

The udder must remain clean for a show

# Prepare your cow for the show

by Liza Burger

While much can be said about judging and how the various cattle breeds are judged, it takes a lot of care to first of all prepare a cow for the show. Although there are general guidelines and definite do's and don'ts, every farmer and his stall-hand (in some cases a whole team) have vastly different approaches.

## Soap and water

Jaco Herbst of Imago Holsteins and his team, for example, never use soap when they wash their cows. Shampoo for a “sensitive scalp” is used.

“Soap dries the skin out and dandruff-like flakes form on the cow,” he says.

His two right-hand men at the Bloem Show in April 2008, were Vusi Thwala and Johannes Makhatla. “We use only cold tap water and a currycomb,” explains Makhatla. “Then the cow dries off in the sun. It is most important that she doesn’t lie down and get dirty.”

## A hairstyle that works

Show cows are shaved about a week before the show. Herbst explains that, for him, it is ideal to shave his Holsteins with a hair clipper ten days before the time: “If the shaving is done too close to the time, pink skin shows through, especially on the white parts at sharp curves.”

The shearer must shave according to specific lines to highlight the important aspects of the cow. He indicates along the backbone – or top line – and explains that the hair should be a bit longer in that area. If the hair is cut like this, it will be better displayed.

“Along the ribcage, you shave in line with the ribs to show the rib hock. The neck is shaved down a long line to accentuate the length of the neckline.”

## Under the dryer

Pierre Bosman from Bospre Ayrshires prepared 16 animals for the 2008 Bloem Show. Bosman stood ready with the brush and hair dryer, brushing the top lines of



Use a brush and a hairdryer to remove the knots from the top line



Polish may be applied to make the hooves dark and shiny



Wash and comb the tail so that it is glossy and smooth

the clean, gleaming cows straight up and setting it with the help of the hair dryer.

“I make sure I remove the knots from the cow’s top line. It appears to be sharper if you ensure that this hair is neat,” he explained.

### Attitude is everything

Temperament plays an important role in show animals – the cow must be able to behave herself inside and outside the ring. They all wear soft, thick-rope halters during preparation. In the arena the rope halters are mostly replaced with leather halters with shiny buckles and a strong leading rope or chain.

### Udder perfection

Of course, good care also includes the basics: Enough top quality feed, sufficient water and a comfortable, clean stable is a necessity for every show animal. Remember to take a mobile milking machine with or see to it that you will have access to one to maintain a healthy udder.

Herbst describes the perfect front udder: “The udder must be well-balanced. To achieve this, some of the udder’s quarters may have to be milked a while before the judging begins.”

For Holstein owners, the characteristic black and white hide is a challenge to keep. There is, however, an answer to the problem, says Herbst. The black marks are carefully painted with a 50/50 mixture of baby oil and spirits. The oil makes the hair shine and prevents the skin from drying, while the spirits clear any grime build-up.



Use a mobile milk machine to balance the udder

### The stall

The stall partitions are usually decorated with colourful hangings and even knee-high ornamental trees. Each cow’s nameboard is neatly placed above her stall.

Thwala explains how he quickly scrapes up the manure and keeps the stall clean. The straw is clean and lies thickly on the floor. “We use a special bucket to prevent the cow from dirtying herself. The udder especially must be kept very clean.”

The tail hair is also inspected. There must not be a knot in sight and the hair must be shiny, soft and carefully combed. Remember to wipe the snout with an absorbent towel just before the cow enters the show ring. Make sure the halter is firmly buckled. Good luck! 