

A Beginners Guide to Showing by Nick Hunkin

At most shows with GOS pigs, there are usually the following classes:-

1. July boar born between 1 July and previous December 31.
2. January boar from same year as shown.
3. Sow born before previous 1 July in pig.
4. Gilt born between previous 1 July and 31 August.
5. Gilt born between the previous 1 September and 31 December.
6. Gilt born after January same year.

Prepare your farrowing times in advance to coincide with these classes.

Older boars are not recommended for absolute beginners but you will soon be only too keen to bring them out when you get used to showing.

July litters

From your litter, keep as many good underlined weaners as you can afford to (you can always sell off any extras for either breeding or pork later on). Make sure the weaners have at least 14 sound teats (7 a side) and more is even better. Make sure there are no inverted teats and be ruthless in your selection process if there are.

At about 4 to 5 months old make your final selection. Look for good hams, straight back and generally smart alert appearance. You may have relatively local show pig people who I'm sure would come and help you at this stage if you're not sure. Make sure you feed your show pigs well; 6 lbs of proprietary pig feed per day is recommended for all show pigs but when they are first weaned, ad lib them with grower pellets if you can for the first 3 months. If this proves too expensive, we are very lucky with Old Spots that they grow well on almost any food and you can supplement your pig feed with vegetables (roots or greens), potatoes* or maybe sugar beet making sure it is pre-mixed with water and soaked overnight.

Get them used to board and bat as early as you can and you can always walk them round their pens inside. As soon as possible walk your pigs outside if you can set up some kind of dummy show ring, so much the better. They will get used to it. If they tend to rush about on initially going outside, wait a few moments. They will soon settle down and quieten.

At around 8 months take them out on any quiet country roads you may have nearby, always make sure there are at least 2 people to help control the pigs and warn the traffic. In my experience, drivers are usually fairly laid back and often delighted to see the pigs walking about. Try to do this at least 3 times a week up until the season begins.

A week before the first show, gently wash the pigs with tepid water and a mild shampoo (Johnsons baby shampoo, certain horse shampoos, Lux etc are all quite adequate and recommended for pigs). Avoid detergents which are okay for some of the white breeds but can sometimes cause hair loss. Use a medium powered hose to remove stubborn dirt from the bottom of feet and noses. Be careful not to get shampoo inside the pig's ear as it will cause them to become lopsided.



Nick Hunkin providing one of his entertaining commentaries.



Smaller shows such as Stroud are a good place for beginners to start (although Guy Kiddy pictured here is one of the 'old hands').

When loading your trailer to go to the show, use plenty of straw especially on the tailgate and leave no room for possible escape between the back of the trailer and the shed door. Try and keep the pigs as calm as possible. We are lucky with GOS as they are usually amongst the best and easiest loaders providing the preparation is good AND ABSOLUTELY NO ESCAPE ROUTES AVAILABLE!



Hatfield House Show always attracts good entries and would be a good place to visit to talk to exhibitors and watch how they do things.

Once at the shows, ensure pigs are walked a few times before judging (especially the night before so they get used to their surroundings and being around strange pigs).

If possible watch experienced pig showmen show their pigs. You will learn more from this than anything. But be patient - it takes time to do the job well.

When in the ring, don't get worried if the pigs do a runner and start some of the other pigs off as well. Just go along with it. If you stay calm and collected and keep as close as you possibly can, chances are the pig will calm down fairly quickly. If you get wound up and harassed, chances are so will the pig. They pick up their owner's moods almost psychically!

The judge will want to see firstly all pigs walking around against each other clockwise if possible. He/she will then inspect the pigs individually with particular attention to underlines (good to get someone to practice doing this on the pig at home). They will then often walk the pig individually and finally walk all pigs again against each other.

They will then make their selection and the rosettes will be doled out usually first prize first. From the first prize winners of all the individual classes, the judge will finally select a breed champion, reserve champion and sometimes male and female champions individually as well. If you go out to some of the larger shows, you will almost inevitably get quite a decent prize as at many of them there have only been a few exhibitors in recent years.

For older sows, again it is always more difficult to teach an old dog new tricks but road walking and regular handling will help. If you can purchase an older show sow from a regular exhibitor, so much the better as they invariably will be used to things and quiet.

As your young pigs get older, so they become easier to show and it seems to get in the blood so after 4 or 5 years you will find everything very much easier than when you started.

Finally with January pigs just get them in the ring and try and keep up!!!!
- That's what everybody else will be doing.

Come on, get out there and have a go. All us oldies will be there to cheer you on and help in any way we can. Dont' be scared!!!



The ultimate to aim for is probably the Royal Show at Stoneleigh although being over four days it takes a lot of commitment so perhaps it is best to work up to the RASE via the other shows first.

*Ensure you comply with the law and only feed vegetable matter that has never been in a kitchen, domestic or commercial (not even from a vegetarian restaurant!). If you want chapter and verse on what can or cannot be fed, go to www.defra.gov.uk and in the search box on the opening page, type in 'A Guide for New Keepers Pigs' which takes you to a short brochure full of useful information.

[Remember that Bluetongue disease restrictions do not apply to pigs and that pig classes should go ahead unimpeded this year—Ed]

(This article was first published in Tamworth Trumpet. Nick Hunkin is not only a Tamworth breeder but can be found at some of the leading shows giving an erudite commentary in the pig rings). Photos by Richard Lutwyche