

Trust is key in cat show

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

RICKREALL — Rose started out a stray cat, heading toward being euthanized, when she found Tiffany Clark's family. "She kind of adopted our family," said Clark, 17. "So now she's my cat, and she's really fun to have around."

Clark, an experienced showman when it comes to dairy goats, market lambs, rabbits and poultry, was talked into showing Rose at the Polk County Fair's cat show. She got reserve champion for her mink coon kitty, Rose.

Not bad for a stray, and Clark's first time showing cats.

Monica Szczepanski, 17, won grand champion showing her cat, Snickers.

"Having a good connection with your cat is first of all," she said. "I got my cat when she was about 7 weeks old, and she's been my favorite cat ever since. She's one of the sweetest cats I've ever had. She's always wanting love, no matter what. She's never been mean at all."

Getting the cat to trust you is also important, Szczepanski said.

"She has a good connection with me," she said.

This was also Szczepanski's first year showing cats, but her older siblings had shown cats for years, so helped her with tips.

Molly Burger, 14, won intermediate champion with her cat, Hobbs.

She agrees that trust is No. 1 in showing cats.

"He has to be in really good health," she added. "He has to be groomed, free of parasites. You have to make sure your cat isn't too creeped out or he could injure himself — or you."

Burger has no problems manhandling Hobbs.

"He's very relaxed," she said. "I can do almost anything with him. He's very lovey and really playful."

Clark noted that the cat's temperament matters when it comes to showing felines.

"With (Rose), she's not around other cats, so being around the other cats on the show table was a little nervous for her, so she was hissing, but she kept herself really collected under the pressure," Clark said. "Her harness, she doesn't like either, so she was trying to step out of it."

The relationship Clark has built with Rose enabled Clark to help calm the kitty, she said.

"If your animal gets too stressed, if you hold them, your heartbeat against them will calm them," Clark said. "When (Rose) starts purring, that's how I know she's relaxed."

Purring isn't always a sign of a relaxed cat. Virginia Anderson, 12, struggled to get her black and white tuxedo cat, Druzy, to behave on the show table.

"She purrs and meows at the same time," Anderson said, holding Druzy close between competitions.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Brylie Emigh, 8 months, sits atop her dad, Matt Emigh, before the Polk County Fair's Beautiful Baby Contest on Saturday morning.

Beautiful baby runs in family

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

RICKREALL — Brylie Emigh is only 8 months old, but is already carrying on a family tradition.

Brylie has bright blue eyes, an infectious smile and is dressed in overalls, a flowery head band — and has a fascination with her father's sunglasses.

Waiting patiently in the arms of her dad, Matt Emigh, of Dallas, she's about to go in front of the judges in the Beautiful Baby Contest at the Polk County Fair Saturday.

While called the Beautiful Baby Contest, the judges aren't actually looking for the prettiest child, but the top three in a host of categories, like "Bluest Eyes," and "Best Dressed."

Not that he remembers, but Matt had been in the same place as his daughter back in 1990. He was only

10 months old at the time, so he doesn't know much about the contest, but he did win in a category.

"I don't remember which," he said. "I just have a picture."

Matt and his wife, Lindsay, thought it would be fun to see if Brylie could follow in her father's footsteps.

"I was excited," Lindsay said. "He wanted her to win so I could brag about both of them."

Lindsay, who also grew up in Dallas, said she would come to the contest with her

family every year. She said the category she thought Brylie was most likely to place was "Most Looks Like Dad" or maybe "Best Smile." Seeing the resemblance between dad and daughter, you understand where she gets her opinion on the former.

So did the judges, announcing Brylie as one of the top three in that category.

Daddy was all smiles walking up with Brylie to get her ribbon to add to the family's collection



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Monica Szczepanski presents her cat, Snickers, to the judge on Thursday morning at the Polk County Fair. Snickers and Monica won grand champion.

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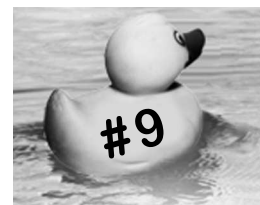
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