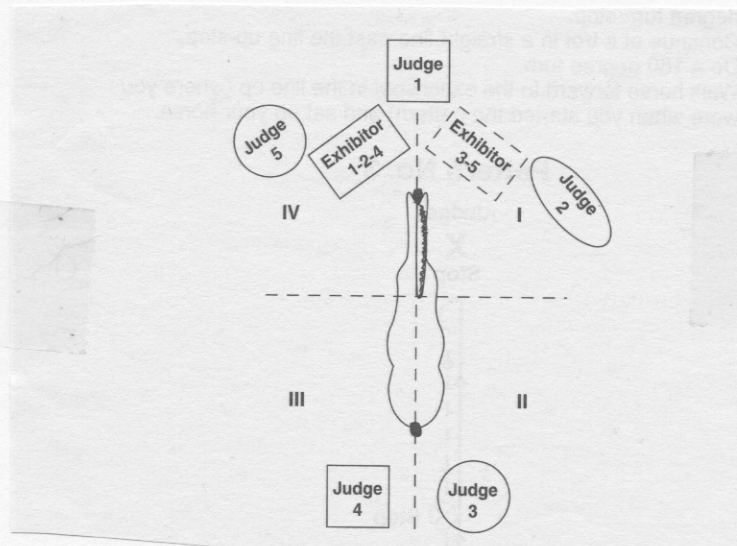


Little Hooves 4-H Club Showmanship

Showmanship at halter is all about the details. Only the exhibitor is judged; the horse is merely a prop to show the ability of the exhibitor to show at halter. 4-H exhibitors are judged on their horses appearance (condition, grooming, clipping, and braiding), showmanship (leading and posing), showing their animals to their best advantage, and their poise, alertness, and attitude. Neatness, fit, and cleanliness of clothing and tack are important, but nothing needs to be expensive. All horses are to be shown with a halter and may be shown with a chain under the jaw.

In some classes the exhibitors enter the arena together, to the right, and proceed counterclockwise, and sometimes they enter one at a time to complete a posted pattern. The exhibitor always walks on the horses left side and should not control the horse from the chain (if used), but only from the leather portion of the lead, which is held in the right hand. The remaining portion of the lead is held in the left hand either in a figure eight or one or two large loops. The left and right hands should be held at the same level as if you were carrying a tray.

Unless there is a posted pattern, showmanship contestants usually line up side by side after they have entered the ring and at the judges direction, each exhibitor works individually and returns to the line-up. Each contestant walks and/or trots to the judge, making sure it is the HORSE that is lined up with the judge so he or she can see its movement. The horse should be stopped a comfortable distance from the judge and set up in as little time as possible - 4 seconds or less is ideal. Always set the hind feet first (usually the right hind) and then use pressure on the lead to move the others. When the horse is set the way you want, step back and smile to the judge to indicate you are ready. As the judge walks around the horse, the exhibitor needs to move according to the rules. Usually this is the "quarter" system shown below. Your movements form an arc in front of the animal as shown below. from position 1-2-4 to position 3-5, and they should be "crisp". In the diagram below, when the judge is in position 1 (in front of the horse), position 2 (quarter I), or position 4 (quarter III), the exhibitor stands in quarter IV, facing the horse at the angle shown and slightly in front. As the judge moves from position 2 to position 3 (quarter II) the exhibitor must smoothly and quickly move to the position shown in quarter I, again facing the horse at an angle and slightly in front. As the judge crosses behind the horse to position 4 (quarter III), the exhibitor must time the move to cross in front of the horse at the same time, back to quarter IV. Again when the judge moves to position 5 (quarter IV) the exhibitor moves back to quarter I. It should look almost like a smooth dance. When dismissed, usually with a head nod, complete the pattern or follow oral directions.



The pivot: At some point in the pattern you will almost certainly need to turn your horse 90, 180, 270, or even 360 degrees, pivoting on a rear leg and always turning to the right. The horse should work off your body language and a subtle cue (like a "kiss") and you should move briskly but it isn't a race! Do not over practice this, as it is hard on the horse's pivot foot. To teach the pivot, you can tap the left shoulder as you step and give your cue(s) and reward one step, as long as the left front crosses OVER (and not behind) the right. Add steps gradually, along with rewards.

Some tips: Keep your eyes on the judge and your horse at all times. As you walk or trot, every 3-4 steps, turn your head to look at the judge. When moving away from the judge this means turning to look back over your shoulder to make sure you are moving in a straight line. Make eye contact and smile, but do not overdo! If the judge says "good morning", respond in kind, but do not speak first. Answer questions politely with a "sir" or "ma'am". Do not be distracted by people either inside or outside the ring. IGNORE anyone trying to talk to you (other than the judge or ring steward). If your horse moves during the judge's inspection, fix things if you can easily, but if not, focus on the judge and keep showing! When standing in a line, your feet should point to the horses nearest front hoof, so you stand at an angle. As the judge moves down the line, you move to the opposite side just as you did during inspection, so you never block the judge's view of your horse. DO NOT MOVE BECAUSE THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU MOVES; you move in relation to the judge and your own horse, so move when he or she passes YOUR HORSE. If backing is required, make sure you back the right length or number of steps, and back straight. Be sure you are on the correct side of any cones, and leave enough room to turn or pivot if that is part of the pattern.

Showmanship takes a while to learn but anyone can do it if they work hard and pay attention to the details. You do not need an expensive horse to be good at this. Lots of practice so you and your horse work as a team really helps. It is really all about teamwork, basic training, and attention to detail.