

Lincoln/East Adams County Weekly 4-H Article



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Market Goat Showmanship (Part I)

Introduction

Showmanship may be the single most important quality necessary for success in the show ring. A goat showman is responsible for presenting his/her goat in a manner that promotes the animal's strengths and disguises its weaknesses. Concentrating on the development of proper showmanship skills will improve your chance of success. The combination of a high-quality showman and a high-quality goat makes a very competitive team. Some youth have a natural talent for showing animals while others develop the skill of showing livestock.

Showmanship is not learned or developed overnight. Hard work goes into becoming an experienced showman. Time must be spent with your goat at home, months before the show, to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to properly train the animal to lead and brace. Showmanship should be fun and exciting for exhibitors. This is your opportunity to do everything possible to make your goat look its best. A great goat showman is aware of everything surrounding and involving the person/goat team. The showman must maintain awareness of him/herself, the goat, the judge, ring steward(s), other showman, other goats, and areas in and outside the show ring. In addition, the showman watches for other unknown details that could develop unexpectedly. Performing at the highest level every time you enter the ring will allow everything else to fall into place. In this article, you will find information that will help you learn to become a more skilled showman.

Animal Selection

One of the key ingredients for a successful showmanship effort is to select a **good** animal. While any animal may be shown, **remember** that it is always easier to show a high quality animal free of major faults.

At Home

Collar/Halter-Breaking

The real work of showmanship begins once goats have been selected and placed on feed. Begin training goats by teaching them to lead with a collar and halter. Collars and halters are available on the commercial market. For the animal's safety and comfort, the lead rope should slide easily through both sides of the nose piece. Halters are designed to fit only one correct way on the goat's head. Put the halter on the goat correctly at each training session.

Notice that the piece running across the animal's nose is not adjustable. (Figure 1).The nose piece is used only to hold the halter



Figure 1. Proper halter placement.

in proper position. Pressure comes from the portion of the halter leaving the left side of the goat's jaw, running behind the goat's ears around the head, to the right side, and returning under to the left side of the jaw. The halter applies pressure to the back of the head encouraging the animal to move forward. At the same time, pressure is applied under the jaw, encouraging the goat to keep its head held high. Goats often fight the chain and halter at first, but will soon adjust to the restraint. Starting them on a halter reduces the risk of the animal becoming choked and is safer than starting them out using a collar and not having an easy way to release the animal in a dangerous situation.

When using a halter, allow a small amount of slack (4 to 6 inches) in the lead rope so the goat can stand with his head parallel to the ground without heavy pressure under his jaw. Never allow enough slack in the rope that the animal can put its head down or get its foot over the lead rope and become entangled (Figure 2).



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Follow these steps to train your goat to hold his head up in the show ring. Figure 2. Tie halter low with slack. Figure 3. Attach collar even with top of goat's shoulder. Figure 4. Attach halter high to keep head up. Figure 5. Attach collar to overhead structure to keep head up.

Always tie animals using a slipknot. This knot will allow for an easy, quick release for the showman or if the animal is in danger. As the animal grows accustomed to being tied with a halter, begin tying it with the collar. This process allows the animal to grow accustomed to the chain while being tied to the fence. If you want to start goats immediately using collars, watch them very carefully until they grow accustomed to the collar. When starting with a chain collar, use a "quick-link" to adjust collar size to fit the goat so the chain will not slip over his head. Initially, secure the goat to the fence with a snap and chain at shoulder height with no more than 6 inches of slack (Figure 3). Four-inch double snaps work well to tie the goat to the fence. As the goat learns to stand with little or no resistance to restraint, tie it to a fence or overhead structure with its head held above its shoulders. This way, the goat begins to learn how to hold his head up in the show ring. As goats grow accustomed to the chain/halter, tie them a little higher in each training session until they appear as if they are standing at attention (Figure 4). Do not tie a goat any higher than his head would be held in a show ring. This is uncomfortable for the goat and does not teach him anything.

Goats tend to climb, so it is best to tie them to an overhead structure or a fence with a smooth, solid bottom. Goats that tend to resist standing with their head elevated may be tied to an overhead structure using a bungee cord to improve their posture (Figure 5).

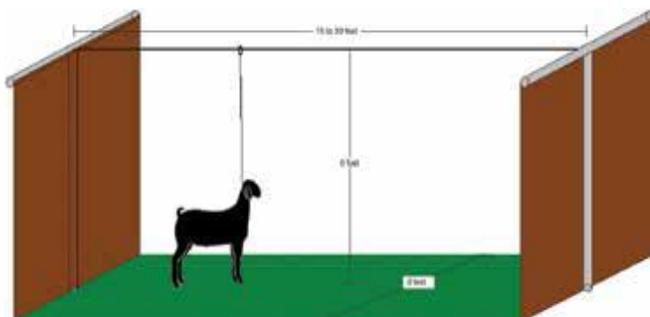


Figure 6. Clothesline training tool.

An additional training aid would be to tie goats using a bungee cord, rope, or chain to a ring that slides on an overhead cable or heavy wire similar to a clothesline. The ends should be 15 to 30 feet apart with the overhead cable at 6 feet. The cable should be high enough to keep the showman's head safe and the goats from jumping over it. Be sure to have solid ends made of plywood or fencing that will prevent

goats from being jerked to a stop by the chain and potentially causing an injury to the animal. This exercise allows goats to walk between the two structures where the overhead cable or heavy wire is tied (Figure 6). This allows for some self-teaching on how to walk with their head up at the right level. It is best to tie only one goat at a time or use a series of these overhead structures for multiple animals.

Never leave tied goats unattended. Goats should be haltered and tied daily – or as often as possible – for a minimum of 20 minutes. If an exhibitor has several goats, practice leading and bracing an individual goat for 5 minutes while leaving the others tied. After an individual training session is completed, re-tie that goat and work another until all goats have been trained to lead and brace. During hot weather, work goats early in the morning or late in the evening to avoid heat stress on both the showman and goat. The more time you spend training goats, the more successful your experience will be when you and the goats enter the show ring.

Repeated work with each goat is critical. Spend time teaching the animal to lead using the collar/halter and eventually without the halter. At first, goats will resist the collar/halter by pulling backward, lying down, and sometimes trying to run away. **Be patient.** Goats tend to be much more vocal than other species. They may make sounds like you are hurting them, but do not be too alarmed.



Figure 7. Pull tail lightly to encourage the goat to move.

Pull the goat forward with steady pressure, and when it takes a step or two forward, immediately give it slack in the lead rope or collar. Goats may need to be encouraged to move forward by applying slight pressure to their tail (Figure 7). Eventually the animal will rarely pull backward and will lead easily along the showman's right side as the halter/collar is held from the animal's left side.

At this point, goats are ready to start leading without the halter, using only the collar. Smaller showmen may leave the halter on the goat as a security measure, but they should use the collar as the primary means of training.



Figure 8. Hold the collar with your right hand palm up.

Showmen should hold the collar using their right hand palm facing upward and toward the goat's head (Figure 8). Showman should let their left arm and hand relax at their side. There is no need for the showman to place their left arm behind their back. This often appears unnatural and can be a distraction. If you must encourage the goat to lead by pulling its tail, change hands and hold the collar with the left hand, lightly pull the tip of the goat's tail with the right.

As the goat begins moving, change your hands to their original position. When goats lead with ease, halters will no longer be necessary. Showmen naturally present the goat from the left side of the animal. A situation could arise in the show ring that may require leading the goat from its right side. A good showman must be prepared when that time comes as it may be critical to presentation of the animal. Therefore, goats should lead easily from either side.

Positioning the goat's feet

When teaching goats to lead, stop them regularly and set their feet in the correct position. Most goats will learn to correctly place their feet each time they stop. A goat's feet should be placed on the four corners of its body, and the goat should not stand too wide or narrow on either the front or the back legs. On the profile, goats should not have their hind legs pulled forward too far underneath them or stretched backward too far behind them. Correct foot placement can make a huge difference in the animal's appearance. Therefore, it is extremely important to devote a good portion of training sessions to establishing correct foot placement. Most goats do not like having their feet and legs touched, so you may have to spend extra time picking up their feet and legs so they are used to being handled.

Next week...."Bracing"

Credit:

Brian R. Faris, Ph.D., *Market Goat Showmanship from Start to Finish*, Kansas State University, November 2012.

Additional resources related to 4-H Goat Projects:

<https://pubs.wsu.edu/ListItems.aspx?Keyword=goat>

<http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/meat-goat.aspx>

<http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/dairy-goat.aspx>

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