

Work the basics, and you'll do fine

By Jerry Fitzgerald
Windy Acres Angus
Harrison, Neb.



There are those performance-minded cattle breeders who scoff at the people who show cattle. Show-minded people, on the other hand, say that cattle must be shown and that type is more important than performance.

I submit that both advocates are wrong. We need to be the best at both to sell our cattle as well as we can. We need pounds, "do"-ability, and efficiency in our cattle. But we also need type and a little glamour in the cattle business.

There is certainly nothing glamorous about getting up at two o'clock in the morning to help some heifer calve, feeding cattle with the snow or rain running down your neck, or about doctoring some calf with scours. So sometimes we need to have a way of enjoying part of the cattle business a little more—a way to compare our animals not only on the basis of pounds but also on the basis of type. We need a way to bring in new breeders, and we need another tool to merchandise our cattle. One solution is to show them.

The art of showing cattle and the business of showing cattle are really one and the same thing. You must take care of the fundamentals, then you eventually fine-tune your product.

Select the calf or cattle that represent the breed and your breeding program. Select the best you have—remember that everyone else is doing the same thing. Select for correctness, straight lines, good legs, clean brisket and sheath, feminine females, reproductively sound bulls, height, thickness, and length. Look for cattle with performance—good all-round animals.

Put your animal on a ration that will grow him and also put on some condition. Start with a ration of about $\frac{1}{2}$ oats, $\frac{1}{4}$ rolled corn and $\frac{1}{4}$ rolled barley, with enough protein (1 to $1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds) to keep his droppings good.

If the animal is getting too fat, don't cut back on the amount of feed, but simply change the ration. Try adding more oats. Be sure to give him what he will clean up in 20 to 30 minutes. If he backs off and doesn't eat it all, take the feed away from him. Keep him looking for food, but always give him as much as he wants. This

sounds a little difficult, but once you start watching you will find it's not hard—just basic husbandry.

The quickest way to get an animal or person hurt is to wait until that critter weighs 1,000 pounds, and it's two weeks to show and he is not halter broken. A hurry-up job won't do the job.

Start young and take your time. Run several calves together in a very small pen, almost crowded. Crawl in with the cattle, and very slowly with your scotch comb and brush, start scratching and brushing those calves over the back. At first they'll crowd into the corners trying to get away from you, but in a small crowding pen they can't, and soon they will be standing quietly while you scratch them.

After a few days of this, try putting a halter rope on. Again, run them in the pen, start scratching and pick up the halter a little bit. Pull on it a time or two—just jerk it a little, and then let go. Let the calves drag the halter ropes that night.

The next day, run them in, and tie them up again. They will fight, but they will be fighting the halter and not you. (After all, all you have done is scratch their backs and made them feel good!) If you will go back in and scratch on them now, they will settle down twice as fast, with no one getting hurt. Do this several days and drag them a little bit before turning them loose. This is a little longer method of breaking cattle, perhaps, but it's very effective, and it's easier on the body than just tying them up and then taking them for a walk.

Sixty days prior to show, start to rinse your calves two or three times a week. In the summer, brush the hair down, pull up the hair on the legs and brush it dry. There won't be much hair to begin with, but you'll be surprised how brushing will make it grow. Brush up as high as the flank or a little higher, and on the outside of the quarter. Brush around the whole leg.

Besides needing exercise, cattle need to have their feet trimmed about 30 days ahead of show time, so that in case they get a little sore-footed, they'll be over it in time. If you don't know how to trim

feet, find someone in your community who has the knowledge, facilities, and tools to do the job.

Teach the calf to be shown in a properly adjusted show halter (preferably a brown one). By this I mean that the nose piece should be up on the nose, just under the eyes. Nothing looks worse than a nose band down around the nostrils of an animal. Furthermore, you don't have as much control. As you pull the halter tight, it shuts off the animal's breathing and then it will panic and fight you.

Put the halter on a few times at home so that the animal will get used to the chain under its chin and won't get so excited at the show.

Get a good show stick and teach the animal to stand correctly and squarely. To do this, scratch him *slowly* along the belly . . . move one foot . . . scratch again . . . remember that an animal can only pick up one foot at a time. If you are gentle and slow, they usually work better than if you try to force or hurry them.

A few days before the show, clip the animals' head, brisket, belly, and bottom line. If you haven't any idea what to do or how to do it, try and find help. Go to other shows and study other exhibitors—ask questions!

Remember, teach your cattle at home. If you're not ready when you go to the show, you sure won't get ready there.

The day before show day, give your animal a good washing. Make sure you get all the soap out when you rinse it. On show morning, get it up early, exercise it, rinse it, comb out its tail and let it rest if possible. Feed it normally and at the normal time. Get your show dressings, halter, stick, entry number, and other necessities ready to go.

About 45 minutes to an hour before your class is to be in the ring, get your animal out. Get all the dirt and dust brushed off, put on the show halter, and use a bar of saddle soap on the leg hair. Use plenty, rub it back and forth, and continue to constantly comb up while you put it on, up to the flank and outside of the quarter. Trim off any of the rough hairs sticking out the leg to give it a smooth look. Add some coat dressing, and brush to the animal to set the dressing.

Be at the show ring when your class is called. Pay attention to the ring steward, your animal, and the judge. Be courteous in the show ring and others will be to you.

It is very hard to know exactly how an animal should look in the show ring unless you see one.

Just remember, if you get beat at a show, make sure that you got beat because the other person had the best animals and not because you beat yourself by not doing your homework.

(Reprinted by permission from the American Red Angus magazine.)

AJ