

WHAT THE HECK IS
CAVY SHOWMANSHIP?

By Adam Demanett



Did you ever wonder how you could win prizes with a guinea pig? One way is to compete in guinea pig showmanship. Showmanship is a contest that gives you a chance to show off how well you can handle your guinea pig and how much you know about guinea pigs. You can win ribbons, pins, badges, trophies, and sometimes you can even win money.

Are there any other reasons for learning showmanship? Learning showmanship teaches you how to handle your guinea pig in a safe and confident way. You will learn to do a thorough health inspection on your guinea pig. Your guinea pig also gets used to being handled and examined so that medical treatment is much easier. This is a great way to help make sure your guinea pig has a full and healthy life.

How do you pick out a guinea pig that will help you win awards? When you choose a guinea pig for showmanship it's important that you choose a guinea pig that is as calm as possible. Make sure you pick out a guinea pig that has been handled before. It should fit comfortably in your hands. A person with small hands has a hard time holding a large guinea pig. A person with large hands finds it difficult to handle a small guinea pig. It is also a good idea to choose a guinea pig that looks it's best when it's groomed. A guinea pig that always looks like it's having a bad hair day probably isn't the best choice.

Before a showmanship competition you will need to make sure your guinea pig is looking its best. Bathe your guinea pig using lukewarm water and a gentle shampoo, like baby shampoo. You may use a mild conditioner if you like, but it isn't necessary. Make sure



Wanda Curran hands out award rosettes after showmanship at the county fair.



Even the youngest kids can compete in guinea pig showmanship.

that you rinse all shampoo and conditioner out completely. Blow-dry your guinea pig before returning it to its cage. Use the low setting only and keep the blow dryer moving so that your guinea pig doesn't get over heated and suffer heat stroke. Some breeds of guinea pigs actually look better if you don't wash them too close to a competition. Never wash a Teddy, a Texel, or an Abyssinian less than two weeks before a show. Washing will make these breeds' hair too soft and it won't look or act right. Just before the show brush your guinea pig so that its hair looks its best and you get rid of as much shedding hair and dandruff as you can before the judging.

Guinea pig showmanship is judged on a point system. In each part of your inspection it is possible to earn points. There is a total of 100 points possible. The sample form on the next page shows how many points each part of the process is worth. Look carefully at the form and you will see that your appearance, actions and knowledge are worth a hefty 10 points each. That's almost a third of the total points possible!



SAMPLE FORM

4-H CAVY SHOWMANSHIP CONTEST

NAME _____ PRIMARY
ENTRY NO. _____ NOVICE
JUNIOR
SENIOR

PLACE _____

- I. Carry cavy to the table (5 points) _____
- II. Showing the cavy to the judge (60 points)
(6 points each)
 - 1. The ears _____
 - 2. The eyes _____
 - 3. Teeth and nose _____
 - 4. The front legs _____
 - 5. The hind legs _____
 - 6. Sex the animal _____
 - 7. Front view _____
 - 8. Rear view _____
 - 9. Side view _____
 - 10. Cleanliness of fur _____

TOTAL _____
- III. Appearance, actions, and knowledge of showmanship (30 points)
(10 points each)
 - 1. Appearance _____
 - 2. Actions _____
 - 3. Knowledge _____

TOTAL _____
- IV. Carry cavy from the judging table (5 points) _____

Total points possible 100
SCORE _____

You now know that your guinea pig should be calm and look its best, but how should you look? Showmanship is a competition where *you* are being judged. The judge will look at how you look and how confidently, securely, and gently you handle your guinea pig. It is very important to look your best. If you are in 4-H you need to be dressed in full uniform. Make sure that your uniform is clean and ironed. If you are not in 4-H you should still look your best. Wear nice clean clothes that are ironed. You will be speaking to a judge, so practice speaking in a confident voice that is loud enough for the judge to easily hear. It is also extremely important that you handle your guinea pig in a gentle and secure way. The way you look and act has a high point value on a showmanship scorecard, so remember to look and act your best.

One of the best ways to prepare yourself and your guinea pig for showmanship is to practice, practice, and practice some more. I really can't overstate just how important practicing is. Practice will help your guinea pig know what to expect and get used to the motions involved. Practicing will help you be more self assured in your mannerisms and your speech. Practicing will help you be able to speak more clearly and with a louder voice. Practicing will pay off by helping the judge see how confident you are in your abilities, that will make you a sure fire winner!

When you hear your name called for competition you will need to pick up your guinea pig in a safe way. The right way to do this is to put one hand under the rump of the guinea pig and the other under the chest with your index finger and your middle finger scissored around one front leg of the guinea pig and your thumb hooked over the opposite shoulder of the guinea pig, with your palm on its chest and tummy. If you



Practicing is the key to successes in guinea pig showmanship.

don't pick up your guinea pig right it might struggle and get injured. You will also lose points from the judge.

Put your guinea pig into the crook of your arm, sort of like a football and keep your other hand securely on its back. Carry the guinea pig to the table in this way. This process is called "Catch and Carry". It is worth 5 points on your score sheet.

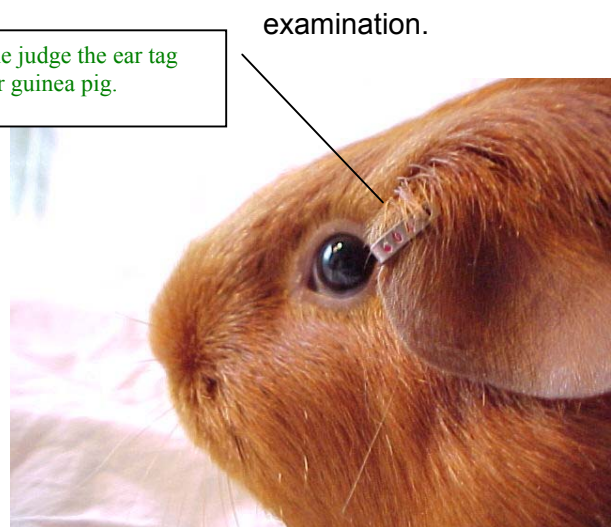
At the show table put your guinea pig on the carpet sample that will be in front of the judge with the guinea pig's left side facing the judge. Put one hand on the guinea pig's back and introduce yourself to the judge by saying your name and your club name. Then tell the judge about your guinea pig. What breed, color variety, weight class, and sex it is. You should say something like this, "My name is Adam Demanett. I'm in Wilton 4-H. This is my American Red sr. boar." The score for this part of the competition will show up in your overall score for appearance, actions, and knowledge.

Next you will start your examination. The first thing you will examine is the ears. Your guinea pig will probably have an identification tag in its left ear. Look at the ear tag and tell the judge the number. It's a good idea to memorize the number before the show; the numbers are extremely difficult to read. You will look at the ear for rips, tears, and warts. Then check for ear mites, which show up as dark brown earwax. You will also look for the right color of skin and hair on a show quality guinea pig. Tell the judge what you find. "There are no rips, tears, warts or signs of ear mites. The hair and skin is the right color."



Holding your guinea pig the right way while carrying it to the judging table is important.

Don't forget to tell the judge the ear tag number of your guinea pig.



Next examine the eyes by lifting the guinea pig's chin up slightly. Look for cloudy eye, also called moon-eye, a white film over the entire eye. Check for discharge, swelling, and pea eye (a hereditary pea shaped lump in the lower eyelid). On a show quality guinea pig you will also look for the right color, size and position of the eye. Tell the judge your findings, "There is no pea eye, moon-eye, discharge, or swelling. The eyes are the proper color." If, during your inspection, you find something wrong tell the judge that as well. This is how the judge will know that you are familiar with your guinea pig and how it should look.

The next thing on your inspection is to gently but firmly turn your guinea pig over. This is probably the hardest part of the examination because it makes the guinea pig feel very vulnerable and defensive. This is the part where practicing with your guinea pig really pays off. To turn your guinea pig over put one hand under its rump and the other on the chest, just as you did when you got it out of its cage. Let the guinea pig's rump rest on the table so that its back rests against you. Alternately you may pick up your guinea pig and turn it over so that the rump of the guinea pig is against you and your hand is holding its back and neck while your thumb is looped around one of the front legs. There is one other way of doing this that works very well with an especially squirmy guinea pig. Place the guinea pig in the crook of your arm like you would a baby. You will need one hand free for the examination, so choose the most



Guinea pig showmanship is a good way to show off your ability to handle your guinea pig.

comfortable way for you and your guinea pig. Then practice a lot and your guinea pig will learn that you are not going to hurt it and let you hold it any way that you want to.

Once you have your guinea pig turned over you will examine its teeth. This isn't as bad as it sounds, most guinea pigs don't bite. If your guinea pig does get nervous and bite you during this, or any other part of the examination, don't stop. Just keep going and never ever scold your guinea pig during showmanship. To examine the teeth, put your hand around its head and gently open its mouth. The guinea pig will probably struggle less if you try not to cover its eyes. You will be looking for chipped or missing teeth and malocclusion (crooked, twisted, or buck teeth). While your guinea pig is still on its back check the nose for signs of discharge. Tell the judge your findings.

Don't turn that guinea pig back over yet. Next you will examine its legs and feet, then its abdomen, and vent (sex organs). The legs are examined by running your forefinger and thumb down the length of each leg. You're looking for old brakes, which show up as bumps, and also overall straightness of the leg. Check the feet for missing toes or toenails, polydactyl (extra toes), bumble foot (swelling of the feet), and the correct color of the toes and toenails. Check the abdomen for missing hair, lumps, sores, and the wrong color hair. Make sure your guinea pig has two teats. Finally, check the sex of your guinea pig. Check for vent infection, which usually shows up as a discharge or unusual odor. Check boars for impaction, a build up of hard matter in the pouch between the testicles. Tell the judge your findings after each step. Now you may gently return your guinea pig to an upright position.

The next thing you will examine is the fur. Gently lift the fur over the hindquarters and hips. Look for cleanliness, density, and texture of the hair. Check for lice or mites, and missing hair. Check the hair color, position and size of patches, and the length of the hair. Different breeds of guinea pig require you to check other aspects of their fur as well. For instance, on an Abyssinian you would need to check the rosettes (swirls in the fur), for the right position or any double rosettes. On a Teddy you would need to check for resiliency

(ability of the hair to spring back into place after being pressed down), and on a White Crested you need to check the crest.

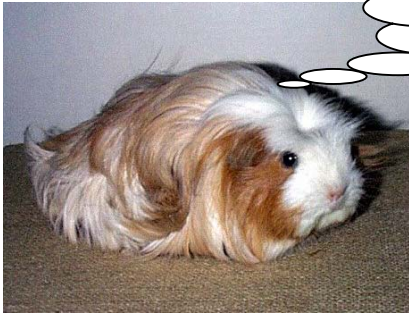
Abyssinians need to have their rosettes and ridges checked during showmanship.



I'm a Teddy. I need to be checked for density, resiliency, and kink.



Coronets like me, and White Crested guinea pigs, like my neighbor need to have their "crests" checked.



All of the guinea pig breeds with long hair, like me (I'm a Peruvian), and my neighbors the Silky and the Coronet, need to have their long "sweeps" checked.



I'm a Texel! You'll need to check my "ringlets" during showmanship.



Don't forget to check the *American Rabbit Breeders Association's* **Standard of Perfection** to see if there's anything extra that your guinea pig may need checked during showmanship.

You're almost finished. Next you pose your guinea pig checking for overall balance and proportion. Start by placing your guinea pig left side toward judge. Tuck its rear legs underneath its body and run your hand gently down the entire length of its body. Move your guinea pig and pose it with its head toward the judge, then do the same thing with the right side and the rear. Then return your guinea pig to the position you started in, left side toward judge. Tell the judge your impression of the overall balance, proportion, and body condition (firmness of the body).

At last, you can tell the judge you're finished with your examination. Wait a minute though; don't leave the table just yet. The judge will want to ask you a few questions to test your guinea pig knowledge. The judge may ask you what malocclusion or polydactyl is. Or maybe to name some faults your guinea pig may have, or any number of other questions. The best way to prepare for this part of showmanship is to carefully study the current *Standard of Perfection*, a book published by the American Rabbit Breeder's Association. Another good way to learn more about guinea pigs is to join a 4-H guinea pig project. Contact your local 4-H office to find out more.

When you are done you will be judged on how carefully you return your guinea pig to its cage. Pick it up the same way as you did to get it out of its cage and carry it back to its cage in the crook of your arm. Always return it to its cage rump first or it may become overexcited and jump hitting the side of the cage and getting seriously injured.

Always remember that in a showmanship competition you are the one being judged, not your guinea pig. If you follow this formula and practice, practice, practice, you are sure to win at showmanship. You will also be prepared to win as a responsible guinea pig owner who will be able to handle your guinea pig and take proper care of it so that your guinea pig can live a long and happy life as your companion.

GLOSSARY

4-H: A youth organization that specializes and animal sciences.

Boar: A male guinea pig.

Bumble foot: A infection of the foot that causes swelling and open wounds.

Coronet: A breed of guinea pig that has long hair and a crest.

Crest: A rosette on the forehead of a White Crested and a Coronet guinea pig.

Impaction: Hard matter trapped in the pouch between the testicles of a male guinea pig.

Malocclusion: Twisted, crooked, or buckteeth on a guinea pig.

Mooneye: A white film covering the eye of a guinea pig.

Pea-eye: A growth of pea shaped tissue in the lower eyelid of a guinea pig.

Peruvian: A breed of guinea pig that has long hair that extends over the face.

Polydactyl: More than four toes on the front foot of a guinea pig.

Resiliency: The ability of something to spring back to its original shape.

Rosette: A swirl of hair on an Abyssinian guinea pig.

Silky: A breed of guinea pig that has long hair.

Sow: A female guinea pig.

Standard of Perfection: A book published by the American Rabbit Breeders Association that lists all recognized breeds of rabbits and guinea pigs and the judging guidelines.

Teddy: A breed of guinea pig that has kinky hair that stands on end.

Texel: A breed of guinea pig that has long ringlets of hair.

White Crested: A breed of guinea pig with short smooth hair and a white rosette on its forehead.

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