

GETTING STARTED IN THE SHOW RING

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So you've bought your new donkey and he's everything you wanted. Just looking at him gives you such pride. He's built well, has a wonderful personality, his color is striking, and you're wanting to do more with him than simply admire him in the pasture. You find out that there is a donkey show within driving distance and the breeder from whom you bought him mentioned that you might want to show your boy. In the beginning, the thought is absurd. I can't show a miniature donkey. I've never done that before. I don't know how. I'd be too nervous. I will embarrass myself. I can't win with all those experienced exhibitors. But after several more days of thought and looking at your donkey who is the example of absolute perfection in Miniature Donkeys, you think you might need to rethink this decision. If this sounds like you, you're in luck. This article will help you get started showing Miniature Donkeys. But before I bombard you with more information than you probably wanted, let me say that this discussion is taken from my husband Pete's and my own experiences and observations. Others may have other insights into this topic. You should ask lots of people about their show experiences, techniques, and philosophies. Most exhibitors are very free with their advice and willing to help those new to the show ring.

Let's look at a few of those questions you asked yourself earlier. *I can't show a miniature donkey.* If you can learn to dress yourself, you can learn to show a Miniature Donkey. *I've never done that before.* You never knew how to drive a car either, but you did it. *I don't know how.* Unless you have an IQ of "1", you can learn. *I'd be too nervous.* Even the most experienced exhibitor is anxious. If you don't have a little nervousness, you aren't taking it seriously. Besides, I've never seen an exhibitor who screwed up in the show ring jailed for public stupidity. *I will embarrass myself.* You won't have to worry about that one. Your donkey will do that for you! *I can't win with all those experienced exhibitors.* At every show, you will find experienced breeders who don't place, screw up a pattern, their donkeys don't behave, or their donkeys aren't what the judge likes. We're the ones in the bathroom with a box of Kleenex so that you don't see us crying. At least if you do screw up, you're in good company. The show ring isn't nearly as scary as when your high school English teacher made you diagram a sentence in front of the whole class. Besides, those screw ups are the fun things we remember and enjoy laughing about. Pete and Deacon were exhibiting in a showmanship class a couple of years ago. They were doing so well and looked so professional until Pete turned around. He didn't realize that he had a white sweat towel about a foot and a half long hanging out of his back pocket. Every time he moved, it dangled like a flag in the breeze. Needless to say, he didn't win. Now, this is the same man who two years earlier had won first place in showmanship in Houston competing with almost 40 exhibitors, some professional trainers. Experienced exhibitors can screw up just as well as new ones. Then there was the time that Barney sat down on his rear end in the middle of a lead line class and refused to get up, but that's another story. We wouldn't trade these stories for ten successes because those are the things that we remember most and enjoy telling.

So what is showing all about? It's a venue where you can have fun with this most precious animal that all of us are so fortunate to own and love...our Miniature Donkeys. You should show for the fun of it first and then for the marketing, competition, and social aspects. Some people mistakenly believe that in order to sell donkeys you MUST show. There are more Miniature Donkey breeders across the country who don't show than those who do, and they sell their donkeys very well. Show for fun! The show ring is a place where family and friends can share experiences with their donkeys, and make lasting memories for everyone. It's a lot of work when you do it correctly so it has to be a positive experience for you or you won't stay with it. So let's get started. There are basically two types of classes found in the show ring... halter and performance. Let's look at each individually in order for you to determine which appeals to you more.

HALTER CLASSES

Halter classes judge your donkey solely on his conformation. The judge is looking for the donkey who most closely resembles the breed standard. He takes into consideration the donkey's conformation, overall quality, movement, and show presence. You may not like the judge's placings or understand why he placed the donkeys the way he did, but barring any rule infraction, there is nothing you can do about it. It's his opinion and his alone. Personal preference shouldn't but does play a part in halter selection at times. Some judges like a more drafty than refined donkey. Others like to see a lot of width in the chest or hindquarter. Although color should not be a consideration and is not among the more qualified judges, occasionally you will encounter one who is struck by a certain color. For the most part, a judge's decision in halter is very subjective and depends on his knowledge of the breed standard and his personal preference.

In most cases, you will be asked to walk your donkey to the judge then trot away from him so that he can see correctness in the legs, movement, and balance. You will then be asked to set your donkey up in a line with other donkeys. Therefore, the halter donkey needs not only to be a well-conformed animal, but he should lead well at the walk and trot and stand patiently for observation by the judge. GOOD LUCK!!!! All of us have donkeys who no matter how much they've been trained or how many shows they've been in, you're just praying that they will even walk into the arena. Ours is Quarter Moon Bonnie Blue. Bonnie is an NMDA champion and multiple halter champion, and has been in 16 shows in her career. But even with those credentials, we all place bets as to whether or not she is going to trot while in the ring or even enter it. She likes to play mind games with Pete. Just prior to walking to the judge, Bonnie hesitates for a mille-second to let Pete know that she's just doing this out of the goodness of her heart. Occasionally, there are those who have shown her for us when we had another jennet to show. The word they use for Bonnie cannot be repeated in mixed company. That's the fun and frustration of showing donkeys. They have good and bad days. It makes no difference whether you are experienced in the show ring or not, if it's one of their bad days, take an aspirin and I hope you have a really good sense of humor.

If you choose to show at halter, there are some things that will help you succeed and enjoy the experience.

1. Do Your Homework

If possible, attend a show or two in order to sit in the stands and get a flavor of what showing is all about. Observe not only the conformation of the donkeys being exhibited, but the handlers, their dress, the judge, the procedure during the class, what's going on in the warm-up arena, the way the handlers present their animals, their sportsmanship, etc. We learn more by doing than observing, but it helps some people to have seen a show at least once prior to actually participating. On the other hand, you can learn a lot by just jumping in there, so send in your entry fees now before you chicken out. We haven't had a miniature donkey exhibitor who made an error in the show ring drawn and quartered in a very long time.

2. Conformation

Be very critical and realistic about the conformation of your halter donkey. Choose an animal based on his structure and conformation, not just because he's your favorite. Halter classes are judged solely on conformation and you set yourself up for disappointment if you don't make sure the animal you are exhibiting is a worthy candidate for a halter class. Just because you paid a lot of money for a certain animal or bought him from a certain big named ranch doesn't automatically make him a halter donkey. Not every breeder, even those who have bred champions, produces only show champions. Understand conformation and the NMDA Breed Standard. You can purchase the NMDA Breed Standard in booklet form from NMDA and everyone who exhibits should have a copy. Having said that though, it's important to remember that there are very few "perfect" donkeys. Don't eliminate a donkey from consideration because he doesn't meet all the conformation requirements you would like to see in a miniature donkey. There are halter champions who may have a weak topline or one whose chest is narrower than you would like to see. The judge may have a personal preference that permits him to accept a weakness in one area over another. Halter classes are very subjective and are one judge's opinion on any given day based on the donkeys presented to him that day. In all probability, another judge would place the same donkeys differently. We've been asked many times what makes a superior halter champion. When many different judges in many shows place your donkey first, you know you truly have an exceptional animal and a real champion. Those halter champions are few.

3. Grooming

A donkey shown in halter should be well-groomed. Depending on the area in which you live, the shows can be casual or more formal. Here in Texas, the days are long gone when you can yank your donkey out of the pasture, throw him in the trailer, trot him into the show ring, and expect to take home a ribbon. Your emphasis on grooming can make the difference between placing or not placing or winning first or winning fourth. Grooming involves body clipping your donkeys, maintaining a good healthy coat by means of good nutrition prior to the show, and finishing products (sprays and lotions) applied at the show. We like a little hair growth on our show donkeys because the new

growth will blend in any lines you have from clipping. We clip 7-10 days before a show rather than a few days prior to it. Some parts of the country like to see even more hair on the donkey so they may clip several weeks prior to a show. Regions vary relative to custom. Hooves are either blackened or a clear polish is applied. Manes and tails are trimmed based on personal preference.

4. Conditioning

Body condition is important in a halter class. I'm not talking about yours, I'm talking about your donkey's! If left on pasture or on free feed hay, your halter donkey can easily get a grass or hay belly that's unsightly. This can be prevented by special feeding. If you talk to 10 exhibitors, you will get 10 different feeding programs for their show donkeys, and all of them can be appropriate. If you have the facility available, putting your donkey up and feeding him twice a day with hay and supplemental feed is a good plan. Supplemental feed can be crimped oats, horse and mule feed (10, 12, or 14 percent), horse pellets, complete feeds such as Purina Strategy, Wendland's One and Only, Omaline 100 or 200, special blends, and various others are some of the supplemental feeds some exhibitors use. Do not put your donkey on a "crash" diet if he's overweight. Any change of diet in preparation for a show should be done gradually over weeks rather than days. If your donkey is given a drastic change in his feed, you run the risk of colic, founder or hyperlipidemia, all serious conditions. Colic and especially hyperlipidemia can even be fatal. Adding mineral oil, corn oil, or products like Nu-Image or Super 14 to the feed can produce a healthy, shiny coat. Make sure your donkey is free of parasites to insure optimum health and condition. Exercise is also an important element in conditioning. Some exhibitors have invested in a horse walker to help with body conditioning for the show ring. In lieu of that expense, taking your show donkey for a brisk walk around the ranch either on foot (which wouldn't hurt the person on the other end of the lead rope either!) or with the help of your ranch Gator, Kawasaki Mule, or other vehicle, is of great benefit.

5. Dress

Dress in miniature donkey shows is dictated by either the rulebook under which the show is regulated or by regional custom. Most show committees will designate in their advertisement and entry forms that their show will be governed by a certain rulebook. If the show is sanctioned by one of the national associations, it always follows that organization's rulebook, i.e. the rulebook of NMDA, NASMA, ACOSA, etc. Your area may have a local association who has their own rulebook as do we in Texas. It is up to the individual exhibitor to know under whose rules the show will be governed so that he can be knowledgeable about required dress in halter and performance. As an example, our Texas rulebook requires exhibitors in halter to wear a long sleeved shirt or blouse with collar, long pants, and a hat. Some rulebooks require gloves for certain classes. You can purchase NMDA Rulebooks through NMDA. Some shows have more casual dress codes and some have no requirement at all. Whatever the dress in halter classes, you should look neat and clean. I would stay away from lots of dangling jewelry and flapping attire. Donkeys have been spooked by the noise and movement and it can draw attention to yourself rather than to your donkey. If you're twenty,

female, and a size 6...that might not be an entirely bad thing! Most exhibitors choose attire that is not garish or extremely loud in color or design.

6. Training

Now we come to a very important requirement for showing in halter. Too many people have been disappointed because, even though they have an outstanding donkey, they never seem to do well in the show ring. You are never going to succeed in halter if your donkey does not present himself well. We've seen very nice donkeys who merited a ribbon because of their outstanding conformation be excluded from consideration because they had to be dragged into the arena, wouldn't trot, wouldn't stand still in line, and basically fought the handler. How can the judge make any kind of determination about your donkey relating to conformation and movement if the donkey doesn't show well? 99% of the preparation for halter or performance takes place AT HOME. Does this mean that your donkey must stand like the rocks at Stonehenge? Wouldn't hurt. Does this mean that your donkey needs to trot with his head up like a Tennessee Walker? Wouldn't hurt. Does this mean that if he doesn't do those things, he will never place? Absolutely not. Remember our Bonnie Blue? The point is that you lessen your chance of placing if you have done nothing to train your donkey to do what he's going to be asked to do in a halter class.

Your donkey must have some basic training either by you or a professional. Teach your halter donkey to lead well, walk and trot on command, and stand quietly. You can do it and it doesn't take that much time. Working with him 3-4 times a week for 15-20 minutes will accomplish what you need. Donkeys are fast learners and remember things well. They do best with short frequent lessons. You will need to learn how to train your donkey for halter, but this can be done through books on the topic and asking advice of other exhibitors. Of course, another option is to take your donkey to a professional trainer. Should you choose that approach, you will still need to reinforce his education periodically at home prior to a show. When choosing a trainer, make sure he or she understands the difference between the personality of a donkey and that of a horse. Some trainers don't understand that a donkey must be trained differently than horses. These are extremely intelligent animals who think for themselves. Also, be sure the trainer doesn't employ harsh training techniques that can physically or emotionally harm your donkey. No ribbon is worth having if it took abusing your donkey to get it.

Although a halter judge should be determining his placings based solely on conformation, there are times when he must look to other things to help him make his decision. That's when grooming, training, and the handler's ability can become a determining factor. As an example, suppose a judge is considering two donkeys for first place. Both in his mind are equal in conformation. If one is exquisitely groomed, well-behaved, and the handler has presented his animal well, any or all of those things can make the difference between first and second place. The quality of miniature donkeys being exhibited today is much more superior and consistent than when Pete and I started years ago. There are so many good donkeys being shown and the classes are becoming so large in some shows that it's quite an honor to win any ribbon. That tells

us that conformation is improving not only in the show ring but in the breeding pasture as well. But because there are so many good donkeys in the show ring today, you need to make sure you do your job as well as the donkey does his.

7. Equipment

You will need to purchase a show halter. In some regions of the country, a simple leather or even nylon halter is sufficient. In others, you will want to invest in one that has some flash to it with silver or beading. In my opinion, it's not the amount of silver you have on your show halter, but how tasteful it is and how well it looks on your donkey. You don't want a halter that takes away from the overall presentation, but a halter that enhances it. As an example, you wouldn't want a weanling halter to have wide leather loaded with a gaudy amount of silver conchos and bars on the cheek and noseband. Conversely, your mature donkey should have a halter that matches his size and color. Show halters made of leather and biothane are popular. Biothane is easy to clean, doesn't fray like leather, and keeps its leather appearance with use. It's our favorite. You can purchase your show halter from many of our miniature donkey tack suppliers or from a local leather smith who will make your halter custom for you. It is also helpful to take a stroll in the stalling area where you will find exhibitors. Observe their set up, supplies, and storage items.

8. Halter Classes

Halter classes are customarily divided by age and sex. Most every show will have a halter class for jacks, jennets, and geldings. Many shows further divide these classes by age and sex such as foals, yearlings, two year old jacks, jennets, and geldings, etc. When entering your donkey in halter classes, you must enter him in the appropriate class according to his age. That isn't always his ACTUAL age. Shows determine age by either the actual age of the donkey or by using a January 1st reference date. If the latter method of determining age is used, the age of your donkey is computed on the basis of a calendar year starting with January 1st of the year foaled. This means that your baby boy is a weanling during the calendar year in which he foaled and is a yearling during the first calendar year following his foaling date, regardless of the time of year he foaled. Clear as mud, huh? Let me give you an example. If your precious baby boy was born in February of 2008, he will be considered a weanling until January 1st of 2009 when he becomes a yearling (or 1 year old for entry purposes). Even if he was born on December 1st of 2008, he would still be considered one year old on January 1st of 2009 even though he is only a month old. Got it? NMDA uses ACTUAL AGE in determining age at all NMDA sanctioned shows. Additionally, NMDA requires that a foal be at least 6 months old before he is eligible to be shown at an NMDA sanctioned show, be it halter or performance. Once again, be familiar with the rules regarding age of the show in which you plan to exhibit. You don't want to enter him in the wrong class which would make him subject to disqualification.

9. Awards and Titles

Most shows will award ribbons to the top six exhibitors in each class. First and second place winners will go back into the arena for the judge to determine the Champion (sometimes referred to as Grand Champion or Model Donkey) and Reserve Champion

(sometimes referred to as Reserve Grand Champion or Reserve Model Donkey). Because exhibitors in performance are accumulating “points” with each placing, their title in most cases is Champion and Reserve Champion High Point Donkey.

PERFORMANCE CLASSES

Performance classes judge your donkey solely on his ability to perform certain tasks either in hand, meaning with a lead rope and a handler at side, or in harness, meaning driving a cart or walking behind a donkey who is harnessed. (Although some of the in hand classes are categorized as “Gaming Classes”, for the purpose of simplicity for the beginner, I will refer to any class other than halter as a performance class. Also, some of the terminology found in this article may not be technically accurate for experienced exhibitors. Keep in mind that I am trying to make it less confusing for the beginner.) Some performance classes are judged on the performance of the donkey, i.e. his manners, way of going, condition, appearance, and fit of the harness and cart as in Pleasure Driving. Others are judged on the ability and skill of the driver, i.e. his handling of the reins and whip, control, posture, and overall appearance as in Reinsmanship classes. Still other performance classes are judged on the ease with which the donkey maneuvers obstacles (Obstacle Driving and Lead Line Obstacle classes) or the timeliness in which the donkey and handler finish a course (In-Hand Jumping and Cloverleaf Barrel Racing). These are all fun classes but do require training. Unlike halter classes, performance classes are judged much less subjectively. The exhibitor has requirements he must fulfill in order for him to place and receive points. You either fulfill the requirements of the pattern or you don’t which is different from halter. A pattern is your road map for performing in that class and is determined by the show rules and/or by the judge. It is posted in a visible location prior to the beginning of the show so that exhibitors can familiarize themselves with the patterns for each performance class.

1. Do Your Homework

As in our discussion of showing at halter, if possible, attend some shows in order to better understand what’s required for exhibiting in performance. There is a fundamental difference between halter and performance classes that can effect your safety, your donkey’s safety, and the safety of other donkeys and exhibitors in the ring. Remember, for many of the performance classes, you will be in harness. That is not the place for an untrained donkey who can be a danger to himself and others, or an untrained driver who does not practice safety nor know the rules. The judge has a responsibility to other exhibitors and will excuse anyone whose donkey is not under control or is preventing other exhibitors from showing their donkeys at their best. Preparation for the show ring begins at home.

2. Conformation

Unlike halter classes, conformation is not a consideration in performance classes. Of course, a donkey with a certain amount of eye appeal does present a pretty package in harness. Bad teeth, cow-hocks, and other conformation faults that would eliminate your donkey from halter classes are not a consideration for the performance donkey. The requirements of a good performance donkey have to do with fitness, movement and

temperament. A good driving donkey is fluid when he moves, not choppy. His front feet reach out and his back legs dig in to propel him forward. Most good driving donkeys are not tiny for the same reason that a runway model is not short. The taller the model, the more elegant the stride. The taller the donkey, the more graceful the movement. Additionally, smaller donkeys have a more difficult time pulling a cart and driver in some arenas due to the deep packing on the arena floor. A good chest and strong hindquarter is desirable. Even a slight cow-hock enables the driving animal to more easily get his feet under him in order to pull a cart. Balance and proportion permits the performance donkey to avoid putting strain on other parts of the body meaning that you want the neck, head, and body to be proportionate to each other. Lastly and something that's extremely important in choosing a performance donkey is a willingness to perform. Not every donkey can be successful as a performance animal. In many classes, you will be asking him to do things that he doesn't like to do and is even fearful of doing. An even temperament, his willingness to trust you, and his desire to please will make your experiences in performance so much more enjoyable. As an example, there are classes where your donkey will be asked to jump over obstacles and ever increasing heights. Some donkeys love to jump. It's a tremendous advantage if your donkey enjoys what he's doing.

If your goal is to participate in both halter and performance, then you must select a donkey with good conformation as well as one with good performance characteristics. Jacks, jennets, or geldings are suitable for performance although jacks and jennets can have attention diverted at times due to, shall we say, "overactive hormones". NMDA encourages the use of geldings for driving. Toward that end, NMDA has introduced a Gelding Incentive Program that will pay \$50 toward the cost of gelding your jack. Geldings make wonderful driving animals and are good candidates for the jacks we breeders raise who don't have quite the conformation required for herd sires. The show ring is a wonderful place to showcase our geldings.

3. Grooming

A donkey shown in performance should be well-groomed like his halter counterpart. At some shows, body clipping is optional. At others, exhibitors prefer to body clip feeling that it presents a better image to the judge.

4. Conditioning

Body condition and fitness is everything in performance. The performance donkey is an athlete and like human athletes, he should be in good physical condition, neither overweight nor thin. Poor conditioning not only prevents him from performing at his best, but it fails to complete a fit overall picture when the judge observes him. The same feeding program as that of the halter donkey is applied to the performance donkey with the exception that the protein content in supplemental feeds may need to be increased due to a more stringent exercise program. Exercise is critical for the driving donkey in order to insure that his muscles, heart, and lungs are up to the task you will be asking him to perform in the show ring. BTW, it also doesn't hurt to have the HANDLER fit too! If you would like to shed a few pounds, exercise both you and your donkey by walking and trotting around the ranch. It will prevent the paramedics from

being summoned during an in hand class. There's nothing sadder than seeing a donkey finish his course while his handler is receiving oxygen from the show management.

5. Dress

Attire for those exhibiting in performance classes, like halter attire, is dictated by either the rulebook under which the show is regulated or by regional custom. Because each performance class is so diverse, there can be different requirements for different classes. As an example, some driving classes require a lap blanket or lap robe to be worn. Youth classes require protective head gear. It is up to the individual exhibitor to know the rules for each class in which he is participating. Having a copy of the rulebook and bringing it to the show is extremely helpful. In most cases, show attire for halter is sufficient for show attire in most performance classes.

6. Training

Driving is becoming a very popular activity for miniature donkey owners. Some owners enjoy driving around their ranch or on trail rides with other equine. Others enjoy the challenge of the show ring. In all of these disciplines, a carefully trained animal is so much more enjoyable. Because there are rules to be followed in showing in performance, your donkey must know more than simply to lead, walk, trot, and set up. He must back, side pass, jump, walk over hazards, pull a cart, do speed events, and much more. This requires special training that can be done by you or a trainer. Many people enjoy training their donkeys for performance themselves. It's not difficult to teach your donkey to walk over obstacles or even to drive. It just takes patience, commitment, and consistency. One source you might want to consider to help you get started is a booklet entitled "Training Your Miniature Donkey to Drive". It's published by NMDA and can be purchased through Asset's Mini-Mart at a cost of \$12.00. Dr. Judy Martens and I authored this publication primarily for driving instruction, but it also has some techniques that will help you train your halter donkey as well. It's an uncomplicated approach to training and has an abundance of photos that illustrate the text. Additionally, there are many books out there that can help train your donkey for performance. The Hee Haw Book Club of ADMS is a good place to start for finding them.

You don't have to exhibit in every performance class. There may be only one or two of them where you and your donkey have an interest. That can be fun too. Coon jumping may be your donkey's cup of tea because he loves to jump. Lead Line Obstacle may have your and your donkey's name all over it because you enjoy taking him through new challenges. Do the things you enjoy and enjoy the things you do.

7. Equipment

Showing in performance, namely the driving classes, requires much more of a monetary investment than showing at halter. You will need to purchase a cart, harness, and other driving accessories. A cart that is used quite often in shows, especially for beginning drivers, is the Easy Entry Cart which costs approximately \$425 and up. This is a wonderful cart for use around the ranch as well. The pleasure cart and other show carts

are typically more expensive depending on the type and where you purchase it. Another important piece of equipment is the driving harness. These can range in price from the nylon and biothane harness (easy to care for and looks like leather) which costs around \$170 and up, to a leather or patent leather show harness that can cost \$325 and more. Should you desire to show in hand, you may want to either purchase or build your own obstacles for practice at home. With careful shopping, all of these items can sometimes be purchased used or on EBay. Do a search on the Internet for miniature donkey or miniature horse carts, harnesses, tack, and driving equipment. You can also find companies who sell these items in the ASSET and the BRAYER.

8. Performance Classes

Both performance and halter classes are usually divided by age of the exhibitor similar to the following:

Adult	Age 18 and up
Youth	Age 11-17
Sub-Youth	Age 6-10
Pee Wee	5 and under
Open	A class in which both Adult and Youth may participate.

Performance classes can be further divided by your donkey's show history and/or age similar to the following:

Green	The donkey shall not have been shown over a period of more than 2 years at any show in performance classes from the age of 3 years (actual age) and over.
Pre-Green	The donkey must be under 3 years of age (actual age).
Novice	The donkey shall not have won 3 first place ribbons in that class at any show.
NMDA Sanctioned Shows	All donkeys in jumping and driving classes shall be 3 years old or older (actual age). Foals shown in foal classes must be a minimum of 6 months of age.

Typical Performance Classes:

- Showmanship
- In-Hand Trail
- In-Hand Jumping
- Lead Line Race
- Coon Jumping
- Pleasure Driving
- Pleasure Driving Reinsmanship
- Obstacle Driving
- Cloverleaf Barrel Driving
- Single Stake Driving
- Keyhole Driving
- Pole Bending Driving

Snigging

9. Awards and Titles

Most shows will award ribbons to the top six exhibitors in each performance class. Points are tallied among the exhibitors who placed. The higher the placing, the more points they are awarded. The title of Champion High Point Donkey is given to the exhibitor with the most points. The title of Reserve Champion High Point Donkey is given to the exhibitor whose point standing was next. At some shows, Champion and Reserve Champion High Point Donkey are also awarded to Green, Gelding, and Youth classes.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Although a responsible exhibitor would NEVER knowingly bring a donkey who is ill to a show, sometimes it happens. There have been instances where sick donkeys have transmitted a flu virus to other donkeys at a show, then in turn, those donkeys brought the virus home to others in the herd with sometimes deadly consequences. Don't worry. There are some steps you can take to avoid this from happening to you. You will want to protect your donkey from exposure at a show by giving him a flu shot 3 weeks prior to the show. In doing so, he is at peak immunity during the show and better able to fight off exposure or lessen the severity should he become ill. To avoid bringing a virus home to the herd, we isolate our donkeys for 2 weeks after a show at least 30' from other donkeys. Even if your donkey doesn't become ill himself, he could be a carrier. Flu viruses can be carried on show equipment and even your show clothes and shoes. If your facilities don't permit you to isolate, do what you can to prevent nose to nose contact with other donkeys by separate stalling or some other arrangement. Just like a human virus, equine viruses are airborne.

Showing is an excellent way to not only have fun with your donkey, your family, and your friends, but it's also good advertisement for your ranch if you are a breeder. When you show, your name is visible to other breeders and owners, other exhibitors, and new folks discovering miniature donkeys for the first time. It's a great venue for meeting prospects, networking among donkey owners, learning how to better care for your donkey, and becoming involved in your local donkey association and miniature donkey community. You might want to consider setting up a table in front of your stall with information about your ranch, your breeding program, your donkeys, and whatever information you would like to make available to the public. You might also want to be creative and make stall drapes to dress up your stalling area. Most stalls are 10' x 10' with the stall door being 4' wide. Heights vary but are commonly 7' to 8'.

Probably the most fun Pete and I have at shows is sharing our donkeys with passersby. At the larger shows such as Houston, Fort Worth, and the Texas State Fair, most of these folks have never seen a miniature donkey nor will become owners or breeders. They are just attending the rodeo or fair and their travels bring them to the barns where we are stalled. The thrill on the faces of those discovering miniature donkeys for the first time helps us to remember how we felt when we did the same. We take the time to let visitors pet the donkeys and learn more about them. We listen to the older folks tell

their stories about when they owned a donkey or mule when they were young. We feel as though we are being ambassadors for the breed when we share our donkeys with others. It's not all about winning. It's also about sharing.

Well, we're coming to the end of this article. Aren't you glad? By now you're either chomping at the bit to get started showing your boy (soon to be the next Champion Halter Jack or Champion High Point Donkey) or you're on the floor in a coma thinking it's too much to comprehend! Hopefully, it's the former. Here's just one more parting comment.

Remember this. When we exhibit our donkeys in the show ring, we're not only representing ourselves, our donkeys, and our individual ranches, but we're representing Miniature Donkey owners and exhibitors as a whole. We should be mindful that there are people watching us to see if they like this group of little long ear owners. There are youngsters in the youth classes and alleyways watching us. They will become the exhibitors, owners, and breeders of tomorrow. There are new Miniature Donkey owners watching us. They want to know if showing is something they might want to do. If it's obvious to them that we're having a good time, they will want to participate. There are people who attend these shows watching us to see if they would like to own or miniature donkey or even begin raising them. There are our fellow competitors who are observing whether we handle ourselves with dignity and each other with respect. We need to show a positive face to all of these. We need to be humble in our winning and gracious in our losing. Simply stated, we need to be good sports. Speak to every competitor. Wish them luck. If they place ahead of you, congratulate them. If you lose, don't blame the judge, your donkey, the exhibitor next to you, the weather, your spouse, or the federal government. It just wasn't your day. Your world will not fall apart. There are much more important things going on in this world than whether or not you win at a donkey show. You have your health, your grandchildren are wonderful, your donkeys love you, your family is blessed, and we're a free people. Those are the truly important things in this world.

It goes without saying that winning is much more fun than losing. We should all go in the arena to win, not to beat someone else, but to win for yourself and your precious little donkey who has worked so hard for you. Understand that even those who seem to continually win top honors are never on top forever. The pendulum always swings and it will swing your way in time. Your character is on trial in the show ring. People are looking to see how you behave when you take home 1st place and when you leave empty handed. Do your best but remember that people aren't going to remember you for what you won but rather for who you are. Let your good sportsmanship be evident. Tell your donkey how much you love him when you leave the arena whether or not you're holding a ribbon. If you do these things, your show experience will be full and rewarding. Now get out there and start working. You have a show coming up in a few weeks!

