

Leading in the Show Ring

By: Lyndsey Keller

When leading your lamb during a show, you aren't supposed to use a halter on your lamb. Some shows/judges will allow you to use a halter, but it is preferred that you do not use one. You can't just expect your lamb to go into the show ring knowing how to be led without its halter, so you must train it to do so. In order to do this, pick a day when you have nothing better to do (what's better than sheep?) and get your lamb out. Practice nothing but leading without the halter. When leading your lamb, place one hand under its chin near the jaw line and your other hand on the back of your lamb's head, right below the ears. Using slight pressure, gently pull on your lamb's head in the direction you would like it to go. If your lamb will not walk when you are leading it, take your hand off its head and tap or squeeze the lamb's dock. This is slightly uncomfortable to the lamb and will cause him to move. However, some lambs, particularly wild ones, may jump into the air instead of moving forward when their docks are touched. Never let go if they jump. This will only teach the lamb that when he jumps he gets loose. If you are unable to control your lamb when it jumps, you can try to straddle your lamb to prevent him from jumping altogether. Depending on your size and the size of the lamb, straddle your lamb so that you are standing right over his shoulders. Then, hold onto his head like you normally would and start walking while still straddling him. If he stops, reach for the dock. When he jumps, you'll be on top of him, preventing him from getting away and coming off the ground. Another advantage to straddling your lamb is that you can use your legs to prevent it from running forward or backward. If your lamb starts to run, all you have to do is squeeze your legs around the lamb and it can't get away. It's easier if you use a stick or long object to tap the dock when you're in this position, or you can have someone else stand behind you and do the tapping. Keep working with your lamb in this way until you don't have to touch the dock at all or very little. A lamb is more attractive in both showmanship and market/breeding classes if it doesn't constantly have a hand reaching to its dock. Just keep working with him and you'll get it.

Bracing Your Lamb

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“What is bracing and why should I do it?”

Bracing is when your lamb flexes the muscles in the leg and loin areas. The lamb does this by pushing its body into you. By flexing the muscles, they will feel harder and smoother.

“How do I train my lamb to brace?”

There are many different methods that can be used to teach your lamb to brace. Some lambs will naturally brace on their own, but others have to be taught how to do it. To teach your lamb to brace there must be some reason for your lamb to want or need to push into you. When your lamb does begin pushing into you, reward them by releasing pressure at the first sign of them pushing. Slowly build up the amount of time pushing against the lamb, and still keeping with rewarding it with a small break. The following are common procedures used to train lamb how to brace:

Backing the lamb off a ledge of some sort. By slowly pushing into your lamb with your body and working your way to an edge, such as off the back of a pick up truck or a blocking stand, you will scare the lamb into thinking that it will fall off. You do this by letting one leg go over the edge. The lamb thinks it is falling, so it will drive into you. Don't actually push the lamb off the ledge because this could hurt the lamb or yourself.

Backing the lamb into a ditch filled with water. When the lamb feels the water on its feet (the majority of lambs hate water) it will begin to brace into you.

Backing the lamb into a wall or fence. When the lamb is backed into a wall it has no where else to go but forward, into you.

Have someone else help the lamb into going forward. Hold your lamb and have another person stand behind it and tap or pinch the dock area. For more stubborn lambs, try tapping the area with a slicker brush (bristles going into the lamb) or having someone snap the lamb with a wet towel. These methods irritate the lamb and make them move forward.

Set the lamb up on a steep hill and practice isometrics. Place your lamb on a steep hill with you standing on top. The lamb's dock should be facing the bottom of the hill and its head toward the top of the hill. Set your lamb up on the hill just like you would in the show ring. The lamb will have to push against you stay on all fours and not slide down the hill. Soon when it gets tired, it will want to push past you. Let the lamb do this as a reward for its efforts. If this is done correctly, it will harden a lamb up and develop a lot of overall definition from its rack all the way to the leg. However, don't stretch the lamb out too far because you can break down the muscles over the loin.

Leave your lamb behind. If you have two or more lambs, this method may work well for you. Have someone walk one of the lambs on its halter quite a distance away from your lamb. Because of a lamb's natural flocking instinct, it will want to catch up with the other lamb. Use this to its advantage. Allow your lamb to face the lamb that is far away. Now stand in front of it. Your lamb will begin to push into you to try to get to the other lamb.

Use a food lure. Hold your lamb and have someone stand behind you with a bucket of feed or just pour the feed into the lamb's feeder and hold it back from it. Your lamb will drive into you to try to get at the feed.

Blindfold your lamb. When a lamb is blindfolded they naturally calm down when frightened or nervous and will be more cooperative. By blindfolding your lamb and then repeatedly pushing him backwards he will push into you. He won't know where he is going so he will normally reject in being pushed backwards.

“When should I begin training my lamb?”

Training should begin as soon as you get your lamb. Even if your show isn't for another three months, the sooner your lamb learns how to brace, the better it will be at it. It is also easier to teach a small lamb how to brace than it is to train a larger lamb how to brace. Just take five or ten minutes each day to work with your lamb.