

# From the Bean Pile – on Showing

By Marj Brady

**N**ormally I try to avoid potentially controversial topics like shows but I thought this might be fun. I like going to shows because it gives me a chance to reconnect with people that I rarely get to see in person. It also gives me a chance to get my hands on some wonderful alpacas, to continue my education and to have my animals assessed by people who are supposed to be better at this than I; after all, they get paid to do that job.

Even though we only show two to three times a year, and take only a few animals to each show, there is a significant amount of work that goes into getting ready. Banners, feed, halters, leads, toenail clippers, water, pails, the list is long. Thankfully I haven't yet forgotten an alpaca or any of their necessities. I haven't forgotten my kids or husband and everything that they need but every year it seems I forget to pack something for myself. One year it was my toothbrush. Another time it was my hairbrush, one year it was my underwear and no, I didn't go commando in the ring. Last year I put on the black jeans I've been wearing for four or five years and couldn't figure out how they

had shrunk three sizes over the winter; turns out I had gained about fifteen pounds. Immediate note to self: "Try on show clothes before the day of the show."

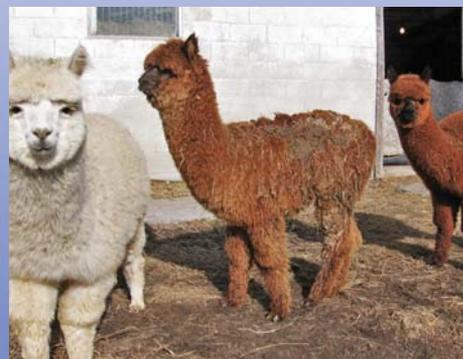
I worry about the weather a lot in the weeks before the show. Halter training on ice is not fun and it seems that every year we're dealing either with snow up to our armpits or a skating rink – does this mean I should start training earlier? Why yes it probably does. Does it mean I will? Probably not. I try not to worry too much about trying to get my crias clean – the judges say pasture clean is good and they mean it. I check to make sure little bums are tidy and check under the hood to make sure my entry has the appropriate reproductive equipment for its class. Little boys like to play testicular hide and seek.

A couple of years ago we experienced an incredible melt about a month before show time. The weanling barnyard wasn't terrible but there was a large bowl of mud soup where runoff had accumulated. Most of my alpacas seem to dislike mud, although they enjoy water when it's hot and like getting hosed, but they will detour around mud. One of our little girls that year was a hay magnet - there's always at least one in the herd - and either she rolled in that mud or was pushed in by her buddies.

Coated shoulder to butt, both sides, and over her back, she went from being a hay bale to an adobe brick. I consulted an expert who advised me against washing it out as the fleece wouldn't have sufficient time to regain its fundamental character before the show. I waited and waited and prayed for sunshine and gentle breezes and, over time, the mess dried, crumbled and fell away. By the week before the show her fleece wasn't looking



*Little Miss Mess' left side caked with mud. The right side isn't any better.*



*We did give her a second chance as her fleece - sans mud - is really quite lovely and she performed well in subsequent shows.*

too bad. Then, the day before the show, we had a cloudburst, one of those sixty-second torrential downpours, and Little Miss Mess laid out in it. We did take her to the show and, not surprisingly, she didn't place.



### **Helpful Hints:**

There are any number of listings online and on association websites giving you advice on what to take with you, how to train your alpacas and how to keep smiling even if you're thinking the judge is a moron but I do have a couple of additional suggestions:

- Please, please, please don't yell at your significant other, your kid or anyone else when you're at the show... and don't hit your alpacas. My kids still talk about a well known breeder who smacked one of his animals when it was getting a little fractious. That smack left a mark in more ways than one.
- Please remember that judges aren't perfect even if some of them act like they are. Personally I prefer a judge with a light touch, who remains focused and educates and entertains without being pompous and preachy. If you don't agree with the result try to be objective in your assessment and show again.

We like to show in halter, fleece, composite and spin-offs. Hopefully a good animal will do well in all venues and give you lots of shiny ribbons for

your wall of fame.

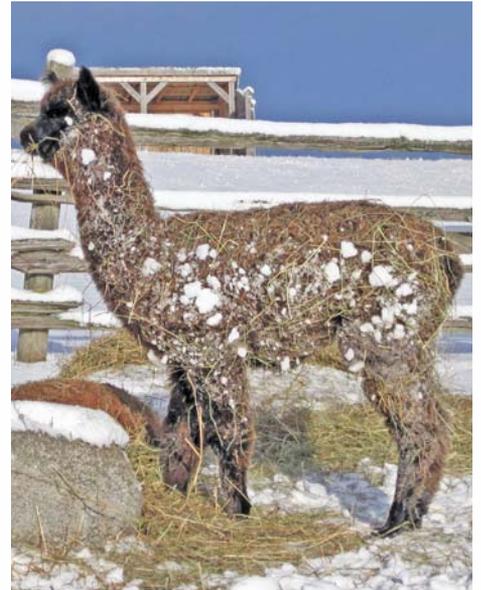
The whole show event can be tons of fun. I get to take a shower with excellent water pressure several days in a row and we don't have to fight about who goes first. So far the hotels have managed to accommodate my teenage son's need for hot water. We spend quality time trapped in a vehicle for hours, we get to eat really expensive pizza and we get to see old friends and make new ones.

In closing I'd like to suggest that you try to enjoy show season, learn from it, participate in it to the best of your abilities but try not to take it too seriously... and don't forget your underwear!

**CQ**

### **About the Author**

*Marj. Brady has been breeding entertaining huacaya alpacas since 2003 and lives with her family on a small farm north of Stirling, Ontario, Canada. You can reach Marj at [amazinggraze@sympatico.ca](mailto:amazinggraze@sympatico.ca) or phone 613-395-6406. Feel free to visit her web site at [www.amazinggrazealpacos.ca](http://www.amazinggrazealpacos.ca)*



*This year I may not have to pack hay – I think this little girl will be able to feed all her pen mates. She's a half sister to the mud maiden so it might be smarter to leave her at home till her second fleece comes in, unless there's an award for dirtiest cria. I wonder if that's a trait you can select for?*