

4-H Showmanship

I am a previous 4-H member of Josephine County of 6 years. Of those 6 years in the rabbit project, I was Grand Champion showman 3 times, Reserve Grand Champion once, and Reserve Champion Intermediate my 2nd year out. My senior year I participated at State Fair and I won Reserve Champion Senior Showman. Having Vern Palmblad as a judge most of those years, I quickly learned what it took to be a good showman and I'd like to share some tips with you so you can be fully prepared on the showmanship table.

Each judge will have a different style and expectations. However, it never hurts to educate yourself to your best ability. Use ALL of your 4-H material books and handouts. Use the ARBA Standard of Perfection and Better Guide to Raising Rabbits and Cavies when available. {Your 4-H leader should have some available or make them available to you}. Ask other kids what types of questions were asked the year prior and last but not least, STUDY! Not the week or night before but all year long. Study with other rabbit kids, as they may have study tips or can teach you something new.

Know your breed... Not just your rabbit's variety, show room class and sex. Know other colors, min/max weights, history, body type {also knowing the other 4}, fur type {also knowing the other 3} breed specific DQ's and all general DQ's. Know more than one breed of rabbit {as many as you can, and some pointers about those breeds as well}. Know a handful of diseases {including prevention, cause and cure}. Know what you feed your rabbit and how much. {protein, fiber and fat %'s}. Be able to describe how you house and clean your rabbit's cage. Know body parts and the temperature of rabbits. Know about gestation and kindling. Know fryer, roaster and stewer weights & ages. Pretty much memorize the Standard of Perfection key terms. Know how they relate to each other, breeds and diseases. Know the oddities and trick questions {IE: peg/pegged teeth, pointing to your rabbit's crown {you should only do this if you have a lopped breed, and know which lop breed doesn't}. Know about 4-H and what it's all about. Also know the other areas of your project {companion rabbit, producing does or market project}.

When coming onto the show table, always pose your rabbit frontwards.

Sometimes, the judge will have you all turn to the left, towards you and to the right making a complete circle or he will tell each individual a position which may be different than your neighbor. KEEP that position after examining your rabbit until/unless he tells you to do otherwise.

ALWAYS handle your rabbit, and others with 100% safe handling skills. NEVER drag your rabbit's toenails on the carpet; ALWAYS pick your rabbit completely off the

table {judges like to see air}. Use 1/4 turns and do not rush. If asked to “pick up your rabbit, turn around and walk back”, do not set your rabbit down unless instructed to. It gets kids every time. Pick your rabbit up, tuck it’s head and legs under your arm and support the rump with the other hand. When asked to “check” the teeth/nails/sex, show yourself. If asked to “show” the teeth/nails/sex, the judge wants to see it. Look at the judge after you complete each step. When “showing” you have to do it the “opposite” or whichever way you feel most comfortable. For teeth I flip the rabbit, tuck its body under my right arm and show the judge the teeth. For nails I flip and semi-rotate using my left hand to show the front and hind nails and sex at the same time. You should have plenty of practice with your rabbit when not checking yourself, use a parent or another kid to be the judge. When asked to “check” or “show” the teeth/nails/sex, do it in that order and that order only. Keep one eye on the judge and one on your rabbit. When the judge moves to the next person, slowly move your feet so you are still facing him. If your rabbit moves, calmly place it back on your rug, repose and put your hands behind your back. If your rabbit is way out of control, you should keep one hand on your rabbit’s head, or whatever keeps it still. Even if your rabbit is rowdy, knowing how to calmly keep your rabbit in place and answering questions to your best ability, you can still come out a winner. Last but not least, try to SMILE 😊

THE BASIC VET CHECK

- Beginning and Carry {controlled tuck and carry to/from table}
- Check Ears {mites, cankers, rips/tears, tattoo -- remember your rabbit has two ears, check them both}
- Check Eyes {left and right eye for proper color or disease. Know proper color for variety/breed and know diseases that affect the eye}
- Check Nose {look at/in nose - know what symptoms of disease would be there. Look at insides of legs}
- Check Teeth - Look at front and bottom teeth. Know what problems affect teeth and know proper bite}
- Check Front Feet/Toenails {count correct number on left and right. Proper nail color, pad color and know DQ’s}
- Check Front Legs/Bone {lift and feel each bone in right and left. Know what DQ’s to look for}
- Check Back Feet/Toenails {count correct number on right and left. Know proper color and check hocks, Know what DQ’s to look for}
- Check Back Legs/Bone {lift and feel each bone in right and left. Know what DQ’s to look for}

- Know Sex {Doe - expose vent, Buck - expose penis, check for both testicles. Know possible diseases (make sure the area is clean)}
- Tail {check bone for breaks, straightness and carriage. Know DQ's}
- Pose {correct pose for breed, proper setting of front and hind feet, ears and tail}
- Checking Body {upper & under body, feel for abscess or rupture, sides and neck area. Know possible DQ's (also know how to palpate)}
- Check Fur {after you are all done, stroke fur backwards and blow, checking for mites/mange. Set fur properly when done. Know DQ's, how to treat and what fur type you have}

If you are given the wonderful chance to switch rabbits with your neighbors, know that breed and how it's posed. If it is posed correctly, leave it alone. If your neighbor forgot something, FIX IT! {IE: One year I won by finding the Himalayan's tail which was tucked underneath the body}. When switching, always put one hand on your neighbor's rabbit while switching positions with them. If the other showman is on the other end of the table, look to the judge and he should hold your rabbit while you walk over to the other.

Depending on your age level and the judge, he may put a carrier on the table and have you place and remove the rabbit in the carrier. Always control the back feet to make sure you don't hook nails and latch the carrier when the rabbit is in. After removing the rabbit and it's safely tucked, close and latch the carrier back up.

DO NOT watch your neighbor. Do not repeat what they said. Usually the reason a judge asks kids who are next to each other is because one person said it wrong and he wants the right answer. If you truly do not know, it's okay to say "I do not know". If you have an educated guess, go ahead and say it - you might be right.

ALWAYS speak loud and clear. {Especially with Vern... he's old}. If the words don't come out right, try to rephrase yourself before the judge goes onto another showman. Most are patient and willing to listen. Do not "over" talk, but don't talk too little. The more good information you can get out in reasonable time, to show the judge what you know is preferred.

ALWAYS groom YOU and YOUR RABBIT. Free yourself of necklaces, hoop earrings, piercings, rings and bracelets. Always wear long sleeves and pull your hair back. {A good set up is a long sleeved button up white shirt, with black pants and close toed shoes, preferably boots}. Your rabbit should be free of molt, but every attempt to groom the rabbit for those summer months is kept in mind. Your rabbit should bear no stains; ears, eyes and vents should be clean. Your rabbit's nails

should be clipped as short as possible, filed smooth if still sharp. If you have a white rabbit, it should be purely white. Provide your own carpet that your rabbit is used to.

After showmanship, whether you've won or not, always smile and shake the judge's hand. He should offer a time to ask questions, and tell you what he was expecting or looking for and what some of you did wrong. Take this advice wisely.

If you have any further questions, you're more than welcome to contact me. mellenti@onid.orst.edu or (541) 226-5523.