

# Showing

## Showing Your Donkey

**Do you show them???**

**Yes we do!!**

All sorts of donkey classes are staged at every conceivable size of show, from those with Royal Patronage to the event held in a local field. The majority of these are held under the auspices of the Donkey Breed Society who maintain a register of accredited judges and offer special rosettes for the benefit of DBS members.

Have you ever thought of showing your donkey? It is great fun to compete against other donkeys and to meet all the other owners and exhibitors.



Our donkeys enjoy going to shows just as much as we do, and you will find there are a wide range of classes to choose from. You don't need to own a prospective supreme championship winner, there are classes for pet donkeys, best conditioned and turned out donkeys, fancy dress and activity classes, childrens? classes and driving classes.

We welcome new exhibitors and all donkeys, miniatures, standards, and an increasing number of larger examples of the breed. Adults, juveniles, male, female, white, brown, black, grey, pink or broken coloured, bred in the UK or bred elsewhere.

Contact us for an informative leaflet, 'Showing Your Donkey' or just come and have a look at the donkey classes at a show near you, check out the [Shows Calendar](#) You won't be disappointed!

## What to Wear

Our immaculate donkeys are the stars of the shows and the Donkey Breed Society but we sometimes let them down with our own 'anything will do' appearance.

Much of the attire worn by handlers and riders in the equestrian world is vested in tradition and may seem a little far fetched to someone who feels that aspiring to show their donkey is far removed from the Horse of the Year Show, however leaving aside the top hat and tails, much of that tradition is based on common sense and practicality. Hence the close fitting beige trousers were both smart and practical as they left little in the way of excess material to catch on hedgerows neither did they allow surplus material to form ruckles that might lead to

sore flesh. Brown boots and gloves, never black - brown showed mud and sweat less than their black counterparts and tweed jackets proved more hardwearing than fine plain coloured worsted cloth which were kept for special occasions and liveried employees. Gloves were there to protect the hands from the rein rubs likely to result from holding onto those prime examples of bloodstock of the age, and hairnets and hats, were a mark of 'polite society' kept ladies hair in place and gave men something to 'dof' to the ladies.

For a long time the donkey was seen as the poor relation to the horse but in 2007 that is far from the case and we take our place alongside the cream of the equine world at major shows around the country. So we have moved on and gone are the days when donkey shows were just about donkeys, and dress for the handler seemed unimportant and the shorts and sandals approach a bit of 'cop-out' in today's critical world this needs to be rectified especially if we all wish to continue to be taken seriously by show organizers and the general public.

So for those hardened competitors about to invest in some new apparel and for those just starting, a few tips:

- Gentlemen can't fail to look smart in a shirt and tie, (the DBS tie available from the DBS shop is excellent) country suit or tweed jacket and trousers; gloves to protect the hands from rubs and a bowler or soft cap or trilby hat complete the look.
- Ladies look well in beige trousers and a well cut tweed or plain jacket, with a pastel shirt and tie or if our figures allow it a tailored skirt of an appropriate length for running. Hats and gloves could be considered optional unless in a condition and turned out class, but they do give a very smart impression.
- Long hair is best braided or tied back and controlled by a hair net, in which case a hat is essential as it covers the join between net and face.
- The old adage 'no foot - no horse' can equally be applied to we donkey grooms and handlers, so a well fitting elastic sided jodphur boot gives plenty of ankle support during a long day, or failing those or to accompany a skirt, a pair of medium height comfortable brown shoes.
- To complete the look a neat pair of soft brown leather gloves a leather covered or rattan cane and a discreet buttonhole or membership badge. Traditionally the rattan or knobbly cane and buttonhole would have accompanied the tweed jacket and the leather covered cane and discreet traditional cornflower buttonhole for a plain jacket.

Before everyone starts shrieking do they think I'm made of money ? - I can't afford that lot !- smart beige trousers and shirts or blouses are available in many major supermarket outlets, society ties are available from the DBS shop and charity shops have provided many an exhibitor with tweed jackets and gloves, which being largely unpopular as day to day dress today, can be purchased for a song.

- Let us take pride in our appearance and do justice to both the donkey and the Society.

## **Trimming and Grooming as a preparation for Showing**

Donkeys just love being groomed and will benefit healthwise from a stimulating brush every day, so this is probably one of the most pleasurable and therapeutic of occupations for both donkey and owner. The secret of success is to establish yourself with a nice dry area to work, some where secure to tie your donkey to and a suitable carrier to hold all your grooming and trimming bits and bobs, and another to contain all the loose hair and trimmings.

We all know that the donkey is not a native of our shores and that a summer coat is seldom acquired naturally before the second week of July and will be a distant memory by the second week of August!!! One can hasten the departure of a winter coat by judicious rugging from January onwards and one can extend the time in a summer coat by rugging in late summer, but such a regime has to be carefully thought out if your donkey is not to assume the appearance of a tortoise - with a smooth body in the middle and hairy extremities sticking out from either end.

Grooming is the secret to a shiny healthy coat as the action of the bristles stimulates blood flow to the skin and sweeps away dust and debris from the base of the hair, at the same time the brushing action squeezes the natural oil from the skin down the shaft of the hair. Nothing that comes in a spray bottle can replicate the natural gloss achieved by an hour's daily grooming.

Given that many shows take place long before any self respecting donkeys is thinking about shedding last years winter woollies some action needs to be taken to prune the verdant growth of hair that will have sprouted from manes, tails, ears and under jawlines, but not so drastically that your donkeys looks shorn!!

- Jawlines - starting with a spot that will be least visible if you make an error, some gentle trimming of the long hair under the chin and up into the jowls will improve the look of your donkey's head no end, although care needs to be taken to get a smooth outline as you move towards the cheeks and the throat.
- Mane - without yet wielding any scissors, practise seperating the grey or brown hairs growing up from the the neck from the black or darker mane hairs, once you are happy that you can manage that, starting at the withers, trim the paler hair on eithert side of the mane following the contours of the crest of the neck but without cutting too close to the skin, at this stage it is even possible to improve on nature by adopting a slight curve in the hair over the middle third of the crest. When both sides are evenly shortened, cut the mane hairs to your chosen length, assuming a straight or gently curving line by holding a section of hairs between your index and second fingers and trimming across the excess hair before moving on to the next section. Finally if you like the headpiece of your bridle or headcollar to sit flat without squashing any mane hair, trim out a section close to the skin, behind the ears. Don't do this without trying the bridle on to see where this needs to be - it is all to easy to be wrong.
- Ears - not always an easy task as many donkeys dislike having their ears touched let alone trimmed, however patience is usually rewarded and days spent gently stroking both ears from base to tip will hopefully pay dividends. Having established this routine it should be a relatively painless step to gently tease inner ear hair forwards and by cupping the ear edges together and cutting towards the tips for the hair to be trimmed off level with the edges. If this causes no major problems it is an easy step to then trim any excess hair from around the ear edges shaping the outline as you go.
- Tail - a donkeys tail can either be its most attractive feature or a stubby nightmare! Detangling with your fingers rather than raking through the long hairs with the curry comb will preserve the tassel which will be further preserved if it is trimmed about four inches below the hocks, rather than left so long that it catches on fences and branches. Don't be tempted to just scissor sraight across the bottom as it hangs, but place your arm under the tail close to the body thus lifting the tail slightly away to mimick the tail carriage when your donkey is moving and then by holding the tail hair in your spare hand you can mentally plan the length, cutting at a slight downward

angle from the body. Then gently move up the top section of the tail trimming out any stubby short hairs that have grown out and are now now resembling a bottle brush; this trimming can be done right up to the root of the tail on either side so that you are left with nice smooth outline.

- Feet and lower legs - most donkeys have very little in the way of feathers, but a hoof can look very much neater if you gently trim away any long hair that grows down over the face of the hoof, not so short that you expose the coronary band but more to create a nice neat line around the top of the hoof. Unless you are extremely skilled with scissors or clippers leave legs well alone, and allow the winter growth to fall out when it will, but accelerate that with daily brushing.
- Tummy hair - is always long after the winter and will fall out in due course, especially if you groom every day. Trimming it off with scissors or clippers is unwise as rather than making your donkey look neat and tidy the opposite could happen and attention will be drawn to that area due to scissor marks, and a visual alteration to the donkey's proportions. In fact where young animals are concerned the presence of long tummy hair can enhance their conformation as it gives an appearance of depth to the body that may not actually be the case.

Sounds so simple !!! Don't be fooled it isn't - but neither is it hard once one has the confidence to try. Far better to make a few errors now when you are cutting a winter coat which will be replaced in a few weeks rather than waiting until the summer coat comes in when your mistakes will be visible for longer.

Scissors come in all shapes and sizes and from a safety angle they should have rounded ends, but the longer the blade the easier it is to get a smooth appearance down the neck and tail as short blades inevitably require more cuts and leave more room for error when moving onto the next section of hair.

Scissors are not essential, there are many experienced exhibitors who favour cordless dog clippers, human hair clippers with their many adjustable combs or even dog stripping combs that use protected razor blades to cut the hairs. It is one of those occasions where 'practise really does make perfect'

## **Bridles, Bits and hopefully no bruises!!**

So you are the proud owner of a yearling colt? now there is a real life recipe for disaster if ever there was, so it is never too soon to accustom them to wearing a correctly fitting bridle and bit.

If you intend to show your pride and joy then it is mandatory under Donkey Breed Society rules for showing that the lead rein be attached to a bit, and for your own safety and security at home the enhanced control that this will afford you on walks or even moving around amongst other donkeys is essential if your youngster is to grow up to respect his handler.

Whilst a show slip with its sliding noseband is fine on fillies and some geldings it certainly will not afford much control over a headstrong young colt with his own ideas about where you are going and at what speed.

If funds are limited and you prefer to buy a bridle from the Equestrian section of your local farm store then look for a Shetland pony or small pony size bridle which is most likely to fit

in all aspects but the brow-band, in this area donkeys are much broader than their pony counterparts, having a larger brain to accommodate, and you will find that a cob size brow-band will fit without pinching around the sensitive areas at the base of the ears. If you intend to show then a bridle with brass buckles is attractive and a brass trimmed brow band will complete the look. If cost is less of an issue then your local saddler will undoubtedly be able to create a 'made to measure version' but will require some very accurate measurements from you or even a home visit to ensure that the bridle he crafts will fit correctly.

Special care should be taken with your choice of bit which must fit comfortably without pinching the sensitive skin at the corner of the mouth, again donkeys are not the easiest candidates as their lip configuration is smaller than a pony of similar size which means that for the bit to be effective it will almost certainly wrinkle the corners of lips substantially; a bit dangling and rattling against the teeth is neither effective nor attractive.

For a youngster the weight of a metal bit may be quite upsetting in the early stages of training so a straight or slightly curved nylon bit with small brass rings is more appropriate, and even that needs to be introduced in a careful and sympathetic manner. There can be no benefit to forcing some cold metal bar between resisting jaws, so the lighter nylon option carefully wrapped in 'licorice string'(or some other tempting sweet confectionary substance) during the learning period will soon render this alien mouthpiece an acceptable treat. It will also be beneficial if you allow your young donkey to spend time wearing the bridle in its stable, whilst you attend to other things, or whilst tied up to be groomed ensuring that you only tie up using a rope attached to a headcollar worn over the bridle, and never to the bit. These periods of relative relaxation will ensue that your youngster becomes accustomed to the feel of everything before you venture forth together.

Although many people favour attaching a single lead rein to the bit rings it may be found more effective to buy a light pair of riding reins, attaching them as you would to a riding bridle, gather them into your hands some six inches from the chin to give balanced control over both side of the donkeys head. Practice on home territory and avoid getting into any situation where the donkey is able to pull back or away from you - remembering that the home paddock is never a good classroom as it is familiar and familiarly breeds contempt - your donkey will undoubtedly know where all the low tree branches and gate catches are - you might not!!!

If your home or stable location allows it, progress from the front lawn to walks away from home in as quiet an environment as you can contrive, tussles with cars and lorries will not be productive neither will barking dogs or large puddles, and any or all may only serve to frighten both you and your youngster; and rest assured your donkey will always know when you have turned for home so try and return home at a similar speed to the outward journey.

### **So You Think you'd like to show your donkey?**

No I'm not interested in showing - how many times have I heard that response to the suggestion that showing is a way of meeting more donkey owners? and how often does that same person decide that they might just have a go - but only to be sociable !!

Agricultural Shows and Dedicated Donkey Shows are an important show case for the breed, with our Show Diary growing by the day; and it doesn't have to be all serious and in fact

seldom is - you may not own the perfectly formed donkey, none of us does - that perfect specimen is yet to be born!

However go to any show and you will see not just the breed classes but other more light hearted classes for those just looking for a nice day out and some donkey companionship. Best conditioned and Turned for example, where it is all about how your donkey looks and is prepared - nothing to do with conformation, often there are classes for veteran donkey, large donkeys, small donkeys and even coloured donkeys, activity classes - such as obstacles and fancy dress, classes for junior handlers and riders and driven donkeys - in fact something for just about everyone.

However 'Showing' whether it be white mice or camels, is by its very nature a competitive sport, with everyone hoping to achieve their ultimate dream and go home with the much coveted red rosette, sadly on occasions this can also bring with it some unwelcome attention, especially when things do not go according to plan.

Donkeys are by their very nature popular at shows and attract the general public to the ringside in droves, so when things go awry it happens very publicly and these people are quick to take note and comment. To have won well in the past, is no guaranteed passport to winning in the future, and none of us should lose sight of the fact that whatever the result it is the opinion of one judge on one day, and tomorrow even he or she may come up with a different decision - Loud comments from outside the ring as to the quality of the judge's eyesight do little to endear us to bystanders.

The Donkey Breed Society will not tolerate abuse of a Judge, Steward, nor of any Official acting in any capacity for a show hosting donkey classes, and should reports of this come to their notice steps will be taken to penalise any member found to be doing so.

The Donkey Breed Society will not tolerate any abuse of the donkey, however justified a case the perpetrator might put forward.

All exhibitors, but essentially those in charge of showing colts and stallions should ensure that the donkeys they are handling are well trained, wearing a well fitting bridle and bit, and are being shown in the correct manner, paying due regard to the safety of those around them at all times; if there is any doubt as to the latter then they should elect to leave the ring at the earliest opportunity, and take no further part.

Similarly the Donkey Breed Society will not tolerate any form of abuse towards any other competitor, nor any action that may be deemed as obstructive to another, as it is our sincere wish that all competitors should enjoy the experience.

If you feel that your knowledge of what is acceptable and required behaviour is a little lacking, then how about attending any one of the Showing Workshops advertised in the events diary. If none of those are within your reach, then the 'Rules for Showing' can be found on this site, and you will find any number of exhibitors willing to share their expertise with you at shows, but do wait until the classes are completed if you want their full and undivided attention.

All of that aside go out and have fun at your local show, it most definitely isn't the winning but the taking part that is important - and the jollifications and shared picnics in the lorry park afterwards are a great way to meet your fellow members and donkey lovers.

### **'How To and How Not To Show A Donkey'**

**a little light reading to help you onwards - written by Liz Langford.**

Having come from a donkey loving, farming family, Lizzie has been a past exhibitor of donkeys and is a current Donkey Breed Society panel judge.

This helpful little book is available at £4.00 plus £1 P/P contact [lizlangford@hotmail.com](mailto:lizlangford@hotmail.com) in the first instance.

### **Rules for DBS Champions**

Shows that are underlined in any Show Calendar are Qualifying Shows from which the Champion (or in the event of that donkey already having qualified, the Reserve Champion) qualifies for the relevant Championship at the Donkey Breed Society Supreme Championship Show to be held on 20th and 21st August 2011 at Warwickshire College, Moreton Morrell Equestrian Centre.

Donkeys winning the Championships at these Qualifying Shows will be known as e.g DBS Devon County Show Champion or DBS Royal Highland Show Champion. Certificates acknowledging this win will be awarded at the Annual General Meeting

A Donkey will earn the accolade of DBS Champion when it has won four show championships under four different judges.