

How To Select and Show Winners

By Mike Safley

After many years in the show ring both as an exhibitor and more recently as a judge, I have some observations on what it takes to win. These are merely my opinions and you may or may not agree, but if they are helpful and you win a few more ribbons then my purpose is served.

SHOW PREPARATION

I have judged several large shows this year, and I noticed that more and more breeders are "blocking" their huacayas and "washing" their suris. The Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA) show rules prohibit excessive preparation.

By blocking, I mean giving them a full body hair cut so that the animal almost becomes a fleece sculpture. This is a much different look than a cria that is shorn early so it will look good for the next show season.

By washing, I mean just that. A number of suri breeders seem to think that it increases the luster in the fleece if the animal is washed. Others actually add oil or show prep to the fleece to make it shine.

AOBA SHOW RULES

On page 31 and 32 in the AOBA show rules, you will find the following rules pertaining to excessive show preparation.

K. Alpacas are pasture animals and as such their fleece may be exposed to different environmental conditions. Alpaca fleece should be shown in a naturally clean condition with as little disruption to the fleece architecture as possible. Cleanliness is the absence of contaminants in the fleece; this includes excessive mud, dung, or vegetable matter which may interfere with the judge's ability to adequately assess the fleece quality.

L. The use of conditioning shampoos, conditioners, luster enhancers, dyes, color dressings, oil dressings, and toenail painting is prohibited and may be the basis for reduced placement or disqualification at the judges [sic] discretion.

M. Fleece Preparation for Alpacas entered into full fleece halter competition:

1. The practice of cutting, trimming or otherwise altering a Huacaya alpaca's fleece in the blanket or prime fleece area, other than a uniform annual shearing(s) for the purpose of removing the entire blanket fleece, is prohibited. When evaluating full-fleeced Huacaya halter classes of ages yearling or older, if such cutting or trimming is determined by an alpaca judge to artificially enhance the alpaca's appearance by:

- a. evening the length of the fleece to hide medullated fibers and/or guard hair;
- b. making the alpaca appear to be more conformationally correct than it actually is; . . .

I can tell you that based on my conversations with other judges and my own judging experience that excessive preparation such as blocking and washing does not work. In fact, it most often results in the animals being placed lower rather than higher.

The problems for a judge when evaluating over-prepared animals are:

- 1) The animal is more difficult to assess for a number of reasons,
 - i) short staple length
 - ii) an unnatural staple with a blunt tip
 - iii) the hiding or masking of medulation, and
 - iv) the fleece seems to lack density.
- 2) Washing removes natural luster and the greasy slick handle of a high quality suri fleece
- 3) The phenotype is altered by the sculpture technique.

When I see a blocked animal enter the ring, a red flag goes up. I know the breeder has tried to alter the look and possibly hide defects. I look closer in an effort not to be deceived. Breeders will do better in the ring if they leave the fleece undisturbed and maybe clip a little around the head and neck.

WINNING TRAITS

There are some traits that are common denominators among prize winning alpacas. They include: 1) size - larger alpacas tend to win; 2) bite - a bad bite often eliminates an alpaca from competition for first or second place; 3) in huacayas crimp wins; 4) in suris luster wins; 5) density often becomes a determining factor amongst similar alpacas; 6) fineness is good, but absolute superiority in fineness is rarely the determining factor in ribbon placement; 7) conformation rarely determines the winner because most alpacas that place have excellent conformation; 8) animals that lead well and do not pull against the halter do better than unruly alpacas that fight their handler making it difficult for the judge to see their true leg conformation; 9) presence is important as it catches the judge's eye, and; 10) grooming - animals that have not been brushed or beaten with a wand or particularly, in the case of suris, washed, do better.

I will take the above factors one at a time and suggest how you might select for them or ensure the particular quality is in your alpacas. These suggestions are abbreviated. For a complete discussion of these ideas please read my book "[Alpacas: Synthesis of a Miracle](#)".

1. **Size** is highly heritable and most studs who sire winners are large, say 35-38 inches at the wither and weighing 165-200 pounds.
2. **Bite**, never ever breed to a stud with a bad bite and do not bother to show alpacas with an obviously bad bite.
3. **Crimp** is highly heritable in my experience. Breed your females to older males that still exhibit crimp. Check a male's progeny to see if they generally exhibit crimp.
4. **Luster**, only breed to males with knockout, bright luster. Check a stud's progeny to see if they exhibit luster. And I mean "bright".
5. **Density** is easy to select for. Simply measure the stud's fleece weight and check his progeny.
6. **Fineness**, check a stud's progeny for fineness. You must be careful here because fineness and density are often antagonistic traits. Winners are often 20 microns or less, but remain dense. This number is higher in older animals.
7. **Conformation**, dose your cria with vitamins A, D, and E, particularly in the winter time or if you live in a climate with little sunlight. I have had few leg problems since I began this practice over 10 years ago.
8. **Handling**, do not wait until one week before the show to train your alpacas. Just because they lead does not mean that they are ready for a show. The animal should also stand calmly for inspection, and above all it should not kick or spit on the judge.
9. **Presence**, this is important, particularly with males. I recommend running your show prospects with females beginning at a young age, say 12 months and older. They can be pregnant females. It also helps to have them in a pasture next to a breeding male, the sights and sounds of their activity tend to jump start testosterone. The important thing is that they not run with older males that tend to intimidate and dominate the younger males. The largest male in the pasture tends to have the best presence.
10. **Grooming**, less is better, but clipping away a little medulation from the chest and shaping the head a bit can't hurt. Blocking an animal or extreme shearing or trimming of the fleece often raises a red flag in the mind of the judge. Do not wash the show animal.

I want to make clear that the above ideas are simply my opinions based on observation, success, and occasional failure. Let me know if they work for you.

GROUP CLASSES: GET OF SIRE AND PRODUCE OF DAM

I have recently completed judging several shows. I had the opportunity to work with some first class judges, such as, Amanda VandenBosch, and Jude Anderson. In the process of judging the shows, we placed classes in the Get of Sire and Produce of Dam. As a result of this experience and several questions from exhibitors about how these important classes are judged, I have developed a score card to assist my judging that might also prove beneficial for exhibitors to use when they are deciding which animals to include in their entries.

The judging criteria for both of the classes emphasizes the uniformity of the alpacas being exhibited. This is particularly true since these classes are intended to highlight the genotype of either the dam or the sire. This differs from the other halter classes which are judged based on phenotype.

The score card below is a synthesis of ideas that came from discussions with both Amanda VandenBosch and Jude Anderson. Get and Produce classes could be scored as follows (remember these scores are given across the entry):

1. Head Phenotype
_____ Consistent _____ Inconsistent
2. Bite
_____ Good _____ Off
3. Conformation of Legs
_____ Good _____ Bad _____ Inconsistent
4. Gait or Movement in the Ring
_____ Good _____ Bad _____ Inconsistent
5. Fleece Fineness
_____ Fine _____ Soft _____ Course
6. Fleece Style
_____ Good _____ Average _____ Poor
7. Uniformity - Color and Character
_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Poor
8. Overall Fleece
_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Poor

I think many exhibitors often put one excellent animal in a Get thinking that it will carry the day. Jude Anderson pointed out to me that in Australia, supreme champions are often left out of Get Classes because they are far too superior to the other entries and create a Get entry that is not consistent, looking uneven or lacking uniformity. The key to winning a Get Class is consistency. They should be peas in a pod.

The alpaca show ring is growing by leaps and bounds. Breeders that have won ribbons also know the show ring is a great marketing vehicle. Taking the time to understand how to win can be quite lucrative. Good luck!

Reproduced with permission from:

[Alpaca Breeding Farm: Northwest Alpacas](#): raising suri and huacaya alpacas for sale, alpaca investment, and alpaca business plans for alpaca breeders and owners worldwide. Find more useful information at the [Alpaca Library](#).

Copyright © 2003-2005 Northwest Alpacas