



# Show Like A Champion

Cheramie Viator explains and shows juniors the finer points of showmanship.

Story & photos by *Mathew Elliott*

**T**he National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, or any other showmanship contest, is not won in the showing only. The showing is just a place to fine-tune the hard work that must take place in order to be a winner.

During a showmanship clinic at the 2008 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Des Moines, Iowa, July 13-19, Cheramie Viator of Franklin, Texas, emphasized hard work and offered other tips for those looking to improve their showmanship skills. Viator, a former National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board member, previously won the national showmanship contest and called it one of the highlights of her junior career. She then advised that the work to win that competition began just a few days after her show calves jumped off the trailer.

Viator recommends waiting a couple days after bringing their new show calves home so the cattle can calmly get adjusted and settled into their new surroundings.

"Then spend some time with them in a 10×10 or 12×12 pen," she says. "Still give them plenty of space and spend some time with them in there, building a relationship with them. Don't get too excited. I know this is a very exciting time for you, but this is a lot for a calf's brain to take in."

During this time, the calf is getting used to being worked with, and the junior is getting used to the calf. While adjusting to each other, Viator recommends always carrying a showstick. When the calf has calmed, start working with it and setting it up in the pen.

## **The halter and footwork**

The next step of showmanship contest preparation is to halter-break the calf. While using a rope halter to train a calf to lead, Viator advises, "patience, patience, patience and again patience! If you are having problems, step back and think, 'What am I doing that could cause a problem?' Then again, some calves are just stubborn and need to be worked with more."

Something that can help to calm a calf is to find its "sweet spot." This is a spot on the brisket that is too far back for any cattle to reach with their head and too far forward to reach with their foot. A slow and smooth scratching of this spot can be very comforting and calming to the calf.

A fairly common practice that Viator doesn't agree with is to let the cattle drag their rope halters while getting used to them.

"Never let the calf drag [its] halter," she says. "When they are dragging their halter and step on it, they cannot move. Later on when you are trying to lead them and pull on the halter, the habit of fighting comes back."

After getting used to the rope halter, a good idea is to put the show halter on before going to any shows. The sound and feel of the metal chain can be a large adjustment for a calf. If they have it on for the first time in the showing, they could be easily spooked.

Another important thing to practice with the halter is using it to help set up the calf. "Work with the showstick and halter in conjunction," Viator says. "While the showstick will tell the calf which foot to move, the halter will tell the calf [the] direction to move it." Besides being able to help set up your animal, keeping your hand closer to the head will also help keep better control of them.

While using the halter to help set up, another helpful tip is to "walk into square front legs." By this Viator means stopping the animal with its front legs square and straight down from its shoulders. In a lineup this is the first step of setting your animal up. When in a lineup, Viator says juniors should

picture a rectangle under their calf and put a leg on each of the four corners.

“Don’t pick at the animal too much, though,” Viator says. “Close is better than perfect in most situations. Get your animal set up as quickly as you can and then be aware of your surroundings while keeping your cool.”

### Don’t do this!

Throughout the presentation, Viator had several experienced showmen enter the ring. Some were used as good examples; others played the role of a bad example.

With her baseball cap on, shirt untucked and a tear in her jeans, Kirbe Schnoor of Chowchilla, Calif., laughed as she was made an example of what not to do.

“Come into the ring ready to show,” Viator says. “Wear showing attire, a collared shirt and nice jeans, and enter the ring with a relaxed professionalism.”

Included in the professionalism is being courteous to others in the showing. Help them out if their animal isn’t walking and keep about a half of a cow length between your animal and theirs were two examples of courteousness given.

“Turn your cell phone off,” Viator says. As the audience laughed, she told a story where she was judging a show where the young man answered his call in the ring. “I thought about offering to answer it for him, but, seriously, turn your phone off or leave it behind. Tuck in your shirts, take your caps off, and be ready to show.”

To catch some of your other bad



► With her baseball cap on and an untucked t-shirt, Kirbe Schnoor of Chowchilla, Calif., shows exhibitors what not to do in the showing as Cheramie Viator explains on the microphone.

habits, get videotaped. Whether it is in the showing or just at home, being able to see some of your mistakes might help you realize what they are and fix them. Little things like excessive use of the showstick to stop or slow your animal or bad posture on your part can be picked up on a video, realized and easily fixed.

### Little things, big results

A question Viator commonly gets is, “how much should I look at the judge?”

“I like to stick to the rule of thirds,” she answers. “Spend one-third of your time on the cattle, one-third on the judge, and one-third on your surroundings.”

“Don’t ever lose your cool in the ring; some days you are just not clicking with

your heifer.” Viator adds. There can be many things causing your show animal to act up. In Des Moines, the showing was air-conditioned and when the cattle came in from the outside it felt good, causing them to be a little frisky. A heifer could be in heat or just curious about her new surroundings. Whatever the situation, remain calm. Your nervousness or frustration is transmitted to your animal.

Also important is to be knowledgeable about your animal, breed association and general cattle knowledge. Some judges will ask exhibitors questions, such as the sire or dam of their calf or how they would change their animal to make her a more ideal female in the breed.

Viator then advised showmen to think about the little things.

“If it’s around feedin’ time, feed them early so they are not wanting to be fed,” she advised. “Be sure to also water them. Also exercise these calves. They are used to a lot of exercise, then they come to a show and spend most of their day lying in a stall. Of course they are going to want to be frisky when they get into a big open ring if you have not walked them.”

Something not so little, Viator adds, is to be able to lose graciously, and to not ever let your disappointment show in the ring.

“Finally, the NJAS showmanship contest can be the pinnacle of your junior career,” Viator says. “Be sure to watch this and other showmanship contests, watch exhibitors show at Denver and Louisville, ask seniors questions and find your own style. And never forget the power of thank yous. Someone has spent a lot of time and money getting you here. A simple thank you goes a long ways.”



► Find that sweet spot on the brisket where the calf normally cannot reach, Viator advised.

