

CAVY & SHOWMANSHIP FITTING MEMBER'S GUIDE

4-H Youth Development • Michigan State University Extension

by

Sam K. Varghese

Associate Professor-Extension Specialist

Department of Animal Science

Michigan State University

and

Jerry & Judy Missler and Keith Forbush

State 4-H Rabbit and Cavy

Developmental Committee Members

Illustrations by

Marian Reiter

Cavy fitting and showmanship offers an opportunity to compete with other 4-H members within your county or from other parts of the state. In regular cavy shows, the animals are judged rather than the 4-H member. However, in a fitting and showmanship contest, the judge evaluates members on the various cavy skills they demonstrate and their general knowledge of cavies. The judges also consider each participant's preparation, attitude, and behavior.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of a cavy fitting and showmanship contest are to develop:

- practical skills
- leadership qualities
- competition and sportsmanship
- a special interest in raising cavies
- an appreciation for cavies and the knowledge of how to handle them in a humane way

FITTING

Fitting is a word used to describe how a 4-H member selected a particular cavy from a breed and how the cavy was fed and cared for prior to the contest. The term also encompasses any preparation of the cavy prior to the contest, such as cleaning the coat, removing stains, or trimming the toenails. The animal should not have any diseases or external parasites, such as mites or lice. Use an appropriate carrying case to take the animal to the show. Fitting also includes the participant's general appearance.

Preparation Note

Cavies should be groomed by brushing or washing. If necessary, bathe your cavy

in the sink on the day before the show. Use a soft baby shampoo and try to keep soap out of the eyes. Rinse the animal and blow dry with a hair dryer set on a warm, gentle cycle. Then trim its toenails a small portion at a time, to avoid cutting the quick. (Figure 1 shows the proper way to trim your cavy's toenails.)

Guidelines for the Cavy

Should you select a mixed or pure breed animal? Ask your 4-H cavy leader or a cavy specialist. In the *Standard of Perfection of Rabbits and Cavies*, published by American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc., several cavy breeds are listed. They are: Abyssinian, American, Crested, Peruvian, Satin, Silky and Teddy. You could choose any one of them, though some people may have special preferences. If none of these breeds are available or affordable to you, a mixed breed cavy will also allow you to enter showmanship competition. However, you should realize that it is not easy to win first place with a mixed breed cavy if competition is really tough.

Selecting the Animal

Choose an alert, active animal with clear, bright, bold eyes and a smooth, shiny coat. These are indications of good health. Consider the following factors when choosing your cavy:

- Total number of animals available to choose from
- Sex
- Age
- Condition
- Defects, eliminations and disqualification points dealt with in the *Standard of Perfection of Rabbits and Cavies*

A greater number of animals to choose from means that you can make a better cavy selection for your project. Limited numbers provide little selection. If at all possible, avoid choosing an animal with defects or disqualification points, or an animal in the later half of pregnancy.

Feeding and Care of the Cavy

Once you decide which cavy to enter in the contest, it is very important to pay

special attention to the animal's feeding and care.

Conditioning

As soon as your animal is selected, begin conditioning as follows:

- Provide a balanced diet and clean water daily, so that the animal excels in its health and produces a nice coat.
- Keep the animal in a cage with clean litter. Change litter as often as necessary.
- Control the temperature to keep the cavy comfortable.

Wire cages are not recommended for cavies. Other containers, including old aquariums, wooden or cardboard boxes, or plastic tubs (if deep enough) should be used instead.

Training

You may wonder why a cavy must be trained for the showmanship competition. An animal in a fitting and showmanship class will not pose properly and will not adjust to handling by the participant or the judge unless it has been trained. The animal needs to be worked steadily for a few days in the contest areas so that it gets used to the different steps and performs better at the contest. Otherwise, the cavy might become a nervous wreck—which would be an embarrassment to you.

You are also going to need some training! Learn first how to carry a cavy correctly and then how to pose and examine it properly. Knowledge is one thing; actually working with the animal is another. The experience of working with your animal will give you the skill and confidence to expertly perform the activities in the competition.

Before beginning to train the cavy, learn the proper methods in each area of showmanship, and practice those methods during the training period, which may last for 2 or 3 weeks.

Guidelines for the Participant

The fitting and showmanship contest for cavies is generally an annual event and may have several curious spectators.

Remember that a cavy fitting and showmanship contest should be as important to the raiser as any other fitting and showmanship contest. Therefore, your appearance is important. In a county contest, the show superintendent may recommend the dress code. In the state contest, it is recommended that you wear a show coat or any other neat and clean attire such as dark pants and a light colored, long-sleeved shirt or blouse. Do not wear dangling necklaces or other jewelry that might interfere with the examination. Hair should be properly combed. Wear appropriate shoes; bare feet are not allowed.

SHOWMANSHIP

The showmanship competition will begin after all participants bring their cavy to the table at the assigned area. As a participant, you will stand behind the table with your cavy in front of you facing sideways, with the head to your left. When the judge gives the command, "handle your cavy," you should follow the steps listed below. (These directions are for right-handed contestants. Left-handed contestants should use the opposite hand from that noted in the steps.)

Carrying the Cavy

- Step 1. Place the cavy on the table facing your left (fig. 2).
- Step 2. Place your right hand over the animal's shoulders and grasp (fig. 3).
- Step 3. Lift the cavy's front legs and slide your left hand under the rear end for support. Do not let your cavy dangle, but perform the motion smoothly (fig. 4).
- Step 4. Lift the animal in the above position and hold it against your body.

Posing the Cavy on the Table

Always pose your animal on a rug or a carpet piece on the table. A smooth surface will not give an animal the necessary grip, therefore it may not pose properly.

- Step 1. Stand behind the posing table with your cavy.
- Step 2. Slowly place the animal on the carpet, facing the judge. Both you and the cavy will now be facing the judge.
- Step 3. At the judge's command of pose, set up the cavy in the following manner: set the front legs directly under the shoulders, and the hind legs under the hips, with the feet tucked under. Make sure the cavy is not too stretched out or tucked in (fig. 5).

Step 4. Gently touch the end of the animal's nose. This will help induce the animal to lower its nose, thus raising the crown and shoulders, and will help pose the cavy in a natural way (fig. 6).

Step 5. If the judge gives the command of attention, take a step back and stand at attention behind your animal. The cavy should remain in the pose until the judge gives another command (fig. 7).

The judge will be looking at the various steps you use and at how well you perform them. In the showmanship part of the contest, the judge attempts to determine each participant's practical knowledge by checking the cavy for defects and disqualifications.

Examining the Cavy

The animal is already on the table, since this is a continuation of the posing activity. However, be sure to turn your cavy sideways with its head to your left. The examination steps allow each contestant to demonstrate to the judge his or her ability to handle the animal, and to check for points which determine general faults, eliminations, or disqualifications. You should familiarize yourself with such points so that the examination can be conducted easily and confidently. The examination should be carried out in a systematic fashion, using these steps:

Step 1. Examine the hairs in the crown of the head for any foreign hair colors (fig. 8). Foreign hair color refers to any color differing from that prescribed for the variety in the *Standard of Perfection of Rabbits and Cavies*.

Step 2. Examine an area behind the ears for lice or mites. Look for any tears and for ear carriage (fig. 9).

Step 3. Examine the cavy's eyes thoroughly. Point your index finger at your cavy's eyes so that the judge will know what you are examining (fig. 10). The eyes should be bright and clear. Look for blindness or specks on the iris. Check the size of the eyeballs, which should be the same size and bold. Eye color should be examined to determine whether it is true to the variety.

Step 4. Check under the throat for lumps or abscesses (fig. 11). Gently press the cavy's abdominal area with the fingers of one hand, as shown in Figure 12. Look for signs of abscess or lumps and check for potbelly—in sows, late pregnancy will be indicated by a heavy belly.

Step 5. Turn the cavy easily and smoothly onto its back. Grasp the cavy's shoulders firmly with your right hand (fig. 13). Your left hand should support the hindquarters while turning (fig. 14). Hold the animal firmly in position against your body, in the crook of your right arm (fig. 15). The cavy is supported in the crack between your arm and body, or in the case of a large cavy, on the table. A very small cavy can be held and examined in the palm of your hand.

Step 6. Examine the nose area by pointing your left index finger (fig. 16). Look for signs of cold (wipe the nose to check for wetness). The nose should be dry and clean and free of discharge.

Step 7. Use your encircled left thumb and index finger to gently pull back the cavy's lips. Check the condition of its teeth (fig. 17). The teeth should be straight and not broken.

Step 8. Check under the neck for foreign hair colors (fig. 18).

Step 9. Pull front legs and check their straightness (fig. 19).

Step 10. Check front legs for any extra toes, for missing toenails, and toenail colors (fig. 20).

Step 11. Check for foreign hair coloring between front legs (fig. 21).

Step 12. Check your cavy's belly area for foreign hairs by looking at it while you run your fingers up and down over the cavy's belly hair (fig. 22).

Step 13. Examine hind legs for deformities, broken toenails, extra toes or wrong-colored toenails (fig. 23).

Step 14. Examine the cavy's sex (fig. 24). Is it a sow or a boar? Check for any signs of disease on the sex organs.

Step 15. Return the cavy to the table to sit (fig. 25).

Step 16. Examine the hair color and length of hair on the back and the sides (fig. 26). Flip the rear of the coat to see the length. Also examine the hair shafts on the cavy's rear for any signs of lice or mites.

Step 17. Pose the animal for final examination (fig. 27).

Step 18. Put your hands on both sides of the cavy to check its width (fig. 28).

At this point, the examination is complete. Carry out the sequence of the examination systematically, confidently, and smoothly. Take time to make sure the judge sees most of what you are doing.

**Grooming:
Trim the
Cavy's
Toenails**



Figure 1. This is the proper way to trim cavy toenails.

**Carrying
the
Cavy**

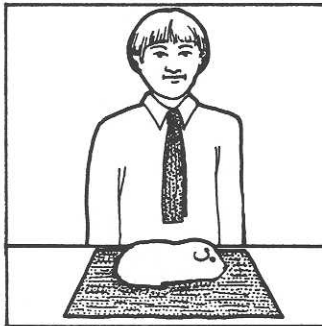


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

**Posing
the
Cavy**



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

**Examining
the
Cavy**

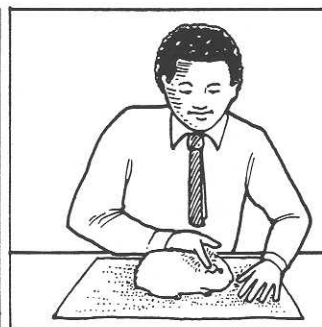


Figure 8

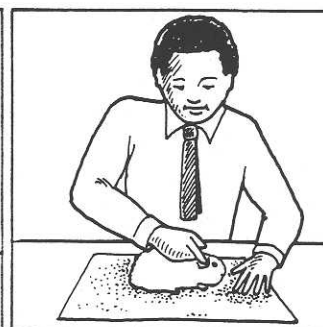


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

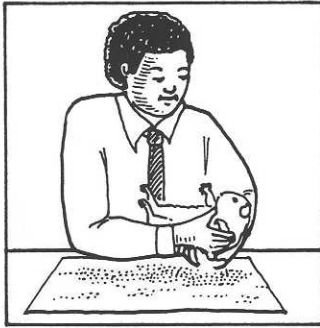


Figure 15

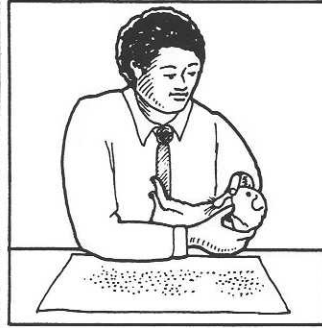


Figure 16



Figure 17

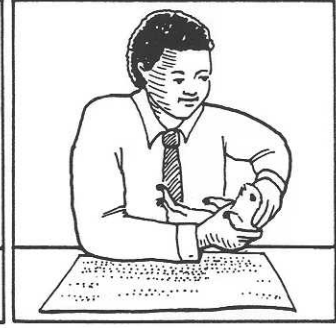


Figure 18

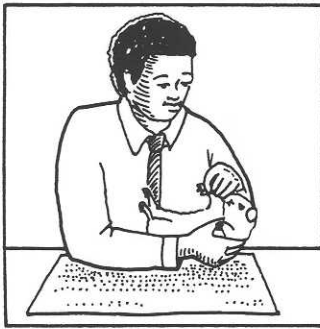


Figure 19

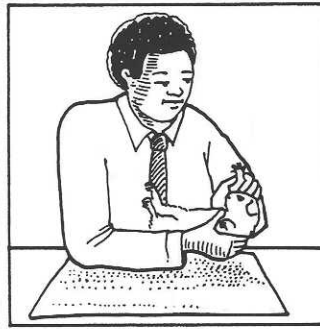


Figure 20

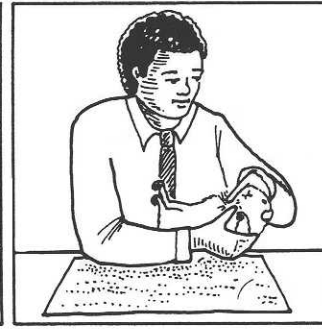


Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24

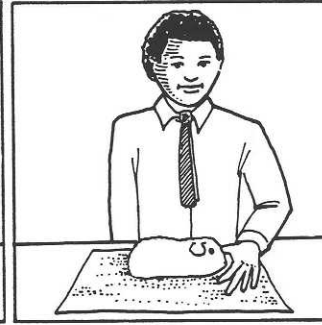


Figure 25

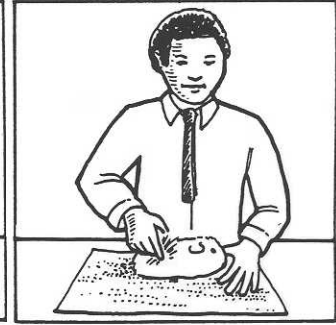


Figure 26



Figure 27

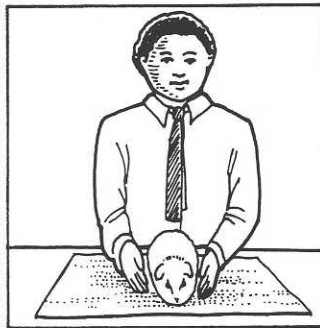


Figure 28

Condition of the Cavy

The judge will now examine each cavy for its condition. The cavy's condition includes its health, proper preparation of the animal for show (fitting), and any defects or disqualification points.

The judge will examine each cavy on the table in a general way. This may or may not be a detailed examination due to the time factor. However, the judge will thoroughly examine the fitting of the animal (fig. 29).

Tips for Cavy Showmanship

The points outlined in the examination steps represent what you will do at a cavy show when owners are asked to show their own animals, or when the table is full of contestants competing in a cavy showmanship contest. In both cases the judge will ask you to show what he or she wants to see. If there are only a few contestants, or if the judge is having difficulty in selecting a winner, you may be asked to participate in a more in-depth showmanship experience.

This usually means that you will carry your cavy to a table and perform each step in the showmanship procedure again, this time without the judge's cues. You will explain what you are doing or looking for in each of your actions, and tell how your observations compare with

the standard for the breed. While showing the cavy to advantage, respond to any question that you may be asked. Then carry your cavy back to its carrying case or to the exhibitor's cage. Return to the judging area and listen to the rest of your class—remember, you can learn a lot by watching and listening!

Attitude and Behavior of the Participant

Every eye will be on the participants; therefore, it is absolutely necessary for you to act properly. Remember that this also is a time of fun for you! You have the opportunity to show the audience and the judge that you are competent and proud to be a part of the contest. Be alert and look at the judge from time to time to make sure you have his or her attention.

Your attitude should demonstrate good sportsmanship as you congratulate your peers on their achievements. If a judge asks you questions, answer politely. Be enthusiastic about what you are doing and put on a smile to indicate that you are enjoying the event.

Remember, cavy fitting and showmanship can be as much fun and provide as great a learning experience as any other livestock fitting and showmanship competition...so don't miss your opportunity. Good luck!

Quiz

At the state level, the cavy quiz is part of a separate option of the Michigan Rabbit and Cavy Expo. In the county, the quiz is generally given to each participant in each division at the end of the contest to test his or her general knowledge about cavies. There are several ways this can be done. If there are only a few contestants, the judge may decide to call each participant to an area to answer a set of questions on a one-to-one basis. Each contestant will be instructed not to discuss the quiz with others. Everyone will be given the same quiz to allow for consistency within each division.

The number of questions asked will depend on the age division and the time allowed, as well as other factors. The quiz will usually consist of questions of general knowledge about cavies. The quiz may be oral or written. The advantage of a written test is that all begin the test together, which saves time. The oral quiz gives each participant a chance to experience the interview process.

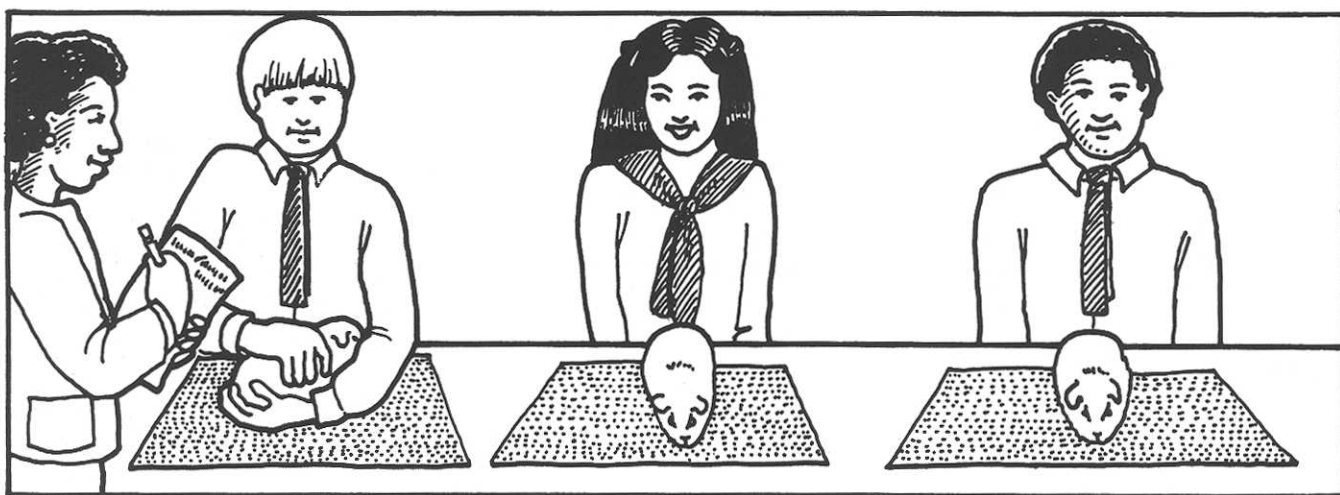


Figure 29. These 4-H members are demonstrating cavy handling.

4-H CAVY FITTING AND SHOWMANSHIP SCORECARD

	Score
Handling of cavy	15
Posing cavy on table	20
Examination of cavy	30
Condition of cavy (Fitting included)	15
Cavy quiz	10
Appearance and attitude of participant	10
TOTAL POINTS	<hr/> 100

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thomas G. Coon, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The name "4-H" and the emblem consisting of a four-leaf clover with stem and the "H" on each leaflet are protected under Title 18 U.S.C. 707.

Printed on recycled paper.

6P-1R-500-MI4H-RM