

Fun And Frustration At Ferret Shows

Fun outweighs frustration at ferret shows as friendly competition and common bonds create a wonderful community.

By Jennifer Mons McLaughlin

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Courtesy of Laura Baran

The manners a ferret displays while being judged does affect its score.

The Payoff

Countless stories of confidences gained, underdogs shining and once-abandoned ferrets becoming champions are testaments in themselves to the pure joy that accompanies showing ferrets.

Among the friendly competition, shows serve a much larger purpose for many. "A major reason people show is to check how their ferrets are doing in comparison to others," Barzda said. "It really helps a breeder make decisions about what ferrets to breed, which lines to continue, which aren't turning out as well as hoped, etc."

Barzda, who is also a show judge, explains that judges work very hard to be consistent to the ferret standard.

"A breeder then has a standard to work for in their pairings, and showing is the only way to find out if they are meeting or exceeding the standards," she said.

"As a breeder, it's encouraging to have placements in the ring as knowing that you are on the right track to breeding better ferrets," Scheer said. "Plus, you have the camaraderie with your fellow ferret owners. It's an overall good time."

As proud parents watch their babies, onlookers find themselves participating in many heartwarming moments.

"One of my proudest moments was when Rob, a once badly beaten, neglected and starved horrific biter, took first place in one ring of the Companion classes," said Laura Baran, co-director of the Emmett Ferret Shelter. "He was so good being handled by strangers and showed off his manners. No one would have known he once would run and latch onto your face and hands on a whim. He was a real testament to how difficult shelter ferrets can turn around with time patience and love."

Challenges

While veteran show goers cannot contain the excitement and pure joy showing ferrets brings, even they can experience frustration and challenges.

Maintaining a trim physique, dealing with a ferret that blows its coat in the weeks before a show and traveling long distances to reach show locations are among the issues show goers deal with and overcome.

"The hardest is probably keeping your ferrets in good show condition," Barzda said. "They go up and down in weight and muscle depending on the season, and aren't always at their best. Keeping muscle on your ferrets is the hardest part of keeping a ferret in showing condition, especially as they get older."

At shows, keeping ferrets ready and perfectly groomed is a balancing act.

"Sometimes they call the ferret to the event and it seems like there is no time to primp them; and on the opposite end they are called and things get delayed," said Ferguson. "It's sort of like taking a child for a picture, and having to wait so long that by the time your number is called, the child is cranky, hungry, asleep or just plain messy."

And like children, a ferret's reaction to the surrounding environment varies. Some ferrets may not exactly enjoy the sights and sounds of a ferret show.

"Ferrets are in an environment that they are normally not accustomed to," said Sara Hamilton-Yotz. The loud noises may make them nervous or anxious, judges holding them or the other ferret smells in the show hall may affect their behavior.

"It's difficult to get comments on your score card of 'squirmy' or 'bit judge,'" Hamilton-Yotz said, "especially when those are not normal behavior characteristics of your ferret."

Well Worth It

McKimmey, who is also a ferret judge, recently judged a show in Japan and she notes that the enjoyable aspects of ferret showing transcend distances.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s here in the States or another country, people like taking their ferrets out, being with people and talking ferrets for the day,” she said. “It’s a real social event.”

These thrills keep ferret lovers coming back for more, no matter what side of the competition they are on.

“I can say one of my favorite aspects of judging is handing the first place ribbon and trophy to someone new or who never expected to get it,” Barzda said. “I know of many times I’ve placed first a ferret that had a rough start in life — including several that were abandoned, one that was injured, one was nearly starved, several severe biters — that were rehabbed by the loving care of a shelter mom or dad and then by their permanent homes.”

In moments like these, the hard work, challenges and frustrations of the organizers, judges, breeders, owners and ferrets translates into pure joy and makes it all worth it. Barzda commented, “It proves to me that each and every one of us can really make a difference.”

Jennifer Mons McLaughlin lives in Minnesota and has been writing about the pet industry for more than 10 years.

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