

First Time Showing an Abyssinian Cat in NSW

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I am fairly new to the show scene and thought it would be useful to let people interested in showing their cat know a little about the preparation and equipment required. My experiences are with Abyssinian cats but I'm sure many of the details would be the same for other breeds. It would be interesting to hear from Somali owners and other cat owners as to how their regime differs. I found that there was not really one person or place I could go to ask questions and help with all my queries. I used my breeder, Internet sites, e-mail and a learn as you go approach to gather my information. To some members this article may seem to spell out every little detail but when you are new to something it's not knowing the procedures and what's expected that can actually affect the experience you have. I think it is important that those new to showing know what is expected and don't have a negative experience due to a lack of knowledge.

Getting started

So it's your first time showing your cat and you're not sure where to start. If you got your cat from a registered breeder in your state then ask them to help you through the ins and outs of showing. If you are like me and got your cat from another state then contacting your state's cat registering body such as the NSW Cat Fanciers' Association (NSW CFA) would be a good place to start.

Paper work

There is some preparation required before you even get to a show.

Make sure you have entered your cat before the show entry closing date. This requires downloading the entry form from the NSW CFA website or phoning the club's show manger to get a show schedule sent out to you. The form will require you to include a photocopy of your cat's pedigree, which you will need to get from the breeder and a cheque for the entry fee. If you would like

to know who the other cats competing are tick the catalogue box on the show entry form and for a few dollars more you will get the comprehensive catalogue of all the cats entered when you arrive at the show. Once the paper work is completed the beauty treatments begin.

Grooming

The cat's front and back claws must be clipped. Your vet will do this for you but claw clippers are available so that you can do it yourself. You must be careful to cut the claw above the vein that runs through it. If you hold the cat's extended claws up to the light you should be able to see where the vein ends.

You may like to wash your cat a couple of days before the show so their coat looks shiny and clean. There are several good quality cat shampoos on the market. I use a small tub in the shower and fill it with warm water. Make sure the water is not too hot or too cold for your cat; you want to make the experience as pleasant as possible for your cat. I have a sponge that I use to sponge down the cat and wet its fur thoroughly. Try to do this as quickly as possible because your cat may get cold very quickly. Squeeze out a small amount of shampoo on to the palm of your hand and rub it through your cat's fur. Keep it away from its eyes, inner ears and generally the whole facial region. Quickly rinse off the shampoo. I find pouring the remaining water from the tub over the back of the cat is an efficient method making sure the belly gets rinsed as well. Some people suggest adding a little vinegar to the final rinse to get rid of any residual bubbles. If you have a shower with the flexible shower cord it may be useful to use in this situation.

Your cat may not like the bathing experience so you will need to gauge the situation as you go. Most Abys seem to take the experience in their stride. Wrap your cat in a towel and dry them as much as possible

they will probably be quite keen to get away by now but also give them a brush to smooth out the fur.



Photo: Swift after a bath

Inside the cat's ears should also be cleaned. Use a pet ear wipe or a damp cotton ball to carefully wipe out any dirt or wax build up in the ear. Remember parts of the ear are very sensitive so try to be as gentle as possible.

Your cat should be in good general health to be shown and have its vaccinations up to date. A cat that is used to being handled and is exposed to a variety of people and noises is more likely to cope well with the sensory overload a show situation may present.

Kitty Kit

Make sure you organise a 'Kitty Kit' to take to the show that contains all the necessities plus any emergency items for you and your cat. Typically my 'Kitty Kit' includes:

- ❃ White bathroom towel or white padded base to place in the cage for your cat to sit on.
- ❃ A clear or white plastic container with a lid to be used as a litter tray in the cage.
- ❃ A set of white curtains to fit the cage dimensions (to fit single cage: 457mm x 457mm x 457mm or double cage: 686mm x 457mm x 457mm). I made mine and found that having 3 sections

of curtaining with ties at each section space was useful and then threaded them on elastic which means one size can fit either cage size.

- ❃ White pipe cleaners and a few small bulldog clips for securing cages and cage adjustments.
- ❃ Water bowl & fresh water.
- ❃ A small bag of cat biscuits.
- ❃ Treats and a familiar toy for after judging.
- ❃ Cat comb
- ❃ Plastic shopping bags, paper litter and litter scoop.
- ❃ Cat claw clippers
- ❃ Cat wet wipes & ear wipes
- ❃ A folder with the cat's papers (vaccination certificates for kittens) which is also good for storing their ribbons & award cards at the end of the show.
- ❃ A pen for filling out results in the catalogue
- ❃ Drink and snacks for you although there is usually a canteen that provides food to buy.

Make sure you check the date and place of the show as well as the time allocated to vetting and set up of your cat's cage.

Show day

When you arrive at the show with your cat in its cat carrier you will have to get your benching slip from the registration desk. This slip will tell you the cage number for your cat and you will have to take it to the vetting area to get your cat checked by the show vet before you can put your cat in its cage in the exhibition hall. You must get your cat out of the carrier cage and present it to the vet. The vet will check that your cat is healthy and shows no signs of infectious diseases. Once the vet has given your cat the health seal of approval and checked off your benching slip you may put it back in the cage and proceed towards the main hall.

The exhibition halls are set up for the different groups and classes of cats being shown. The cages have numbers on them that relate to your benching slip and you will have to walk around the hall to work out where your designated cage has been placed. Once you have found it you can set up the cage with the curtains, towel and litter tray and place your cat inside. You should also have time to check that your cat's ears and face are clean and give them a final brush and hug before the judges take the floor.

Judging

If it is a closed style show then you will not be allowed to stay in the venue while judging is taking place. Once all judging has finished (this usually takes a few hours) you will be allowed back in the venue.

Open style shows allow the exhibitors to remain in the hall while judging takes place. When a judge is judging a class no one except show personnel should be in the vicinity of the cat cages. There is usually a judging table and a few chairs set out for exhibitors or members of the public to sit on and watch the judging. A fold out stool or chair can be handy to take as at some shows not many chairs are provided. The cat's cage number is what identifies it to a judge not its name. During judging anonymity of the cat and the cat's owner is the aim.

Your cat has several chances of winning a ribbon, rosette or prize. Your cat is assigned a group and class depending on its breed, gender and age within this class your cat will be judged firstly against other cats that are the same breed and colour. A Best in Section or Challenge will be awarded to the best kitten or cat in their respective division. The judge then carries on judging the other colour varieties of cats in that breed. This will result in a Best of Breed being awarded. The judge will continue to judge the other breeds and will then work

out his/her Top 5 cats for that class. The Top 5 will include cats that were given the Best of Breed awards and perhaps some of the runners up if the selection of a breed is particularly good. These cats may go on to compete against cats in the different class Top 5s to become a Top 10 exhibit in a show or Group. Top 10 exhibits are not always part of a show.



Photo: Wendy and Swift with winnings from The Abyssinian Cat Club's 2005 show.

Once judging has been completed for the class in a ring you may tend to your cat. NSW shows tend to have two or three rings, which means two or three different judges will judge your cat over the course of the day. In the afternoon the public will be allowed entry to the show and usually at 4pm the show will close.

Performance

Little things seem to affect the way your cat may perform or react to situations at a show. One of my cats seems to need a good night's sleep the night before a show to perform at his best. If he hasn't been to the toilet before the show starts he makes little grumbles when he is picked up or if pressure is put on his underbelly.

I hope this has been informative and look forward to meeting some new show cats and people during the year. Good luck!