

FITTING

A Behind the Scenes Look

Tips on how to have the "best dressed" animal.

BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON



THERE IS NOTHING MORE satisfying to a 4-H, FFA or National Junior Angus Association member than presenting a well-fitted calf. Even more gratifying is the feeling they have when they know they've done the fitting themselves.

The difference between grading an A for fitting and a C could be the effort at home. As you stand around the show ring at any event, you can tell which junior members have done their homework before going to the show.

Cattle fitter Jeff Rhode, Kingston, Ill., says the object to fitting is getting the cattle to look the best they possibly can. To achieve this goal takes a lot of time and effort. Caring for and exhibiting a show heifer, bull or steer is a big responsibility, but it is a rewarding experience.

Brad Hillard, show cattle herdsman at Circle A Ranch, Iberia, Mo., says teaching someone how to fit and clip is hard to do. He suggests beginners watch an experienced fitter, then just practice doing it themselves.

"Don't give up. You can learn a lot from correcting your mistakes," he adds. "Becoming a good fitter takes practice and patience."

No two fitters clip or dress cattle exactly the same. Each one has his or her own style and ideas. Not all animals are alike, and each requires different fitting techniques. On the following pages are a few of the basic techniques used by fitters today.

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AT HOME

Halter breaking

There are several philosophies of how to halter break an animal. Find a strategy that will work the best with your resources and time. The goal should be to minimize stress for all concerned—the calf, equipment and you.

No matter which option you choose, creating respect early will be rewarded later. In most cases, the younger you halter break a calf, the easier and less stressful the experience will be.

To get started you'll need a rope halter, preferably nylon and 1/2- to 5/8-inch (in.) in diameter; a confined area or chute where you can corner the animal; and a sturdy place to tie the newly haltered calf.

Some herdsman halter the calf and let it drag the halter for a few days prior to tying it up. This lets the calf get used to the pressure when it steps on the rope repeatedly.

Others immediately tie the calf and remove the halter each night. They say this reduces the calf's stress and frustration.

In either situation, the first time you tie the calf, tie it close to the pole or board, not allowing much slack in the rope (about 12 in.). Do not tie the calf with its head up. Allow it to hold it in a natural position the first few times tied.

Tie the newly haltered calf for a short duration. It's important to keep checking the calf every 15-20 minutes to make sure it doesn't get in a position to hurt itself.

Begin talking to and touching the calf as soon as possible. Combing and brushing helps calm the animal. The more time you can spend with the animal, the sooner you'll develop a relationship and trust.

Rhode suggests playing a radio to also help calm the animal and to get it used to different noises.

When releasing the calf, do it calmly and don't jerk on the halter. If the calf starts to pull and get away try to hold on. Once a calf gets away, it thinks it can do it again.

After three days, or when the calf does not pull on the halter as much, Hillard starts tying the calf with its head up so it gets used to standing with its head up and its feet underneath it. Usually on the fourth day he tries to lead the calf, possibly even taking it to the wash rack.

When teaching the calf to lead, voice reward is very important. Accept a few steps as an accomplishment. Be patient and calm.

Hillard says it's important to practice with a show stick before going to a show. Scratching with the show stick should calm the calf when it's introduced to new environments.

Hillard says the best time to halter break is at weaning and warns that some calves do take longer to break and some never break to lead. Genetics plays an important role in the calf's attitude and its willingness to be trained.

If you're a beginner use two hands — one to steady the clippers and one to hold them. Use the animal's body as a guide.



Nutrition

Nutrition plays an important role in the growth and hair condition of a show animal. Each calf's individual requirements may vary. Consult your local nutritionist to develop a ration that fits your resources and your calf's genetics. These are some ingredients to consider, according to Hillard:

1. Protein (Hillard suggests a ration with 12-14% protein—a 60:40 oats: corn ration)
2. Minerals and salt block
3. Vitamin A
4. Routine worming
5. Beet pulp or cottonseed hulls to act as a filler, expanding the animal's stomach. Cottonseed also helps keep oil in hair.

Hair Care

An important tool when fitting an animal is its hair coat. You can use hair to hide an animal's faults.

Just like a calf's attitude and nutrition requirements, a calf's hair coat is related to its genetics. The best way to stimulate hair growth is brushing, especially in the hot, summer months.

Body clipping or shearing prior to the show season promotes fresh hair growth (Illustration A).

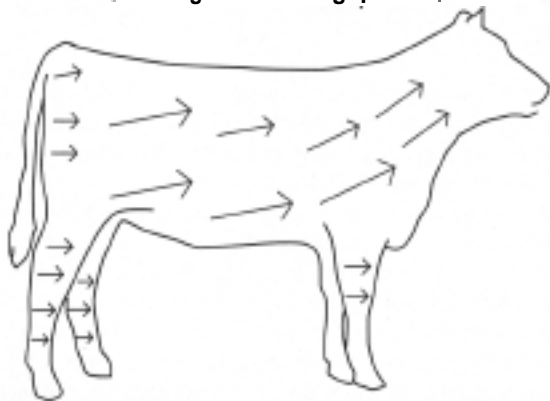
During the summer, bedding the animal in a dark place during the day shortens the day length and promotes hair growth. Keeping the calves under fans and/or misters will help cool and circulate the air.

Also, rinsing the calf every day promotes new hair growth and helps train the hair. Rhode suggests using a conditioning product (rag oil or Show Sheen mix) each time you rinse.

Keeping the animal clean will also help. Both Hillard and Rhode suggest washing show calves once a week.

If an animal's hair is dry, both fitters suggest spraying the calf with an oil such as rag oil, Final Touch or Final Bloom, blowing it in using an electric groom before washing.

External parasite and ringworm control are also important to

Brushing and combing pattern

Brushing is the key to a well-maintained hair coat. At home and at a show, brushing and combing will promote hair growth. After rinsing or washing an animal, brushing and then blowing the animal dry using an electric groom will help set the calf's hair in the desired angle. While at a show, blowing out the calf and brushing it each time it gets up helps keep the calf clean and presentable.

After washing/rinsing:

1. Remove excess water with the backside of the comb, raking in a downward motion.
2. Brush all of the hair downward, removing curls.
3. Brush the hair forward toward the front shoulder and neck.
4. For animals with more hair, brush at a 45-degree angle, as pictured, and work toward desired angle. The outside and inside of the front and back legs should be brushed straight forward.
5. Using a blower (moving from top to bottom, front to back) helps train the hair. Rest the tip of the nose next to the skin and move slowly in an arc pattern for best results. Be sure not to create lines in the animal when using the blower.

keeping the animal and its hair coat healthy. Rhode suggests using a product such as Ivermectin to reduce external parasites.

Watch carefully for the onset of ringworm. It begins as a round, scaly spot that will show hair loss. It spreads rapidly on the body, to other cattle and to people. Consult your veterinarian for treatment. Possibilities include Iodine, TBZ or athlete's foot spray.

Washing

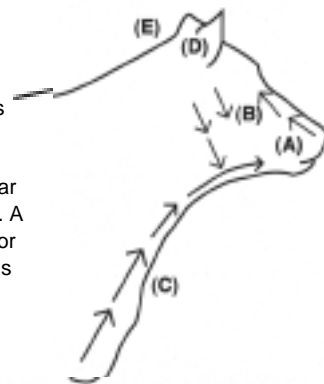
Most fitters today use a mild soap— Joy, Dove, Ivory— when washing. Be sure to rinse thoroughly. Rhode cautions excessive use of soap can lead to dry skin and hair.

After washing, replace the natural oils using a mixture of vinegar, Mane 'N Tail or other conditioner. (Dip tail and pour remainder over the animal's back) In the summer, you can add Repelex to the dip to serve as a fly repellent.

After rinsing, brush and blow the animal dry (Illustration B). Before the animal is completely dry, mist with a sheen-type spray to help set the hair. Rhode uses a mixture of rag oil and Show Sheen. Then finish drying.

Clipping the head

Always clip against the natural direction of the hair with the 84AU blades to achieve a close, smooth job. Approximately three weeks before the show, shear the neck, brisket and head. A few days before you leave for the show, reclip the animal's face. Try not to make lines too distinct; keep it neat and natural.



- A. Clip up on the nose and forehead.
- B. Clip down on the cheek to reduce lines. Blend carefully.
- C. Clip up on the brisket and blend carefully. This promotes a longer extension of the neck.
- D. Hair is thinned on the ears.
- E. The poll hair is trimmed and blended into a peak (about an inch). The poll hair serves to give style, length and eye appeal to the head.

Clipping

Clipping is one of the most rewarding parts of the entire fitting process. You can actually see the changes you make to an animal.

The key to a successful clip job is knowing an animal's faults and weaknesses. Clipping allows you to sculpt a more ideal animal. Before starting to clip, evaluate the animal carefully and trim off the hair accordingly. It's important to realize not all animals are clipped alike.

Mistakes and gaps will happen and serve as a good learning tool. Hillard says the easiest way to learn is to pick up a pair of clippers and practice.

Before clipping be sure your animal is clean and restrain it in a blocking chute for its safety and yours.

Clippers need to be in good order and working properly. Be sure to oil and lube before starting. When purchasing clippers, there are several brand names to consider: Oster, Lister, Heiniger and Andis. You will need:

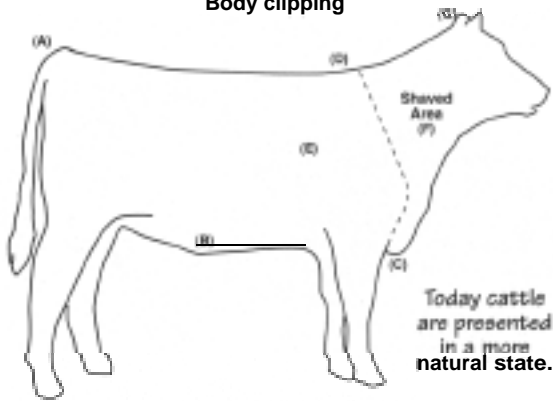
- A. A regular pair of flat heads. Use standard, flat 84AU blades or the plucking blade for shaving areas where you wish to leave more hair.
- B. A pair of sheep heads. Beginners should use a C-type head with the 20-tooth goat comb blade (P7112 blade).
- C. A pair of inexpensive, small, adjustable clippers (Andis). These are less noisy and are used for the final touches.

Approximately three weeks before a show, clip the head, brisket and neck (Illustrations C & D).

Body clipping usually takes at least two sessions— before leaving for the show and at the show. Most of the clipping is usually done at home with the last-minute touches at the show. The hair is usually trimmed in an upward and forward motion. Rhode suggests

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Body clipping



Tail and tailhead (A) — The tailhead area is used to enhance the visual effect of a level hip. It can add body length and thickness by the way it is clipped. Today most fitters clip the hair above the grow bone tight (see also Illustration E).

Belly (B) — Using the sheep heads, trim the long hairs on the belly to give it a clean appearance.

Brieket (C) — Shave the brieket up with flat heads when shearing the head. Try not to make a distinct line. Blend in with neck hair.

Point of shoulder (D) — Use this as a guide point when shaving the front end (three weeks prior to show). Hair should be trimmed very short in this area to reduce prominence.

Under the shoulder point — This hair and some neck hair is left long and used to blend in a prominent shoulder.

Behind the shoulder (E) — The hair is left as long as possible in this area to ensure proper blending of the shoulder joint.

Neck (F) — Three weeks before the show many Angus fitters clip out the neck on females from the point of the shoulder forward. Using sheep heads (7112 blades) go up or with the flat heads (B4AU blades) clip down. This makes the females appear more feminine.

Top of shoulder joining neck — Hair should be utilized in this area to give the appearance of a smooth joining of these two parts.

Poll (G) — Leave this hair on the head to give added head length and youthfulness.

Ear — Trim the hair on the ear.

working one area at a time (shoulder, top line, legs, etc.). Body clipping or blocking out the animal can take 45 minutes or more, depending on the amount of hair and the clipper's experience level.

Hoof trimming

Proper hoof trimming can correct structural problems and help the animal move more freely. Trimming should be done by someone with experience. Permanent injury or movement disorders can be caused by inexperience.

A calf's hooves should be trimmed on a regular basis, every 30-60 days. If trimming prior to a show, Hillard suggests giving the animal at least a month to heal.

When traveling to a show, it's important to keep the calf eating and healthy. If you have to travel a long distance to a show, Hillard suggests not feeding the morning you leave. After arriving at the show that evening, feed a half feeding.

In many cases, the longer you are at a show the more accustomed the calf becomes to its surroundings. While at the show, it's important to keep the calf clean and as comfortable as possible. If possible, every time the calf gets up blow it out and brush the hair.

Hillard suggests the night before the show to only allow the calf to drink half of its normal water intake. Restricting water will hopefully make the calf drink more on show day, thus creating more of a fill for a deeper-bodied, more voluminous appearance.

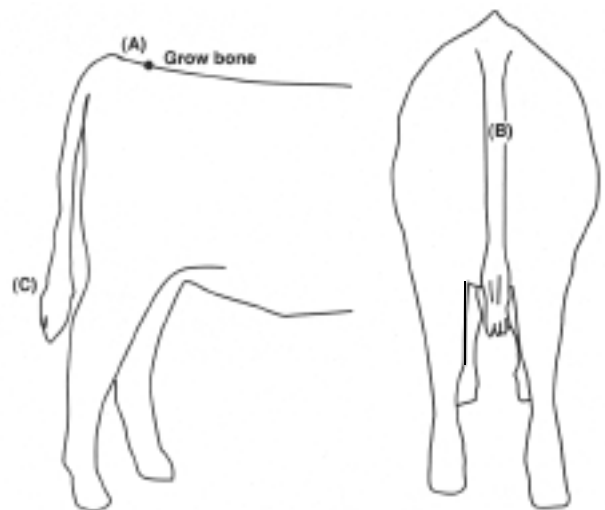
Show-day preparation

Prior to fitting on show day, the animal should be rinsed, dried, fed and given time to rest. If the show starts at 8 a.m., try to have the calf washed, dried and fed by 6:30 a.m. Hillard says some fitters wait to water prior to showing, but he waters after feeding so as not to break the established routine. If the show starts later or runs long, you can refeed a half feeding at noon. A proper fill is important the day of the show. Beet pulp, cottonseed hulls, water and alfalfa are all stomach fillers.

Allow plenty of time to fit, about 30-45 minutes per animal. There are several show product companies that offer products for different hair types. For more information about products, contact your local supply dealer.

Here are some fitting tips:

Clipping the tail and tailhead

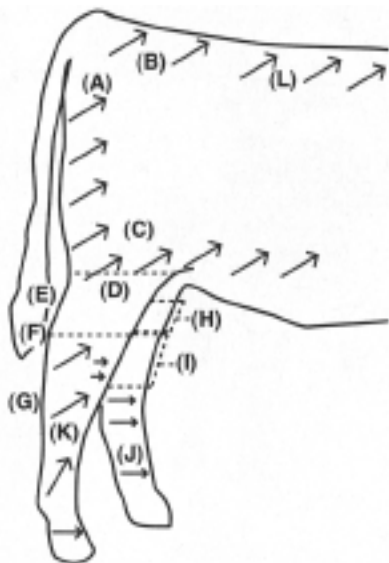


A. Extend the hair at the tailhead so it has the appearance of a corner, making the animal look longer hiped. The tailhead hair may be held up with glue and then trimmed to the desired shape.

B. The hair down the middle of the tail is clipped into a short "Y." This gives the appearance of more width between the pins.

C. Today the tail is bobbed or trimmed for a natural look.

Hindquarter clipping (side view)



- A. Hair should be brushed out and around the hindquarter to add dimension when viewing the animal from the rear.
- B. Hair in this area is used to fill in the hip to make it appear to be more level from the hooks to pins.
- C. Hair is pulled up and out and held in place to add muscularity.
- D. Hair is left longer to add width to the lower quarter.
- E. Hair is always left in this area above the hock to reduce hock prominence.
- F. The ball of the hock is shaved to the skin in about a 3-inch-long area to reduce hock prominence.
- G. Long hairs are trimmed after boning the leg (pulling the hair up and out) to give the appearance of a straighter leg.
- H. Trim this area beginning right above the hock area to straighten the appearance of the leg. (very important)
- I. Trim the long hair here to fill the hock joint area and to straighten the appearance of the leg.
- J. Trim this area and around the entire leg to give a straight, symmetrical appearance.
- K. The hair on the inside and the outside of the cannon bone is pulled slightly forward to help add hair length to the front of the leg.
- L. The loin area on steers and heifers should be clipped flat on top and all of the hair left on the loin edge.

Body hair

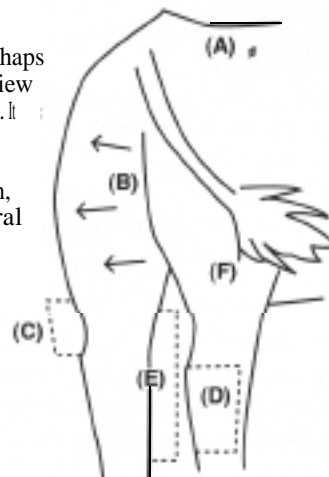
1. Apply show foam over the entire body (except the legs). Brush it in and blow it dry. The foam holds the hair and brings up the under coat.
2. Another option is misting the calf with a show product such as Base Coat, Zoom Bloom, Show Sheen or rag oil to set the hair. Hillard says when using those products you need to have the time to blow it in using an electric groom for the hair to really pop out (the more you blow the hair, the more volume it gets).

Tail

Today most fitters are leaving an animal's tail natural -just trimming it.

Hindquarter clipping (rear view)

The rear view is perhaps the most important view when evaluating cattle. It shows muscularity, muscle design, cleanness, condition, height and structural correctness in the animal.



- A. Hip hair is very important to give the animal a level hip.
- B. The area close to the tail is trimmed very short in an outward motion, leaving the most hair on the hindquarter edge. This adds thickness and dimension.
- C. The area from the hock to the lower stifle is blended in to add muscle shape.
- D. The outside hock area is trimmed very short. This adds to the straightness of the leg and gives the animal the appearance of being taller.
- E. The inside hock area and twist can be shaved or trimmed short to add height.
- F. The twist area can be trimmed and shaped to give the appearance of more muscle.

If you choose, you can put the tail up using a ratting comb, glue and a tail tie if needed. The completed symmetrical ball should be in a position to add balance to the animal. A tail too high will make the animal look heavy-fronted.

Top knot

Most fitters today don't leave a lot of hair (about 1 inch) on the top knot, or poll. If needed, spray a little tail glue on the hair and pull up.

Legs

Use spray glue to hold the leg hair in place to be clipped. By fitting the legs you are trying to give the animal the appearance of straight legs with good bone.

BACK LEGS

1. Bone the legs, spraying adhesive on one area at a time and pulling the hair up and forward with a scotch comb. Don't bone the legs too high on the hindquarter. The leg and the hindquarter must join as smoothly as possible. Pull the inside back legs below the hock forward and the back 1/8 of the leg backward creating a finned look, with the hair on the front and back below the hock meeting at a peak.
2. Clip the legs for the final effect using sheep heads with 7112 blades.
3. Paint the legs using a non-oil-base, show-type paint. Touch up the hooves with black paint.

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FRONT LEGS

1. Bone the front legs below the knee forward (inside and outside) using spray glue. This gives the animal the appearance of more bone.

Final preparation

1. In hard-to-hold areas, including the tailhead, you can use spray adhesive to glue the hair in place.
2. Put on the show halter.
3. Check the calf's fill. Offer water or hay if needed.
4. In the make-ready area or prior to showing, mist the animal with a show oil to add shine.

After the show

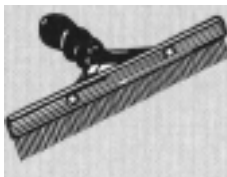
There are several products available to remove show products (alcohol/purple oil mix, Hocus-Pocus or Unfit). Make sure to wash out all fitting products and replace the oils in the calf's hair.



EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

EVERYDAY SUPPLIES

- rice-root or rice-root-mix brush
- soft** brush
- plastic brush
- 0 scotch comb
- Cl sprayers
- Show Sheen, rag oil
- hoof brush
- blower
- feed pans
- 0 water buckets
- extension cords
- broom, fork, shovel
- 0 pliers, hammer, etc.
- 0 neck rope
- Cl extra halter
- blocking chute
- fan

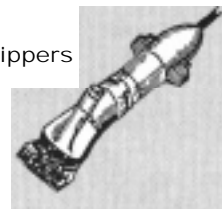


WASHING SUPPLIES

- soap (Dove, Ivory, Joy, etc.)
- vinegar
- Mane 'N Tail or hair conditioner
- scrub brush
- hose
- nozzle
- wash bucket
- dip bucket
- 0 Repelex or other fly repellent

CLIPPERS

- flat heads
- Andis or small, two-speed clippers
- sheep heads
- blades
- clipper lube and oil



SHOW-DAY SUPPLIES

- adhesive (Body Adhesive, EZ Comb, Prime Time or Formula-I)
- tail comb, **glue** and ties (if needed)
- show oil (Final Touch, Final Bloom, Final Mist)
- paint
- show foam**
- scissors
- show product remover (Hocus-Pocus, Unfit, purple oil)

RING-SIDE SUPPLIES

- show halter
- clean scotch **comb**
- show stick
- show harness
- nose lead (for bulls)
- a can of adhesive
- show oil (Final Touch, Final Bloom, Final Mist)

