

# Fittin' In

Clipping and fitting demonstration aids juniors.

Story & photos by *Alaina Burt*



► **Above:** Kirk Stierwalt, who has been giving clipping and fitting demonstrations for 17 years, illustrates the differences between various clipper blades.

► Leg hair can be trained to stand upward by utilizing a roto or drill brush, which will allow hair to "pop" on show day.



Junior showmen are challenged with a variety of methods and products to prepare their cattle for the showing. They typically learn from family, friends and by watching fitting demonstrations. At this year's National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), Kirk Stierwalt, Leedeey, Okla., welcomed National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members and their families to take part in the third annual clipping and fitting clinic at the NJAS.



Stierwalt begins his demonstration by advising showmen to be prepared before they start to clip. First and foremost, he says, start with a clean, dry animal.

Before the clipping begins it's also critical to make sure the blades are sharp and the right set of clipper blades are available for the job. Stierwalt, who has been clipping since he was 6 years old, recommends having a set of 10-wide clipper blades for blocking and shaping, as well as a set of medium blocking blades. Different blade sizes cut the hair in different ways.

With clippers in hand, Stierwalt begins to discuss proper care of clippers. "Never wrap the cord around the body," he says. This causes the cord to fray and will cut the life of the clippers in half. While clipping, he drapes the cord over his neck and shoulders to avoid stumbling on it. This provides support while working and limits gouging of hair.

When clippers get hot, Stierwalt reaches for a can of lubricant. "Blades can get to 140 or 150 degrees," he says. Applying lubricant will drop the temperature of the blades by 70°.

Turning to the animal, Stierwalt focuses on having it secured. He places two halters on the animal, tying one to the left and one to the right. Then, he hooks a round eye snap to the back of the halter (behind the poll), securing the animal's head with a rope tied over the top of the chute to give the animal balance and support.

It's important to do most of the clipping at home, Stierwalt says, because the environment is not as rushed and there's less pressure.

## Shear perfection

"All clipping is, is leaving the valleys and clipping the hills," Stierwalt remarks. Understanding the animal's strengths and weaknesses is important for the individual doing the clipping.

"[You] have to know the good and the bad — know the parts, how they work — to make them better," Stierwalt says.

As he demonstrates, Stierwalt grabs a white piece of chalk and begins to draw lines on the animal to help visualize where to clip and where not to clip based on the animal's structure. It's like connecting the dots, he says.

Starting with the tail, Stierwalt asks the audience why it's important to clip the tail. The audience members call out, "To make the

animal look wider.” They are correct.

“The smaller the tail, the bigger the hind,” Stierwalt says.

For working with hair on the underbelly, the hair can be left a little longer if more depth is desired, he says. While working on legs, Stierwalt reminds juniors that whatever work is done on the outside of the leg must also be done on the inside of the leg.

The brisket is the key for how long the switch of an animal’s tail should be, he says, adding that a common misperception is that the hocks determine switch length. “The lower the brisket, the lower the tail for balance.”

Switches should be tapered to make it look more like a ball, he recommends.

As clipping on the tailhead commences, Stierwalt shows the audience a trick by using a piece of cardboard and white paint. The cardboard provides a straight line, and the spray paint provides the contrast to make a neat, snappy tailhead. He uses the cardboard’s straight edge as a horizontal line across the tailhead, keeping the top of the tailhead covered by the cardboard and leaving long hair exposed. By misting the exposed hair with white paint, the contrast of colors provides a guide for clipping the tailhead.

After working clippers through glue and adhesives, it’s important to use a blade brush to clean blades, he says. This will extend the life of the clipper blades.

### Fit to show

Switching gears, Stierwalt begins focusing on fitting the animal for show. Legs are like chrome wheels, he says. They can make a whole calf look better. Working with leg hair is a daily process. Leg hair can be worked by utilizing a roto brush or a drill brush to help lift the hair on the leg upward. By training the hair, it’s easier to get the hair to stand up and “pop” on show day, Stierwalt says.

Before any fitting actually begins, make sure a comb is available that has all of its teeth, Stierwalt says. When starting on the legs, he applies two squirts of adhesive and combs the hair upward, utilizing long strokes from the base of the hoof to the top of the leg.

Once the hair is set, additional clipping can be done to enhance the animal’s structure. Stierwalt warns participants that the fit job can make an animal appear structurally incorrect as easily as it can improve an animal’s visual appearance. For example, clipping hair in such a manner that makes a calf look straight-legged can be a detriment in the showing.

At the end of the hour-long demonstration, Stierwalt and a team of sponsors representing Oster, Sullivan Supply and Purina Show Chow distributed squirt bottles, brushes, T-shirts, clipper blades and bottles of Oster Kool Lube®, as well as two sets of clippers, to members of the audience.

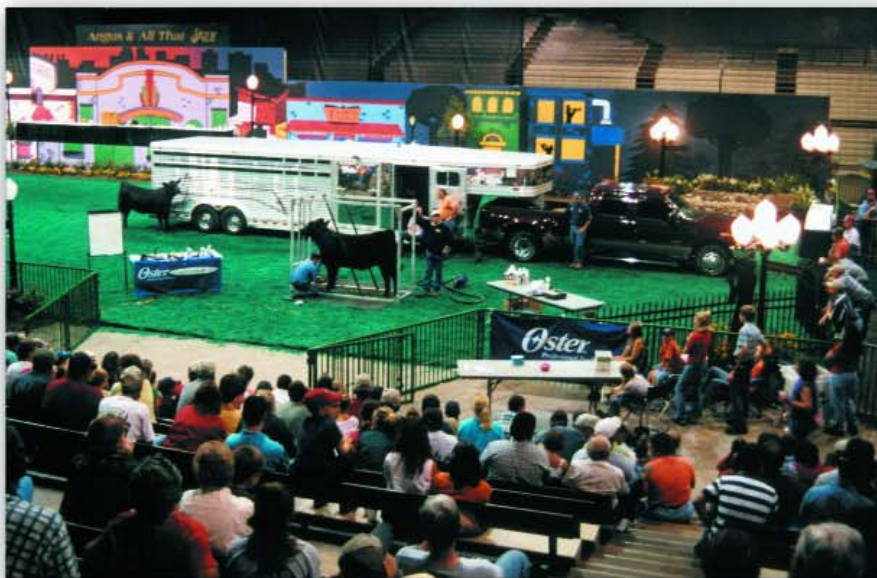


PHOTO BY CORINNE PATTERSON

► **Above:** Parents and juniors alike take part in the clipping and fitting demonstration at this year’s NJAS.



► **Left:** White chalk lines can provide guides for clipping, Stierwalt says, adding it is a lot like connecting the dots.

► **Below:** A heifer’s head is secured in three places to provide balance and support. It’s important to keep the animal from moving when clipping.

