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Head to Toe

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS IN THE SHOW RING.

By Micky Burch

"Everything in moderation" is a famous quote by Oscar Wilde that can be applied when choosing what to wear in the show ring. In many ways, how you present yourself in the show ring is similar to how you would present yourself at a job interview. "The people standing ringside could possibly be future employers or may serve as a reference for you someday," Patti Wilson, cattle and sheep producer from Hazard, Neb., points out. "It's important to wear clothing that is appropriate and functional for a livestock show, not a fashion show."

Wilson served as the market beef showmanship judge at the Ak-Sar-Ben 4-H Stock Show in Omaha, Neb., in 2008 and 2009. At that point in time, exhibitors were chosen from the regular market beef classes and called back to participate in showmanship at the end of the day. Among other things, Wilson took into consideration how exhibitors were dressed when deciding who to call back for showmanship, and offers up the following tips for dressing for success in the show ring.

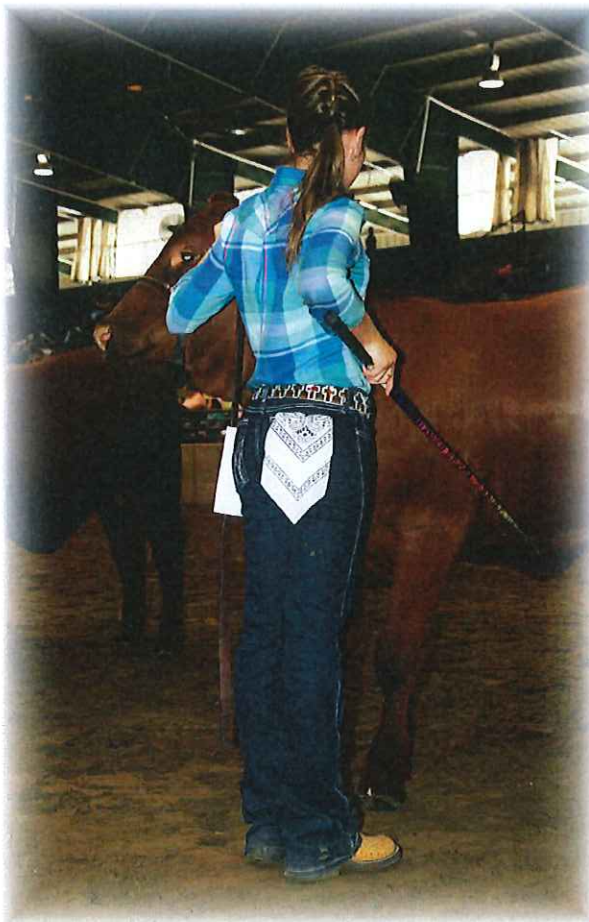
Stock Show Staples

Bling in the ring has become a staple in many young women's ensembles, and Wilson is one of the first to admit that she likes a little sparkle – but only a little. When it comes to accessories, she recommends keeping the extras to a minimum. In the show ring, she prefers to see young women wear small or stud earrings as opposed to something dangly. Big, chunky necklaces and bracelets can be skipped altogether, she adds. These days, many young men choose to sport some sort of accessory as well. For show ring purposes, Wilson

prefers young men not wear items like earrings, necklaces or bracelets. "It's matter of functionality," Wilson explains. "When judging showmanship, I don't want to be distracted by what the showman is wearing; I want to be able to concentrate on how they work with their animal and their ability to show that animal to its maximum potential."

Belts should absolutely be worn by both males and females, and silver conches or bling on the belt is welcome. "I look for an exhibitor's belt when judging showmanship, so if I can't see it, it doesn't count," she says. In other words, tuck your shirt in so the judge can see your belt.

Sometimes, all exhibitors at a show are given a uniform shirt to wear. When exhibitors are free to dress as they choose, they should choose a collared, button-down dress shirt or, for warmer weather, a three-button polo shirt. "My first preference is for long sleeves, but in hot weather a short sleeved button down is also a good option," Wilson explains. She likes to see a variety of colors and patterns in a shirt, so that's an area where exhibitors can really express themselves.



THIS YOUNG LADY SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW TO DRESS FOR THE SHOW RING: HER HAIR IS OUT OF HER FACE; SHE'S WEARING A COLLARED, LONG-SLEEVE, BUTTON-DOWN SHIRT THAT'S TUCKED IN SO YOU CAN SEE HER BELT; SHE CHOSE A NICE, DARK-WASH, BOOT CUT PAIR OF JEANS; AND IS SPORTING MORE TRADITIONAL COWBOY BOOTS.



SOMETIMES, ALL EXHIBITORS AT A SHOW ARE GIVEN A UNIFORM SHIRT TO WEAR. STILL, THE BASIC GUIDELINES OF HOW TO DRESS FOR SUCCESS IN THE SHOW RING APPLY, LIKE WEARING A BELT, JEANS THAT ARE FREE OF HOLES, AND BOOTS OR HARD-SOLED SHOES.

Still, when wearing a button-down shirt, Wilson says to keep it buttoned up. “Low-cut and midriff shirts don’t have a place in the show ring,” she states. “Before you get dressed for a show, just ask yourself, ‘Would I wear this to a job interview?’” She also reiterates that livestock shows aren’t fashion shows. If you find yourself getting dressed for a show, and have chosen an article of clothing to wear in the show ring that was also worn to the last school dance, it may be best to think twice about putting it. “There’s a time and a place for everything, so use good judgement,” she says.

Jeans, without question, should always be boot cut, dark wash and free of holes. “This is a pet peeve of mine,” Wilson admits. “I don’t like washed-out jeans; my favorite look is a good pair of dark wash Wranglers.” Rise is also something Wilson takes into consideration when judging. Girls should make an effort to wear jeans that are an appropriate fit, like a mid-rise. Guys need to make sure they’re pants are pulled up and aren’t too baggy for an appropriate fit as well. Again, Wilson reiterates, the reason for wearing cloths that fit is a matter of functionality. “Loose clothing isn’t always safe when working around livestock,” she states. Further, she explains, the combination of tucking one’s shirt in, wearing a belt and choosing appropriately fitting jeans aids in access to items in a showman’s back pocket, like combs and brushes.

Shoes are an item that are always up for discussion, and the latest trend in youth footwear are boat shoes. Ideally, Wilson

wants to see showmen in traditional cowboy boots or another version of a hard-soled shoe, especially in the cattle show ring. Boat shoes may be acceptable when showing smaller species, like sheep or goats, as long as they have a good sole and aren’t moccasin-type shoes. Remember, if you get stepped on, a heavier, more practical shoe is more likely to protect your foot. Under no circumstances are tennis shoes, sneakers or flip-flops acceptable footwear in the show ring.

To top things off, Wilson recommends both guys and gals make sure their hair is out of their face. “When you’re in the ring, you don’t want to be distracted by constantly brushing the hair out of your eyes,” she points out, adding that often-times it takes two hands to show livestock, and showmen don’t have a hand available to be fixing their hair. For gals, she likes braids and pony tails – anything to keep the hair out of their face. When it comes to hair accessories, the same rules apply as with other accessories. “Bows and headbands are great, as long as they aren’t a distraction,” she reiterates. For guys, the number one rule is no ball caps. Usually, a little hair gel to keep things in place is enough to do the trick.

Finally, showmen may be conscious of their breath before entering the ring, especially if the showmanship judge is asking questions. No matter what, don’t go into the show ring with gum in your mouth. Instead, have a mint or two prior to entering the ring.

When dressing for success in the show ring, functionality and practicality of wardrobe are key things to keep in mind.

CHOOSING CLOTHING THAT FITS APPROPRIATELY AIDS IN ACCESS TO ITEMS IN A SHOWMAN’S BACK POCKET, LIKE COMBS AND BRUSHES.

