

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

By Allen Bush

Tammy and I have been lucky enough to visit several rabbitries. We also have had discussions with a number of top breeders throughout the country. I would like to take this time to share some of the secrets we have learned to help you become more successful at the show tables.

Grooming your rabbits before a show is very important. We try to groom our rabbits a couple of days before the show. We will cut toe nails on all rabbits we plan on showing. This includes juniors which have very sharp toe nails. You will definitely save on scratches for yourself and judges by doing this. Rabbits are always calmer in your own rabbitry than in a strange place. We will also try to remove all of the dead or loose fur from the coat. We try not to use a comb or brush for doing this. We lightly mist the rabbit's coat with water. We will rub the fur until the rabbit is dry and all of the loose fur is off the rabbit. The final step is to check the rabbit for any obvious disqualifications and the rabbit should be ready to go to the show.

Driving short distances to shows is usually not a big deal for the rabbits. However, going a long distance can be quite a challenge if you do not prepare properly. We make sure the car's air conditioning is working properly before we go any long distance to a show. We also make sure the car has been serviced and is running properly. We also bleach out all of the carriers for the rabbits and try to put a small amount of shavings in the bottom of our carriers. This will help eliminate any odor when the trip is just starting. We normally give the rabbit a little bit of water in the carrier for trips longer than 6 hours. For shows where the commute is less than six hours, we water them when we get to the show. We will also give them a little bit of hay at the show to help them in food digestion when they arrive back home. On longer trips, which take two or more days, we always will stop each evening and feed and water the rabbits when we stop off at a hotel. We will crack the window and make sure the rabbits are cool. We feel it is very important to not drive straight thru and the rabbits seem to do better when they get a night's rest and food. Most always they will eat and drink after the car has been stopped for a couple of hours. The next morning we will make sure the rabbits have fresh water and resume the trip. Another very important precaution is to try and put some kind of rubber mat or soft cushion under the rabbit's carrier to help limit the jolts the rabbits take when the car hits a bump. This will help the condition of the rabbit when it arrives at the show. We also try to have some kind of hand cart to carry the carriers to the show. It makes it easier to get around with your animals.

Flying rabbits to a show is very difficult and normally very expensive. We recommend driving whenever possible. However, you may find it necessary to fly on some limited occasions. A few suggestions will help you when flying with rabbits. One is to bring your carriers to the airport before the actual flight date and get them

approved with a picture and a signature by someone who works for the air line. A second idea is to fly the rabbits as cargo. It is much easier to do and significantly less stressful than flying the rabbits excess baggage. The additional cost is worth it. The final tip is to make sure you get to the airport early and have health certificates and food and water for the rabbits. You will need these to fly. Please check with the air lines for any additional requirements well in advance of flying and book the rabbits as early as possible.

Arriving at a show can be very stressful to yourself and the rabbits. The best advice we can give you is not to be in a hurry. Carrying case shows are a little easier than coops shows. We just try and find a quiet spot with a lot of ventilation and set the rabbits down and make sure they have plenty of water. Hopefully, your rabbits will not need any grooming because most carrying case shows will require a small amount of time traveling. Coop shows are more challenging. You and the rabbits are normally very tired when you get to the show arena. We will start by getting the rabbits out of the car and setting the carriers in the building. We will then try to get shavings in the coops for the rabbits, as well as getting their dishes with food and water before we put them in the new coop. We always try and let the rabbit get out and stretch its legs on a show table before putting it away in the coop. This is an excellent time to do any final grooming. Normally a light misting and then lightly rubbing the fur will make the rabbit feel better before it goes in its new coop. In addition, this is also a good time to add a coop number to the right ear if required by the show rules.

The next morning, should be used to check the rabbits for feed and water. We try to give a little bit of hay to any rabbit not eating. This is also a good time to give any treats which you have had luck with in the past. You are now ready to put your rabbit up on the show table and hope for the best.

Before we leave the show and head for home, we try to clean each carrier and put in fresh shavings to help the smell in the car. We may try to drive a more non-stop route on the way home. We are normally ready to get home and the rabbits are pretty well sick of being in the car and have not expressed to us any complaints. Getting rabbits to eat when you get back home seems to be the hardest thing for us after shows. The most important thing to do is make sure the rabbit you are bringing home gets to go back into the exact cage it was in before the trip started. It is important for the rabbit to know it is back home and all is back to normal.

In summary, going to shows is why many of us raise rabbits. You want to do all you can to help your rabbit make the trip safely and do as well as possible at the show. It is probably a good idea to do a couple of small shows first. Do this before taking rabbits to a show far away from home. Remember, you should not take a rabbit which can't be replaced in your breeding program. We always try to have a brother or sister of an excellent rabbit staying home for safe keeping. Good luck and see you at a show real soon.