

SHOWMANSHIP

by: Preston R. Faris

Showmanship! Is it really important or is it just a class for youth so that the ones who can't afford a great goat can have a place to compete on a more even footing? I contend that showmanship is extremely important, no matter what the age of the exhibitor. Showmanship is very simple to me and I don't want to get bogged down in a discussion with the focus on the showmanship class. Showmanship, as I view it, is the display of the animal and not necessarily the evaluation of the exhibitor's technique. While there certainly is a place for the competitive showmanship class, there is always a need to use good showmanship technique in every class in which an exhibitor participates.

Too frequently when the showmanship class is held, the exhibitor forgets the basics of good showmanship and begins to be overly concerned with showing- all too often himself and not the animal. The other problem that I see with the class itself is that many try to make the showmanship class a venue for measuring the overall knowledge of the exhibitor about the project. While it is certainly beneficial for the exhibitor to be informed about the animal itself, I choose to leave the measurement of knowledge of all of the management, business and other interests about the specie being shown to another time. In other words, if I ask a question of the exhibitor it will be specifically about the particular animal, i.e. weight, age, date of birth, twin, single, etc. I personally do not like to ask questions about the industry as a part of judging the showmanship class. To me showmanship means just that- the skill involved in displaying the animal.

With that in mind let's get down to the basics of showmanship. I believe that showmanship is a skill and therefore almost everyone can learn to be a functional showman. Since it is a skill it can be taught and learned. Some, however, are born with the natural ability to do better than others. Some people are just simply gifted. There are even a few who will never quite grasp the whole concept.

First of all we must understand that showmanship is simply an effort to make the animal shown always look its very best in the show ring. You will notice that I said we are here to make the **animal** look its best and not the exhibitor. The exhibitor should certainly be neat and well groomed. After all when a judge is judging it is impossible to view only the animal and not the handler. Therefore the whole package makes an impression if only subconsciously. If, however, the handler distracts from the animal by dressing obnoxiously or improperly then he has defeated his purpose as the showman.

Dress appropriate to the event and the class is important. It is just as possible to overdress as it is to over show and neither will be beneficial to the animal's image as the judge is evaluating it. Neat, comfortable clothing which will not inhibit the exhibitor from moving and maneuvering the animal is important. Courtesy in the showing will be discussed later but it perhaps starts with the exhibitor being courteous to the judge in appearance. Therefore, except in instances where the exhibitor is self conscious about uncovering the head, hats or caps generally have no place in the indoor showing. They may bump the judge as he handles the

goat and that can be embarrassing to the judge and the exhibitor. While we are on the subject of embarrassing, it is never appropriate for female exhibitors to wear revealing clothing. If as a judge I have to worry about what others are thinking of me while I am looking at an exhibitor and her animal because she is inappropriately dressed, then I will just be forced to ignore that exhibit. Obviously good showmanship would not be anything to cause a judge to be distracted away from the exhibit. Dress neatly, comfortably and appropriately for the class and show.

Now down to the real basics of good showmanship. First we must decide what is the proper gear to use on the goat-- Halter or collar or neck chain. My personal belief is that a simple flat small link chain is the best in the showing. There may be other things used in the training phase like a chain with a halter or some of these wicked looking things which put intense pressure with the aid of prongs into the neck. Halters are not my choice because I do not believe larger animals respond to them as well as the chain and they prohibit easy display from either side of the animal. We must also remember that the general public does not want to see anything that they believe to be cruel to the animal. Don't give them any ideas by showing them these harsh looking devices. There may be a need to use them on mature bucks but I can't see much other use for them except to use at home in training.

Technique. While showmanship really begins at home with an understanding of the weaknesses of your animal, it really is highlighted the instant you enter the ring. Begin showing before you ever walk through the gate into the ring and never stop until you leave the ring. It is never official and never too late for a judge to change his mind until the ribbons are handed out and the books marked.

When the ring is entered walk in with a good upright posture. Don't enter stooped over or walking backward dragging the goat. The goat should lead alongside with the point of his shoulder even with the your leg. Walk out naturally in a path parallel to the basic path of the goat and with your body sideways basically perpendicular to the line of the goat. Don't turn your body in toward the goat. Be sure to keep the animal's head up as high as possible and keep him walking out naturally.

Follow the directions of the ring steward or the judge in moving around the ring. If you are not entered in the first class, then watch it. Most judges will utilize the same basic procedure as they work every class. A good showman will learn that procedure early in the day. There is little more frustrating to a judge than to have to explain to the same exhibitors and even sometimes ring help the procedure for working the class when the show has been underway for several classes.

If asked to enter and line up side by side then leave adequate space between you and the next animal but don't waste space. Always allow for the novice who comes in behind you and tries to crowd you out by leaving a little extra space to which you can adjust and even up after that exhibitor pulls in the line. Try to stay in a fairly straight line and maintain at least four feet off of the fence in front of you unless told to get closer. Many times the judge will want to walk in front of the animals between the animal and the fence and he will want to have enough

room to be far enough away from the animal to see the chest of the animal and the front legs. If asked to enter and remain at a side view, head to tail with other animals then once again it is the responsibility of the showman to gauge distance and stop soon enough to leave nice space in front of the animal. Remember that novice can really mess you up when stopping on the side view if he presses you for room, so stop early enough to adjust if you have to.

Now its time to set the feet and legs. The corners of the body are the focus point for the feet. Some adjustment can be made to help an animal look longer or to overcome a weakness such as a weak top or sickle hocked, camped under leg structure. Don't spread the legs too wide apart when looking at any point - front view, side view or rear view. Don't stand the animal too narrow on either the front or rear view and don't stretch the animal out when on the side view. Remember the corners of a table type leg setting are the example to shoot for. When asked to move, it is best to do so smoothly but deliberately. Don't get in a big hurry; but, at the same time don't take all day. Always know where you are going and basically move there in a straight line. Look back at the judge with a glance while knowing where you are heading and keep in mind the position of your animal. Always be ready for instructions from the judge. Good eye contact lets him know that you are proud of what you have and would certainly appreciate a good look.

When asked to lead away from the judge then do just that. Lead straight away- NOT IN A CIRCLE. He wants to see the animal track. The same applies for leading to the judge. Lead straight and stay out of the line of vision of the judge. You may be able to fool him if you know you have an animal that does not move especially soundly off his feet and legs but you will probably do more harm than good if you try to hide something. Remember to keep that head up on the animal.

Keep your head up as well. Nobody likes a pouter. Always keep your cool in the showing even if its not your day. Everyone has those days when the judge just doesn't like what you are exhibiting. Remain courteous and do your job. Take him a different kind next time and hope for the best. Never take your misfortune out on the other exhibitors. Courtesy is a must in the showing. However, don't let courtesy get in the way of doing what you must to maintain good position and highlight the best traits of the animal which you are exhibiting.