

ShowBirdBid's Advice to Newcomers to Exhibition Poultry - 2013

By Matt Lhamon

Ring Master SHOWBIRDBID.COM

ABA President

moderngameman@gmail.com

ABA & APA General License Poultry Judge

1. Have a thick skin and listen to advice whether you agree or not. Ultimately it is your decision on what to do with it. Don't bother arguing with the advice giver, you can ask for clarity but remember you asked their opinion and you have little chance of changing it.
2. You cannot be the savior to every rare breed and variety. The more breeds and varieties you start with the less chance of success you will have. Do not pick a rare breed or variety because there is less completion or because you think they are easier to win with. In the end this will not be true.
3. If you know anything, memorize the written Standard for your chosen breed. If someone asks what the Standard for the head of a Wyandotte is and that's your breed, you should be able to recite it to them. Own the current edition of the APA and ABA Standards and read them often.
4. Evaluate your facilities before you load up on birds. The game is not how many you can hatch or collect, but how many you can raise to maturity so you can select your keepers.
5. Set goals to improve your birds every year even if it is a small thing. Keep records and know what birds produce what.
6. A true breeder only exhibits birds in top condition. Remember a bird you exhibit is a direct reflection on you as a breeder and your skills. If you're going to show birds, study the current winners of your breed. Compare what the best of breed bird looked like to the Standard. If your breed is on champion row study them even closer and compare them to the Standard. In your mind, does the bird on Champion row mirror the Standard? Also look at how they were prepared for the show. I don't think I have seen any dirty birds on champion row at any show I have ever been to.
7. When I go to a show, I expect nothing so I am never disappointed and if I win something I am pleasantly surprised. Don't judge poultry pictures and birds from the aisle. You really never know what a bird is like until you handle it. Most all judges will tell you why they placed the birds and you can then decide if it is correct to your interpretation of the Standard.
8. If you can, ask judges questions after the judging is over. They can share their ideas about your birds from a judge's perspective. You do not have to agree with it but it is best to hear them out and go on about your business. Most all will tell you why they placed the birds and you can then decide if it is correct to your interpretation of the Standard.
9. Do not ask a judge about breeding qualities of a bird unless he is a breeder of that breed. So often folks will ask me and I tell them I do not breed that breed and can't tell you. As a judge we look at the birds as show birds not breeding birds. One of things most judge's struggle with when they judge their breed is just looking at the show aspects of the birds and leaving out all the breeding aspects.
10. If you want breeding advice, ask a prominent breeder of your breed. Ask intelligent and specific

questions and not ones like I often get "Tell me everything you know about breeding Wyandotte bantams?" Some of us are sarcastic, grumpy and jaded but will be glad to help after we get through all that. We have had hundreds of newcomers dazzle us with enthusiasm and only a few have become Exhibition Poultry Fanciers. We need to see your commitment and passion before we invest a lot of time in you. Instead of asking to buy my very best show birds, try asking to buy some birds which I can breed good show birds from. One little addition to point 10 (from Rich Barczewski), about asking questions of prominent breeders. "remember after you ask the question that you learn a lot more with your ears open and your mouth shut than the other way around". One disappointing thing to me is when someone wants information but then tries to dominate a conversation with their own ideas. I never mind answering questions but I can't stand it when someone asks a question and then goes out of their way to try to answer it themselves.

11. Last, you feed them and care for them every day. Raise what you like and love and have fun and enjoy the hobby. There is no place in the world I would rather be than at a poultry show. Enjoy winning, be gracious when you don't! Help a new fancier get started, remember when you were a beginner and how overwhelmed you were with all of this!

Additional Advice from other Veteran Poultry Breeders/Exhibitors

The Picture in the Standard is not the Standard per say. Just someone else's interpretation.

Each bird is placed according to how that particular judge interpreted the Standard at that particular time and how your bird looked at the time the judge looked at it and the competing birds present. If your bird had a ruffled tail feather or happened to be tired and didn't stand correctly or had a droopy wing they may not place as high as they did at a previous show. I have seen birds win a class at show #1 and not place at all at show #2. Don't decide the quality of your bird from 1 show. Give it at least 3 shows. If it consistently places as 4th or 5th then you'll know there is room for improvement on that bird.

Remember, when entering a competition you are asking the judge for their opinion. Asking them for reasons to support that opinion is appropriate "I see you placed my bird as 2nd. Can you suggest ways I can improve?" "What qualities does the first place bird have that I can improve on in my 3rd place bird?". Rarely does an argument change someone's opinion.

Most (but not all) judges are willing to help you. I have had judges explain things in depth and others snicker at me and give a flippant answer. Take the good and learn from it, forget the bad as it's that judges unfortunate personality.

Have fun! A smiling face and a positive attitude will open all kinds of (coop)doors for you.

Don't forget to ask the fellow for advice who wins these classes who has been breeding them for ten or twenty years. I know a guy in Oklahoma who would take the time to help you and then coach you on how to improve your matings to upgrade the line you have. You may also have purchased birds from two separate breeders and you are going rough stage of breeding out the faults that are popping up with the cross. This may take three to five years or more. You are competing against a person who has spent years cleaning out his or her defects and one way to advance faster is to get two breeding pairs from such a super star breeder. He or she will help you and you will reach success so much faster. When it comes to the Standard and pictures don't forget the APA Black and White Standard. Take the

book to a place that has a copy machine blow up the black and white picture to the size that will fit a 5x7 frame. Place the picture of the male and female in your chicken house on the wall. Study this picture and burn it into your mind's eye. Then go look for birds that you have that have sections that meet that ideal and use them as breeders. In time you will have birds that are very close to that picture if you put breeding pressure to these sections. Of course if you have a old rare breed that is almost hatchery level in quality this may take twenty years to achieve. That's what I try to tell the beginners I help. Buying birds from a master craftsmen and then getting them as your mentor is priceless. BOB

