

## The Basics of Swine Showmanship

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*Kim Brock is a nationally renowned swine judge who has been working with youth in the swine show rings for over 15 years. Kim's experience in swine judging has been all over the country with him reviewing hogs at national breeding stock and major market hog shows nationwide.*

*While enjoying judging numerous times per year, Kim's primary occupation is to manage and oversee the nutrition research and "teaching" swine herd at Oklahoma State University. Over his 20 years with Oklahoma State, he has helped to develop their swine management program to a place of national prominence. His students repeatedly place high at National Livestock Judging Contests, and he has developed OSU's swine herd into one of the top purebred herds in the U.S.*

There are certain basics in showing swine that even the youngest showman can work to achieve. While these ideas may seem to be very detailed, they are the keys to making the showmanship experience as positive as it can be. Always keep in mind while you prepare for your showmanship that a judge is looking to be impressed in the show ring. If you want to win the blue ribbon, your number one task is to find a way to impress him!

### **#1, Things to do at home**

First, we need to discuss the showmanship work at home. Brushing, driving, and washing your project on a regular basis go a long way to getting your hog and you to understand and like each other. As you begin to think about showmanship while you're at home, practice driving all of your pigs each day so that you can determine which of your hogs are the most docile. Finding your calmest and most cooperative pig at home does not insure that your pig will be calm on show day, but it does give you a better chance than waiting until show day to pick out your showmanship pig.

To finalize your preparations at home, you need to do two other things. Be sure to find out all of the rules of your upcoming show. Each show has a different set of rules that apply to how your pig can be groomed, so you need to know what your particular show expects. Your final job at home is to clip your pig properly. Clipping your pig extremely short is not the goal, but, rather, you want to clip the pig to accentuate the positive physical traits of your hog. DO NOT wait until you arrive at your fair or show to clip your pig. Your pig will already be stressed enough from the move and adding more noise and fighting will only make it worse on the pig.

### **#2, Show Day Preparation**

Now, let's talk about show day. Your clean, well-groomed pig should come into the ring at a slow pace so that the judge can take a good look at your hog. Be sure that you have dressed appropriately and that your brush is in your pocket. Your job is to remain focused, calm, and confident throughout your showmanship class, no matter how your pig acts. If your hog takes off running across the ring, DO NOT take off running after him. Rather, move quickly but not at a run to recover complete control of your pig. After you enter the ring, keep your hog at the far end of the ring until all of your competitors have entered the ring. Your judge will immediately be impressed when you exhibit the control to keep your hog out of the way of incoming pigs. It also helps to show the judge that you want to be courteous to the other exhibitors.

### **#3, In the Ring**

As you enter the ring, have in mind where you want your pig to go. The idea is NOT to simply following your pig around the ring, but, instead, to drive your pig around the ring to the places where the judge can get the best look at your hog. At all times, you want to keep your pig between you and the judge while moving your pig along at a slow, even pace with the least possible use of your whip/cane. Excessive use of your whip/cane is one of the easiest ways for a judge to determine that you are a less experienced showman. Successful swine showman accomplishes complete control with very gentle use of their whip/cane. Light taps on a hog that has been worked with is all that will be necessary to get them headed or turned in the right direction.

Your goals as you drive your hog are to keep your pig 10 to 15 feet from the judge, keep your pig off of the fence, keep your pigs out of the corners, and on the move at all times. The more that you can be in the center of the ring, the more that the judge can get a good look at your hog. Feel free to use your free hand in your pig's face to move him out of a corner or get him off the rail, but NEVER use your knees. Your plan is try to anticipate when your hog will head for the fence and keep him from reaching it. Your posture should be slightly crouched in a relaxed, casual position. Keep your eyes on the judge and always know where your judge is at all times. Eye contact with the judge is a very basic necessity to becoming a successful showman.

### **#4, In the Holding Pens**

When your judge orders you to pen your pig, he is expecting you to complete this task on your own. Pen your hog in a timely, efficient manner without the assistance of the ring staff. NEVER go directly to the pen while you leave your pig wandering aimlessly around the ring. Only open your pen's gate when you have your hog near the designated pen. Should your hog move away from the pen before you can get him penned, return to the pen that you opened to close and latch the gate. This shows a courteous, respectfulness for your competitors that will impress the judge.

During the time that you are in the pen, DO NOT take a break! Judges love to watch how well the showman pays attention to them while they are in the pens. Remember, the pens are a part of the competition and you need to stay focused when you have your hog penned. Feel free to give you hog a quick brushing as well as a quick squirt of water, but get them ready for the judge's review as fast as possible. You want your hog to be positioned parallel to the entry gate of the pen with you kneeling behind the hog. In this position, the judge gets the best possible view of your hog and you are ready to drive your pig out of the pen when the judge asks you to exit the pen.

### **#5, Answering the Questions**

The final aspect of many showmanship classes is the judge's questions. Many times, how well you are prepared to answer your judge's questions can be the deciding factor in a class. Your knowledge of your hog and the overall swine industry is critical to your success in this aspect of your class. Work with your parents or your advisor to come up with possible questions that you may be asked in the ring and what the best responses to these questions may be.

Here are a few commonly asked questions that you should be prepared to answer any time you enter the show ring:

What is the ear notch of your pig?

What kind of feed did you use? How much did it cost?

What does NSR stand for?

How many nipples should a gilt have?

Why do we dock tails?

What can you see from the rear view of your pig?

What does your pig weigh?

What is the breeding of your hog?

How much did your hog cost?

What are some of the good and bad points of your pig?

#### **#6, Have Fun!**

Allow me to say now just how much I enjoy working with the youth swine showman across the country. Enormous values and responsibility can be learned from all livestock projects. These are lessons that will stay with the kids throughout their lives. Because of the lessons that a junior swine showman learns throughout their project, it is my hope that the adults involved with the swine industry can continue to increase the emphasis placed on showmanship. Use these ideas to work on all aspects of your showmanship, and always remember the last key to a successful showman , **HAVE FUN!**