

Lincoln/East Adams County Weekly 4-H Article



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Article X

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Market Goat Showmanship (Part II)

Bracing

To prepare to be competitive in any situation, goats should be taught to brace. Some shows, by rule, may not allow bracing. Certain judges may or may not allow showmen to brace their animals. If a show has no rules against the practice and a judge allows showmen to present their animals on a brace, do not be surprised to see the animals that are braced stand at the top of the class. Therefore, showmen should train goats both to brace and stand in place so they will be able to show their animal either way depending on show rules and how the judge allows them to show.

To date, most shows allow bracing. Because most goats do not weigh more than 115 pounds, bracing has become a relatively easy technique for smaller showmen to master, and it provides the most level playing field when showing against bigger, stronger showmen. Many goat showmen, and especially those who started with market lambs, are actually overdoing the job when bracing. Goats do not require the same amount of brace as lambs do in the show ring. A small amount of pressure applied correctly to the front of the goat will make the animal feel much better than his counterparts that are not braced.

After goats have learned to lead without a halter and to place their feet correctly each time they are stopped (some minor adjustments may still be necessary), you are ready to begin training your goat to brace. In the braced position, the goat's muscles (primarily its top line) are tensed and its body feels firm. A firm handling goat is more desirable because softness may indicate that an animal is fat and it may be perceived as having less muscle. While training your goat to brace, remember there are times he may look his best when he isn't bracing. Many times goats look better on the profile when they are not braced. This is why identifying your goat's strengths and weakness is important. If your goat is strong and level topped, you may not need to brace to provide the desired appearance. If they have a tendency to be easy in their top, brace them a bit to level their top line.

Some goats naturally brace when pressure is properly applied to the chest, but most goats tend to move backward. To properly brace an animal, the showman's hands, knees, and feet must be positioned correctly. This may differ based on the showman's size and what feels natural

(Figure 1). Use the combination of hand, knee, and foot positioning that works best for you and the goat. Techniques may change as the showman becomes taller and stronger. The most effective way to brace a goat is to use what feels most comfortable to the showman while getting the best possible brace from the goat. The goat's front feet can be lifted slightly off of the ground to set them or cue the beginning of a brace. All four feet should remain on the ground while bracing (Figure 2). Holding an animal off of the ground can be uncomfortable for the goat. In addition this technique often makes a goat look worse structurally because the animal will usually have a "dip" in front of its hip, causing it to lose loin shape.

At any time you are showing, be careful not to choke the goat or hinder its breathing by applying too much pressure directly behind the goat's jaw or down the middle portion of its neck. If a goat begins to pull its head downward or seems to be trying to cough, immediately remove all pressure from its neck. Some goats may begin to tremble slightly, but will return to normal in a few seconds without harm. The most effective way to teach a goat to brace requires a combination of techniques. First, the goat's feet should be positioned properly on the corners of its body. Second, the showman's hands, knees, and feet also must be in the correct positions. Third, apply pressure by placing the knee into the goat's shoulder and chest. Never pull the goat forward. Always push toward the goat.

Teaching a goat to brace requires **time and patience**. It is natural for the animal to move away from pressure, not toward it. Never try bracing a goat heading downhill. Instead, position the goat so he is on level footing or facing uphill to practice bracing. It is more natural for the animal. At first, the goat will probably step backward. If that happens, apply enough pressure to the goat's tail to make it move forward. Allow the animal to take several steps forward, then stop and repeat the process. This exercise may require the help of another person to have the greatest effect, but should be the most effective. Continue practicing until the goat begins to respond by bracing against the pressure applied by the showman. Some goats may not respond to pressure to their tail. If the goat steps backward when you apply pressure with your leg, try backing the goat in *quick* circles. Often the goat will try to stop and start forward to avoid having to continuously walk backward. At this point, let the goat lean into your leg to create a brace so his top feels firm. Let him walk forward a few steps and repeat the procedure.

Another training method involves placing a goat on a platform just high enough so he thinks nothing is below him. A trimming stand works well for this method. Some showmen may choose to set the stand in an inclined position. Brace the goat, and as he steps backward and cannot feel solid ground,



Figure 1. Bracing leg placement.



Figure 2. Bracing profile perfect.

he will tend to push against the showman. When he does this, allow the goat to move forward, and repeat the steps until he does not step backward. Make sure the platform is high enough to be effective, yet low enough to assure the safety of the goat and showman. Do not “over” brace your animal. The goat should brace against you just hard enough so his top becomes firm and more defined. Do not worry as much about the leg muscles flexing. Most judges do not handle or touch the goat’s leg because it makes the goat tuck its tail and squat, taking away from its appearance. Bracing too hard can also cause the animal to squat and look worse.

Bracing is one of the most critical parts of showmanship, so showmen must make sure goats learn to brace. Bracing goats for an extended period will increase the endurance of both goat and showman. Practice bracing for 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 15 seconds, building up to 30 to 45 seconds. Seldom will a good judge demand steady bracing for more than 30 to 45 seconds. Exhibitors should learn to lightly brace and fully brace their goat. A light brace refers to just enough pressure to improve the appearance of the animal. A light brace may sometimes help keep a goat still and in place. A full brace adds more pressure and results in the goat “flexing” its muscles. A light brace is often used on a profile view while the full brace is used only when the goat is being handled by the judge.

At-home practice

As goats begin to master the training, showman should practice show ring techniques. Ask parents, siblings, friends, or volunteer leaders to act as “judges.” This will allow you and your goat to test your skills as a show team. Practice working with goats in an area familiar to the goat but out of sight from its pen mates. Goats need to learn to work on their own. At a show, they will be taken away from the animals they are familiar with and need to feel calm when on their own. A goat should be comfortable when handled by a judge, so the more this can be practiced at home, the less likely the goat will misbehave in the show ring. Practice moving the goat from one location to another. Master the ability to change from one side of the animal to the other at the appropriate time to keep the animal between the showman and judge. Other tips or recommendations may include the use of a large mirror in the barn so an exhibitor can see how the goat appears to the judge. Video cameras can also be useful. Videos from shows or taken during practice sessions can be used as teaching tools.

Next week....”Show Time!!”

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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