

Posing Modern Game Bantams

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Over the years, much has been written about judging Moderns, but very little that I have seen, about posing them properly in order to let the bird show itself to its full potential. This perspective is offered to both breeders and judges. After all, if we as breeders cannot correctly judge our own stock, how can we be expected to choose the right specimens for the breeding pen or the show hall? As judges, bringing out the best in a bird at a show is an art as well. Different breeds require different techniques, and what works say, for an Old English, will not work for a Modern. I'm sure the same holds true for many other breeds of which I confess my ignorance.

Before a bird can be trained to pose, it must be tamed and settled enough to become comfortable being in the show coop, and to have the trainer handle it. Treats such as bread or soft dog treats can be used to gain the bird's confidence, and get it to naturally come to the front of the coop when someone approaches. Handle the bird gently and often during this process. If after a few sessions you are not making progress, that bird is probably never going to be a show prospect. Moderns, by their nature, are a docile breed. Males are naturally harder to tame, and there are some differences between varieties and strains. Tameness is a trait than can be acquired by culling unworthy specimens. Remember breeders, as a judge once told me; "it is not the judge's job to train the exhibitors' birds."

Once an acceptable comfort level has been attained, begin to train the bird to pose. There are two ways that I was taught to pose the bird to its best advantage. First, use your hand to nudge the bird into a proper stance. It should be erect on its legs, wings held perfectly horizontal to the floor, neck stretched out but not exaggerated beyond the natural range, and the tail held near horizontal and whipped - tightly held together. Once this pose is achieved, use the hand to hold it steady for gradually longer periods. Begin to remove your hand and when the bird will hold the pose on its own for several seconds, you are ready for pose number two.

.Pose number two involves the use of a judging stick. Many breeders and judges apparently don't carry one, if observation at the shows is any indication. The stick should be introduced gradually, and the bird will probably at least peck at it until it realizes the stick is not a threat. Other birds may become extremely agitated and fearful of the stick. Be patient and leave the stick resting against the inside of the cage for a while. The bird will usually calm down after a bit. Some folks even offer bread on the end of the stick to overcome the bird's fear. After the bird has accepted the stick, it is used to pose the bird in the same way as with the hand (see above).

Many birds will respond better one way than the other. I try to train mine both ways and just hope that when they are at a show, the judge will use both methods and find which way works best for that individual bird.

I have witnessed a lot of other ways that people use to try and get a Modern to “show”. Just a few that come to mind are: banging on the cage to get it moving, slipping a hand under the bird to lift it a few inches off the cage floor and dropping it, and using an ink pen to poke down from the top of the cage to try and get the bird’s attention. All of these result in the bird being scared, and a scared Modern is not a pretty sight! Another approach is the use of a large shaving (looks like a piece of bread?) to entice the bird to stretch as high as possible through the top of the cage. This results in an unnatural pose that may show reach, but nothing else. The wings drop to achieve balance and the result looks like a giraffe eating from the treetops, not a Modern displaying its inherently regal manner.

I could go on, but I hope I have made my point. The important thing is to get the Modern to show its station and bearing in a natural way. The two methods I have described work for me, and were taught to me by one of the masters of the breed in the latter half of the 20th century, Weldon Idol. I claim no credit for innovation in this matter, but rather merely being astute enough to recognize a good thing when I see it.

Hopefully this article will be taken in the manner in which it is intended – to inform, not criticize. I have the utmost respect for the difficult job that judges do. To try and be an expert on so many varieties and so many breeds seems an almost impossible task. As a school teacher, I have become committed to being a life-long learner. I teach gifted children and sometimes it is a real challenge to stay ahead of my students! We as poultry people should be life-long learners as well. I know I make mistakes every year, but part of the thrill in this hobby is figuring out something new that works, and putting it to use!