

Ringside Guide to Dairy Goat Shows

What Is A Dairy Goat Show?

At first glance, a dairy goat show looks like a beauty pageant for goats. In reality, the purpose of a show is to select animals which come closest to the ideal of sound, productive type.

Awards and publicity from shows encourage breeders to adhere to the ideal for continued improvement of the dairy goat. Shows put quality dairy goats in the public eye to improve their public image. And shows give dairy goat breeders recognition for long months of work in the barn, plus an opportunity to talk shop with fellow breeders.

Who Is The Judge?

The judge at your show is a member of a very select community. Fewer than 150 people in the United States and Canada are currently licensed to judge shows sanctioned by the American Dairy Goat Association.

To qualify for a license, applicants must pass stringent written and oral tests, demonstrating thorough knowledge of correct dairy goat conformation and the ability to organize and communicate that knowledge. Dairy goat judges must also requalify every two to four years in order to keep their licenses.

What Does A Judge Look For?

ADGA provides all of its judges with a scorecard to evaluate dairy goats. The scorecard for Senior does assigns the following priorities: general appearance 35%, mammary system 35%, dairy character 20%, and body capacity 10%. The Junior doe is allocated for general appearance 55%, dairy character 30%, and body capacity 15%. For Bucks, general appearance is allotted 55%, dairy character 30%, and body capacity 15%. In addition, the judge must see that each animal meets the breed standard for its breed.

On the ADGA scorecard, *general appearance* is defined as "An attractive framework with femininity (masculinity in bucks), strength, upstandingness, length, and smoothness of blending throughout that create an impressive style and graceful walk."

In *mammary system*, the judge seeks one that is "Strongly attached, elastic, well-balanced with adequate capacity, quality, ease of milking, and indicating heavy milk production over a long period of usefulness."

Dairy character is "Angularity and general openness with strong, yet refined and clean bone structure, showing freedom from coarseness and with evidence of milking ability giving due regard to stage of lactation (or of breeding season in bucks)."

Finally, *body capacity* should be "Relatively large in proportion to size, age, and period of lactation of the animal (or of breeding season for bucks), providing ample capacity, strength and vigor."

There are a number of defects which may cause the judge to disqualify an animal, such as blindness, serious emaciation, permanent lameness, double teats or other permanent physical defects.

How Are Shows Organized?

Shows are first divided by breed. The eight breeds recognized by the American Dairy Goat Association for its official shows are Alpines, LaManchas, Nigerian Dwarfs, Nubians, Oberhaslis, Saanens, Sables and Toggenburgs.

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Not all breeds may be present at all shows. Some shows combine two or more breeds into a division called All Other Purebred when few entries are expected in those breeds.

Another breed division found at many shows is Recorded Grade - for does whose ancestry makes them ineligible to compete in the purebred classes.

Within each breed, animals are further divided by sex and then into age classes. Thus, each animal competes against others of its own breed, sex and approximate age.

First place winners from each class compete for Champion. There may be Junior and Senior Champions which then compete for Grand Champion. A Reserve Champion is chosen from the remaining first place winners plus the animal which placed second in its class behind the animal chosen champion.

Besides age classes, shows may have group classes in which animals are sorted by criteria other than age. Group classes commonly seen are "Get of Sire" (all sired by the same buck), "Produce of Dam" (all having the same dam), "Dam and Daughter," "Dairy Herd" (all owned by the same person), "Breeder's Trio" (all bred by the same person), and "Best Udder." The final class of the day is usually "Best in Show," in which the judge selects a winner from the Grand Champions of each breed.

Some shows have showmanship competition, in which the judge considers the appearance of the animal and the exhibitor as well as the actual showing, looking for the exhibitor who shows his or her animal to best advantage without undue fussing and maneuvering.

How Are Classes Judged?

Each class follows a set pattern. As the clerk calls the class, the exhibitors enter the ring leading their animals in a wide circle around the ring. The judge observes the animals as they move by.

Once the clerk announces that all entries are present, the judge begins the mental process of sorting out the animals according to merit. The judge then stops the animals, has them line up, and then proceeds down the line, checking each animal individually for smoothness, skin texture and other qualities that can be detected only by feel. If an animal has defects, this hands-on examination may reveal those as well.

With placings in mind, the judge may ask two exhibitors to walk their animals side by side in order to decide on a close placing. The judge then has the exhibitors move into first place, second, third, etc. After the animals are lined up, the judge may still change a placing.

Having completed the process of placing the animals, the judge takes the microphone and gives reasons for each placing, telling why the animal ahead is superior to the animal behind. While the judge is giving reasons, winning exhibitors receive ribbons and/or trophies.

When Grand and Reserve Champions are announced, the exhibitors of the winning animals bring them and their registration papers to the clerk's desk. The judge reads each animal's tattoos (in the ear or tail web) and checks to see that they are the same as those on the registration certificate.

What Are The Benefits Of Showing?

Showing can be a valuable experience for you. You will have the opportunity to listen to the judge as she or he gives reasons for the placings. Often the judge will be willing to talk with you after the show if you don't understand the placings. You can also talk with the exhibitors and see the animals in their pens.

Besides the memories of the beautiful dairy goats you have seen, we hope you will carry away with you a greater understanding of what makes a truly good dairy goat.