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Showmanship
guide



Showmanship introduction

Standing at or near the top of the line is not simply about taking hold of the halter and walking into the ring. It is about hours of preparation and dedication and about building up a relationship with your animal. This guide is aimed at giving advice on how to get started, tips on what's right and what's wrong and guidelines on good practice.

Selecting your calf

Calves with natural style will always attract the judge's eye. They should be well grown, have strong top lines, and look clean, dairy and open ribbed. As calves only have udder promise rather than an udder full of milk, more emphasis is placed on the other parts of the animal. Therefore the calf you choose should have good feet and legs and track well. From a showmanship point of view, it is important to choose a well balanced calf which will stand naturally and does not need too much training (avoid calves that naturally stand with their legs out behind them, for example). Every animal has a different attitude; very quiet calves can be hard to control in their head carriage as they are head heavy. Alternatively, you do not want a calf which is so nervous it will kick the judge or career off to the other side of the show field dragging you along behind.

The art of showmanship is showing your calf off to its best advantage. Ensure the calf is the right size for you, ideally not too big or small compared to you, and this again will make your task as show person easier. Also bear in mind how much calves grow during a show season!



Training your calf

Training calves requires a lot of time, effort and patience! Starting well in advance of the show will make things easier and less pressured, at least a month before is advisable. For showmanship, starting with a couple of calves may also be advantageous, giving you the chance to consider the different temperaments and personalities of the animals. Start by tying the animal with her head up for an hour each day over two or three days; make sure this is on a non slip surface and to a solid structure like a gate. This will make her familiar with the feel of the halter and teach her to hold her head at the correct height.

The next stage is to start walking your calf. To begin with this is better in a confined area like a pen or collecting yard. Cattle will be more controlled if you use a natural barrier along one side such as a wall, and in the early stages having two people, one on the front end pulling and the other at the back pushing, will make for an easier time. Again do not sicken either yourself or the animal by doing this for too long.

Holding the halter

Once your animal is well trained, don't forget to practise with a leather and chain halter as you will use in the show ring.

The way you hold the halter is very important, it should be held in the left hand with the shank rolled up or looped.

Your shank should be about one and a half feet long to enable you to hold it properly (which will annoy Dad when he has bought you a new halter and then you cut the shank so you can hold it all in one hand).

Your left hand should be through the halter gripping the chain and shank. Never put your finger through the ring as the calf may pull and seriously hurt your hand!



This halter is too loose.



Avoid the halter in the calf's eye.



This halter is too big.



A well fitting halter should fit half way down the nose.



The correct way to hold a halter.



Never put your finger through the ring.



Here the head and nose are too high.



Correct head carriage.



The elbow in the right position.



The elbow here is too high.

Your hand should be snug to the calf's face so that the halter does not ride up into her eye. If it's not held tightly enough and the calf takes fright and jumps backwards, you will probably be left standing with the halter.

Ensuring you have good head carriage with your calf is very important and this is made easier by having the right sized calf. Your arm should be in line with the calf's head and bent at the elbow and NOT held straight or too high.

Knowing your animal

As mentioned before, the art of showmanship is showing your animal at its best. To do this you must assess your calf's strengths and faults. For example, if your calf has a weak loin, it will be necessary to position her with her hind legs well underneath her body. If your calf is throaty, you will need to hold her throat up to make her look cleaner and sharper in this region. This will be with your opposite hand (i.e. right hand when walking backwards around the ring).



Above right and below:
Correct head carriage
with excess throat held up.



A poorly set up and positioned calf.

You must also train your calf to 'set up' when in the ring, which is what you do when the judge raises his or her hand and asks you to stop, either to all exhibitors in the ring or you as an individual. The correct feet placement is right rear and front left feet behind, although her front

feet may be positioned side by side.

Although you need to build up a rapport with your calf, it is important that they know who is boss without you overpowering them. Petted calves often make fools of their leaders in the ring. If your calf plays up, don't lose your cool; be firm with her but avoid hitting her in the ring and never hit her with the halter.

Presentation and washing the calf

Your calf needs to look her best when she enters the ring. During the week prior to the show, you will need to wash your calf several times, but it can be useful to wash and clip your calf many weeks in advance of the show. This will remove muck clumps (depending on how your stock is reared, particularly in winter) and 'fluffy' and unworkable baby hair. However, be wary of scalping your calf of all the hair it has, especially on the top line, as it can be slow to re-grow and you can take hair off but you can't put it back in again.

When washing your calf, remember to:

- Tie the calf to be washed with a nylon rope halter, not hemp or cotton. Hemp rope will shrink when wet and cut your calf's nose. Always tie your calf up with her head held high - if the head is low she is likely to topple over.
- Use lukewarm, not hot, water when starting to rinse your calf. Get your calf used to the temperature of the water by starting to rinse its legs and underline and do not rush up to your calf, make sure she is aware of your presence.
- Be careful not to get water in the ears when rinsing around the calf's head or they will droop. Hold the calf's ear curled in your hand while rinsing around the head. A damp cloth should be used to wipe the inside of the ears.
- Once rinsed, apply a good animal shampoo for the first washing.
- Brush the soap into all areas including the legs, starting at the top of the animal and working down all the time.
- Rinse really well between the calf's legs, belly, tail head and top line as this is where soap tends to collect. If the top line is dirty or soapy, it cannot be worked. Soap left in the hair will cause the skin to flake, so ensure that you have rinsed properly.
- Make sure hooves and under the dew claws are clean, using a wire brush if necessary, and make sure they are clean before leaving for the show. A clean calf with fresh muck will be much quicker to wash on arrival at the show.

- Brush the calf to make sure the water is out and no soap remains – this helps shine the hair. After her first wash, treat her for mange and lice. Using the side of your hand in a downward motion will remove excessive water and save on buying a scraper. Towelling off your calf should not be necessary unless it is very cold.
- Return the calf to her bed to rest – she will want to eat at this point, but because she is cold and stressed, it is best to give her hay.

The calf should be clipped again two or three days prior to the event. Although it is vital to the general appearance of the calf, the judge cannot give additional points for a professional clip since many showmen do not clip their own animals. However, the judge will discriminate against a bad clip job.

How you should look

The general appearance of the handler is as important as the calf. The judge will often use your appearance as an indication of your overall attitude.

Wear the correct showing dress – white trousers or white jeans, a white Shirt (if long sleeved it should be worn long sleeved and not rolled up), HYB or HUK tie and a sturdy pair of shoes or boots. Jodhpur boots are ideal, while trainers and high heels are unacceptable, and footwear should be clean and polished. If a belt is worn it should match the colour of your boots.

Your shirt should be tucked in and the top button fastened. Such things can be deciding factors in a very tight class.

When you enter the ring you should be clean, neat and tidy. Keeping clean before entering the ring can be a bit of a problem and it is advisable to be changed well in advance of your class to avoid panic, so if you can, wear a boiler suit over your show whites until the last moment.

Entering the ring

Exhibitors should enter the ring in catalogue order and showmanship classes should always be held before the calf conformation classes. If you do not get called in catalogue order then always try to be first, this way you will immediately attract the judges attention – first impressions are very important and it shows you are ready and dedicated to taking part.

Enter the ring in a clockwise direction quickly and calmly with the halter in your right hand, walking forward. The judge wants you in there as quickly as possible so he can get on with the job.



Strong clean footwear is recommended, while shirts should be tucked in.



Moving round the ring

Walk forward until the entire class is in the ring and the judging begins. If you reach the entrance of the ring again before the rest of the class has entered, wait at this point until all the competitors are in the ring.



Once everyone has entered the ring, walk backwards with the halter in your left hand. Walk in an upright position, NEVER crouch.

It always looks better if you can walk in time with your calf, so when she moves her left foot forward you should move your left foot backwards, this will be

Move backwards round the ring once everyone is in the ring, watch for the judges commands and allow sufficient spacing.



easier if you are familiar with your calf and have practised sufficiently and, again, if the animal is the correct size for you. Showing is almost like formation dancing!

For showmanship classes you need eyes in the back of your head. You need to have one eye on your calf and one

on the judge whilst in the ring and be aware of what's going on around you. Leave plenty of room between your calf and the one in front or you will not have any room to reposition your calf if necessary and always leave space between yourself and the ringside so the judge can come to the other side of you and the calf.

In a full show ring it could be considered discourteous to your fellow showmen if you are greedy with space. While you should not stick to the barriers around the ring, neither should you be near the middle of the ring hiding the calf in front of you or the one behind. This is very discourteous and will also count against you.

The judge will generally observe all the exhibitors from a distance first, so remember first impressions are important. The judge is likely to evaluate the

class by continually asking contestants to stop and start. Missing one signal is enough to knock you off the top spot; in essence in a showmanship class everyone starts with a 100% and a clean sheet and it's what you do wrong that takes you down the line, the person winning being the one with the fewest mistakes.

When you are asked to set your calf up, walk into position and set her up as simply and quickly as possible. Once you are satisfied she is set up correctly, move slightly back from your calf and keep your eye on the judge



and your calf for the walk on signal, steady your calf on the point of the shoulder if you are not holding the throat. If your calf is being awkward to set up, accept near perfection, it is better to be 90% right and have it done quickly than 100% right and have taken a long time to set her up.

Above: Avoid standing the calf's back legs like this. Right: Always be in a position to see the judge. Below: This is an ideally placed calf.



Examination by the judge

After an initial observation, the judge will then proceed to examine each contestant individually. This is not an excuse to relax while he looks at the other showmen; keep your animal set up when stood still – you never know when the judge might turn round and catch you out.

When examining you, the judge will usually ask you to draw forward and he will then give you the chance to set the calf up. Do so as quickly as possible. When the judge is examining the calf in front, you should move into the position that the previous person was in and await the judge's signal to move on and set up. Then the judge will feel the skin - when he does this move the calf's head gently toward him, to loosen the skin. Then he will walk round the back of your calf and look along her back from tail to head. Make sure your



Be polite and smile at the judge.



Turn the head towards the judge as he feels the skin.



Walk forwards towards the judge.



Draw your calf forward as the judge comes to the off side.



Turn the head towards the judge.

calf is straight when he does this and the head is looking forward so he can see right up the calf's spine.

He will then walk round to the other side of the calf and at this point, if you feel confident with your calf, change its back legs so he has a view of the whole calf. In a close placing, the ability to do this neatly and quickly maybe a deciding factor. Finally he will walk round to the front of your calf; at this point you will turn round to face the judge with the calf's head following the judge. This means the calf is always in view of the judge, so you must not be an obstruction in front of the calf.

The judge may also engage you in conversation; be polite and interested and be ready to tell the judge, if asked, the name, age or birth date and what your calf is sired by. As the whole experience is supposed to be fun, a smile to the

Walk away straight and hold the head straight when the judge views the calf from behind.



Pinch down
toplines as
needed.



Correct raised
tail heads.



Avoid bad
back legs.



If the calf is
dipped in the
back, pulling
up the skin
just behind
the front leg
will lift the
back.



judge might also help. The judge is then likely to ask you to move off; do so quickly and try to travel in a straight line away from the judge so he can see the calf on the move easily.

Some calves will hold up their tail head, or may either pee or muck in the ring, meaning their tail head needs adjusting; again this is easier if you are sized in relation to your calf. If the calf does muck or pee, try to be alert enough to realise and stop while it does so. If you need to adjust the tail setting, leave the halter in your left hand, turn the calf's head towards you and reach with your right hand to put the tail head down.

Being pulled into line

Once the judge has seen all the exhibitors, you will be asked to draw into line. Once you are called in (again you should have one eye on the judge so you do not miss his direction), you should turn and walk forward as quickly as possible into the line following the direction of the judge and/or ring steward.

The handler with the calf in first position should set their calf up with the rear legs in the opposite position, i.e. the hind leg furthest away from you further forward. This is because the judge will be looking at your calf from the side nearest you. Try not to fuss over

your calf too much while in line. If your calf moves forward, try to back her up - this is easiest done by applying pressure on the point of the shoulder, something which can be practised in advance of show day. Similarly, applying pressure on the shoulder as the calf comes into line can stop the calf coming too far forward and make positioning the front feet easier. If you need to move the feet on your calf, this is best achieved by working the halter. It's also acceptable, if not ideal, to move the front feet by using your foot, either rubbing down the front of the foot to move a foot back, or rubbing under the dewclaw to move a foot forward. It is NOT acceptable to move the back feet with your feet. Unless absolutely necessary, do not draw your calf out of line and walk her round.



Face the judge in an orderly line, note the reversed back legs in 1st. Use your feet to help position the calf's front feet.

Everyone would like to be drawn in first, but judges in showmanship classes frequently make provisional lines up from which they work their contenders and they may wish to see how you cope under pressure and whether you know to swap feet when at the top of the line, or how to move up and down the line correctly.

Moving once in line

If asked to move from one position to another, whether up or down, you should do so as quickly as possible. You should, on direction, walk forward with your calf, turn clockwise so you are on the outside of the calf (eliminating its ability to run off) and come back through the same position then move directly into the new position.



Avoid moving out of line.

There is, however, an exception to this movement rule. If you are in top spot and asked to move down the line, you should move forward and then turn anti-clockwise to come back through the space, then move directly into the new position. At no other time should you move anti-clockwise.

Finally, when another calf is placed between you and the next showman, be courteous and let him in. Sportsmanship is important in the ring and helping to let a calf in, just as much as tapping a calf on should it stop in front of you, is seen as sporting by the judge, as long as it doesn't distract you from your own job in hand.

Completing the job

The above advice should stand you in good stead to be competitive and put on a good display with our calf. Other areas of consideration include:

- Watching others compete will help you see how to do, and not do, things. Each judge will have their own special preferences, so if you are not in the first class of the day, try to listen to their reasons on a class before you go in the ring, as this will enable you to gauge what they are looking for. When you are given reasons, pay attention as we generally learn from our mistakes and you avoid making the same mistake next time you are in the ring.
- A close placing may be sorted by asking two contestants to swap calves. The first thing to do is to set up the new calf. This requires a very quick evaluation of her faults, it is likely that the calf has been pulled out of position before you swapped by an alert showman that is keen to win and wants to make your life more difficult! When the calf is positioned, gather up the halter - NEVER gather it up first. No matter whose calf you are showing, you must show it off to its best advantage.



Conduct

The judge will be monitoring your attitude, so try not to appear nervous and give the impression you are relaxed and having fun. Make sure you are in the ring on time and in the collecting ring when called. Be aware of what's going on in the ring, never switch off and remember always to have one eye on the judge and one on your calf. The judge will have eyes in the back of his or her head, so concentrate on the job in hand, don't be distracted by what is going on outside the ring and don't get into conversation with spectators.

In the end

Your attitude is still crucial and will count for a fair amount with any judge in his or her final considerations, so always be polite and courteous to the judge and other competitors. Look cheerful; smiling should not be a pain and looking cheerful suggests you are having fun, which is the aim after all. Listen to advice offered by the judge when summing up, learn from your mistakes and remember not everyone can stand at the top of the line. With practice and by trying your hardest in the class, your chances of being near the top of the line are increased.

Good luck and enjoy your showing!

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