



Ferrets Arrive On PBS!

Filmmaker Mark Lewis explores the world of ferret ownership and showing in the latest addition to his Pursuit Of Excellence programs.

By Marylou Zarbock

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Ferrets and their owners are the stars in a documentary from acclaimed filmmaker Mark Lewis. *Ferrets: The Pursuit of Excellence* tells the story of the human-ferret bond through the owners' words. Their stories are at times wise, sometimes quirky, but always intriguing. The people and their ferrets are featured in a straightforward, respectful way.

Lewis said that the *Pursuit of Excellence* programs focus on the pursuits of a variety of individuals. "People and their passion for ferrets seemed to naturally fall into this," Lewis said. "The other programs follow hairdressers, synchronized swimmers and people who compete in the growing of giant pumpkins."

Viewers meet the ferret owners in the first part of the program and get a sense of life with ferrets at each household. From playing games and wondering what random objects could disappear in the paws of their petty theft-prone pets to reminiscing about favorite ferrets, owners reveal an endearing, deep-seated joy in sharing their lives with these intelligent, playful animal companions.

The program then switches gears to discuss preparation for and attendance at The Buckeye Bash, perhaps the largest and most popular ferret show in the United States. Every August, the Buckeye Bash takes place in Columbus, Ohio, and draws hundreds of top ferret breeders, seasoned experts and ferret enthusiasts to compete in the ferret equivalent of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. It is open to the public. In addition to championship classes that judge conformation, ferrets can also enter specialty classes and take part in games.

Lewis learned about the Buckeye Bash from several ferret owners he and his crews interviewed. "It seemed like a logical climax to our show," he said.

Three crews worked together to film the 2006 Buckeye Bash for this program. Lewis said that all filming has its challenges, but the project went smoothly overall and they came away with great material.

"My favorite task is the filming process – it allows me to visit people all over the country, and I enjoy that part of it the most," Lewis said.

This isn't Lewis' first experience with ferrets. As a youngster in Australia, he enjoyed accompanying the full-time ferreter who worked at his uncle's large farm on his rounds with the ferrets.

In 2006, PBS aired *The Standard of Perfection: Show Cats* and *The Standard of Perfection: Show Cattle*, also by Lewis. He is also known for his award-winning documentary *The Natural History of The Chicken*.

We asked Lewis if viewers should keep anything in mind as they watch *Ferrets: The Pursuit Of Excellence*.

"Not really. It's a film cliché, but I prefer to let the images and sounds speak for themselves."

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