

Practice, Practice, Practice

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Now that we have our goats halter broke and responding to the neck chain, it is time to begin work on getting our prospects to respond to actual show ring situations. The more goat shows I attend the more I am convinced we do not spend enough time practicing foot placement, head placement and walking with our goats. Recently, I attended a show and the animal that was easily the best in the show entered the show ring with its head down, never had any of its four feet facing the same direction when stopped on the profile and spent most of its time in the ring running circles around its exhibitor. Where did this obvious champion place? Second. Why? Lack of **PRACTICE**. Maybe the judge knew this was easily the best goat in the show, but presentation, even in weight classes is a huge part of your success in the show ring. It is this reason that I tell all the young people that I work with that it is **ESSENTIAL** that you **PRACTICE** with your animals everyday. I am a firm believer that to be successful in the show ring, three things are needed: A good goat, a great exhibitor and a lot of luck! Obviously, you have bought or raised the best goat you can find, I know all young people either are great showmen or possess the ability through **PRACTICE** and hard work to be great showmen. The problem is luck. I also firmly believe that we can make or change our luck through preparation and lots of **PRACTICE**.

When training goats to show, in the beginning, I like to work them on the trimming stand. I have seen numerous exhibitors, especially young people, have tremendous success by starting their goats on the trimming stand. The stand holds the goat's head in the ideal position and then the child can spend more time in teaching both the goat and themselves the correct way to set the feet. This is also a good way to teach the goat to keep its top level and allows the young person the opportunity to see the goat from the same view as the judge. If you are using any of the "magic powders" or "foo foo dusts", placing them on the stand twice a day to drench animals with these products affords you the opportunity **PRACTICE** with the goats twice a day, every day. Since the animals are on the stands twice a day it is the perfect time to have the young people work with setting the feet and getting to goat comfortable when being handled. Too many times, I have seen goats walk in the ring looking like a champion only to see the exhibitor reach down to set the goat's legs and then see the goats tuck its tail between its legs because it had no idea what was going on. Nothing is uglier than a goat with its tail tucked between its legs!

The next obvious question is: What is the correct way to set an animal's feet? Unfortunately, there is not one correct answer to this question. Generally speaking, you want the feet set on the corners of the goat's body as they would stand naturally. Too often, I see young people who have been taught to set their animal's feet as wide as possible and the animal winds up standing there with all four legs "spraddled" out in an uncomfortable manner. Not only does this not look normal, but it draws more attention to your goat and reassures the judge that your goat is not nearly as wide based as you are trying to make it appear. Also because this is not natural for your goat, setting your goat in this fashion will cause him not to stand still for a very long period of time and he will constantly be moving his feet to try to make his stance more comfortable.

Some tricks that are used by great showmen include setting your goat longer if they are high topped or setting them shorter if they are weak topped. If your goat is short or steep rumped, then **PRACTICE** setting the rear leg on the judge's side back a

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few inches. This will help in the leveling of the of the goat's rump. Also making sure that you goat will keep its tail up helps in improving the appearance of your goat's rump. So many times I have seen exhibitors grab their goat's tail either to get the goat to walk or try to get the goat to hold its tail up higher. MAJOR MISTAKE! This only serves to cause the goat to tuck its tail tighter between its legs and look even steeper rumped. If the goat will not hold its tail up, all the exhibitor has to do is gently touch the goat's rectum and the tail will instantly go to "full mast." Now I'm sure you're saying, "That's nasty!!!!" But believe me, the kids that really know how to show their goats use that little trick a lot and their goats always look great.

Another common problem is when a goat has a breast bone that sticks out in front of the animal's body. This problem can be hidden by placing the animal's front leg on the judge's side somewhat further forward than the other leg. True, you can use your leg to hide the problem but when the judge asks you to step away from the front of you goat or if you have a judge that does NOT like an exhibitor to brace their goat like a sheep then this little trick works well in hiding this problem.

Head placement is another issue that you have to **PRACTICE** at home. My friend has a ten year old son that has just started showing. When asked what is the most important thing when showing his goats, he proudly proclaims, "Head Up!" Unfortunately, too many nine to twenty-one year olds have not learned this lesson. I recently attended a goat sale and the pedigree reader kept referring to certain goats as "being proud." I think this is especially true in the show ring. I can guarantee that a goat that enters the ring with its head and tail up will get an additional look from the judge and often times it is the difference between first and second place. With this said, I have also seen exhibitors bull their goat in line and then try to pull their head off or use their ears as handlebars to hang on to their goat. You must **PRACTICE** with your goat so they will stand naturally in line and be comfortable with their head being held erect. A simple trick to get your goat to hold its head up is to tie your goat everyday with its head in that position. By doing this everyday, you train you goat to become comfortable in this position. This is especially important with goats that are heavy fronted, short necked or deep chested.

The final area of concern in training your goats to show is teaching them to walk. I have a whole fact sheet on halter breaking and I can not reiterate how important this is for you to be successful in the show ring. **PRACTICE** walking your goat as though you were actually showing the animal in the ring. Playing with "Little Barney" for five minutes on a ten foot lunge line is not practicing with them in a show ring setting!

In conclusion, whether your primary interest is showmanship or on foot performance of you goat is the answer is the same, you must **PRACTICE** with your project at home in the same fashion as you expect him to perform at the show. The old saying "Proper Prior Practice Prevents Poor Performance" is so true. **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!**