

Benching-Setting Up and Tearing Down Your Show

by Mrs. A. M. Dickie*



THE 1959 YEAR BOOK carried a most instructive article by Mrs. Walker K. Johnston and Mrs. Joan Van Zele, "So You Want to Put on a Show." Because I seem to get more from an outline I rearranged and added to this article for my own use and then, in 1960, when editor, printed it for the use of those whose minds worked like mine, under the title of "A Check List for Your Show."

In the following article I will attempt to cover the selection of a hall, benching and general layout for a show and give some ideas for setting up and tearing down the show with the least confusion and furor.

The selection of a hall is of utmost importance. The availability of motels or hotels, restaurants and parking facilities is important but, no matter how fine these are they cannot make up for cramped quarters in the show room.

You will, of course, know approximately the number of cats to be entered in your show. Before signing any contract for a hall procure from the management (or prepare yourself) a scale drawing of the hall. I've worked with a plan 1/16th of an inch to a foot; I've also drawn my own plans on squared paper using 1/4 in. to a foot and measuring the hall with a yardstick! Be sure that all windows, doorways that must be kept clear and such items as fire extinguishers are marked on your plan.

Now you are ready to plan your showroom layout. If the hall is a long rectangle you may prefer to put your show rings at opposite ends of the hall — single shows, one on each end, double shows, two. If your hall is more nearly square you may choose to put your rings along one side wall.

The space for your rings should be figured first. If your judging cages have doors front and back you will need to set them out at least three feet from the wall. From the front of the cage to the judge's table should be about five feet. Your judging ring then will be eight feet deep plus the width of the table upon which your cages set and the judge's table. My experience is that most tables are 30 in. wide giving thirteen feet for the depth of your ring. The usual

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judging cage is two feet square and eleven will take care of all but the largest classes. Allow at least twenty-four feet of table for your eleven cages. Each ring then is twenty-four feet, plus a small amount for divider and necessary official traffic at each end, by thirteen feet.

Working on the principle that there is one exhibitor for each two cats entered and that only one quarter of them will be watching the judging at one ring at one time the number of seats for exhibitors can be estimated. The number of spectators paying admission will vary in each part of the country and can only be estimated roughly, however it is my experience that most spectators will tarry only briefly at the judging areas, they are more interested in the cats. Each row of chairs will take three feet and fourteen or fifteen chairs can be put in each row before each judging ring. Five or six rows should be ample unless you expect a huge gate. You can now figure the number of chairs that you will need for your spectator areas. Don't forget to allow one per exhibitor to be used at the cages.

You will need space to exhibit your trophies. The amount will vary according to the number you offer. They can be placed between rings, on the ends of the rings or on low stands in front of the rings.

You must also provide space for your stewards. They should have chairs and a table large enough for sprays, towels, sponges, etc.

With the judging area blocked out you are now ready to figure your benching. First check your fire regulations. The manager of the hall under consideration should be able to tell you the minimum width of aisle, aisles to be left open for exits, etc. Six feet is the minimum aisle that can be used with comfort. A ten foot aisle can accommodate a very large crowd and still allow the exhibitor to move freely. In a show with four thousand spectators ten foot aisles were ample save for the afternoon peak hours.

The normal rental or hall table is 30 in. wide and from four to ten feet long. A long row is unwieldy and I prefer a cross aisle at least every forty feet. A single forty foot row will take twelve 36 in. cages with ease. Always remember, no matter what size your cage, you must allow at least 2 in. per cage for variation of cage size. Many a beautiful plan has had to be reworked at the last minute because a given number of cages took more room than planned. A rough benching plan for your hall should be worked out now to be sure that you can bench the number of entries you hope to receive.

All this may seem like a lot of work but it pays off. An empty hall looks huge and even the measurements can be misleading. Better to find out at the start the limitations of a hall than to beg, borrow and scrounge for room after you've paid your deposit.

Perhaps this would be the place to consider the number of entries you wish to accept. It has always been my feeling that a judge should not be asked to handle more than 125 cats a day. This is especially true of specialty judges with several sets of finals. With 300 entries you will find that there will be from 25 to 50 absentees.

This makes a comfortable show which, if started approximately on time, will be over at a reasonable hour.

When your entries are in and the catalog goes to press you should completely bench your show. **Don't** wait until the last minute. You will know how many cages you need and who must be benched with whom! Have more than one copy of your plan! The exhibitor's envelopes should carry their location. By benching early you have time to provide a large diagram and also an alphabetical index for the lobby. This allows spectators to locate their friends or the type of cat they are interested in.

When laying out your rows of cages try to leave one or two vacant spots for grooming. Even with a grooming room most exhibitors will prefer to groom at their cages. This is partially because they do not wish to leave their cats and also because many cats are easily upset in a bare room where other cats are "protesting." Then, too, your spectators are always interested in grooming procedure and it adds to their pleasure at a show to be able to watch your cat being readied for the ring.

I wish that we might color-bench but the lack of stewards and the fact that so many exhibitors have more than one color and breed of cat precludes this. Naturally you want your cats all benched together! I bench from the catalog starting with the white Persians. If Mrs. A. has an abby and a Manx they go with her white. Kittens go with the exhibitors adults or in their proper order according to the catalog. Of course, there will be the friends who wish to be benched together to consider. Much erasing and rebenching will take place before you have settled everyone in his proper place. It seems like an insurmountable task but, once started, is not really so difficult.

For a single show a judging schedule is not necessary. Your AB judge goes straight through the catalog starting at the front. Your Specialty show will start with Short Hairs. A quadruple show is more difficult, especially if you have many small specialties. I start with a column for each ring. One AB judge can go through the catalog, the other can reverse the catalog. The Specialties must then be worked in around these two and each other. The number of cats in each division are the determining factor when it comes to laying out your schedule and slightly more cats should be listed for the first day with the hope that you can stick to your schedule, having started **on time!** Here again your eraser gets a workout before you arrive at the finished product. Have a copy of this schedule for each exhibitor.

If you are fortunate you will be able to set up on Friday and tear down on Monday. Whether you have the whole day, half a day or must set up and and tear down at night try to arrange storage room at the hall so that your tables, chairs and cages can be on hand when you start setting up. If you have enough people to have a separate crew for setting up tables, arranging skirting, fastening

paper, setting up cages and setting up the judging rings your hall can be made ready with ease.

Plan what each group of helpers is to do and then oversee the job yourself. You can not do it all and you must be everywhere at once and ready to direct whenever necessary.

When the paper is on your tables and the cages are up use a marking pen and mark cage spaces for your exhibitors. This enables them to locate their proper places more quickly and also makes sure that choice spots are not preempted by the early comers or more cages taken than allotted.

A word about skirting. It is not necessary but makes a much neater looking show room. Certainly it should be around the audience side of the judges' and clerks' tables. You can use almost any fire-proofed material or a plastic that will not flame. Burlap, muslin or crepe paper are often used.

Announcing is an important part of your show and can make or break it. I prefer one announcer whenever possible. If you have rings at opposite ends of the hall you will have two announcers and they must be cautioned to attempt not to conflict with each other. Good announcers (usually male) are a great asset. Your perfect announcer calls all numbers in and out as soon as cards so indicate. Long blank periods should be filled in by explanations of what is going on in the rings or with any interesting bits of information that can be thought of. There is a happy medium between the announcer who talks all the time and the one who only announces the numbers. In addition to the announcer calling numbers, one show I recently attended had a blackboard for each ring. Numbers needed were marked on this and it was a great convenience to the exhibitors.

Taking down a show can be simple and make your next years' set up so much easier if it is done properly. I like to get a number of heavy cartons of the same size. Into these should go all of the small usable objects — sponges, spray guns, basins, thumb tacks, etc. The first three, of course, must be washed and dried before permanent storage. Make a list of the contents to fasten on each box for future reference.

You can usually acquire the card board rolls that oilcloth comes on if you make friends with the manager of that department in your local store. These are ideal for rolling oilcloth and skirting for storage. Be sure that the length of each piece is marked on each end and roll pieces of the same length together, or pieces necessary for one judging ring or one length of table. Materials that are marked and rolled will be easy to use at your next show. A damp sponge and a handful of paper towels will clean off any liquid or spray spots on oilcloth and allow you to roll almost immediately. Since most fire regulations call for fireproofed skirting and this is expensive only launder as necessary.

Cages should be bundled in either fours or fives. They are easier

to count and handle and will not be so easily damaged. They should be wired in four places (middle of sides and ends) and doors and tops should be folded in. In the case of judges' cages with doors both sides you will have to wire the outside doors. Cages can be steam cleaned while bundled.

You should have several itemized lists of your show materials so that the manager next year will know where things are stored and what must be purchased. You should also have a list of your cages. Copies of these lists should be in your secretary's files.

The happiest solution to the ease of putting on a show is to have one person in your club or area who likes to do that sort of thing and who can gradually acquire and store all the paraphernalia in one spot. Many clubs have such a member. Those I know of have been benevolent dictators who have acquired their know how over a period of years and who need only extra hands to assist them. Too often show committees are "all chiefs and no indians." No show can be successful without a good crew of helpers and from these "indians" come your future "chiefs."
