

So You Want to Show Your Cat



So you've signed up for a cat show, and you've never done this before, and you're wondering what to expect, and how to groom your cat for the show, and what to bring... Well, you've come to the right place. This document explains:

- ◆ What to do before the cat show
- ◆ How to groom your cat before the show
- ◆ What to bring to the show
- ◆ What happens at a cat show
- ◆ How to groom your cat at the show

Chapter 1

A Pre-Show Checklist

This chapter briefly lists the things you'll want to do after entering the cat show of your choice (which we assume you've done, since you're reading this document.)

- ◆ Check the information on your show confirmation (which you should receive a few weeks before the show). Be sure it's correct. Inform the entry clerk as soon as possible if you find any errors.
- ◆ Clear your calendar for the day(s) of the show. Your cat is expected to remain in the show hall throughout "advertised show hours" – typically, from 9 AM to 5 PM (check the show flyer or the show website for the exact hours.) You will need to arrive ½ hour to an hour early for check-in (again, check the show flyer for check-in times).
- ◆ Be sure your cat's vaccinations are up-to-date. Although you probably won't need to provide proof of this, it's still important, since it helps to protect your cat from contagious disease. (A cat show is an excellent place to pick up diseases.)
- ◆ Make sure your cat does not have fleas, ear mites, or a communicable disease. If a judge finds signs of disease or parasites on your cat, he can disqualify it and ask you and all your cats to leave the show hall. If your cat does have fleas, shampoo with a flea shampoo a week before the show and again a day or two before the show. If in doubt, consult your vet.
- ◆ If your cat's fur has a tendency to mat, remove any mats or tangles. Try to start this process gradually, several weeks before the show. That way, you can remove the mats a little at a time, rather than cutting or tearing out large mats the day before the show; large-scale mat removal can leave unsightly bald spots.
- ◆ If your cat has stud tail (greasy or oily fur on the top of the tail, usually near the base), start dealing with it at least a week before the show. (See "Dealing with Stud Tail" in Chapter 2.)
- ◆ The day before the show, clip your cat's claws, front and back. (See "Clipping Your Cat's Claws" in Chapter 2.)
- ◆ Shampoo your cat the day before the show. (See "Inflicting a Basic Bath" in Chapter 2.)
- ◆ Make sure your cat's ears are clean and free of dirt and accumulated ear wax. You can remove visible ear wax by gently swabbing the ear with a cotton ball dipped in a little mineral oil and wrapped around your finger. Don't probe into the ear canal.
- ◆ The night before the show, pack the equipment and grooming supplies you'll need. (See "Packing for the Show" in Chapter 3.)

Chapter 2

Grooming Your Cat Before the Show



Most cats, even shorthairs, need special grooming before a show. I'm not going to try to give an in-depth course on grooming here. There are several good publications available that explain how to groom your cat in more detail than I can cover here; look for them at your pet store, vet's office, or book store. This chapter covers the following topics:

- ◆ Grooming Supplies
- ◆ Clipping Your Cat's Claws
- ◆ Inflicting A Basic Bath
- ◆ Dealing with a Really Oily Coat
- ◆ Dealing with Stud Tail

Grooming Supplies

Most cats do just fine grooming themselves with their tongues. But if *you're* going to be doing the grooming, you probably won't want to use your tongue; and you can be pretty sure your cat won't lend you his. So you are probably going to need some grooming supplies. You probably won't need all of the supplies described in this section, or even most of them, unless you really get into showing. But you will almost certainly need one or two of them.

Combs

Regardless of the length of your cat's coat (unless it's a Sphynx), a comb will probably come in handy. Combs are great for removing mats, detangling, and general grooming. Whatever type of comb you get, be sure that its teeth have rounded ends so that they won't damage your cat's skin or coat. Some tips on combs:

- ◆ Stainless steel combs are best: they resist bending, won't break, and won't rust.
- ◆ I don't recommend plastic combs, as they add huge amounts of static to the cat's coat.
- ◆ Some combs have two "grades" of teeth, fine and coarse; I like these for their versatility.
- ◆ Flea combs have very fine teeth, and are great for combing out dirt, fleas, and dandruff.

Brushes

The type of brush that's best for your cat depends on the cat's coat length and texture. (Whatever type of brush you get, don't use one made of plastic — it can cause problems with static.) You'll have to experiment to see what works best for your cat; but here are some rough guidelines.

Pin brush (also called a styling brush)	Has sparse, stiff pins with ball ends. You can get one at a pet store, or in the brush section of any drug store. A pin brush fluffs up the fur, so it works best on longhairs. (On some cats, like Maine Coons, a pin brush may be appropriate only for the parts of the coat that are supposed to be fluffy, such as the ruff and britches.)
Bristle brush	Has many closely spaced, fairly soft bristles. (Natural bristles tend to be softer, and damage the coat and skin less.) Many shorthaired cats do quite well with a bristle brush; it can help to shed dead fur without damaging the rest of the coat. Bristle brushes don't tend to work as well on longhairs because they don't get down into the thicker fur. (However, I like to use a bristle brush behind my Maine Coons' ears, where the fur is shorter and the skin is too tender for a pin brush.)
Slicker brush	Has many closely spaced, fine wire bristles, often bent at an angle. A slicker brush can be very effective at shedding dead fur, but because it is a fairly harsh brush, it can sometimes damage the coat (or pull out fur that isn't ready to shed). It also tends to smooth the coat, rather than fluff it up. Slicker brushes aren't a great idea for most longhairs, unless you are battling mats and accumulated undercoat. Be careful using a slicker brush on the belly; it can scratch the cat's nipples painfully.

Shampoo

The most important thing about the shampoo you choose for your cat is that it be *safe for cats*. It's a good idea to stick to the following types of shampoo when bathing your cat:

People shampoo	Most people shampoo is safe for cats. In fact, for cats with oily coats, "oily hair" people shampoo sometimes works better than the expensive "show cat" shampoos. (Flex "Extra Body for Oily Hair" works well, for example). For seriously oily coats, try dishwashing liquid (see below).
Flea shampoo	(For washing cats, not for washing fleas). Some flea shampoos are more medicinal than cosmetic, and aren't ideal when grooming for a show: they can be too harsh, and can leave the coat rough, dry and smelling of flea-killing chemicals. However, there are several flea shampoos that work well for show grooming, including Mycodex and Adams Flea Shampoo. Of course, one major advantage of using a flea shampoo for a show bath is the effect it has on any fleas that might be hanging around.

- Dishwashing liquid A good old basic liquid dish-washing detergent, such as Dawn, is great for oily coats, since it cuts the grease quite effectively. (It's not always the best thing for dry coats.) Other basic, good-quality dishwashing liquids, such as Joy, Woolite and Ivory, also work well. Stay away from the perfumey ones. Also, some cats have very sensitive skin, so if your cat is itchy or gets dandruff after being bathed with Dawn (for example), either switch to a gentler shampoo or dilute the detergent at least 1:10 before putting it on the cat. Woolite is the gentlest of the bunch.
- Goop If you have a Maine Coon or another cat with a generally greasy/oily coat, you may want to apply Goop (waterless handcleaning cream) to the oily areas immediately before bathing. Use *only* Goop brand handcleaner – nearly all other brands of waterless hand cleaner contain ingredients toxic to cats.
- “Show cat” shampoo There are many brands of shampoo designed specifically for cats. Most of these are just fine; all are rather expensive. I've tried many of them, and prefer the Ring 5 brand. Most of the “show cat” shampoos I've tried aren't as effective at cleaning really oily coats as “oily hair” people shampoo or Dawn.
- Orvus Orvus is pure Sodium Lauryl Sulfate – the stuff that makes most other shampoos sudsy. It's sold at feed stores in giant 1-gallon jars as a horse shampoo. We have found that Orvus works even better than fancy shampoos, is gentle enough for even the most sensitive skin, and rinses out more easily too. In fact, it's the only shampoo we use on our cats, unless we need to kill fleas or something.
- Hand cleaner A waterless, petroleum-based hand cleaner, such as Goop, Gojo, or DIF, is great for treating stud tail, or for de-greasing a seriously oily coat. (Be sure the cleaner is non-toxic.) Just rub a glob into the problem area while the cat is still dry. Let it sit a minute or two, then rub some shampoo or Dawn dishwashing liquid into the Goop and mush it around till your cat is thoroughly fed up. Then, rinse out the Goop and shampoo as usual.

Anti-Static Coat Gloss Spray

Static can be a real grooming headache: your cat looks gorgeous, you give it one last brushing before it goes into the judging ring, and -- snap, crackle, pop -- your gorgeous Persian suddenly bears a disturbing resemblance to Bill the Cat. Ack!! Besides looking all stuck-together, grooming powder can cling tenaciously to staticky fur, which makes the powder almost impossible to brush out.

Unluckily for those of us who've spent happy hours brushing our cats till they crackled and then sticking them to the ceiling, there is an easy cure for coat static: *use an anti-static coat spray*. Ring 5 brand has a terrific anti-static spray called Coat Gloss. I've never noticed much of a change in shine, but the stuff sure does get rid of the static! Just squirt a little into your hands, rub them together, and then pat the cat and rub the stuff well into his coat. I wouldn't advise spraying it directly on a skittish cat...



Specialty Grooming Supplies

The following grooming supplies are ones you may find useful, but which you can probably do without until you really get into showing.

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| Chamois cloth | If your cat has a very glossy coat, you may want to use a leather chamois cloth to smooth and shine the coat. Just stroke the cat with the chamois in a long sweeping motion from head to tail. (Don't use this for coats that should not lie flat along the body.) |
| Grooming powder | An oil-absorbing powder can make a long coat fluff up beautifully. Use either specialized grooming powder (available at pet shops) or cornstarch baby powder. Don't use kitchen cornstarch (it leaves the coat feeling greasy) or talc baby powder (it's not very good for the cat's innards). See "Grooming at the Show," later in this chapter, for information on how to powder your cat's coat. |
| Fuller's Earth | To treat problem greasies (for example, behind the ears), you can use a bit of fuller's earth, an oil-absorbent mineral powder that's available at many pet shops. Rub a pinch into the problem area, let sit a minute or two, then brush out. (Because fuller's earth doesn't agree with cats' innards, it's not a good idea to use large quantities of it.) |
| Alcohol | A cotton ball soaked in alcohol may be the only way to get stud tail under control in the show hall, where you can't exactly haul your cat off to the rest room for a quick bath. See "Dealing With Stud Tail," later in this chapter, for more information on stud tail. |

Clipping Your Cat's Claws

Most shows require that you clip your cat's claws, front and back, before entering the show hall. This helps to protect the judges, you, and your cat from injury. It's prudent to clip your cat's claws before bathing it. You can use either a people or animal nail clipper. Here are some clipping tips:

- ◆ Sit in a well-lit chair with the cat held securely in your lap. If your cat is feeling particularly uncooperative, have a helper sit and hold the cat while you kneel in front of them and wield the clipper. Hold the cat's paw (or have your helper hold it) firmly in your left hand.
- ◆ To extend a claw from its sheath, squeeze the toe and claw vertically between your left thumb and forefinger.
- ◆ Before the cat can snatch his paw away, clip off the sharp white portion of the claw. Be sure not to cut into the quick (the pink part).
- ◆ Don't forget about the cat's "thumb" (dewclaw), which is partway up the cat's front paw on the inside edge of his wrist.
- ◆ Work quickly; most cats get restless after about a paw and a half. For some cats, you may have to do two paws, then take a break before doing the other two.
- ◆ If your cat has extra toes, be careful; for many cats, handling these can be uncomfortable. However, it's particularly important to clip the extra claws because they are easily caught on things and damaged.

Inflicting a Basic Bath

Bathing your cat need not be a terrible ordeal, especially if you have help. The best place I've found to do it is in the kitchen sink. It's best if you have a spray hose so you can direct the water, but a faucet will do OK too.

Before you get the cat into the sink:

- ◆ Clip the cat's claws. (This is a basic survival technique when bathing a cat.)
- ◆ Make sure the room is warm; this will help to avoid chilling the cat. You might also want to "pre-heat" a small, clean, secure room, such as a bathroom, where the cat can hang out after its bath so it won't get chilled. (We use a small, portable oscillating space heater.)
- ◆ Get a couple of towels ready, but out of range of any stray water. If you have the option, keep the towels hot in the drier so that they will be nice and warm and will help keep the cat from becoming chilled.
- ◆ Get your shampoos ready. Open the bottles so that you won't need to fiddle with opening them later, when you have your hands full.
- ◆ If your cat has a coat that's hard to get wet (you can spray water on a Maine Coon or a Norwegian Forest Cat till the cows come home, and its undercoat still won't get wet), you may want to prepare a *wetting solution*. To do so, fill the sink with 4" of warm water and put a squirt of Woolite (or other non-perfumed dish detergent) in. (Put the soap in after you fill the sink, or you'll have a sinkful of suds.)

When you and your assistant are ready:

1. (Optional) Before you actually wet the cat, apply Goop. (We normally do this on the kitchen counter rather than in the sink.) Rub it in well on the problem areas, such as behind the cat's ears and under its chin.
2. If you prepared a wetting solution (i.e. filled the sink with 4" of water & added soap), have a helper put the cat into the water and hold it there. He may have to scruff the cat, but normally just holding it down firmly around the chest is sufficient.) Then use a large plastic cup to pour the solution on the cat. Rub it in, and continue pouring soapy water on the cat until its coat stops repelling water and gets wet. Some cats will let you lie them down on their side in the water until they are immersed (except for the head, which you should holding up out of the water). Once the cat's coat gets wet, you can let the soapy water out of the sink and proceed with step 3.
3. Run the water till it's quite warm but not really hot. Leave the drain open so that there's no standing water in the sink.
4. With the water still running, have a helper put the cat into the sink and hold it there (if it's not already there from Step 2). (He may have to scruff the cat, but normally just holding it down firmly around the chest is sufficient.)
5. Get the cat thoroughly wet, if it isn't already.
6. Suds the cat with the shampoo of your choice. Be sure to get the greasier areas behind the ears and on the belly (especially the lower belly). Be careful not to get shampoo or water in the cat's ears or face.
7. Rinse *thoroughly*.
8. You may want to repeat a second suds-and-rinse cycle, especially if the cat still feels oily.
9. Rinse, rinse, rinse! A very thorough rinse is possibly the most important part of the bath: if you leave any shampoo in the coat, it won't look clean, and this whole ordeal will have been for naught. One technique for speeding up rinsing is to use a *vinegar rinse* -- a half gallon of warm water to which 1-2 cups of white vinegar has been added. (Be sure to rinse thoroughly with water after you pour the vinegar rinse over your cat, or it will smell like a pickle at the show...)
10. After a final rinse, squeeze water out of the cat's fur, and then run your hand backwards up the fur to make sure there is no more soap in the coat. If the coat is free of soap, turn off the water. Squeeze as much water as possible out of the cat's fur first, then remove from the sink and wrap in a large towel.
11. Towel dry, preferably in a warm room.
12. If your cat will put up with it, blow dry (or at least blow damp) so that he won't get chilled. Keep the drier moving -- there's no need to use a brush or comb, but using one (carefully) will help dry the fur faster. If he won't put up with being blown dry, be sure he's in a nice warm room (such as the pre-heated bathroom we discussed earlier). If you notice him shivering, try to get him to sit in your lap or on a warm heating pad. A seriously shivering cat is a good reason to try again with the blow drier. If the cat is particularly recalcitrant, but shivering badly, you can try putting him in a carrier and directing the hot air through the (closed!) carrier door. He won't be thrilled, but he'll be warmer.

Dealing With a Really Oily Coat

You can treat a really oily coat by washing with Goop and/or Dawn as described above, before your normal shampoo routine. Don't use a shampoo with lots of conditioners, since it will undo all your hard de-greasing work. Stick to Dawn, Mycodex, and/or people shampoo.

If your cat's coat is so oily that it greases up even after a bath, you may have to do a *powder pack* the night before the show, or in the hotel between show days. You'll need help. To do a powder pack, have your helper hold the cat firmly while you powder it (the cat, not your helper) *thoroughly* all over. Use lots of powder, and rub it in well. Then, brush and blow the powder out with a pin brush and a blow-drier set to Cool. Your helper may need to practically sit on the cat: I have not yet met the cat that faces a powder-pack with a cool, calm demeanor. (Because it can lighten the color, don't powder-pack a black or dark-colored cat.)

Dealing With a Cat You Can't Bathe

OK, so not many cats hop eagerly into the sink and wait for you to suds 'em up. But some cats have what might be described as a fatalistic attitude about baths (as in, "You get me wet and someone is gonna die.") If your cat is one of these, you'll probably find out pretty quick. You'll probably also decide you don't feel like bathing this cat after all.

For a cat that absolutely comes unglued in a water bath, try a series of powder baths instead. A powder bath is similar to a powder pack, but considerably less traumatic because you just let the cat go afterward. You'll need goodly quantities of white, unscented cornstarch baby powder. (Don't use talc.)

You can powder-bathe a cat of any color -- even a black cat. However, if your cat is a dark color, start powdering earlier, and don't powder within 3 days of the show.

To give a powder bath:

1. Get your cat all nice and settled on the floor, preferably on a towel, and pet him till he forgets about being suspicious.
2. Still petting, sprinkle lots and lots and *lots* of powder on the cat. (You might want to have a helper pet & hold the cat while you sprinkle.) Use slightly more powder than you think you really need.
3. Rub the powder in well. Make sure it gets right down to the roots of the fur.
4. Let the cat go. (Unless, of course, you have black velvet furniture.) The powder will settle out of his fur over the next day or so. (He'll groom some of it out, too. If it's cornstarch, it won't hurt him a bit.)

To be effective, you'll need to start this at least a week before the show and repeat it at least once. Powder baths at 10 days before the show, 6 days ahead, and 2 days ahead seem to work well (the last powder bath should 3 days before the show if your cat's color is dark)

If the cat still looks a little dusty the night before the show, rub him all over with a warm, damp washcloth, then with a clean dry towel.

Dealing With Stud Tail

Many male cats have some degree of *stud tail*: the accumulation of a nasty, waxy, oily substance at the base of the cat's tail. It's usually more of a problem with whole (unaltered) males, but females and altered males can get it too. Stud tail is a normal condition, the natural result of a gland that secretes this substance and is stimulated by normal hormonal activity; but it's a real pain in the tail if you're trying to show the cat.

You should treat stud tail before your normal pre-show grooming procedures; sprinkling a bit of powder on untreated stud tail at the show hall will do little (except, perhaps, create an interesting cake on your cat's tail). Follow these steps:

1. If your cat has an ongoing or extreme case of stud tail, start with the Heavy Artillery: Goop, DIF, GoJo, or any other nontoxic, waterless, petroleum-based hand cleaner. (I'm told that Listerine also works well, but I've never tried it myself.) Rub the hand cleaner into the gucky area of your cat's tail, and let it sit five minutes (keep your cat from licking it off; this shouldn't be too difficult, since the stuff tastes pretty vile). Rinse out using warm water.
2. Wash the cat's tail with Dawn dishwashing liquid (other grease-cutting dish liquids should also work). Scrub gently at the fur and underlying skin with your fingernails or with a soft bristle brush. Major scrubbing may be necessary if there's yellow scaly guck accumulated on the skin below the fur. (If there's a lot of yellow guck, consider using an antiseborrheic shampoo such as Neutrogena's T-Gel -- on the stud tail only, not the entire cat.)
3. Rinse. Repeat steps 1 and 2 several (one to four) times, until the tail fur feels like fur again instead of like waxed dental floss.
4. Bathe as usual.

You may want to start the anti-stud-tail campaign several days before the show, and repeat steps 1 and 2 above each night, with a full bath on the evening before the show. If your cat has an extreme case of stud tail, try bathing it with anti-seborrheic people shampoo. (We've had good luck with Neutrogena's T-Gel shampoo.)

To keep a medium case of stud tail at bay, dust heavily with cornstarch (use baby powder cornstarch if possible; kitchen cornstarch seems to have something buttery about it). Let sit 15 minutes; dust again, and brush out. (If the stud tail is not too bad and you repeat the dusting daily, you may not need the Heavy Artillery.)

Dealing With Stud Tail at the Show Hall

So, you ask, what if you do suddenly discover, on the way to the judging ring, that your cat's tail looks as if you buttered your bread with it this morning? Well, there *is* a last-minute panic "cure" for stud tail, but your cat probably won't like it much. (But then, he won't like the tail bath above, either.) Soak a cotton ball in rubbing alcohol, wipe it on the yucky part of his tail, and then wipe off the alcohol and the waxy guck with a towel. Keep doing this until you have either conquered the stud tail enough to put the cat in the ring, or your cat has gotten completely fed up with you. (It stings, so be gentle. Also, it might not put your cat in the most terrific mood, so you might want to avoid handing him to a judge immediately afterwards.)

Chapter 3

Taking Your Cat to the Show

This chapter explains how to pack for a cat show, what to do when you get there, and what to expect. It covers the following topics:

- ◆ Packing for the Show
- ◆ So What Happens at a Cat Show?
- ◆ Grooming at the Show

Packing for the Show

Before you go to bed the night before the show, check the show flier to find out the show hours. In general, plan to arrive about an hour before the advertised starting time of the show.

The night before the show, you might want to pack the things you will bring to the show. You will need to bring the following to the show hall:

- ◆ (Most important) your cat. Bring him in a secure cat carrier. (But don't pack him the night before!)
- ◆ Food and water dishes. Some shows provide these, but they are usually flimsy. Bring something your cat won't be able to knock over easily: there's not much space in a cage.
- ◆ Food your cat is used to. There's no sense in upsetting an already stressed cat's digestive system with fancy new food. Kitty treats are OK in moderation, and they may help to convince your cat that going to a cat show has its benefits. One healthy kitty treat is meat baby food, offered on a spoon (don't put it on your finger unless you are certain your cat won't get too excited and chow down on both the baby food *and* your finger).
- ◆ Water from home, or bottled water. Water from a strange town can cause diarrhea -- not exactly what you want on the day of the show after you're miles from your kitchen sink and kitty shampoo.
- ◆ A litter pan. (A few shows usually provide folding, disposable cardboard pans that aren't very big and don't stand up to much abuse. It's best to bring your own.) Make sure your pan is small enough to fit through the cage door (usually about 12" wide).
- ◆ Most shows provide cat litter. If your cat is picky about his brand of litter, you might want to bring your own. (Most people figure their cat can either deal with the show's brand of litter, or hold it till they get home.)
- ◆ Curtains, sheets, or towels to cover the sides, bottom, and top of the cage. The cage dimensions are usually listed in the show flier. As long as the material is reasonably opaque, it doesn't really matter what you use. People make all sorts of fancy cage curtains, but for a first or second show, towels or sheets held in place with safety pins or clothespins are just fine.

- ◆ Grooming supplies, such as a brush and comb, chamois (for a shorthair), etc. (See Chapter 2 for information on grooming and grooming supplies.)

It's also a good idea to bring the following items:

- ◆ A clean washcloth and one or more clean towels. These are useful for last-minute degreasing, plus they come in handy in all sorts of situations.
- ◆ Paper towels -- they always come in handy.
- ◆ Something warm and comfy that smells like home (a blanket or towel, for example). (This is for comforting the cat, not you.)
- ◆ A pen or pencil. I like the kind attached to a cord so that you can wear it around your neck. That way, even if things get crazy and you're running several directions at once, at least you'll always have your pen.
- ◆ A kitty toy or two, for distracting your cat when he gets bored.
- ◆ A "Do Not Touch" sign to hang or tape on the front of your cat's cage. Well-meaning spectators can inadvertently transfer germs from cat to cat by petting or touching them. Most exhibitors do not allow people to touch their cats uninvited. This is not because they are unfriendly or snobbish: they are tired of paying vet bills. You may also want to bring a sign telling spectators your cat's breed and name, and perhaps his sex and age.
- ◆ Antihistamines and Tylenol. Everyone I know seems to get headaches at cat shows. And many who think they aren't allergic to cats turn out to be, when there are 250 cats in the same room and they are all getting brushed at the same time.
- ◆ Your checkbook, or cash, unless you don't want to spend any money. Most cat shows have a great selection of vendors. Pet supplies are often cheaper from show vendors than they are at pet shops because the vendors don't have as much overhead. If possible, don't bring your purse (or keep it well hidden if you do); you can't always be right by the cage. Theft is very rare, but it does happen, and the usual target is an exhibitor's purse.)

So What Happens at a Cat Show?

Let's suppose that judging starts at 9 AM, so you arrive at the show hall around 8 AM. You'll register at the front desk as you enter the show hall. They'll tell you where you are *benched* (where your assigned cage is). Be sure to get a catalog. You'll need one -- without it, the show will be practically incomprehensible. Write your name, your cat's number, and your aisle or row number on the front cover.

Then go to your cage and get your cage hangings and rugs set up. It's easiest to take the cage off the table and put it on the floor while you lay material on the table for the bottom of the cage. While the cage is on the floor, it's also easier to pin or clip the hangings to the sides. It's a good idea to make sure the inside of the cage is covered -- that is, that the hangings are between your cat and the wire cage. Then put the cage, with its hangings, back on the table, and put the covering material on the top of the cage. Be sure the top of the cage is secured well, so that the cat can't push up one corner and get out when no one's watching. Strong safety pins are good for this.

Don't take your cat out of the carrier until the cage is completely set up. When it's ready, introduce your cat to the cage. He'll probably be upset. Don't worry -- most cats get upset the first time they find themselves in a show hall. He will probably calm down soon. (If he doesn't, playing with him can often help.)

While your cat is calming down in the cage, take a look at the back of the catalog. There should be a judging schedule there which tells you where you'll need to take your cat.

When and where will my cat be judged?

There are usually four to seven judges per day; each judge has a separate schedule and his or her own *judging ring* -- ten or twelve undecorated cages arranged behind a judging stand. The rings are referred to by number (for example, Ring 1, Ring 2, and so on). Each judge works independently and does not confer with the other judges.

Your cat will visit each judging ring in the course of the day. It's a good idea to circle your cat's events on the schedule, so that you can see at a glance when your cat has to go to each ring. For example, if your cat is a *longhaired alter* (a neutered or spayed purebred), you would circle the "LH Alter" event in each ring's column.

What do Specialty (SP) and Allbreed (AB) mean?

There are two types of judging rings: Specialty and Allbreed. In a Specialty (SP) ring, longhairs (LH) compete only against longhairs, and shorthairs (SH) against shorthairs. For example, a Specialty ring has two separate Kitten events, each with its own separate *final* (during which the judge awards rosettes to the best competitors): LH Kittens, with a LH Kitten Final; and SH Kittens, with a SH Kitten Final. In an Allbreed (AB) ring, longhairs and shorthairs compete together for the top ten places. For example, in an Allbreed ring, the judge judges the LH Kittens and the SH Kittens, and then holds an Allbreed Kitten Final to present the overall top ten kittens regardless of hair length.

How do I know when to bring my cat up to the ring?

When a judge is ready to judge your cat and the others in its class, the clerk or announcer will call for the cats they need. Sometimes they call specific cat numbers ("Cats 408, 409, 411, 412 and 415 to Ring 4") and sometimes they will call the entire class (for example, "All longhaired alters to Ring 3.") It's a good idea to check the judging schedule ahead of time and keep an eye on the judging ring in which you expect your cat's event next. Make sure your cat is groomed and ready to go. (See "Grooming at the Show," below, for information about how to do last-minute grooming.)

When you see your cat's catalog number being put up on a cage in the ring, or when they call the cat's number or class, finish up your grooming, carry your cat to the judging ring, and put him into the cage that has his number on it. Then sit (or stand) in front of the ring and watch the fun.

What happens during judging?

The judge takes each cat out of its cage in turn, places it on the judging stand, and looks carefully at it. For example, a judge will usually stretch a Maine Coon to its full body length so that he can judge whether the cat's body is long enough to fit the Maine Coon breed standard. For Household Pets, there is no breed standard, so the judge simply examines each household pet to see whether it's clean, well-groomed, and healthy. The judge will also look at the cat's color and markings, and may check out its personality by offering it a cat toy to play with.

After judging the cat (this usually takes only about 30 seconds), the judge replaces the cat in the cage, marks the judging book, and hangs any ribbons that the cat has earned during this judging round. When the judge has finished judging your cat's class, the clerk will take down your cat's number. That's the signal for you to remove the cat from the cage and return him to his "home" cage. (If the ribbons are laminated in plastic, don't take them.)

If your cat is unwilling to let the judge take him out of the cage, the judge may hold up the cat's number or verbally call for the owner. You should then take your cat out of the cage and place him on the judging stand for the judge. Some judges will ask you to stay and distract the cat while he's being judged; others will tell you that you can go sit down again.

What should I do (and not do) during judging?

There are certain rules of conduct that exhibitors should follow during judging:

- Enter the ring (behind the judging stand) only to drop off or pick up your cat, or if the judge or clerk asks you to come up for some reason.
- Don't speak to the judge unless he speaks to you first. (One exception: if your cat wins a rosette, it's OK to thank the judge.) If you have something to convey to the judge -- for example, to let them know that there's an error in the catalog) go up and speak to the clerk, not the judge.
- If you have questions about what's going on, ask another exhibitor. (Don't ask the judge.)
- Don't comment on any cat within the judge's hearing. In fact, you might want to avoid commenting on the other cats even if the judge can't hear you; you never know -- the cat's owner might be right behind you.

Finals

After judging all the cats in a category (Kittens, HHPs, Alters, etc.), the judge decides which he feels are the best ten cats in that entire category. The lucky cats' numbers then go up on the cages in that ring; the announcer will probably say something like "Longhair alter finals in Ring 3; please check your numbers." Go look at the ring in question; if your cat's number is up, put him in that cage. There's usually no need to groom him again, since most judges have already made up their minds. (A few judges don't decide on a relative 1 through 10 ranking until the top ten cats are all there for the finals. The judge will then walk around and decide how he's going to rank them. Therefore, make sure your cat always looks at least presentable.) Then sit down and wait for the finals to begin.

Grooming at the Show

During the show, you may want to do some final touch-up grooming; but, unless you have a Persian or Himalayan that needs a full-blown fluff-up, you shouldn't need to spend a lot of time at it. (Because I've never properly groomed a Persian for a show, I'm not going to try to describe it here; if you have a Persian, ask your breeder how to groom it for the show.)

What I'm going to describe here is a good basic last-minute grooming routine that should work fine for your first show or two. After that, you'll have figured out what works best for you and your cat, picked up some hints from fellow exhibitors, and so on.

First, figure out the judging schedule; that's more important than grooming your cat! If your cat looks gorgeous, but you miss the event, that great grooming job doesn't do you any good...

When you first get to the hall and have set up your cat's cage, you may want to do one major grooming. Then, before each ring, a quick touch-up is all your cat should need (again, unless you have a Persian).

An Initial Show Grooming Checklist

When you first get to the show hall and have set up, give your cat a thorough going-over. In general, this initial grooming should carry you through the day with only minor touch-ups.

- ◆ Brush or comb your cat's coat thoroughly; get out any remaining tangles or mats.
- ◆ Make sure your cat's ears are clean. Swab out any ear wax with a cotton ball dipped in a little mineral oil.
- ◆ With a damp washcloth or your finger, remove any crusty "sleepers" from your cat's tear ducts and the corners of its nose. If there are tear stains, wipe with a damp washcloth.
- ◆ Double-check the cat's back end for cleanliness.
- ◆ If your cat has fluffy parts, you can make them fluffier using grooming powder and a pin brush. Shake a fair amount of powder on the part you want to fluff, and rub it in with your hand. Then, by brushing and blowing on the powdered fur (if your cat puts up with being blown at) remove as much of the powder as possible. Don't powder a black cat -- it will turn gray. Also, be careful when powdering other dark colors, such as brown tabby; powder lightens those colors too.
- ◆ You can also use grooming powder to de-grease an oily coat. Use as described above, but use more. (Again, don't powder a dark cat.)
- ◆ If your cat's coat is looking greasy and you can't or don't want to use powder, try a quick "sponge bath." Rub the cat well all over with a warm, damp washcloth, and then dry by rubbing thoroughly all over with a clean, dry towel.
- ◆ Rubbing alcohol is a good "emergency" treatment for stud tail in the show hall. (I've heard that Listerine also works -- in a pinch.) Be sure you apply it, and dry it, well before your cat is due to be judged. (See "Dealing With Stud Tail", earlier in this document, for more about last-minute treatments for stud tail.)

A Quick Touch-Up Grooming Checklist

Before each ring, you should do a quick touch-up grooming. This can include the following:

- ◆ Make sure the cat's eyes, ears and nose are clean.
- ◆ Double-check the cat's back end for cleanliness.
- ◆ Comb or brush the cat so that it looks its best.
- ◆ If your cat has fluffy parts, re-fluff them with a pin brush. You can use powder or not.
- ◆ Fluff a fluffy tail by powdering it, then back-brush it thoroughly while holding on to the tip. Brush out all the powder by blowing and back-brushing. Your cat will hate it, but his tail will be gorgeous.
- ◆ For a cat with a close-lying or glossy coat, you can give the coat a finishing shine by stroking with a chamois cloth.

Grooming Tips for Semi-Longhaired Cats

Because we have Maine Coon Cats, we've learned how to groom them the best. Here are some grooming tips particularly for Maine Coons and similar semi-longhaired cats.

- ◆ Maine Coons' coats vary in length. You'll find that some parts fluff up while others lie smooth and others are shaggy, but not fluffy. Fluff the cat's fluffy parts (ruff, cheek tufts, tummy fur, britches and tail) as described above. Pin brushes and powder work well on most semi-longhairs (except black or dark coats). Most Maine Coons have fairly oily coats and respond well to powdering.
- ◆ Comb the body fur straight down the back and diagonally down the sides so that its markings (if any) are clear.
- ◆ All our Maine Coons grease up behind their ears. We use powder or fuller's earth behind their ears, and brush it out with a soft bristle brush. I have to powder behind some cats' ears before every ring.