

# The Tanbark Trail

by Janet Mayer

It's 7:30 a.m., show day.

The smell of wet cattle permeates the air. The sound of blow dryers and clippers makes normal conversation all but impossible. In the barn a palpable atmosphere of anticipation and tension prevails.

About 4 1/2 hours remain until show time. Many of the fitters have been here for several hours, feeding, washing and drying their entries. Some of the fitters who have done their stint at the wash-rack, and are slightly wet around the edges, stand in groups drinking coffee and talking.

After all the cattle are dried and final touch-up clipping is finished, things quiet down. Show halters, polished to a soft sheen, are laid out in readiness. Blocking chutes are lined up. Well-organized show-boxes yield a vast array of grooming aids and apparatus.

All wait for the announcement from the public address system telling them when their part of the show will begin. When it comes, well-organized teams of fitters will spring into action. Spotlights aimed at work areas will be turned on in order to see every minute detail. The smell of adhesive, paint, oil, hair spray and show foam will fill the air. The sound of sheephead clippers and blowers will again make conversation difficult, but then conversation won't really be necessary as the fitters go about their well-regimented routine of making the cattle look as close to perfect as possible.

Finally the showmen will lead the cattle into the show ring. Perhaps they will have the ultimate glory: a win.

The eminent cattle judge Herman Purdy once stated that the only difference between range cattle and show cattle was a bath.

It is evident that the show circuit has come a long way from the time Mr. Purdy made that statement. Gone from the showbarns of today are the short-legged, blocky cattle. Gone also is the simple show preparation of a short overall clip, a bath, brush and spray. Showing and fitting cattle have evolved into a very specialized vocation.

Many cattle breeders employ a herdsman or manager who is capable of showing and fitting in addition to other respon-



*Cattle fitting begins at the wash-rack.*

sibilities. Some breeders go the more expensive route of a professional fitting service; others still enjoy doing it themselves.

No matter who undertakes the actual showing of the cattle, it is obviously both time consuming and expensive. Why then do breeders choose to compete? Is there more to it than winning the purple banner?

David Snider, assistant manager of the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky., thinks the show ring is a vital part of the cattle industry today. He feels that by showing their cattle, the breeders are helping to keep everything in perspective within their own breed.

"A few short years ago, just about every breed had gone to the extreme in size," Snider says. "But we have come around to the point where everything is now about middle of the line, which is a good place to be. I think showing facilitates not only the purebred breeder, but the commercial cattleman as well. They can see the top bloodlines and decide how to improve their herd by using these lines. It is really a good guideline."

Snider feels cattle shows allow breeders to compare their breed to other breeds. It also allows the public the opportunity of seeing where their beef and oth-

er meat come from.

"Livestock shows have been around for years," he says. "I think you will continue to see them grow."

Snider is correct that stock shows have been around a long time and are still growing. The Southwest Expo & Livestock Show in Fort Worth, Texas, has been around since 1896. The Pennsylvania State Farm Show opened its doors in 1916. The show described as the "Super-Bowl" of stock shows, the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colo., recently held its 64th show. In 1906, the first National Western was held in a tent with four breeds in competition. In 1990, 18 breeds were represented resulting in 4,000 entries.

The North American International in Louisville, Ky., is one of the newer shows. It began in 1974 as strictly a cattle show with only five breeds competing. In 1989, 16 breeds were shown with about 3,000 head of cattle exhibited. This major show is no longer limited to cattle, but includes many other species of livestock.

A relatively new and popular addition to the show world is the individual state beef exposition. Iowa was the first state to originate the concept. The 1990 Expo marked its 14th year with 13 breeds competing and more than 1,000 head of breeding stock offered for sale.

Usually sponsored by the state cattlemen's associations, these events are designed not only as a show and sale, but also as a gathering place for cattle producers to socialize and compare notes with their peers. This has resulted in the expos becoming a valuable marketing outlet for the breeders.

Some states that have relatively young beef expos are Texas, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee. This year will see the first expos for Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Besides the more familiar livestock shows, state fairs and beef expositions, there are thousands of county fairs, area breed shows and field days.

Whatever the location or time of year, the "Tanbark Trail" offers breeders endless opportunities to exhibit their stock. Showing cattle is a smart way of advertising and developing prestige. It's also a great way to have fun.

## Two Accomplished Showmen Share Tips

### **Lori Cash, Junior Showman**

"Mentally, I try to put myself in slow-motion and think mellow thoughts before I show," says 18-year-old Lori Cash of Centre Hall, Pa.

Lori's dad is her adviser, and he always stressed using slow movements and being relaxed and calm when showing an animal.

Heeding her dad's advice has led Lori to top showmanship honors in many contests. Winning the title of "Top Showman" at the 1988 National Junior Angus Showmanship contest was the ultimate award.

Lori vividly recalls the final days of competition that led to the title. "I probably should have been more nervous about being in the contest than I actually was. I had a terrible cold when I arrived in Missouri. Every night I kept everybody in the room awake with my cough, and everyone, including me, was quite cranky."

By the time Lori was ready to show, she was so tired and hot, she didn't have the energy to be nervous. Competitors in the final rounds of the showmanship contest had to draw lots for the heifer they would be showing. Lori did worry about the type of heifer she would draw.

"As soon as I drew, I went over to the heifer and tried to familiarize myself with her, which I think helped," she says. "But I think the real key to winning the title was being calm and staying in control. I was really happy when they told me I had won."

Lori has been showing cattle for half of her life, starting in 4-H at the age of nine. She also joined the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) at that time, but didn't show in any Angus shows until a few years later. At that time she branched out to some larger shows and started to compete in various Angus shows. At age 12, she had her first win.

"In 1983, I went to my first Angus Preview Show in New Jersey and my heifer was champion there," she says. "It was the first time I had ever won, I was really excited."

Later that same year, she showed in her first national show in Iowa. At the Ju-

nior National show in 1988, she won the showmanship title. She also came in second with her heifer in the bred-and-owned class.

Her most recent victory was showing the grand champion steer at the 1989 Centre County Fair.

Lori's showmanship career encom-

tered in her early 4-H days. She had a calf that was always trying to put her up against the fence, making her cry and get very upset and nervous. Lori told her dad he had better do something with the calf.

Lori says she fully expected her dad to take the calf in hand, but instead he told her something she has never forgotten.

He told her she was the one who had to calm down, not the calf. If she was calm, then the calf would be calm also.

Lori had to learn to get back in with the calf, even when the going got tough. The experience taught her a lot about patience and discipline.

"I think that over the years you accumulate little things that give you your own style in both showing and fitting," Lori says. "It does take time to learn everything, but my dad was my best teacher."

Lori's parents, Willie and Erskine Cash, can also be very proud of their daughter. She is not only

an accomplished showman, but has also attained numerous other honors. She was named Outstanding Pennsylvania Junior Angus Member for 1989, was elected to NJAA Board of Directors, and recently was named 1990 Miss American Angus. She managed the 1989 Eastern Regional Junior Angus Show held in Pennsylvania and was awarded first place girls' American Angus Auxiliary 1990 Scholarship.

Lori is attending Pennsylvania State University and plans to pursue a career in agricultural marketing or communications.

### **Dale Rains, Breeder & Showman**

The Rains family of Mercer, Pa., has been in the Angus business a long time. More than 70 years to be exact. Rains Angus, co-owned by Dale and Austin Rains, was started by Dale's great-grandfather in the early 1900s. The herd has been designated a Centennial Herd by the American Angus Association.

Being named Premier Breeder at the Pennsylvania Farm Show twice in the last five years attests to the fact that the



*Lori Cash (third from the left) displays the poise and control that earned her Top Showman at the 1988 National Junior Angus Show in Springfield, Mo.*

passes not only cattle, but also hogs and her first love, horses. She feels diversifying has helped to develop her winning style.

"I love horses and showing them, but I don't do it any more because it really costs too much," she says. "I think showing horses helps develop poise because it is a flashy type of showmanship."

Lori feels that basically all showmanship is the same, no matter what species is shown. She says the more you participate in showing and fitting, the better you become. It also is important to watch and learn from others who show and fit.

Fitting was something that presented problems for Lori in her early days in 4-H.

"My dad always stressed the importance of learning to do my own fitting, but I really had a lot of trouble with clipping."

She can remember him drawing guidelines on her animal for her to follow. After awhile, Lori became an accomplished fitter and now does just about all of her own fitting when she shows.

"I have even learned to like it," she admits with a grin.

Learning how to deal with an unruly calf was another problem Lori encoun-



Dale Rains of Mercer, Pa., concentrates on his final touch-up clipping.

herd of 35 brood cows are bred for top performance and eye appeal. It also attests to the fact that Dale Rains is an avid showman.

Dale is a veteran showman. He recalls his grandfather taking him along when he showed his cattle at the local county fair.

"I think I was only about four or five years old when he first took me," he says, "but I really liked it a lot. He was just learning to fit himself so he made sure he took me and my cousins along with him to any shows or fitting demonstrations."

Rains also credits Pennsylvania State University for teaching him about cattle. When he was in 4-H his club would attend junior field days held at the university, where they taught both showing and fitting. Later, as a student at Penn State, he helped show and care for the university's beef cattle.

Rains says you can't limit yourself to learning strictly from one person; it is something that you have to pick up from various sources.

Showing and fitting practices really vary," he says. "You mesh things together and figure out what works best for you."

As a breeder, Rains' choice of animals is a very important part of his program. "I choose my animals carefully, making sure the animals I put in our show string have the type of quality that best exemplifies our breeding program," he says. "I think the show ring is a very important merchandising tool as far as promoting our cattle to potential buyers."

Rains also feels that cattle shows facilitate the cattle industry. It lets the people who aren't involved in agriculture see where their meat comes from and the

progress the industry is making toward supplying the consumer with a good lean, healthy product.

As an advisor to the Pennsylvania Junior Angus Association, Rains stresses several points that are important to start-

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ing junior showmen, or to anyone else considering showing cattle:

"Learn the basics first; don't try to copy practices of people who have been showing for years. Leave out the little extras that you see others doing until you are more experienced."

Rains says it is more important to learn how to make your animal lead out and walk well, and being comfortable with the showstick and the halter in your hand. These basics are more important than learning how to use the stick to bring up the topline or tuck a tail back in.

Don't worry about learning the details until you have learned basic coordination and developed a smooth rhythm.

Another important basic Rains stresses is how you enter the show ring. "I try to create a generally attractive profile with the cattle I am showing," Rains says. "Always remember, the first impression you make is everlasting. It is what the judge remembers."

Rains also cautions about showing in a larger class. "You should bear in mind that you have to be outstanding," he says. "You can't let yourself get hidden. If a judge spends only 20 minutes on a class of 10 or 15 animals, you can figure he will be looking at your animal only about two minutes total."

Another problem with many novice showmen is nervousness. Of course their animal senses this and can become quite unruly, which can create a real problem. Rains feels the best way to handle this situation is to realize that you are not the only person who gets nervous when you show. Even some of the showmen who participate in major shows on a regular basis still get nervous to a certain extent. But they have learned to control it.

"I think once you realize that even the professionals can get nervous, it somehow makes it easier to know you aren't the only one," Rains says. "Do the best you can and be happy with yourself. Just have fun."

Rains recalls a saying that he and his family all try to remember when they go to shows:

"Be relaxed when you show and don't get excited about getting beat. Because if you don't want to get beat, then you had better stay home."

# So You Would Like to Show?

For any breeder, junior or adult, contemplating showing cattle for the first time, veteran showmen and fitters offer this advice:

"Watch others and don't be afraid to ask questions."

Be aware that there are fads and constantly changing styles in the show ring just as in clothing fashions. Fitting styles even differ among the various breeds; so it is best to learn the basics first and leave the fancy styles to the more experienced. Once the basic knowledge of fitting and showing is acquired, each person will develop his own individualized style.

The following guidelines are intended as general instruction for the beginning fitter and showman.

## Training the Hair Coat

One of the most important basics of preparing your animal for showing is to rinse and brush the hair coat daily. In the summer it is best to do this twice a day if possible. This will not only stimulate and train the hair, but also give it bloom. Don't use soap unless the animal is really dirty. It can dry out both the hair and coat.

If dandruff is a problem, use a rinse of a small amount of vinegar in plain water. After the rinse, it is best to use a blow dryer to facilitate drying the hair.

Brush and blow the hair in the direction in which you want it to lay. After the hair is dry, spray with a mixture of oil, balsam, alcohol and water to give the coat luster. Using a fan and misting also helps promote hair growth.

## Clipping

Clipping is the foundation of the well-fitted animal. If it is done correctly, it will emphasize the animal's good points. If it is done poorly, it will detract from them.

Basic clipping should be done at least three weeks before the show. Start with a clean hair coat. It's important to determine the animal's weak points and to clip accordingly, using the hair to hide the faults. Secure the animal in a blocking chute. Be sure the clippers are sharpened and in good repair.

Do the initial clipping with flathead clippers. Start on the belly, clipping to the skin from the brisket back to the testes, udder or cod. Blend the underline into the side by clipping outward. Blend the hair on the brisket by clipping outward and smoothing into the forearms and shoulder. Clip from the brisket toward the jaw, about the width of the clipper on each side of the center of the dewlap.

Clip the head next, always clipping in the opposite direction from the way the hair grows. Clip the hair off the nose and under the jaw. Clip hair off the backs of ears, but leave a moderate amount of hair inside the ear. Draw an imaginary line down from the animal's ear and slightly back; remove all hair in front of this line. Shape the hair on the poll, leaving only enough for a top-knot.

Next, clip the tail upward from the twist, leaving hair toward the tailhead shaped in a V. Change to a sheephead clipper and clip the top of the shoulders working forward. Do the top line last, making sure the animal is standing square. Go back over the animal and trim any missed long hairs on the body.

## Show Day Fitting

Prepare the animal for show about an hour before show time, again depending on the number of animals you must fit. Allow yourself adequate time so you are not rushed. Wash and dry the animal well in advance.

To begin final preparation, brush and blow loose dirt from the hair. Apply show foam to hair and brush the hair in

the direction you want it to lay. Bone the legs by rubbing wax or spraying leg adhesive down the legs to get uniform coverage. Immediately pull the hair up with a scotch comb. Use the sheephead clippers to shape the legs and give a final spray of adhesive to hold the hair in place.

Apply adhesive to the top-knot on the poll and shape. Rat the tail switch with a comb, brush or your fingers. Insert a plastic tail tie and pull the switch up and attach securely to the bone. Make sure not to pull it too high or too tightly or the animal will be uncomfortable. Trim excess plastic off the tie. Arrange the tail into an egg-shape by smoothing the hair and spraying with adhesive.

Trim excess hairs. The tailhead should be shaped by applying boning wax or adhesive. Pull up hair with a comb, trim with scissors. Do a final clipping so the hair blends into the top line. Use spray paint to color feet, brands, legs and blemishes. Finally, apply a light amount of hair spray and oil to hold the hair in place and make the coat shine.

## Show Ring Appearance

The main intent of the showman is to have the animal make a favorable impression on the judge. Not only must the animal be fitted to perfection, but you also should have a neat, clean personal appearance. A sloppy appearance on your part can detract from the animal.

Successful showing begins at home. The animal must be accustomed to you, the show halter and the show stick; practice is a very important part of showing. Halter-break the animal with a rope halter leading from the left side. Hold the lead in your right hand. After the animal is accustomed to leading, change over to a halter; don't coil the halter strap in your hand but allow it to hang.

Carry the show stick in a vertical position in your left hand. Diligence and patience must be used in teaching an animal to walk with you, to keep its head up, to stop on your command and to set up quickly and quietly.

When setting up an animal, change the lead strap to your left hand and use the show stick with your right. The stick is used to position the feet, to keep the topline straight, and to calm and control the animal. When you must reposition your animal, always turn to the right, or in a clockwise manner.

When show day arrives, make sure you are on time for your class and begin showing as soon as you enter the ring. When in the show ring, be quiet and deliberate in your movements. If you become nervous when you show, the animal will sense your mood and become excited.

Always keep your mind on your work and pay close attention to the directions of the ringman or the judge. Set your animal up as quickly as possible, allowing adequate space between your animal and others. Make certain you never block the judge's view of your animal.

A common fault of many new showmen is to overshadow. The main purpose of showing is to present the best appearance of your animal to the judge; this will not be accomplished if the judge is watching you instead of the animal.

And remember, always be a good sport and a courteous showman who is helpful to others in the ring. Never stop showing until the judge has made his final decision. If you win, be modest; if you lose, be gracious. Each show is a learning experience that will help you to be better prepared for the next time you show.

