

Lights! Camera! Gallop! The Story of the horse in Film

Extract from Chapter Four (without pictures – the book itself has colour and black and white photos and movie stills)

The stars – and their glamour secrets

Horse film stars, though certainly glamorous in their own right, have much more in common with human film stars than you may at first think. This chapter will reveal their make-up secrets, tell you about their costumes and their fans, and show how recent developments like CGI are enhancing their onscreen image.

Hair and make-up

Horse film stars frequently have their own make-up artists and even hair stylists. At its simplest, their make-up would involve some kind of water-based paint, used for example to cover up small white markings on a horse which is supposed to be black in the film. Sometimes, though, a much more extensive coverage may be used to disguise a horse so that he could double for the main horse, for stunts or for otherwise specialist scenes such as lying down or rearing. Some Western films, for example, used the same stunt horse double for falling scenes in different films. Cocaine, a skilled and popular stunt horse in the 1950s, was a sorrel red but he had to be dyed completely black to match Robert Mitchum's horse in the 1959 film *The Wonderful Country*.

The 2004 film *Hidalgo* features Viggo Mortensen as a washed-up show cowboy rider and his horse Hidalgo, a small mixed-breed coloured mustang. They enter a gruelling three-thousand-mile survival race across Arabia, competing with pure-bred Arab stallions. As the picture of Hidalgo shows, the pattern of his markings is complicated, and this film took the trick of using doubles to new lengths. The horse which played the main part was called TJ. Seven other horses, each with a different mixture of skills, were used for doubles: for tricks such as moving clothes or removing his own saddle, for chase or endurance racing scenes, or simply as a comfortable ride for the actors. All were coloured, but true to form for coloured horses, each had in real life a different and complex pattern of brown and white. Enormous amounts of make-up are said to have been used to produce the one uniform 'Hidalgo' pattern of markings on each horse.

More recently, the 2010 film *Secretariat*, starring Diane Lane and John Malkovich, used five different horses to portray the racehorse Secretariat, which in 1973 set the record for running the fastest time in the Kentucky Derby. Secretariat was played by four thoroughbreds and an American Quarter horse. All five had special make-up to replicate the real Secretariat's face stripe and star. The main horse acting the part was Trolley Boy, who had been selected through a Secretariat look-alike competition, but he too needed some make-up.

In the 2011 film *War Horse*, the horses playing the main equine characters had a specialist make-up team of their own, with their coats dyed and markings added to ensure continuity between them. For the scene where Joey, the war horse, is born, a non-

toxic 'slime' make-up was devised and smeared on to the foal playing the part. And for a very dramatic scene where Joey has fled through World War One's muddy trenches and lies bleeding, tangled in barbed wire, special non-toxic make-up was used for the blood, mud and cuts on his skin.

In the *Mask of Zorro*, Zorro's black stallion Tornado was described as an Andalusian, a Spanish breed with a finely shaped head that demonstrates its Arab bloodlines. Casey, the lead horse playing this part, has to live up to the performances by previous horses in the earlier Zorro films and TV series. Casey was actually a Friesian rather than an Andalusian. He did indeed have a beautiful black, gleaming coat and flowing mane and tail, but as he appears in the film his mane is especially long and luxuriously wavy – the secret was to add hair-weaves. The make-up used for the stunt doubles in the *Mask of Zorro*, as in most modern films where horse make-up is used, was a water-based, non-toxic dye.

Cass Ole, the horse which played the fabled black stallion in the 1979 film *The Black Stallion*, also had his mane enhanced for the film. Like many ordinary riding horses, Cass Ole had already had the top part of his mane trimmed to make it easier for the bridle to fit around his head – a trim sometimes called a bridle path. The rest of his mane was typical for his breed, with a length about equal to the width of his neck – the average length to which a horse's mane will grow when it has not been pulled or deliberately shortened. In order to obscure his bridle path and create the very long flowing mane which you see in the film, Cass Ole had hair extensions sewn into his mane. The alternative, to grow his mane longer naturally, would have taken too long: it usually necessitates keeping the mane plaited for weeks and a lot of conditioning.

Horses in films with a lot of action are often required to act confidently in potentially alarming situations. Sometimes blinkers were used, because a horse that cannot see anything alarming is generally a calmer horse. A trick used in some films was to paint 'eyes' on over the blinkers or eye-guards, so that from a distance, the horse looked unblinkered.