

# Fitting is More Than Fluff

Juniors demonstrate fitting skills and teamwork.

Story & photos by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

The “fluffy cow” phenomenon on social media finally brought to light the work that goes into fitting cattle well. That velvet hair just doesn’t appear. It is the result of many hours in the barn brushing, combing, conditioning and training the hair long before the animal goes into the showing. In addition to working the hair at home, there is a lot of work that goes into preparing the cattle on show day.

Many fitters work by themselves or with a few other colleagues. However, the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) throws in a twist. In addition to proving their fitting skills to judges, juniors must also demonstrate teamwork by working on a four-man team. To top it off, each team must have a member from each age division, so there is at least one member of the team who is 9-13 years old. The rules require that each team member

use the blower and clippers, so the youngest members must fully participate.

This wasn’t an issue with juniors at the 2013 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Kansas City, Mo. July 5-11.

## Team experience

The team from Montana learned that teamwork and planning are necessary in this contest. Jonwyn Ayres, Stevensville; Abbi

Boggess, Deer Lodge; Beau Bromenshenk, Billings; and Tanner Jensen, Philipsburg, wanted to make their team as strong as possible. Thus, they decided their fourth member, who can be any age division, would be a senior, so Boggess and Bromenshenk lead the team in experience.

All four say they had fitting experience, even Ayres, though she hadn’t clipped before for the showing. They hadn’t fit cattle together before, but they planned their strategy ahead of time and went into the competition with a game plan.

Ayres explains that they worked on the body of the heifer with foam

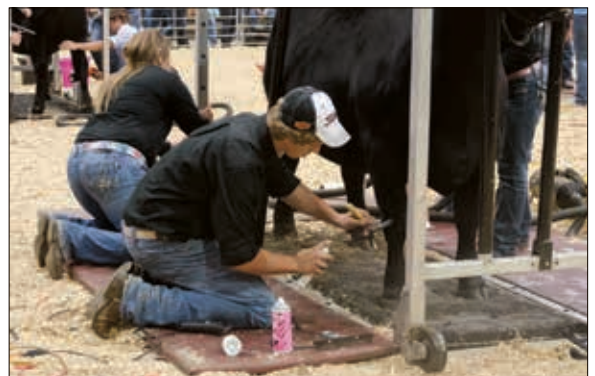


► Montana team fitting competitors (from left) Abbi Boggess, Beau Bromenshenk, Jonwyn Ayres and Tanner Jensen start the contest working on the body of their heifer.

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► **Left:** The youngest member of the team, Ayres wields the blower during the team fitting contest.



► **Right:** Taking the side to face the judge in the ring, senior team members Boggess and Bromenshenk focus on boning up their heifer’s legs to compensate for a smaller structure.

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# Aberdeen in twenty-thirteen

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conditioner by brushing and blowing it in. Then they had each picked a leg to work on, and the tail and head were left till the end for everyone. They also tried to stay organized during the allotted 30 minutes, and kept their fitting area around the chute clean and orderly.

Boggess says the whole idea of the fitting contest is to accentuate their heifer's strengths and minimize her weaknesses. They concentrated on boning up the legs to compensate for the heifer's smaller bone structure.

### Learning life skills

Each contestant of the Montana team learned something a little different. Jensen shares that he's never fitted with others before, so that was an adjustment, but he learned to communicate more to get the job done to the best of their ability. Bromenshenk agrees, emphasizing that working together as a team was an important thing to learn.

Boggess says she learned she doesn't enjoy working in humidity and heat, but she does admit they worked well together. They may have worked too efficiently, because they were ahead of schedule a bit.

Like many juniors at the NJAS, they participated in other contests, as well. This year's NJAS was the first for Ayres and Jensen, at least the first to be able to participate. Jensen says he really enjoyed the workshops, like the Stock Show University fitting and showmanship workshops, the Sure Champ nutrition workshop and the Zoetis genomics workshop. He says he appreciates the opportunities to learn about the cattle business, in addition to the other skill-building contests.

There's always something to do at the NJAS, Bromenshenk adds, noting you never end up just sitting at your stalls. Friendships, new and old, are a highlight for each of these Montana juniors.

"This is when you get to see your Angus family, and sometimes you only see them three times out of the year," Boggess says. "It really is a family — you get really close because you share the same passion."

The family atmosphere definitely helps in a team event.

### Judges tips

Contest judge Rick Carlson, Plattsburg, Mo., says he looks for neatness, organization and knowledge of the animal when judging a fitting contest. Contestants shouldn't have their supplies strewn about their area; supplies should be laid out in accordance with the team's game plan. The teams that stood out to him during questions were ones with a game plan, and who knew what they were trying to accentuate and what they were trying to overcome.

The key is to objectively look at your animal and figure out what you can do to make it look better, says Chad Barker, Kearney, Mo., who also judged this year's contest.

Barker says he really looks at the appearance of the finished animal compared to when they came in the ring. He wants teams to work efficiently and calmly, but not frantically. He could tell many of the competitors work on fitting at home — they looked comfortable with the equipment and really knew what they were doing.



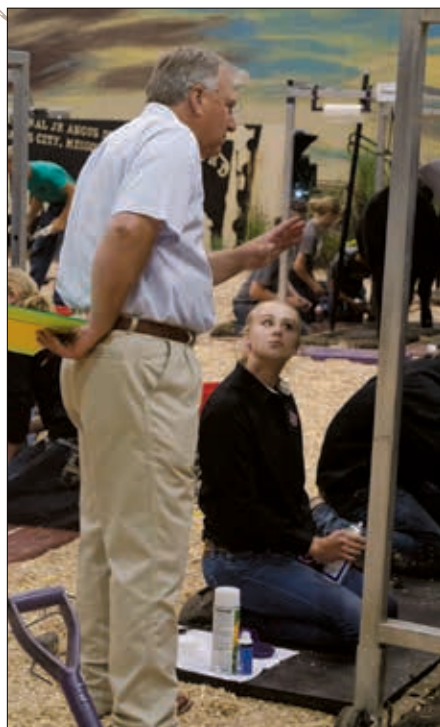
► Each member of the team has to use clippers and blower during the competition. Here, junior team member Cale Hinrichsen of Kansas clips a front leg.

Both judges say a lot of the work for this contest must be done at home to train the hair for fitting. Unfortunately, they say, a few teams were at a disadvantage because their heifer just didn't have much hair. However, many of those teams worked well with what they had. Carlson's advice is to make the animal look as natural as you can, and don't get overzealous with the glue can. For instance, if the leg hair is already trained to stand up, then less glue is needed, and the legs look more natural.

This is a team contest, and judges were looking for teamwork and mentoring of the younger team members. Carlson notes that all members are expected to equally participate, and he appreciates when older team members help the younger ones. They shouldn't do the work for those younger members, but he saw many older team members explaining what needed to be done and how to do it. The younger members learn more by being shown how and then doing the fitting themselves.

Barker adds that this event is unique. He could tell that many kids on the teams were usually competitors, but were able to work together for this event. There was a familiarity in the top five teams that allowed them to work well together without stumbling over each other.

Ultimately, the fitting contest teaches teamwork and some of the techniques that go into exhibiting those velvet cattle in the showing.



► Judge Rick Carlson asks Nebraska team members a question during the team fitting contest.





## Team fitting contest rules

The objective of the contest is to gain the ability to work with a team to enhance the showing performance of the groomed animal. Each winning team member receives an award and the state junior Angus association receives the following premiums: first, \$75; second, \$50; and third, \$25.

1. Each state association may enter one team. Each team will consist of four individuals. Participants must be junior, regular or life members of the American Angus Association.

One team member must be from each age division: ages 9 to 13, ages 14 to 17, and ages 18 to 21 (use contestant's age as of Jan. 1 of the current year). The additional team member may be from any of the three age divisions. In the occurrence of a state not having four members present for a team, they may ask a junior member from another state to compete on their team. Combined teams must consist of at least two members from the same state. Sweepstakes points will not be counted for combined state teams.

2. Teams must sign up during the contest registration period.
3. Each team will be responsible for bringing in a heifer, bull or steer to use in the competition. Bulls, heifers and steers are not to be groomed, but should be washed and dried. Animals will be checked before entering the competition area.
4. Each team must provide its own fitting equipment. Once the contest begins, no team member may leave the area and no additional equipment may be brought into the fitting area. Teams in Heat 1 will be required to provide chutes to be used in all heats.
5. Once the fitting area is designated for each team by the contest officials, the team may set up its grooming chute and supplies in their designated area. These items should be in place at least 5 minutes prior to the announced starting time of the contest.
6. Each team will be allowed 30 minutes to fit its animal.
7. Each team member must fit a leg and use the clippers and blower.
8. All fitting and grooming techniques must be within the accepted practices for American Angus Association-sponsored shows.
9. Judges will circulate and question participants during the 30 minutes, and while the animal is in the chute. Once the animal has been groomed and time is called, participants must stand at the front of the chute until released.
10. Points will be awarded as follows: ability to fit, 25 points; organization of supplies and equipment, 5 points; participation of each team member, 10 points; overall effect, 5 points; and knowledge and response to questions, 5 points.
11. Judging will be by a three-member panel of judges based on 50 points maximum from each judge. Each judge shall total his or her score and rank the contestants in numerical order on the basis of score. (Highest score first, lowest score last.)
12. Animals may be watered, but no feed or hay will be allowed.

— *National Junior Angus Association*