

# A beginner's guide to showing alpacas – from a beginner's perspective

by **Dominique Law**



If you're anything like me, the idea of showing your alpacas can seem daunting and, let's face it, a bit silly. But I'm here to tell you showing is not only survivable, it can also be fun and rewarding.

Showing off your quirky animals is not only a great way to meet other enthusiasts, but a chance to compare your alpacas with others from around your area—or even country wide if it is a big show—providing a perfect opportunity to fine tune your breeding programme.

If you are new to the world of alpacas, welcome. I too am a newbie, and what I have learnt from my short time in this world, is that everyone is more than happy to share their wisdom. So don't be afraid to ask—all questions great and small.

It is a good idea to peruse the AANZ website, particularly the Members' section regarding Showing Regulations and Breed Standards. On the home page you will also find the show calendar—so keep an eye out for your local show.

Upon entering the show, you will need information about each alpaca entered, such as:

- Name, type and sex of alpaca
- Age of alpaca on show day
- Colour of alpaca (if not 100% you can always get your animal colour checked on the day, just talk to the steward)
- IAR number
- Date of birth
- Date of last shearing (if shorn) so that the judge can ascertain the length of fleece grown over a period of time

Also be aware that all A&P shows require a current TB certificate, so make sure you arrange this to be done in plenty time before the cut off date to enter the show. That way you will avoid any last minute stress—unlike us.

On confirmation of your entry you will receive any information you need regarding that particular show. You will also have the contact details of the chief steward in case you have any queries.

To ensure both you and your alpacas have an enjoyable experience, preparation is very important. At the show you will be expected to lead your alpacas around the ring to show off their conformation, as well as have them stand still so the judge or judges can examine teeth, testicles (males only!), and quality of fleece. So leading up to the event make sure to practise not only leading them around, but also standing still while a helper checks your alpaca. Most alpacas are nervous when more than one person is in their personal space, so they need training to get them accustomed to this. Little and often works best. Make sure your halter fits correctly—if it's too loose it tends to slip too far down the nose, restricting their breathing, causing them to panic and misbehave. You want to make sure it feels nice and snug at the top of the halter, where it fits behind their ears. This is a good time for you to check that their IAR ear tag is still intact, and if not you will need to contact the AANZ office to order a replacement, as this is required for the show.

Once your animals are comfortable being handled, it makes it easier for you in the future to do any health checks, or just simply handle your animals.

Alpacas are shown in clean pasture condition. This means there is no fussing about with shampoo at the crack of

dawn—such a relief. All you have to do is make sure you keep them paddocked in the cleanest paddock available. Sometimes easier said than done, I know. If weather conditions are horrible, you can always keep them in the barn the night before the show. But make sure, if you are only showing one, that you keep at least one friend with them.

It is important that you arrive at the show with plenty of time to settle your alpacas before their class (at least an hour). Your entry form may stipulate arrival times, of either the day before, or the morning of, so make sure you time yourself to fit in appropriately.

## Handy hints

**SURI:** You can help them look the best they can by using a dog-grooming mitt just before going into the ring. Carefully follow the fall of the fleece. This will help remove bits of debris, so that your animal won't look as if they are wearing their entire yard while in the show ring.

**HUACAYA:** With the help of a 'wand' you can statically remove dust and debris from their fleece. Ask around at the show for advice on how to use it, and where to get one from.

With both breeds, be careful not to pick at their coats, as this can cause damage to the fleece structure.

## What to bring:

- Buckets for water and feed
- Hay
- Pellets and chaff (lucerne goes down well) and or fibre fresh—it is very important not to make sudden changes to their diet, so if your animals are not used to supplementary feeding, you will need to introduce these slowly, well in advance of the show.
- It is a good idea to bring some willow for them to snack on, as they will be off grass for the duration of the show.
- Halters and lead ropes—enough for all your animals
- Pooper-scooper and bucket for removing waste from their pen.
- Armbands for showing

- Basic first aid equipped with scissors, handwipes and anything else that falls into the 'just in case' category.
- Pen and highlighter for marking catalogues
- Snacks—hydrate and refuel yourself as you could be in for a long day.
- Any signage you may have for promoting your farm

You will be expected to wear black pants or a skirt and a white shirt or top for the bigger shows, with the other shows being more casual. Make sure you have comfortable, enclosed, shoes, as you will be on your feet for long periods of time. It is a good idea to bring along with you a folding chair.

## What to do in the show ring:

The ring steward (in the white coat) will tell you where to walk your alpaca in the ring and where to stand. It is a good idea to watch any earlier classes so you can get familiar with the process.

You want to present your alpaca to the judge, so pay attention to where they are standing at all times. This is where your training comes into play. Be confident when handling your alpaca, and remember to smile.

After the judge has reached a decision, if unplaced, wait for the steward to guide you to exit the ring. If you are lucky enough to place, the judge will give commentary on how they reached the decision while you parade around the ring. Make sure you listen, as it is a great insight into the qualities of your alpaca. First and second place getters will need to be available for the championship class, so remain close to the ring. If your alpaca wins a championship (congratulations!), you need to be available for the supreme champs.

If you have more alpacas coming into the ring than you can handle, (which sometimes happens as classes change to suit the day) just ask the stewards, as there are usually other breeders who are more than happy to help out.

Just remember that we are all here for the same reasons, to meet like-minded people, to expand our knowledge, and to show off our bizarre animals—hopefully gaining ribbons in the process. And remember, no tantrums if you don't place!

A healthy dose of humour goes a long way.

