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Training and Showing Dairy Heifers

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One of the most serious situations encountered in the show ring by judges is improperly trained animals. Unruly animals may be placed down in their class because of the judge's inability to see the animals shown to their best advantage. An animal's show ring training involves leading, walking, and posing correctly. A properly trained and properly shown dairy animal provides much satisfaction to its owner. Four-H Club members should strive to do an excellent job when training their dairy animal for exhibition.

Materials Needed

You will need a rope halter, a heavy-stable leather halter, and a narrow leather show halter with one leather and one chain-leather lead strap.

Preparing for a Show

After carefully selecting the animal to be shown, the animal should be haltered and placed in the barn during the daytime about three months before show date. The animal may be turned out to pasture at night until one month before show date.

A heavy-stable leather halter may be used in the barn as a substitute for the rope halter to prevent rope burns on unusually nervous animals.

Leading the heifer to water and back to her stall when she is fed is the first lesson in training. Always use a heavy halter in the beginning.

After one week the animal should be ready to begin training. At this time, the show halter may be used with the chain-leather lead strap. When the chain strap comes in contact with the jaws of the animal, she is encouraged to lead forward. Short training periods are best. About 30 minutes each day is adequate. Be gentle and kind to the animal.

A correctly trained animal stands squarely on all four feet with her head slightly higher than her withers. She stays alert due to the firmness with which the youth holds the halter with left hand. Four-H members lead their animals clockwise around the show ring (Figure 1) with the fingers of their right hand at or near the point of the left shoulder of their animal.

Showing Your Animal

As the exhibitors lead their animals very slowly, with short steps, around the show ring, they should be continually watching the judge and their animals to show her to the best advantage. The exhibitor should be courteous to the judge and should always be ready to change positions when the judge requests. Exhibitors may "circle" a nervous animal and regain their same position by turning toward the center of the ring and return (Figure 1). Exhibitors should not crowd the animal in front nor interfere with the animal behind. Such actions may lower the placing of their animal.

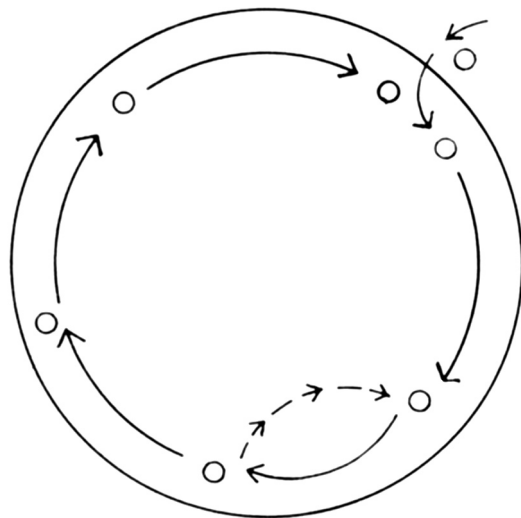


Figure 1

The judge will request that you stop your animal. He is checking to see if you can “set up your animal.” This means squaring of the feet, lowering the tail head, lowering or raising the back, raising or lowering the rump, or placing the right hind leg of a cow in milk slightly forward.

You may accomplish these needs on the ideal animal by (1) holding up on the head, (2) pushing backward on the shoulder halter, (3) flattening the tail with the hand, (4) gently stroking the top line with the open hand, (5) or slightly pinching the loin four inches in front of the hips to raise low pin bones.

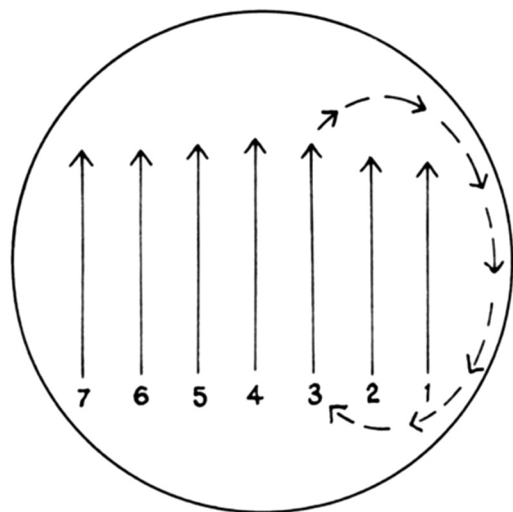


Figure 2

The judge will line up the class from right to left, or left to right, depending upon the show ring situation (Figure 2). Continue to show your animal to the best of your ability while the judge is still working and as you remove the animal from the ring. Exhibitors may lead their animal out of the line-up and around the end of the line (Figure 2) when the animal is nervous or restless. This should not be a habit, and the animal should not be led between the judge and an animal he is viewing.

The exhibitors should listen carefully to the reasons the judge gives for their placings. In this way, the exhibitors can learn and study the defects of their animal and try to pick future show animals with fewer faults.

Questions

1. What is one of the most serious situations encountered in the show ring by judges?
2. How long should training begin before the animal is to be shown?
3. What types of halters are used on the show animal? Why are two types of lead straps used?
4. Describe the posture of a well-trained show animal?
5. In what direction do exhibitors lead their animals around the show ring?
6. Explain how to maneuver a nervous animal while moving around the show ring and in the line-up?
7. Why should the exhibitor listen to the judge’s reasons for placings?

References: American Dairy Science Association, and Purebred Dairy Cattle Association.

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