

# POLISH *with* PURPOSE

*How modern turnout is rewriting the dress code  
for comfort, safety and performance*

## Performance Disguised as Tradition

Walk the aisles at a rated show, stand at the in-gate on a humid afternoon, or scroll through a tack-room thread late at night, and a clear pattern emerges. Equestrian turnout has not abandoned convention; it has quietly rewritten it. What was once built around appearance is now built around performance, with the expectation that it still reads as polished and correct from across the ring.

Riders still care deeply about presentation. The hunter ring rewards restraint. Dressage asks for elegance. Eventers treat cross-country kit as a working safety system. But the modern rider is no longer willing to be overheated, restricted, or under-protected simply to look correct. Instead, turnout has become a balancing act: technical innovation that disappears into a traditional silhouette.

Across disciplines, riders are asking a sharper question: does this make me more secure, more comfortable, and more effective — and does it still pass the judge's eye? The answer still depends on the ring, but the direction is consistent: better function, hidden in plain sight. Breeches now feel closer to athletic compression wear than structured show garments. Show shirts function as base layers. Coats are expected to move with the rider. Helmets are researched, fitted, and chosen with intention.

## Same Look, Different Engine

In hunters, the mandate is invisibility. Coats now stretch through a full day in the saddle, show shirts lean on mesh and moisture-wicking panels, and tan breeches are judged as much on opacity and structure as on shade. Brands like Tailored Sportsman still anchor the look, and most new options are measured against that familiar fit. The silhouette stays traditional; the engineering has changed underneath.



Dressage has opened its aesthetic just enough to signal change. The long line remains; the rules simply allow more room for self-expression now. Riders are increasingly choosing coats in dark green, wine, and charcoal, diverging from traditional black and navy. Helmets carry subtle crystal detailing or tonal trim. Even white breeches have been rethought, with black-lined interiors and technical fabrics that maintain structure through a full day. The result is still elegant, but far more forgiving and functional.

The most visible style changes in the jumper ring tend to arrive from Europe — imported alongside the horses, and carrying the athletic, individualized aesthetic that's long been standard there. That influence registers as lighter-weight coats with shorter cuts, plus helmets and boots with aesthetic customizations. These trends tend to arrive in the U.S. edited to operate within the unwritten rules of polish American jumper riders cut their teeth on in junior hunter and equitation classes.

Eventers operate in three systems at once. Dressage demands polish, stadium borrows from jumpers, and cross-country prioritizes safety above all else. Air vests are now widely adopted, base layers are chosen for breathability, and helmets are selected first for certification and fit. There is little tolerance for compromise. If it does not perform, it does not belong.

Schooling, however, is where trends take root. Colored riding tights with phone pockets and excellent grip, sun shirts with UPF, and light layers have become the default. Half chaps replicate tall boots without the maintenance, and paddock boots are expected to function beyond the barn. The more time riders spend in that kind of stretch and function, the less patience they have for show clothes that get in the way of their best ride.

**Be ready to school in comfort and style almost anywhere in a neutral matching set —  
with the obvious exception of barns that issue their own schooling uniforms.**

Samshield Shadowmatt 2.0 helmet \$550 | PS of Sweden Kaia zip-up jacket \$120 | PS of Sweden Katja riding tights \$120  
Ariat Heritage Contour half chaps \$160 | Ego7 Taurus paddock boots \$200

# GRIT, GRACE *and* GADGETS



Eventers were early adopters of anatomical bridles, and the Micklem itself came out of an eventing trainer's brain. The goal was simple: spread pressure, protect fragile facial structures, and give horses a steadier feel when they're galloping at solid fences.



**JEN**

My checklists have checklists

Eventers live in three gears at once. Grit comes from trusting their horses at speed, grace from stringing all three phases into one clean story, and gadgets from the growing pile of tech that keeps everyone in one piece. Jen builds her turnout like a checklist — pieces that move from ring to ring, then add extra armor and data when the start-box countdown begins.



**Left:** Micklem bridle \$210 | Korsteel Kimberwick bit \$55 | Nunn Finer Eventa rubber reins \$150 | Hit-Air vest \$700 | Kerrits Ice-Fil shirt \$55

Kerrits Crossover II breeches \$140 | Ellany belt \$50 | Ariat Heritage Contour II field boot \$380

**Center:** Plenty Good Ponies hat \$38 | Ariat Breeze base layer \$95 | Kerrits Coolcore tights \$100 | CoolHorseSocks \$20

**Right:** Nunn Finer medical armband \$15 | Charles Owen skullcap \$270 | Optimum Time Event Watch \$135 | Four Star Brand stud kit \$40

Ariat Breeze half chaps \$170 | Ariat Devon paddock boots \$260 | Grab Strap provided by Bartville Saddlery in Christiana, PA | Cool on Track® Quick Wraps from Back on Track, backontrackusa.com, \$83

# The IMPECCABLE AMMY

On Stephanie's aisle, "correct" is a uniform as much as a concept — navy coat, tan breeches, high-shine boots. The fabrics have quietly upgraded to stretch, ventilation, and grip, while the social rules remain the same. Most barns still take their cues from the head trainer's taste, right down to which of the four nearly identical Tailored Sportsman tans is a yes.



In Europe, anatomical and even no-noseband bridles have shifted from novelty to standard gear. Jumper riders on both sides of the Atlantic appreciate the clear communication and reduced poll and facial pressure. The hunter world is waiting for those same welfare-driven designs to learn to hide inside a traditional silhouette.

Jumper riders were the first defectors — compression fabrics, sticky grip, wide waistbands that feel more Peloton than Pony Club. From across the ring, they still read as plain light breeches in ever-so-slightly daring shades; up close, they look like they're headed to a tough Pilates class before the ride and a long run after.

## STEPHANIE

*Most likely to be able to find a safety pin at a moment's notice*

**Left:** Samshield 2.0 Shadowmatt helmet \$529 | KL Select Tryon bridle \$450 | PS of Sweden Helsinki bridle \$180 | Ariat Scout half chaps \$105 | Ariat Heritage Zip paddock boot \$170 | Parlanti Essence Tampa dress boot \$690  
**Center:** Ariat Bandera polo \$75 | Tory Repeated Stitch belt \$80 | The Tailored Sportsman Clarino Side-Zip Bootssock breech \$190  
**Right:** Essex show shirt \$160 | Charles Ancona Classic show jacket \$1,450 | Roeckl unisex Roeck-Grip gloves \$70 | Cavalleria Toscana jumping breeches \$375

## 2026 TURNOUT GUIDE

### Fit, Safety and the Real Market Drivers

The deeper shift is not just what riders are wearing; it is how they think about what they wear and use. Breeches are judged by whether they remain opaque and stable. Coats are evaluated by how they allow movement. Helmets are chosen based on safety and fit, not just appearance.

This thinking extends directly into tack. The conversation around bits and bridles has grown more technical and more welfare-focused. Riders are moving away from the idea that stronger equipment solves problems and toward a clearer understanding of communication and fit. Anatomical bridles, shaped nosebands, and more thoughtful bit selection are becoming standard. The question has shifted from control to clarity.

The most significant trend in saddles is not in what riders are buying, it's in how they are treating saddle fit as an ongoing welfare and performance concern. Where a saddle purchase was once a one-time decision, a new saddle now often opens an ongoing professional relationship, with fit checked and adjusted as the horse's musculature, workload, and condition change. In the eventing world, for example, the USEA now presents routine saddle-fit reviews as standard seasonal practice, with twice-yearly checks as a sensible minimum and more frequent evaluations for horses in hard work or active development. Saddle fitting has its own credentialing pathways, continuing education requirements, and increasingly its own line in the barn budget alongside the farrier and the dentist. It is a quieter trend than anything happening in the apparel aisle, and arguably the most consequential: better fit, sustained over time, for the long-term soundness of the horse.

**Professional saddle fitters evaluate multiple points of contact to support both horse comfort and the goals of the rider — whatever those may be.**



Safety equipment is expanding, driven in part by new attention to injury data. One recent sports-medicine review estimated that about one in five riders will sustain a serious injury during their riding career. Against that backdrop, air vests and traditional body protectors — once nearly exclusive to eventing — are turning up more often in hunter/jumper schooling rings, and the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association has even partnered with Virginia Tech to begin formal testing of air-vest performance. Adoption is uneven and fashion-sensitive. The direction, at least, appears clear.

The push toward comfort, safety, and function over tradition has a clear center of gravity: the adult amateur woman. According to American Horse Council data, the largest single age cohort of horse owners in the United States is 45 to 59. She is self-funding every dollar of the estimated \$11,000-\$25,000 she spends annually. She wants gear that works across barn, lesson, and show; she has neither the patience nor the need to settle for less. She is reshaping the definition of polish, and the industry is only beginning to catch up.

### What Comes Next: Innovation You Won't See

The next generation of apparel, tack, and equipment is designed to perform at a high level while preserving the visual language of the sport. Smart fabrics are moving beyond comfort into performance, with compression, temperature regulation, and early heart-rate monitoring capabilities; USEF now permits biometric sensors in competition for both horse and rider. Helmets are advancing in protection and integration, while air vests expand beyond eventing. Saddles are becoming more adjustable, with rider-accessible fit



**Bitless bridles rethink contact altogether, so comfort and clear communication stay at the center of every ride.**

Photo Courtesy of Bitless Bridle, bitlessbridle.com

systems and pressure mapping that respond to changes in the horse's condition. Bits and bridles are shifting toward anatomical design and clearer communication. Protective equipment is using lighter and more responsive materials such as carbon fiber and molded TPU, and embedded sensors in boots and wraps are beginning to track impact, stride symmetry, and limb temperature. At the same time, connected technologies—wearables, GPS tracking, and training apps — are beginning to link horse and rider into a single performance system.

What is pushing the visual side of that shift, however, is not coming from the top down. In the jumper world especially, influencers and highly visible riders are accelerating the acceptance of color, detail, and individuality. Subtle pastels, tonal sets, and gloss-and-matte combinations are showing up first in schooling rings and social media before filtering into broader acceptance. What once read as flashy is now being normalized through repetition.

But while influencers may introduce the look, they are not driving the market. The real engine remains the adult amateur rider, who ultimately determines what becomes standard by what she is willing to buy, wear, and sustain over time.

### Polish With a Purpose

The modern turnout is not about looking different. It is about performing better while appearing unchanged. The rider still enters the ring in a familiar silhouette, but underneath, every element has been reconsidered: lighter fabrics, better fit, smarter safety, and more intentional design.

Riders are asking better questions. They are buying with more awareness. They are demanding gear that works, not just gear that looks right.

And that is the real trend.

Not flash. Not fashion for its own sake.

But polish—with a purpose.

# The EXPRESSIVE ONE

Several rule changes from the FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale) are impacting the dressage attire and tack Alexis considers in 2026. On the fun side, coats are now permitted in a range of dark colors, breeches no longer have to be stark white, and helmets are perked up with a bit of bling. On the welfare side, the FEI has launched a new noseband-measuring tool to help ensure the comfort of dressage horses.



Dressage bridle design has seen a major, nearly invisible shift, with anatomical crowns, relaxed browbands, and nosebands shaped to dodge key nerves and spread pressure more evenly. On the rules side, the FEI's pass-through gauge for nosebands replaces the old "two fingers" guideline and gives stewards a quick, consistent way to confirm there's space between leather and bone, making over-tightening difficult to hide.

You've come a long way, baby! Half chaps and paddock boots are looking more and more like tall boots these days and are finally becoming acceptable schooling footwear for many dressage riders.



Of all the companies offering the kind of matchy-matchy schooling wardrobe dressage riders love, LeMieux leans in the hardest, offering rider attire, horse accessories, and an app with an outfit-builder function.



## ALEXIS

"Matching is the key to harmony"

**Left:** PS of Sweden bridle with Swedish noseband \$355 | FEI measuring tool \$22 | Ariat Close Contour half chaps \$180 | LeMieux paddock boots \$160

**Center:** Caracas helmet \$289, from Back on Track, backontrackusa.com | RJ Classics stock \$50 | Fair Play tailcoat \$485

Piqueur Candela breeches \$260 | Roeckl gloves \$70 | De Niro Raffaello dressage boots \$1,100

**Right:** All LeMieux | Helmet cover \$50 | Sports T-shirt \$55 | Naomi Pull-On breeches \$95 | Socks \$30 | Ear bonnet \$55 | Loire saddle pad \$120 | Bell boots \$30