

7 breeds of swine and sheep keep him showing

By JOANNE SPAHR
 YORK - Preston Bankert, grand champion Southdown
 Red Lion R3, who owned the ewe and ram in open sheep
 judging at this year's York

Fair, is a real sheep and hog showman - he shows four breeds of swine and three breeds of sheep at every fair he attends. So far this season that list has included (along with the York Fair), the Solanco Fair, the Maryland State Fair, the Huntingdon County Fair, the Allentown Fair, and the Montgomery County Fair at Gatherburg, Md. And, this isn't the first year he's been keeping this schedule, either. He started out about 37 or 38 years ago showing hogs, and making the fair circuit has been in his blood ever since.

In a recent interview, Bankert offered some informative insights into traveling on the show circuit - insights that fair spectators, and reporters, don't often consider.

First of all, Bankert says that, today, a showman has to exhibit several different breeds to "keep his head above water."

With the cost of gasoline, tires, and truck parts, a few

animals in one breed just don't make enough money to cover expenses. And, of course, the trucks wear out eventually and new ones are needed.

Last year was Bankert's year to invest in a new vehicle, so he purchased a 31-foot double deck trailer as a portable home for his 45 to 60 hogs and 25 to 35 sheep he hauls to each show, depending on the amount of classes in those shows. That expense, of course, really cut into profits.

Bankert also noted that the sheep and hog breeders don't sell as much breeding stock as they used to.

"The old timers say...that they had nearly every animal sold after each show, and that they had to go home for a whole new string almost every time," explains Bankert, but that's not the story today.

"Now we don't sell as much stock as we used to," he admits. Bankert figures that the reason for the downward sales pattern of breeding stock is due to fewer and fewer farmers and producers visiting the fairs now that the one-time farm events are becoming more and more commercialized.



Preston Bankert, Red Lion R3, and his daughter Michele, prepare their champion Southdown for competition at the York Fair. Southdowns are only one of three sheep breeds Bankert shows, as well as four breeds of swine.

"It used to be that every farmer went to the county fairs," says Bankert, "but, I'd bet that now only about one per cent bother."

But even though the show circuit isn't a real big money maker for Bankert and his family, there are positive aspects that keep him at it year after year.

For one thing, it's in his blood, now.

He started out approximately 37 years ago with about 12 Hampshire swine when "one breed was all you needed." He had good stock, winning almost everything in that one breed. Then, as his expenses grew, he decided on another breed of swine - Yorkshire. Continuing in this pattern, the money from those top winnings was still not sufficient to pay for expenses, so he gradually built up his stock to include Southdown

sheep, Hampshire sheep, Suffolks, Spotted Swine, and Landrace.

And while there may be little left-over money, there is still the satisfaction of showing animals that are top quality as well as earning a pile of ribbons to show for it.

"It's also a good opportunity to promote meat and wool," he noted.

Bankert's little daughter Michelle, who also shows sheep, has strung up an exhibit the length of her pens to tell non-farm consumers what it takes to raise and care for an animal as well as the products derived from each.

So, another generation of Bankerts is on its way to becoming avid circuit travelers. Most likely, if you're a sheep or swine enthusiast, you'll see someone from this family at one of the upcoming fairs this season.



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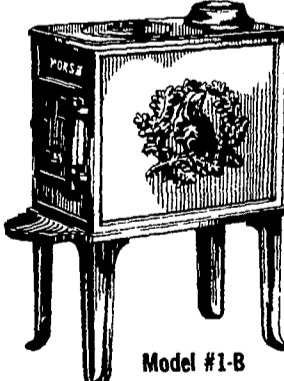
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