

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 Tammy Baxter

Showing ferrets in competition is much more rare than showing dogs, and quite a conversation starter according to Tammy Baxter.

With the end of the year upon us, ferret show organizers, judges and participants find themselves nearing the end of the 2008 show season recalling the challenges, lessons, joys and surprises that come with showing ferrets.

Common scenes at any ferret show include massive crowds, jingling bells, loudspeaker announcements, cage-lined floors, and outreached hands waiting to pet ferrets. To some, it may sound like chaos. For ferret show goers, it's paradise.

"I describe the sights and sounds of a ferret show as pure excitement," said Julie Dyke, president of the Heart of Ohio Ferret Association and Rescue. "There are people excited to show their ferrets — win or lose; people excited to buy all the great ferret items vendors are selling; visiting with friends from all over the United States; and seeing all the awesome ferrets."

Whether it's the thrill of competition, rewards for a job well done, shopping from first class vendors or the friendly dialogue, participants return year after year for more.

"It's really a conversation starter," said Tammy Baxter from Pennsylvania. "I mean, people show dogs all the time, but a ferret? That's really something you can talk about. It's so much fun to go to shows and be around other ferret people. Sometimes I feel they're the only other people on the planet who understand me."

The camaraderie found at ferret shows ranks No. 1 among show goers. Friendships are made and continue growing throughout the years, offering people time to catch up with each other among the friendly competition at show time.

"It's like a huge family reunion," said Jackie Ferguson, vice president of Heart of Ohio Ferret Association and Rescue. "As with any large family gathered in one place, the environment is loud. The sound that stands out above all the clatter is the scream of the first place winner and all of their supporters."

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Ann Barzda went from not knowing what to expect during ferret shows to being a judge at them.

First Timers

While veteran show goers anxiously await the sights, sounds and events of a ferret show, it may seem a bit overwhelming to first timers. It doesn't take newbies long to learn the ropes by watching and asking questions.

When Ann Barzda from New Jersey entered her first show, she had some experience in showing horses, but had never shown ferrets. "I didn't know what classes to enter or what to expect at all," she said. "My boy, Squid, didn't place in his first class, so I went and asked the judge why. " The judge told Barzda that her ferret's ears were dirty. She duly cleaned Squid's ears before his next class. "I listened as the judge called off all the numbers, and we won," she said.

Some frustrating moments can occur in the beginning, especially when something that seems simple enough, like entering a ferret in the right color category, becomes a challenge.

"Sometimes new people don't know what color their ferret is," said Vickie McKimmey, director of shows and special events for the American Ferret Association. "And, sometimes, if it's a big show and closed, we cannot switch them." Many times though, organizers do their best to accommodate this. "Usually if we have an opportunity, we'll switch it," she said.

To help out first timers, the AFA offers short information sessions to steer participants in the right direction. "For 15 minutes, speciality will come over and show what color is champagne, chocolate, and so on, so [owners] will know for next time if it was entered in the wrong class," McKimmey said.

Ferrets new to the experience may take some time to adjust. "A well-socialized ferret is much more at ease in the show arena," said Joan Scheer a show goer from Pennsylvania. "Also, whether or not a male ferret is in rut at the time plays into his mood. It can sometimes be stressful for newbies to have so many males around them in season."

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