

Champion market lamb "jumps out and grabs" judge

BY SHEILA MILLER

FARM SHOW—Imagine having the responsibility of looking at several hundred head of sheep in just a few hours and then having to pick the very best market lamb out of the bunch. That would be an insurmountable challenge for most people, but not for University of Illinois shepherd Richard Cobb.

In his second official visit to the Pennsylvania Farm Show, Cobb very deliberately and thoroughly judged each class of market lambs as they entered the small arena show ring. Running his hands down their backs, circling their leg loins with both his hands, and studying them with an eye that knows what "lamb chops" should look like on foot, Cobb analyzed each lamb for traits of quality and quantity.

In one class of heavyweight lambs, which pitted Lancaster Countian Barbara Herr and her wether against Chester Countian Bill MacCauley and his ewe lamb,

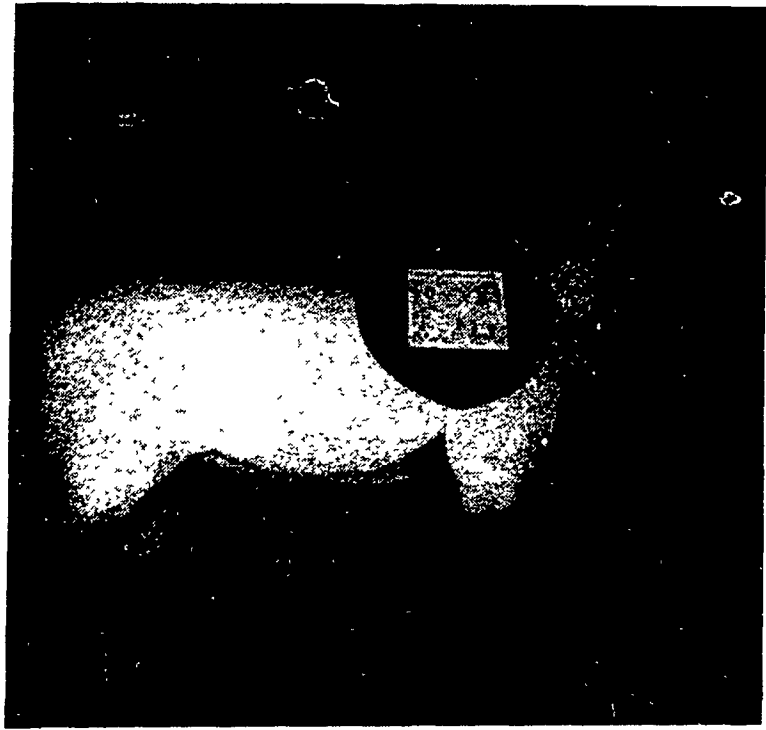
Cobb scrutinized the top two animals from across the ring, walked in to handle the lambs several times, and after much contemplation, chin-raking, and frenzied gum chewing, gave the blue ribbon to Herr's wether.

"Both of these lambs were worthy of winning," said Cobb, in giving his reasons for placing the class. "Both showed the structural correctness and length out to rump, however my first place lamb showed more condition, muscularity and depth of loin."

The same precise process of elimination was used by Cobb to select all his market lamb winners, but not even his selection for grand champion was as difficult as that class of heavyweights. As a matter of fact, Cobb said he was "so impressed" with Centre Countian Julie Kuzemchak's Hampshire x Suffolk crossbred wether when he handled it in class that he knew which lamb, out of the hundreds he



With television cameras rolling, the excitement of the tagging of this year's Farm Show grand champion market lamb was captured on yards of film. Seventeen-year-old Julie Kuzemchak's lamb wears the champion's banner while fellow Centre County 4-H'er Joyce Harpster's lamb was picked as the reserve grand champion.



Following in her brother's footsteps, 14-year-old Joyce Harpster exhibited the reserve grand champion market lamb at Farm Show. She attributes her win to her Suffolk lamb and her "lucky shirt." With Joyce is Judge Cobb.



Last year's winner of the grand champion market lamb honors, David Harpster, right, of Boalsburg, Centre County gives Julie a big hug of congratulations while Harpster's father, Harold, shows his support for five-time-winner Julie.

judged, had to be grand champ.

"That's a good sheep," exclaimed Cobb after the judging was completed. "I was blown away by that lamb — it handles out of this world. It just jumped out and grabbed me. It's a wonderful feeling for any sheep judge to find a lamb that you have to say 'That one's got to be champion.'"

With the traditional back-pat, Judge Cobb dubbed 17-year-old Julie Kuzemchak's Farm Show market lamb the official 1983 Pennsylvania Farm Show Market Lamb. This marks the fifth time the petite, blue-eyed 4-H'er has won this award, having taken the title in 1978 (her first year of Farm Show competition) and each year thereafter until 1981. Last year Julie's lamb was tagged reserve grand champion, but a Centre County lamb shown by David Harpster secured the top honors.

"You see," said Julie, smiling, "it doesn't matter who wins as long as it's someone from Centre County. We've blocked out the other counties for six years now. We're just one big family."

And Julie's sentiments seem to have been born out by the show ring actions of last year's grand champion winner David Harpster, his dad, and his sister Joyce who exhibited this year's reserve grand champion market lamb. Happy hugs were thrown around Julie by David and warm congratulations were offered by his dad. And during an interview Joyce remarked with team-spirit pride that "the important thing is to have the county do so good."

Back in the barn, after television interviews and picture-taking sessions were over, a more-relaxed Julie admitted that this was the first time she's ever been nervous in the show ring. What caused her jitters which signaled her lamb to jump and balk? Julie said it was the amount of "good competition" she was showing against, and not the pressure to regain the championship title.

Will she try to continue her market lamb monopoly at next year's Farm Show? With a shrug of her shoulders and a look at her mother standing next to her, Julie smiled and suggested that this might be her final year of competition. But mother Gayle pointed out that Julie is eligible to compete for two more years if she desires.

Some of her reasons for possibly not entering next year's competition hinge on her demanding school schedule. Julie is presently studying x-ray technology at the Polyclinic Medical Center. When asked how she managed to skip classes this week, Julie grinned

and said, "I told them that if they let me out of school I'd try to make them proud of me."

Not only can the school be proud of their special sheep-showing student, but parents Richard and Gayle Kuzemchak of Pleasant Gap can be bursting with pride. Julie notes that her father is employed by Penn State as shepherd, but she quickly adds that none of her market lambs have come out of the Penn State flock. This year's winner was purchased in Ohio.

Along with the children's market lambs, the Kuzemchaks have a small flock of Dorset and South-down breeding sheep. Their sheep are raised on a friend's farm in nearby Buffalo Run.

Along with her champion market lamb win, Julie also captured the reserve champion carcass lamb trophy, both on-foot and on-rail.

When asked what was the most difficult part about showing market lambs, since she makes winning seem easy, Julie admitted it was the fact that after working and winning with the lambs, she knew they'd be slaughtered. "I cry every year," she confessed, as her

eyes began to mist. "I get so attached to them."

Fourteen-year-old Joyce Harpster also admitted to a special attachment as she held onto her reserve grand champion Suffolk wether. With a blush of excitement coloring her cheeks, she explained that the blouse she was wearing is her "lucky blouse."

"I wore this blouse when I showed this lamb and won the county fair, and again when I won at the Keystone International Livestock Exposition," explained Joyce, the daughter of Harold E. and Shirley Harpster of Boalsburg. Joyce didn't recall if she had worn the blouse when she picked out her market lamb from the flock at Pine Haven Farm, Newville.

Although sheep are an important part of the Harpster's farm operation, dairy cattle, goats and hogs also share the 65-acre operation. In the milking lineup, 35 head of registered Jerseys and Holsteins are joined by 23 milking does. And Spotted Swine and Durocs belonging to Joyce and

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Lancaster County sheep showman Barbara Rohrer demonstrated her relaxed, controlled style of handling her lamb in the show ring. The 12-year-old's showmanship ability caught the eye of judge Richard Cobb who selected Barbara as the grand champion showman during stiff competition on Wednesday at Farm Show.