, facial features, hooves, or details, or ambiguous definition and a lack of precision. With paintwork, it means every stroke of the brush or pencil must be in scale to avoid aspects that are too big. Hairing should be carefully done to avoid out of scale bouffants. Altogether, it means that regardless of the scale of the piece, every feature is consistent to the proper size it would be on a real horse somehow shrunk down to that size.

A handy trick is to take a good scan of your intended reference photo or coat color and use a photo editing program to shrink it or enlarge it to the actual size of your sculpture or Custom. That really helps to train the eye for scale.

Remember: Every feature of an LSQ model is absolutely in scale.

Proportion: This brings us to proportion, or the structural comparisons between the different components of a horse. The LSQ model exhibits the proper proportions of a real horse, with no aspect out of proportion to the rest. Proportion can also relate to proper conformation as long shoulders, hips and short cannons testify. Proportion can also pertain to breed type as drafters are quite different proportionally from light breeds, for example.

Common errors in proportion are heads that are too big, hooves that are too small, legs that are too thin, or backs that are too short.

Remember: An LSQ model exhibits the desired proportions of the type of horse a model depicts.

Custom Corrections: Customized plastic models often entail additional work to correct sculptural or molding problems to make the finished product more realistic. Much of this depends on the choice of the initial plastic model slated for customization since many molds are more inherently more realistic than others. A good rule of thumb is that the more realistic the original plastic, the less corrective work is required during customization. If you are unsure which models are good initial picks, seek advice. Nevertheless, plastics typically need attention in these areas, as follows:

- The sculptural fixing of body parts that have been distorted or damaged during the casting/molding process, such as curvaceous long bones of the legs (“spaghetti legs”), misshapen ears, faces, hooves, joints or other asymmetries and distortions caused by the mass production process.
- The sculptural correction of anatomy or conformation in areas where the original plastic is lacking, to include veining, capillaries, genitals, nerves, whisker bumps/moles, wrinkles, chestnuts and other such details.
- Restoration of compromised details, such as resculpting areas that have been filled for the casting process or resculpting details that have suffered erasure. For example, resculpting of the groin, frogs, soles, ears, inside nostrils, the groove between the jar bars, or the depression between the lateral cartilages of the foot, or restoring veining, capillaries, nerves, whisker bumps/moles, wrinkles, chestnuts, etc.

It's important to understand that some artists have an incomplete understanding of anatomy and may either chose more unrealistic plastic models, or their own corrections lack realism. Even though these models may be novel and exciting, it's good policy to be well informed about anatomy before making any purchase.

Remember: A LSQ Custom should first entail the remaking of the plastic into a realistic,

technically accurate equine.

Finishwork: Applied finishes should exhibit genetic authenticity, mastery of the media, skillful interpretation of life, and artistic eye-appeal. It should also demonstrate keen attention to fine detail, meticulous in-scale features, painstaking workmanship, use of a rich and varied palette, absolute precision, and practiced technique. The pigments should also be expertly blended and with as smooth a finish as the media and technique will allow. No debris or dust should be present in the paintwork. The finishwork should also compliment the sculpture. Above all, finishwork should never appear cursory or rendered in a flat, dull, or hurried manner.

But beware—finishwork exhibits some common problems, as follows:

- It doesn't follow colors, effects, or patterns based on genetic fact. All paintwork must be consistent to authentic data or reference photos, and shouldn't be fudged or just made up. However, nature does throw oddities at us, which can often be found in specific breeds, bloodlines, or regions. For that reason, studying realistic coloration is very important for creating or purchasing each new model. Without a doubt, it's also good policy to provide photographic documentation or historical data for finishwork that depicts a very rare or odd type of coloration.
- Areas left unpainted, often in intricate areas, such as groins, manes, tails, or inside open mouths.
- Painted in a flat, boring, lifeless manner, lacking the necessary shading, highlight and tonal use of pigment.
- Drips, ridges, lumps, bumps, blobs, scratches, wrinkles, fingerprints, pet hair, or other inconsistencies or foreign matter that would mar a harmonious, methodical, clean finish.
- Bald areas in the paint where the artist neglected to layer on enough pigment for an even opaque finish, often seen on appaloosa patterns (in both the spots or white areas) or pinto patterns (in the white areas).

- Sloppy and unconvincing mapping, sometimes with grey pigment regardless of the body color.
- Forgotten items, such as chestnuts or the insides of ears accidentally left as the body color.
- Basecoats that are textured too far away from the natural texture of a living horse, to include overly bumpy or pebbly surfaces.
- White markings with bald patches because the artist didn't layer on enough white pigment to create an even, opaque finish.
- White markings with drips, wrinkles, ridges or blobs.
- A lack of precision in areas that demand clean lines. For example, sloppy eyes and eyelids, careless borders between the coat color and markings, uneven mane in relation to the crest, hurried detailing of the tail hair on the dock, or uneven, sloppy lines between the coronet and the hoof.
- Eyes with a possessed or staring appearance because of unskilled shading and detailing.
- Features of the eye, such as the pupil, iris, sclera (eye white) and tear duct painted incorrectly or clumsily.
- Detail areas such as faces, veins, chestnuts, horseshoes, etc., painted in a sloppy, imprecise manner.
- Highlighting on veins, wrinkles or eyebrows that is not directly and neatly on top of them, but veering off onto the body.
- Shoes painted grey or white rather than silver. (Note: black hoof polish can obscure the clenches and shoe with black pigment).
- Pinked areas on white markings that are flat and harsh, and not delicately shaded so as to appear fleshy.
- Patterns or markings that don't mimic the lay of hair growth patterns.
- Hooves given a cursory treatment with one flat color or simply two hastily applied colors, and lack the attentive shading and detail that duplicates the look of real horn.
- Heels, soles and frogs painted only a monotone dark color (or just the hoof color), lacking independent shading and detail to duplicate

the characteristics of these features.

- Detail areas painted in a hurried fashion, such as inside ears painted only one color.
- Thinly haired areas (such as eyes, muzzles and groin) painted in an “unfinished” manner, using only the body color, and lacking sufficient shadings and pigmentation to visually “set them back” into the body color.
- Use of pigment inconsistent to the tone of the living subject, such as too-orange pinked markings or black chestnuts.
- The typical “20 minute airbrush job” that is flat, uninspired and hurried, using perhaps only 1-2 colors.
- An airbrush finish that is grainy or having areas of “wash” where the pigment was allowed to pool too thickly.
- Airbrush dapples with a bald spot in the middle (like tiny donuts) and/or “spider legs” radiating from it, caused by an airbrush that randomly spit out pigment at too high a pressure.

Remember: LSQ Finishwork should always be technically skillful, complementary, meticulous, attractive and as realistic as possible; if it's not on a real horse, it shouldn't be in the finishwork.

Presence: A model should have “soul,” that charisma and anima that speaks and breathes. It should also emulate real equine nature and behavior so it’s a convincing replica of the living animal. This doesn’t mean extreme or wild expressions, but simply that the model should communicate an individual soul.

Remember: A LSQ model should be a thoughtful and authentic depiction of a living personality.

Cleanliness: The model should be free of dust, debris, or other “life relics” when presented on the table. A clean make-up brush is useful for removing dust and debris. If haired, the hair should be combed and neatly styled. Just like a real horse is groomed, so should a model.

This shouldn’t be confused with models made

intentionally “pasture stained” such as splattered with mud, or with grass stains and other relics present on the model. Some models are deliberately made to be thusly and shouldn’t be discounted for this realistic depiction of pasture life.

Remember: A LSQ model is clean and properly presented for judging.

Clearly, *The Essentials* pertain to absolute realism, those qualities that get a model as close to a factual, technically accurate horse as possible. They also entail artistic workmanship that enhances that goal rather than detracts from it. That is to say every tiny tidbit on that model is consistent to a real, live horse.

Now granted, not every model is as perfect as *The Essentials* demand. Indeed, each model is a gradient of these criteria. It’s in your best interest, however, to acquire those models that embody as much of *The Essentials* as possible since this brings that model ever closer to LSQ standards.

Now let’s consider the other set of criteria, *The Optionals...*

The Optionals

The common denominator of *The Optionals* is individual taste and, therefore, necessitates more latitude than *The Essentials*. Topics entailing *The Optionals* are, as follows:

- Conformation and Type
- Artistic Style
- Hairing
- Pose

Conformation and Type: Individual research on this subject, with an objective and skeptical mind, is highly recommended. Indeed, every successful live show enthusiast is usually highly educated on these subjects.

Nonetheless, it has been argued that a successful LSQ model must be a good representation of its intended breed, yet that's an ambiguous and problematic expectation at times. Why? Well, for many important reasons, as follows:

- Plenty of living horses have undesirable conformation or type, yet are still characterized by equine anatomy. That means they may be flawed conformationally, but they're still technically realistic. And the same applies to models. We need to keep in mind that when we judge model horses, we are judging *realism*, how technically accurate a model is to a real horse, and that doesn't always entail "perfect" conformation and type. While each model is a gradient of "good" conformation, it should always be as technically accurate as possible.
- Similarly, we're judging work made by the work of human hands, and not nature. And so there are plenty of models with "good" conformation and type that are flawed anatomically (that means they have a flaw in realism). They may appear very typey, but their flaws in *The Essentials* reduce their LSQ quality.
- Conformation and type entail the lengths, angles and characteristics instituted by human motivations that qualify an animal for human use and ideals. However, everyone has a different idea about what that "ideal" actually means. Talk to five different people and they'll all have a different opinion in these areas, even regarding the same model! That means conformation and type have to be regarded on a per model basis, with the understanding that judges will be applying their *own* idea of what is "ideal," and that ideal may be very different from yours.
- Likewise, conformation and type should be regarded in balance with equine evolution and physiology, or what is often referred to as "functional conformation." Functional conformation protects against pathologies that cause pain and injury to the animal because its points are aligned to equine biology rather than personal taste, fashion, or type. Such tenets of functional conformation are straight legs, non-extreme heads, good hooves, good bone, and other points that promote the health of the horse.
- Yet it should also be mentioned that many aspects of conformation and type are mostly hypothetical anecdotes rather than proven scientific theory. At best they're tenuous correlations and at worst, they're marketing propaganda. Also conformation and type are also notoriously prone to fashion, bias, misinformation and exaggeration, much to the detriment of the living animal. Undeniably, the truth is that plenty of poorly conformed or ugly horses perform beautifully and stay sound whereas plenty of ideal specimens perform poorly or are chronically lame. And is there anything undesirable about a happy, useful horse?
- Which standard of conformation and type are we supposed to apply to a model? Do we apply modern standards we find today, or also those phenotypes found throughout a breed's history? Of note, this speaks directly to an underlying contradiction in model horse showing, specifically the clash between "historical" judging and "now" judging. Historical judging acknowledges all possible representatives within a gene pool throughout history whether or not they're favored by modern standards. For example, historical desert Arabians can compete equally against modern showring Arabians, and old foundation Quarter Horses can compete equally against modern halter Quarter Horses. Even chestnut Friesians can compete equally against black Friesians (given the shower provides documentation) since it's genetically possible to produce a chestnut Friesian even though the registry disfavors the color. In contrast, "now" judging only acknowledges current, modern representatives of any given gene pool as per current registry rules. This type of judging is most like showing a real horse today, only recognizing current forms and presentation of the breed and shutting out much of what was, and still is, possible. For

example, in its extreme form, such judges favor those models in the textbook modern halter pose, with grooming, coloration and phenotypes currently fashionable, faulting all others regardless of LSQ. So it's important to understand from which perspective you wish to focus your showstring, and to carefully choose which judges you show under; otherwise your perfectly LSQ model may not show well through no fault of its own.

- Likewise, it can be said that there's only one standard of conformation and type for each breed? Nope. In reality, most breeds can be typified as having several acceptable variations due to bloodlines, uses, region, preservation breeding, or tradition. Even very modern representatives have phenotypic variations, so which is more "correct"? Again, that's your personal taste as well as that of the judge.
- Remember that the concept of "breed" or "pure bloodline" is a rather contemporary western notion born of the Victorian era thanks to that period's fascination with eugenics, elitism, and profiteering. As such, these concepts have been adopted and perpetuated by registries and the industries they support, sometimes relying on mythologies and rhetoric. So regard such things lightly and don't discount the part-bred or grade horse.
- Originally, it's important to remember that horses were bred as landraces by individuals or cultures for a specific use with rather open gene pools. In fact, the original application of "type" was to discern between a riding horse, a racehorse, a carriage horse, a warhorse, a workhorse, etc. Also, type could apply to a region or culture a kind of horse could be found. In other words, horses were classified and bred according to their job or regional isolation, not according to their bloodlines or rigid points of types. However, when the idea of "purebred" became ingrained in a status-hungry Victorian culture, gene pools were sealed with "closed" registry books, which meant that these previously open populations now had to operate outside of their original uses. It also meant that rigid points of type were exalted to set them apart from all the other newly established "purebreds" to compete in the horse market. Today, this idolization of these points of type has caused many breeds to degenerate, especially in the halter divisions. We have Arabians and Quarter Horses with detrimental structure due to an exaggeration of fashionable type, for example. So it's important to take "extreme" type with a grain of salt, and remain firmly dedicated to type within the biological limits of the animal to ensure well-being.
- In addition, we all know what happens when people try to "one up" each other for status, money and power. Indeed, the conceit can be so extreme that you can hear people refer to non-purebreds as "mutts," "mongrels" or other derogatory terms. Is this a fair assessment if those animals are functional and happy?
- Also consider that much of modern conformation and type dogma is based on westernized ideals of perfection, and so can be a form of snobbery towards non-western cultures, breeds, types, or colors. Indeed, the Akhal-Teke often unjustifiably suffers from this prejudice despite the breed's functionality. So try to avoid this trap and evaluate each breed based on its own special merits.

Nevertheless, a model should appear as its stated breed or type, especially in the halter classes, with the understanding that variation and different tastes color the placings. Therefore, it's important to research judges to show under those who tend to have criteria more aligned to yours.

Remember: A good rule of thumb is to know the basics of functional conformation for an LSQ piece, and regard everything else with a grain of salt.

Artistic Style: This is another source of conundrum in live showing, and one that may never find resolution (but should it?) as it relies entirely

on your own taste and goals. We are an activity based on creativity, which naturally involves a level of individual expression and unique vision. In fact, many participants find great delight in the variety of interpretations of the realistic equine form, and one could say it's one of our strengths as a community. Indeed, there's more than one way to convey reality! But it also speaks to the paradox between a desire for clinical realism and an appreciation for artistic style, even to the extreme of caricature. But let's be honest, there's no getting around a level of artistic style in any type of creative output, no matter how technically realistic it may be. Yet it can be said that some artists are more successful at finding a balance between style and technical realism, and it's these artists who tend to dominate the showring. Nevertheless, those pieces that are heavily stylized can find success too, so there is some leeway in what our activity demands. So, boiled down, it's important to understand what your tastes are and what to expect when you purchase models aligned to them.

Remember: An LSQ piece typically has a reasonable balance between artistic style and clinical realism, rather than relying on artistic style alone.

Hairing: Hairing was commonplace in the past, but is now quite rare, making it more of an option than a necessity. Nevertheless, a quality hair job still has the same high standards now as it did in the past. For starters, the hair must be of high quality material, such as ramie or viscose, and be of realistic scale, tones, texture, and appearance. It must also be applied with skill to best mimic the look and lay of real hair and be trimmed and groomed to duplicate the look of real manes, tails or feathers. It must also be styled to be consistent to the representative specifics, or the movement depicted by the model. Issues that would compromise a LSQ hair job would be, as follows:

- An excess of glue along the crest or dock
- Glue that has yellowed or discolored
- Glue infused throughout the hair

- If rooted, if the slot along the crest is too wide
- If the hair is dirty, matted or discolored
- Puffy, uncombed and knotted hair
- Hair the wrong tone for the coat color
- Hair improperly trimmed, groomed or styled
- If the hair at the dock forms a sloppy border or is improperly trimmed straight across rather than forming a crescent
- If the hairing is too sparse as to show bald patches
- If the hairing is too profuse and excessive
- If the end of the tailbone unnaturally protrudes through the hair
- If styling mousse or gel can be seen on the body surface of the model
- If hairing is out of scale to the model
- If hairing is sloppily or clumsily done

Remember: LSQ hairing must be precise, neat, in scale, and realistically done with quality materials.

Pose: Many models are depicted in a more natural way rather than according to a strict showring posture standard. For example, models that depict rolling horses, rearing horses, cavorting horses, lying down horses, shaking horses, or even misbehaving horses. As long as they've been created according to *The Essentials* and *The Optionals* they're all viable competitors in the showring. Keep in mind, however, that some judges prefer a more conventional depiction, which is simply due to the differing criteria that typifies live showing at present.

Remember: LSQ applies to all poses and makes each pose equally legitimate in the showring.

It's clear *The Optionals* are dependent on personal taste, which happens to also keep them open to debate and discussion. So do your research to hone your sensibilities and ask questions to help develop a better understanding of them.

Extra Morsels

Now let's delve into four specific subjects that

pertain to LSQ in their own unique ways. These subjects are:

- LSQ Myths
- Types of Customs
- Reserved Rights
- A Healthier Philosophy

LSQ Myths: The term LSQ contains a lot of confusion. As a result, there are plenty of false beliefs floating around that need rebuttal, such as the following:

- Not all live show champions are LSQ and, in fact, many are not. This is due to the confusion as to what constitutes LSQ, even with judges.
- There's little correlation between a model's price and LSQ status because plenty of expensive models aren't LSQ while plenty of less expensive models are LSQ.
- Advertising a model as LSQ does not make it so. If a model is advertised as LSQ, don't take that claim at face value. Research who did the piece and when, ask about care or repairs done to it, ask about return policies and if there was a show record, ask how it placed, and under what judges and when. If in doubt, seek advice.
- If a model is advertised as "NAN Qualified," "Multi NAN Qualified," or having won NAN cards, don't interpret these claims as a guarantee of LSQ. Frankly, there are many NAN qualified models that are not LSQ thanks to the persistent confusion over the term.
- Although many artists claim to create LSQ work, don't take this claim at face value. There's no guaranteed correlation between an artist's claims, popularity, or bravado and LSQ. Do your research and evaluate each piece on its own terms.
- Popular molds are not necessarily LSQ. And be careful about getting excited over new pieces because it's possible that they aren't LSQ. Use your own judgment, trust your instincts, and seek outside advice if warranted.
- Newer works are not necessarily more LSQ than older works. Granted, while skills can grow over time, LSQ is a standard independent of artistic development.

The belief that a LSQ piece has to catch one's eye or be pretty or flashy to be successful in the showing is often typical of misguided philosophies. The truth is that *The Essentials* are the fixed standard, independent of heartstrings, the "wow factor," or personal taste, and it's consistent to all models. A responsible judge won't be duped by what is commonly referred to as "Pretty Horse Syndrome," those models that are certainly eye-catching, but sorely lacking the steadfast traits of LSQ.

You will often hear people boast about the amount of effort that went into a model's creation, implying that it must be LSQ as a result. But the truth is that while it does take a lot of time and effort to create a LSQ model, it can take that same amount of energy to create a model that isn't LSQ, too. The only thing that matters is if the model is actually LSQ, not the degree of effort it took to create it.

A Custom doesn't require a certain degree of alteration to be more LSQ. The truth is that LSQ status hinges entirely on the quality of the workmanship and not the degree of alteration.

LSQ is the same for all scales. Nope! While each piece should absolutely adhere to LSQ criteria, the smaller the scale, the harder this becomes, particularly on "minis." Indeed, a mini presents a unique challenge with LSQ simply due to its size. For example, getting the scale of anatomical features or painted aspects is much harder than on a larger piece. Precision becomes more difficult as does meticulous prepping since seams and molding reliefs tend to obscure more of the sculpture or plastic. So pay extra attention to minis. If they're LSQ, they should be difficult to identify from a larger piece in a good photo. They should also be able to "hold their own" against larger pieces on the table.

Remember: Only The Essentials and The Optionals designate a truly LSQ piece regardless of any

claims to fame.

Types of Customs: Misinformation abounds over what exactly qualifies a Custom as what type, so here's a good rule of thumb, as follows:

- **Drastic:** If an experienced person cannot recognize the original mold(s) because the entire original has been changed. In short: The entire original is altered and covered in epoxy.
- **Extreme:** So much of the original mold(s) is redone than an experienced person can only recognize some parts of the original plastic. In short: Most of the original is altered with some plastic showing.
- **Moderate:** An experienced person can still recognize the original mold(s), but there have been significant alterations. In short: Some of the original is altered with much of the plastic still visible.
- **Minor:** One mold is often used, which is still recognizable to an experienced person, but only small alterations have been made. In short: Only a little bit of the original is altered and most of the plastic is visible.
- **Repaint (or "Simple"):** One mold is used and has only been repainted. However, it should have all molding remnants and distortions removed and perhaps some minor alterations for realism. In short: The original has been repainted, with minor alterations only to improve realism, leaving the initial intent of the original mold intact.
- **Haired:** When the original sculpted mane and tail have been removed and replaced with hair.

Remember: LSQ is pertains only to The Essentials and The Optionals regardless of any alterations made to an original plastic.

Reserved Rights: It's important to understand that certain artists reserve specific legal artistic rights to protect their creative endeavors, whether finished or as blank Resins, for example. Such rights are usually based on the intellectual property laws of Copyright Law and the Visual

Artists Rights Act ("VARA"). These reserved rights need to be researched and taken into account on a per artist basis before making any purchase. You certainly don't want to get stuck with a model you're inevitably unhappy with due to a reserved right. So only work on models that are aligned to your own goals in order to have a happier experience.

Remember: Choose LSQ pieces based on artistic parameters you can accommodate.

A Healthier Philosophy: It must be said that the state of our judging practices is chaos. Unfortunately at this time, there's little consensus on judging criteria, standards or expectations, meaning that each judge uses an individual set of criteria with little accountability to any standardized, governing body. Until this situation changes, live showing can be unpredictable, even with an LSQ model. Therefore, only purchase models you love 100% rather than desperately trying to find models that will win; otherwise, you may find your experience to be continually frustrating and stressful. Even if your beloved model never wins, you'll still enjoy it, which is the whole point, isn't it?

Remember: LSQ is no guarantee of live show success, so be sure you love your model for what it is, not what it'll do for you in the ring.

Closing Thoughts

None of the LSQ points outlined in this guideline are arbitrary. They are *proven* qualities that increase the chance of showing success based on countless discussions with highly skilled artists, savvy collectors, and knowledgeable judges. They also aren't impossible goals to reach. Indeed, many artists create LSQ pieces on a daily basis! Subsequently, this guideline should be thought of as a set of goals to reach when creating, purchasing, or judging a model.

Also, always remember that every live shower and judge has a different idea regarding *The*

Essentials and *The Optionals*. That's simply because there exists no standardized judging criteria at present. Therefore, researching judges before showing under them, to establish if their criteria match yours, increases your chances of success. Plus every model exists on a scale of these qualities, and so each piece must be evaluated as a balance of what's present. On top of that, everyone is in a different stage of understanding these qualifications, and people are learning more all the time.

That means a judge is using his or her own criteria to judge your model, and that criteria may be very different from your own. So don't become angry, offended, or indulge conspiratorial theories if your model doesn't place according to your expectations. It's simply the unpredictability of applied criteria in live showing at work.

Yet despite confusion and differing opinions, LSQ is certainly a tangible and discernible quality. But it takes time and experience to create or identify LSQ. So study, practice, ask questions, and observe to hone your eye. And it's always a good idea to attend many shows and study the work of others up close, and compare them against each other and against your own sensibilities. Without a doubt, it's very important to study truly great work in person to build a mental library of goals and insights. And if in doubt, always seek advice from knowledgeable, experienced fellows.

Absolutely, the ability to objectively identify LSQ is the single most important skill to learn for live showing, as an artist, judge and collector, and the most potent ingredient for enjoying model horse showing. Coming to understand the true qualities of LSQ helps to improve your collection and therefore your showing experience.

Recommended Resources

RESS Technique Booklet 1

RESS Technique Booklet 2

Wire to Whinny Workshop www.lafnbear.com

Color Formulas and Techniques for the Model

Horse Artist www.riorondo.com

Customizing the Model Horse www.riorondo.com

Trade Secrets III www.boshevo.com

Equine Studies Institute www.equinestudies.org

For anatomical information, refer to the current Reference list from Sarah Minkiewicz-Breunig: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualrUWIKb2RPa01RUMVvWHlxRGFJcDMtQQ/view?usp=sharing>

Anatomy Analysis; Legs; Basic Mechanics of the Equine Limbs: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualreEkxZVRfczhNblU/view?usp=sharing>

Painting Conventions, Part 1: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualrREXkNm1kcDI3a0U/view?usp=sharing>

Painting Conventions, Part 2: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualrYTI0T2JJJejduMzA/view?usp=sharing>

Walking The Tightrope; The Unreality Of Realism: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualreHpiX2Q4V2RudlE/view?usp=sharing>

In A Fix; The Neck: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualrWUxHZDFLY19vSHc/view?usp=sharing>

In A Fix; The Hindleg: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DFaqGhualrejAxSkZxSFlGejQ/view?usp=sharing>

Recommended Blog Posts

Now About Those Anatomy Charts Part 1: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2011/06/now-about-those-anatomy-charts.html>

Now About Those Anatomy Charts Part 2: http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2011/06/now-about-those-anatomy-charts_29.html

The Goo Factor: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-goo-factor.html>

Mapping Out Success; Equine Topography: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/04/mapping-out-success-equine-topography.html>

The Need For Context; Harmful Fallacies That Can Compromise Your Realistic Equine Art: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-need-for-context-harmful-fallacies.html>

Gender Binders; Those Wonderful Differences!:
<http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/04/gender-benders-those-wonderful.html>

Steppin' Out; Hooves From an Artistic Perspective, Parts I-XII: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/03/steppin-out-hooves-from-artistic.html>

Viability and Functionality; The Umbrellas:
<http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/01/viability-and-functionality-umbrellas.html>

Anatomy and Conformation, Parts I-IV: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/01/anatomy-and-conformation-part-i-overview.html>

What's Reality Between A Couple of Friends... And a Bunny, Parts I-VI: http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/01/whats-reality-between-couple-of_3.html

Tips For Taking Reference Pix: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2011/09/tips-for-taking-reference-pix.html>

The Yin and Yang of Equine Realism: <http://mink-studios.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-yin-and-yang-of-equine-realism.html>

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