

LONGHORN

Cattle Society

SHOWING YOUR LONGHORNS

WHY SHOW YOUR CATTLE?

There are a number of reasons why you may want to show your cattle but one of the most important is that it shows potential buyers the type of stock that you are breeding. Showing is an enjoyable pastime in the company of like minded people and gives you the opportunity to satisfy competitive urges, however you should always keep in mind that the stock you show represent you and the breed. It would be extreme to say that you should only show home bred stock — indeed there is a lot to be said for showing, for example, a bought in stock bull as often he will catch someone's eye and you will be able to sell his progeny as a result; nevertheless buying in stock just to show them has no part in promoting your herd. So having decided to start showing, where do you start?



You will probably already have an idea of which shows you intend to enter, possibly because they are local. Most shows now have websites or Facebook pages so check on a regular basis that the schedules have been issued, or subscribe to the show's mailing list to get notification that the schedules are out and entries are open. Entries at the larger shows, can close up to three months before the show so you need to plan well in advance. When you get the schedule make a note of the closing date for entries and also the small print on arrival and departure times and so on. What are the ages for your classes? The larger shows will split heifers into yearlings and two year olds - normally those born in a relevant calendar year but sometimes in the 12 or 24 months preceding the show. Do the animals you plan to show fit in? Avoid giving away too much age. Check DEFRA movement and transport regulations, not forgetting the cattle passport rules and the notifications to the BCMS. Also check the show rules for TB and health testing requirements.

PREPARING YOUR SHOW CATTLE



The key to preparing your animals is to give yourself plenty of time. The object is to present your exhibit to the judge to best advantage and this includes not only condition, but also behaviour. Unless your animal has been taught to lead and will walk on quietly, showing itself off, the judge will be unable to assess it and will assume that if it doesn't walk properly it can't walk properly. To achieve this get them used to a halter by tying them up for increasingly longer periods, always under supervision. They will resist it for a bit but soon learn that they cannot get away. When you start to lead them, do it in an enclosed space. If you set off in an open field or down the road and they pull about and you lose them you will put back the training to square one again. The younger you halter break an animal the better as they are more manageable and will never forget. Calves that have been shown 'at foot' are much easier to train as adults than previously untouched ones. Get your show animals used to being approached and handled by strangers, and also teach them to stand square by positioning their feet with a show stick. By gently pressing the stick against the coronet band the animal will pick the foot up and move it

backwards, by using the hook of the stick behind the heel the foot will be brought forward. The aim is to get your animal standing 'four square'.

FEEDING SHOW CATTLE

Condition is a vexed subject. The aim is 'fit not fat'. Again start months rather than weeks in advance. Avoid the trap of thinking it is just a matter of shutting your cattle in a box and shovelling the food in. As important as the food is exercise which will convert the food into muscle. Nowadays few people have the time to lead every animal out for an hour every day. As the show season is in the Summer it is a good plan to turn them out to graze in the day and get them in and give them some hard food (cattle nuts or coarse mix) at night, although in hot weather you may keep them in during the day and have them out at night. This also helps to keep up the training and keeps them used to being handled. Before a show, particularly if they are to be away for one or more nights, keep them in on dry food (hay and hard food) for a week to tighten them up.



FURTHER PREPARATION

Locomotion is an important characteristic and is affected by state of the feet. The feet of housed cattle inevitably grow over long and it is strongly recommended that you have them trimmed back. This is a specialist job best carried out by a professional. It is advisable to have their feet trimmed about a month prior to the first show as trimming can make them sore for a day or two, particularly if they are very overgrown. Horns can be sandpapered, using successively finer grades. Just before entering the ring horns should be given a light dressing of a clear oil (linseed oil, baby oil or paraffin wax)..

FINISHING TOUCHES

In the final week before the show the cattle must be washed. You can buy cattle shampoo although many showmen use washing up liquid. This is cheaper but there is a risk that some animals may show a mild dermatitis unless you are thorough in rinsing every trace from the skin. Thoroughly wet the animal, brush in shampoo and then rinse. The final rinse must be with cold water to avoid opening the pores. Make sure that you remove every scrap of caked on muck and mud, not forgetting the feet. When completely dry, assisted with a blower if necessary although this is not essential, brush the hair 'against the grain' with a stiff brush or curry comb. This has the effect of making the hair stand up and makes the animal look bigger. You can also do a little careful trimming, scissors are adequate, paying particular attention to the little crest of hair along the tail head and running down the tail. The switch at the end of the tail must be washed out and back combed to make it appear fluffy. Washing must be repeated just before the show, allowing time for drying. One spin off from showing is that you will pick up a lot of preparation tips, like the use of setting gels to hold the coat, from talking to other exhibitors.

SHOW DAY

All your efforts in preparation should be geared to presenting your stock to the judge on the day to best advantage. Although it is customary nowadays to show Longhorns in leather halters, there is nothing wrong with a clean white halter. Whatever you choose to use make sure the animal is used to it. Training with a rope halter and switching to leather with a chin chain for the first time at the show can cause problems. Whatever you use make sure it is clean and any brasses on the halter are polished. First impressions are vital so make sure that you are clean and tidy as well. A dirty, unbuttoned white coat, mucky farm boots and an open necked shirt do nothing for the image that you are trying to create - top quality stock from a top quality breeder.



The usual format for a pedigree showing class is that the animals enter the ring in age order, youngest first. Throughout the class keep an eye on the judge and follow his stewards instructions. Concentrate on the job in hand, leaving your mobile phone outside the ring, and make sure your animal is standing right or showing itself off at all times. Even if the judge is looking at another exhibit he may well turn round to compare it with yours and it will not help your cause if your animal is standing badly. After an initial walk around the ring following one another, the steward will ask everyone to stop and then each animal in turn will walk towards the judge and stop. The judge should allow you to set your animal up—make sure it's standing correctly—before he or she approaches you to handle your animal. You may get asked various questions, such as the age of the animal or, in the case of in calf or calved cow classes, how far the animal is in calf or how old the calf is. Be sure you know the answer, and if you have someone leading for you they also know the vital statistics of the animal they are leading. After the judge has handled the

animal you will walk away from him or her so they can see how the animal walks.

After each animal has been looked at the steward will ask you to walk around the ring again and then the judge will select his placings. Sometimes he may change his mind once the animals are lined up and he can compare them side by side, but wherever you come accept your placing with good grace and a smile. The judge will be more than happy to give you feedback as to why he put you where he did so don't be afraid to ask. Once you've finished your classes settle your cattle back into the lines, give them a drink and something to eat, then go and celebrate your success with your fellow Longhorn breeders!



Finally—enjoy exhibiting your Longhorns and good luck!!