

A SHOWING HELP SHEET (Nov 23)

WHY SHOULD I SHOW?

There are many good reasons for exhibiting your Cotswold sheep at shows, some of the most important being that it publicises the breed, stimulates public interest, provides a useful opportunity to meet fellow breeders, increases your knowledge of the breed and your sheep, promotes your flock, and above all, is very enjoyable.

It is a good idea to attend a few shows to observe what goes on. Watch the judging, listen to the judge's commentary as some judges do explain why they placed sheep where they did. Also very importantly, make a mental note of the etiquette in the ring, visit the Cotswold lines afterwards and talk to the exhibitors.

One of the best shows for a newcomer to enter is the Society's own Summer Show. It is a relaxed, friendly event and offers a wonderful opportunity to ask questions and learn. Have a look at the schedule and decide what classes you might be interested in, and then think about how you will prepare for them.

HOW DO I START?

- **As far in advance as possible select your 'show' animals** - according to the Society's Breed Standard, so read *The Ideal Cotswold* and pay attention to *Points of Disqualification and Undesirable Characteristics*, both are to be found in the annual Flock Book.
- **Teeth** - When you are choosing your show sheep, do examine every mouth and make sure that when the mouth is closed, the bottom teeth sit nicely on the top pad.
- **Decide which classes you want to enter** - if you need an additional handler, you will almost always find a willing volunteer in the lines.
- **Be aware who is judging the show** - some judges will have their own flocks of Cotswolds and you must not put a sheep in front of a judge, which they have bred.
- **Be sure to make a note of the Society's show shearing rule** - which is that all adult sheep must have been shorn **before** the show on, or after, 1st January in the year of the show. The one exception to this is if you have entered a Shearling Ewe in Full Wool class.
- **If you can, shear your show sheep early** – so that they have at least a couple of months of wool growth before your first show. Judges, however, should take into account that it can be hard to get shearers exactly when you want them, and if the spring has been cold and/or wet, it would have been unwise to shear ewes with young lambs as there would be a danger of mastitis.
- **Careful management plays an important part in preparing a sheep for show.** The animal should be kept on a level plane of nutrition, and you should provide the best quality feed you can. Hay is best fed from the floor, perhaps in plastic drums, because use of a hay rack means that hay seeds will almost certainly collect in the fleece of animals lying under it. Good management will also help to keep sheep clean, but if they do get dirty round the tail, deal with it as soon as possible, soaking with plain water from a hose. Never cut dung out of the fleece of a show animal; you should be able to loosen any soiling with water.
- **Health care is obviously important** and regular attention to feet will not only keep the animal sound and in good order but also accustom it to being handled.
- **A month or two before the show you should start halter training.** Rope halters are widely used but some breeders prefer leather versions. Practise putting the halter on, remembering that the handler stands on the sheep's left. Start to walk the sheep for a short time each day, be kind and patient and you will find that it soon becomes

accustomed to the halter. A method that often works well is to feed the sheep afterwards so that it comes to associate the halter with a reward. Or, if you have only a few sheep, get them all accustomed from a very early age to walking on the halter each time you move them to a fresh grazing area.

- **Submit your entry form well before the show's deadline** - read all the regulations carefully, and accustom your sheep to being loaded, transported, and unloaded so that they are not stressed by it all.
- **Check that the sheep have not lost either of their official DEFRA ear tags** - if they have, you will need to order replacement tags in good time for the show. The only time a sheep must wear its official Cotswold tag, is if it is entered into the Society Breed Show and Sale.
- **Make a list of everything you will need** - such as feed, water bucket, footcare equipment, shears, halters, bedding (unless straw is provided), clean white coat /s for handler, etc.
- **Make sure your membership of the Society is up to date** - If you are not a fully paid-up member you are not covered by the Society's public liability insurance, which includes members at shows holding dedicated Cotswold classes.

HOW DO I PREPARE MY SHEEP?

General principles – As described previously - a great deal of preparation for showing takes place long before the show. However, many of the questions we get asked about showing relate to grooming, so we have included the answers to some of them here.

Be aware that Cotswold sheep are shown in as natural a state as possible, to enable the judge to evaluate the true quality of the animal. This means that there will be less titivating than with some other breeds, but you will want your sheep to look their very best on show day and may like to check below what is, and is not, permitted by way of preparation.

Can I wash my sheep? The answer is yes! The Society does allow shampooing and the washing of the entire sheep. However, we would strongly advise members that too frequent washing, and the overuse of shampoo, will dry out the wool, meaning lustre will be lost, and the wool will feel dry and brittle, thus lowering your chances of success in the show ring. The use of products such as pig oil will not replace the lost lanolin – indeed, a judge who finds their hands sticky with alternative substances such as pig oil after handling your sheep, may well mark your sheep down.

The best time to wash a sheep is on a warm, breezy day – use cold water from a trough or hose (not high pressure) and rinse the sheep well – use a good animal shampoo on stubborn areas of soiling. Be careful not to get water, or shampoo, in the sheep's eyes, nose or mouth...!

How much should I trim or tidy my sheep? As we said previously, Cotswolds are shown in as natural condition as possible. Go through the fleece checking it is not contaminated with hay seeds, brambles, or straw and open it up so that the judge can examine it easily at any point - this is particularly important if you are showing a shearling ewe in full wool. If you keep the sheep inside prior to a show, you could use a sheep blanket to stop hay and straw getting into the fleece.

In some breeds the fleece is shaped by careful trimming to emphasise certain features and create an illusion of perfection. Bearing in mind our guidelines of honesty and reality, you will appreciate that Cotswolds are never trimmed in this way and no backcombing or teasing of wool is allowed. However, some 'tidying' may be necessary:

- **Forelock** - Make sure the forelock is tidy and not too long, trim it lightly if it rubs the sheep's eyes. You don't want your sheep looking like it is wearing a mop on its head – note that the wool should be trimmed so the sheep is 'clean' between its ears, and between its ears and its eyes. The judge should see the sheep's eyes and the sheep should see the judge!



- **Tail** – the tail should be trimmed so it is 'squared' in lambs and in shearlings in full wool.



- **Feet** – Check that your sheep's feet are neat, trim if necessary, and ensure there is no sign of scald, or other problems that might make any of them lame on the day!

Are Cotswolds bloom dipped? Bloom or purl dips should **not** be used under any circumstances. You may notice however, that some sheep appear to have a slight colour to their fleeces, this is down to the geographical area that they live in, some soil types put a tinge into the fleece, e.g. red Hereford clay causes a pinkish tinge to the fleece.

What about blow fly treatments, etc? Exhibitors who use medicinal sheep dips, or blow fly prevention products such as Clik, Crovect, or indeed any other pharmaceutical substances on the wool, should remember that the use of these shortly before a show could pose a hazard to judges, stewards and any members of the public who may handle the sheep.

Remember also that washing will have reduced protection from any previous blow fly prevention treatments - consequently you would be wise to retreat your sheep after the show. Be aware that some 'pour on' blow fly prevention products discolour wool – so check with your supplier, or an experienced member, before the use of any new product.

Can I use any form of artificial colouring to 'improve' my sheep? The approved method of showing Cotswold sheep relies on honesty and reality. Therefore, the use of any artificial means to deceive the judge is **prohibited**. This includes the artificial colouring of wool, hair, or skin.

WHAT HAPPENS ON SHOW DAY?

Arrive at the show in good time to find your allocated pens and allow the sheep to have a drink and settle after the journey. Check in with the Livestock Secretary to hand over your Movement Licenses - you will need to have filled in 2 versions – one for your journey to the show and one for your return home. You will then receive a pack containing your numbers – one for each of your entries.

If you cannot spare the time to be at the showground every day of, say, a three-day event you will find that one of the other exhibitors will be pleased to top up your sheep's hay and water on the day you must be away – and avoid any drastic changes in diet as that can lead to scouring.

Get yourself ready in plenty of time for your class, wear a clean white coat and give the impression that you have made an effort to look neat and tidy. The steward will tick you off his list as you enter the show ring - make sure you have the correct number with you for the sheep you are leading.

Often when you first go into the ring, you will find everyone walking their sheep round to give the judge their first impressions of the class. Join the back, or middle, of the line so you can follow what other competitors are doing. Remember to walk with the sheep between

you and the judge, so that the judge can see your sheep clearly without you being in the way. If your sheep hesitates when you are asking it to walk - do not pull it along, instead slip your hand under its chin and touch its tail to gently, but firmly, encourage it to move.

When you are waiting in the line, always get the sheep to stand, properly balanced, with all four legs straight. Watch the judge carefully and anticipate what he or she is going to want to look at next. Concentrate fully on the judging - this is not the time to have a chat with the person next to you! Remember that even if the judge is not actually handling your sheep, he, or she, may well be casting an eye back along the line when examining other entries.

If you do not win, or get placed on this occasion, do not get despondent or critical. A good exhibitor never argues with the judge's choice and always loses, as well as wins, gracefully. Remember that even though your sheep may not have appealed to that judge on that occasion, it does not necessarily mean that you will not do better on another day. Perhaps your sheep just walked badly or was tired and so did not look its best. Take the opportunity to learn from the experience, talk to the judge afterwards and ask a few polite questions. Also talk to breeders whose sheep you admire and maybe ask for their advice as to how you can improve your flock.

Above all, enjoy being part of the show rather than just a visitor, and when you find interested members of the public leaning over your pen do take the opportunity to talk to them about the breed and your flock. And prepare to find it addictive - especially after the first rosette!

What do I do if any of my show sheep don't look well on the morning of the show? You must ensure your animals are in good health when taking them to a show. If one seems off colour, leave it at home. Legislation does not permit the transport of an animal that is unfit. There are some conditions, which are extremely contagious such as orf, pinkeye or scab – if your sheep arrive at a show exhibiting symptoms of any of these, or indeed any other, transmissible disease you will be asked to take your sheep home immediately. The use of medication in the form of sedatives or other drugs, which may affect the performance of the animal or have the effect of making it behave in the show ring in a manner which is not natural, is prohibited.

We hope you will by now have realised that showing Cotswold sheep is a very rational and sensible business. But, most importantly, it is also tremendously enjoyable - many friendships have been forged in the Cotswold lines. It is not at all unusual to see all the Cotswold exhibitors having a picnic lunch together after the classes. And where else could you get the opportunity to spend all day talking about sheep!