

A Lesson in Showing Cattle

Showmanship is the one area of exhibiting beef cattle over which you have the most control. In showmanship, you are judged on your ability to control and present your steer or heifer in order to bring out its best characteristics. Advanced planning and hard work are the keys to being a good showperson. Beef cattle showmanship not only generates enthusiasm and competition in the show ring, but also teaches valuable lessons which can be used everyday. These lessons include responsibility, perseverance, learning about hard work and determination to reach a goal, and sportsmanship.

Start early

Success in beef cattle showmanship starts at home and begins with halter breaking your animal. Properly put a rope halter on the calf and allow the lead rope to drag around on the ground for two to three days. This makes your animal aware of the halter. Next, tie the animal for a half hour, working up to two to three hours a day. During this time brush your animal and keep it calm. In time, your animal will respond to your hand movements with a halter and showstick. Training your animal to walk, stop, and set up easily will take time and patience. First, try to lead it to and from water and feed. Then begin leading the animal around the barnyard. Practice in several short segments, not long, drawn out sessions. After the animal is used to being walked and set up, practice having another person move close to and handle the animal with you at the halter. This will allow it to remain calm under a judge's close inspection.

Using the halter

The halter should be properly placed on the animal's head with the lead strap on its left side. The halter cross strap which crosses over the muzzle or nose of the animal should be two to three inches from the eye. Rope halters and show halters can be adjusted for proper fit. Do not have the halter so big that the nose cross piece is down by the mouth.

When leading...

- You should be on the calf's left side with the halter in your right hand.
- Your hand should be six to 12 inches from the animal's head. With show halters, this is usually at the junction of the chain and leather strap.
- You should firmly grab over the strap so your thumb is closest to you, not under the strap. Your wrist is stronger this way, and gives you more control over the animal.
- The strap length should be long enough for control, but not long enough to touch the ground. If the strap of the show halter can touch the ground you or the calf might step on it and it becomes awkward to switch hands. If the strap is long, holding the extra length in your left hand is preferred. If the calf is spooked, you will have two hands on the strap.
- Do not wrap the halter strap around your hand or fingers as this is harder to let go if you need to, in order to prevent injury.

Using the showstick

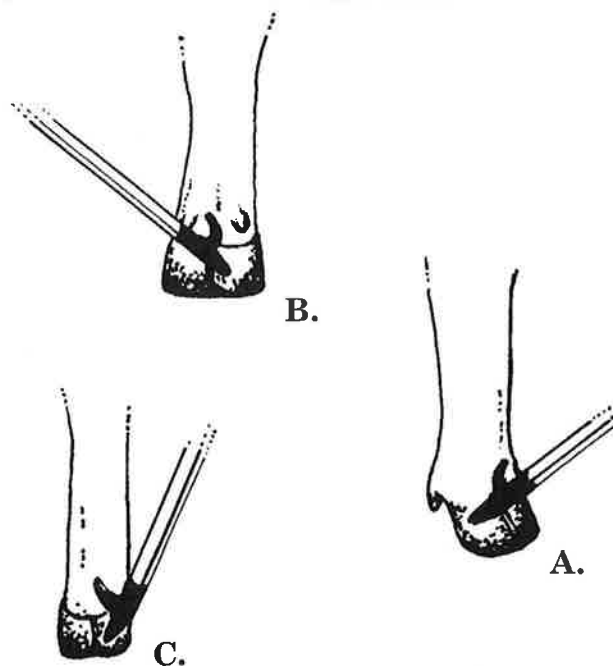
There are five basic uses for the showstick.

- To assist in placing the feet
- Calm the animal
- Control the animal
- Keep the top straight
- Scotch-driving

When setting up your calf...

- Smoothly switch the lead strap from your right hand to your left hand.
- At the same time, switch your showstick from your left hand to your right hand.
- Slowly scratch your calf's belly a couple of times to help calm your animal.
- Set the feet in the appropriate position. Remember, you have two tools in your hands to set the feet. One is the halter, the other is your showstick. If you want a rear foot to be moved back, push backward on the halter and press (do not jab) the soft tissue where the hoof is split with your showstick (Figure 9.09 A). If you want a rear foot to move forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with your showstick under the dew claw (Figure 9.09 B). Remember it is easier for the animal to put a foot back than forward. When the rear feet are too close together apply pressure to the inside of a leg just above the hoof (Figure 9.09 C) and they should stand wider. Front feet can be moved by using your boot or showstick to apply pressure in the previously mentioned areas while pushing or pulling with the halter in the desired direction you want the foot to move. Younger, less experienced showpersons will be safer if they use the showstick. Placement of the feet depends on what view you are providing to the judge and what makes the animal look the best.
- Set the feet at all four corners under the animal bearing their full share of the animal's weight, when the cattle are lined up side by side, in a straight line (Figure 9.10a). At this view, the judge is looking at the rear and front of the animal.

Proper use of the showstick in placement of the feet

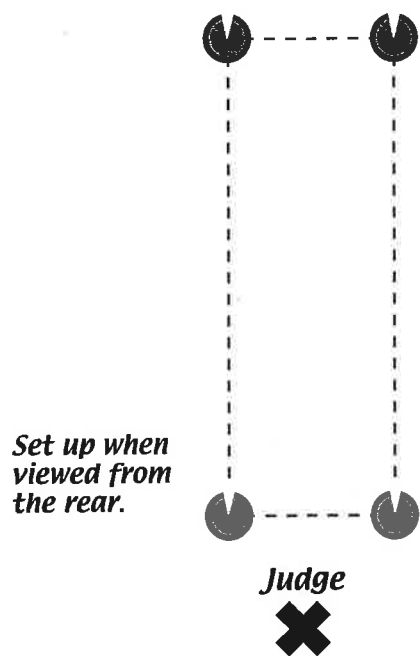


(Figure 9.09)

- Set the feet as if a professional photographer is taking a picture when the cattle are lined up on the profile. The rear feet should be staggered so the far side foot is slightly in front of the foot closest to the judge. Usually, a heel to toe relationship works the best (Figure 9.10b). That means the heel of one foot is parallel with the toe of the other foot. The front feet should be set square or staggered less than the rear feet. The toe of the front foot away from the judge should be set back half the distance of the hoof on the judge's side. By setting the feet in this manner, you provide the judge a sense or perception of depth and thickness. It also makes it easier to correct a topline and rump structure.

Setting up your beef animal for judging

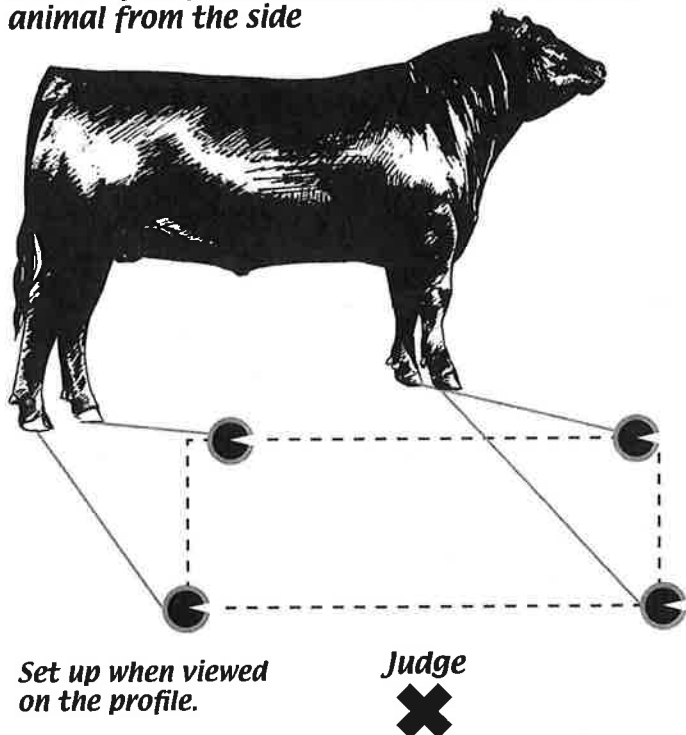
Correct feet placement when judge is viewing animal from behind



Set up when viewed from the rear.

(Figure 9.10a)

Correct feet placement when judge is viewing animal from the side



Set up when viewed on the profile.

(Figure 9.10b)

When using the showstick to correct a topline...

- Simply apply pressure at the navel or flank with the hook of the showstick if the top is weak and needs to be raised.
- If the rump is steep and the loin is high, apply pressure to the loin area to bring it down. Then continue to scratch the animal's belly to keep it calm.

While using the showstick to control your calf...

- Always keep the point of the showstick down, for safety reasons.
- The showstick is in your left hand at the handle or about one-third of the way down when walking. This will allow you to use the showstick as an

additional control tool if needed. If the animal is moving too fast, simply use the portion of the stick between your left hand and top of the stick for tapping the nose. Never hit or beat, merely tap on the nose.

While using the showstick to scotch-drive your calf...

(Scotch-driving is when your calf will not lead or walk and no one is around to help you get started. *Not recommended while in the show ring.*)

- Simply push forward on the halter with your right hand and tap the animal with the showstick on its side or rump. This will make the animal think someone is behind it and it should start to walk.

Using the scotch comb

The scotch comb should be carried in your back pocket, or in a scotch comb sheath (if you do not have back pockets) with the teeth toward you. This is for safety and courtesy reasons as you would not want someone else to get injured due to your equipment. The scotch comb is to fix and groom the hair which may become messed up from the judge or another person handling your calf or another animal bumping into your animal. The corner of the scotch comb may also be used to apply pressure to the loin or top to bring the topline straight, like the showstick.

At showtime

Prior to the show, walk over the show ring to find any high and low spots of the show ring surface. This will help you avoid these areas and assist you in setting up your calf going uphill and not in a hole.

Dress neatly and look like a livestock person. Leather boots should be worn for safety and appearance reasons. If the calf steps on your foot, the calf's foot will slip off a leather boot much easier than a tennis shoe, and your foot will not hurt as much. Wear nice jeans or slacks. Faded jeans look less professional and should not be worn.

Wear a nice button-down or polo shirt which is pleasing to the eye. No camouflage shirts or T-shirts should be worn. Also, tuck your shirt into your pants and wear a belt for neatness. Leave hats back at the grooming area. Hats may distract the judge's concentration. Your planning and neat appearance will help you to gain success.

When entering the show ring...

- Be prompt and have the proper equipment. Be sure to have the proper exhibitor number, showstick, and scotch comb. It is helpful, if you are not in the first class, to watch a class or two so you will know where to line up and how the classes will move through the show ring.
- Cattle are lined up side by side to start a class. When pulling into line, look where you will be and head into that position. Do not simply follow the person in front of you as this usually ends up in an "S" configuration, and you can end up brushing against the calf which was in front of you as you pull into the line.
- Check your animal a few feet before you reach your destination to slow the animal down when pulling into line. To check your animal, simply lift up slightly on the halter so the animal knows you are about to stop.
- Line up where the ring person indicates. If you are third or fourth in the ring, line up your calf even with the other animals and leave three or four feet on both sides of your animal. This allows ample room for you and others to set up the calves.
- Get your calf set up as discussed earlier with the head held high. Be alert, keep a close eye on your calf, keep the feet set square, and know where the judge is located. If your calf is not set square and the judge is nearby, set your calf up. Most judges will wait for you, and you want to present your calf the best you can. Always allow the judge to see the view he or she is seeking. Try not to be between the judge and the animal.

When walking cattle...

- Move as the judge or ring person instructs, either left or right. Most likely, you will pull the cattle up to the rail and turn to your left, three-fourths of a circle, and walk right behind the other cattle in the side by side line.
- Help out the exhibitor in front of you if they are having trouble. Tap the animal's rump with the showstick or preferably put your showstick in your right hand and twist the tail of the calf in front of you with your left hand. Being courteous to others is a must.
- Let the animal walk out freely.
- Stop in a straight line head to tail (profile).
- Remember to check your calf and then stop by lifting the head. Allow four to six feet between your calf and the calf in front of you. This will allow the judge space to move freely around the cattle and help to prevent your calf from mounting the other calf.
- Position the feet as discussed earlier for the profile and keep the topline straight with the calf's head up.
- Locate the judge and calmly wait. Do not saw your animal in half with rapid stick movement while waiting for the judge. Use slow deliberate strokes with the showstick. The judge may handle the cattle and ask you a few questions. Do not make noises or rattle the chain of the halter. As the judge moves around your animal, move a half step back to allow the judge the full view he or she seeks. Be prepared to answer questions about your animal: weight, birth date, sire, dam, pregnancy status of your heifer, feeding program, parts of the animal, yield grade, quality grade, and where retail cuts of meat come from.
- Use the scotch comb to fix the hair which has been messed up.

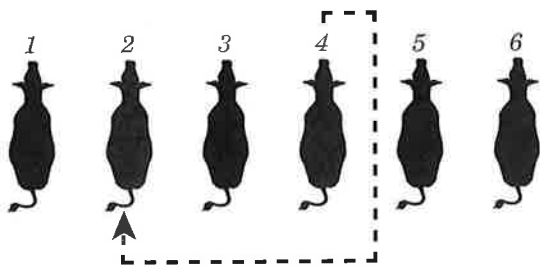
If your animal has moved and the judge has gone on to the next animal...

- Pull your animal out in a clockwise circle in the ring and move the animal back into line. Set the animal up first and then fix the hair. It is more important to have the animal set correctly and looking its best first as the hair may be minor compared to how the animal is standing.
- Look for a sign or motion to be pulled into a line for the placing. This may be another profile line or side by side. As the judge pulls the cattle from the profile line, empty spaces will occur. If two or more spaces between cattle become empty, move forward in the line. Remember your spacing and set your calf up at its best. By moving forward and filling the empty spaces, you help the judge make it easier to make comparisons. Once pulled into a side by side line, you are nearing the end of the class but be aware the class is not over. Pull into the side by side line as discussed earlier, stay alert and set the animal up.

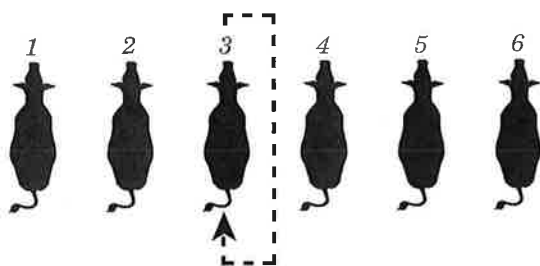
Sometimes positions may be switched. Shown are some situations that may occur (Figure 9.11). Please note you pass back through the same hole that you left and to the proper position. If you are positioned up to a rail, do not turn around in a line. Back your animal out by pushing back on the halter with your left hand and applying pressure with your right hand at the point of the shoulder. Then pull into the line at the instructed position. When the judge starts his reasons, the class is over, but your job is not. You should continue to work hard and display good sportsmanship. Leave the ring in an orderly manner as instructed by the ringperson and pick up your awards.

Switching positions

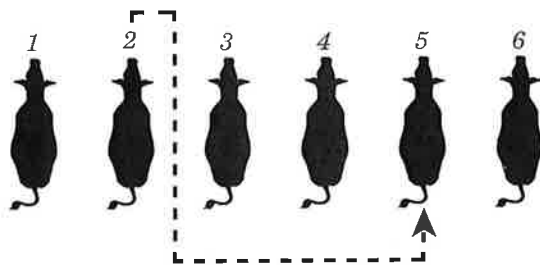
1. How to switch from position 4 to position 2.



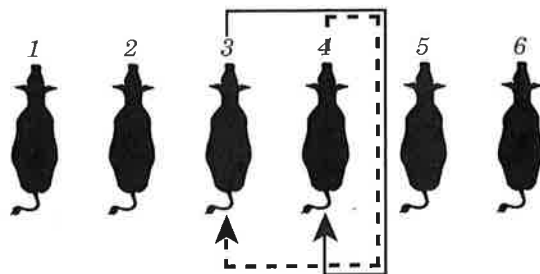
2. How to reset in the same position using position 3.



3. How to switch from position 2 to position 5.



4. How to switch positions 3 and 4. Position 4 would move out first.



(Figure 9.11)

Exhibitor Courtesy and Sportsmanship

Remember to keep straight lines so the judge can compare all the animals. If you are blocking the view of another animal and have space, move so the judge can see all the animals. However, if you are the one hidden, it is your responsibility to be where your animal can be seen. Do not rely on the other exhibitor as he or she may not have room to move. Pull back in line even at the end if this is where space is available on the profile.

Avoid bumping, crowding, or hitting other animals. If your animal becomes nervous or unruly, act like a professional. Be patient, remain calm, and never get discouraged or lose your temper. Finally, congratulate the class winners and those who stood ahead of you. Remember, this is a learning experience. Leave the ring with your head held high, knowing you have given this project your best effort. Learn from your mistakes, watch other showpersons and improve your skills for the next show.