

Horn Training and Polishing

A SET OF HORNS that is trained and polished adds much to the appearance of quality and refinement in a dairy animal. Also when the horns are correctly trained by curving inward and forward, there is less danger of injury to other animals than if the horns are allowed to grow outward. The following discussion of horn training applies to all the dairy breed except the Ayrshire, which will be taken up separately.

Horn Trainers and Their Use

Horn trainers are of two general types — commercial and homemade. The commercial horn trainers have a loop or ring that is fitted over each horn and pulled together with as much tension as desired by adjusting the screw arrangements on the head piece. The entire trainer is held on the head by a strap that buckles around the base of the horn.

The homemade method involves running a hole through the horn about one-half inch from the tip. This hole can be made with a drill or with a red hot ice pick. If you use the ice pick you may have to reheat it several times, depending on the thickness of the horn. How-

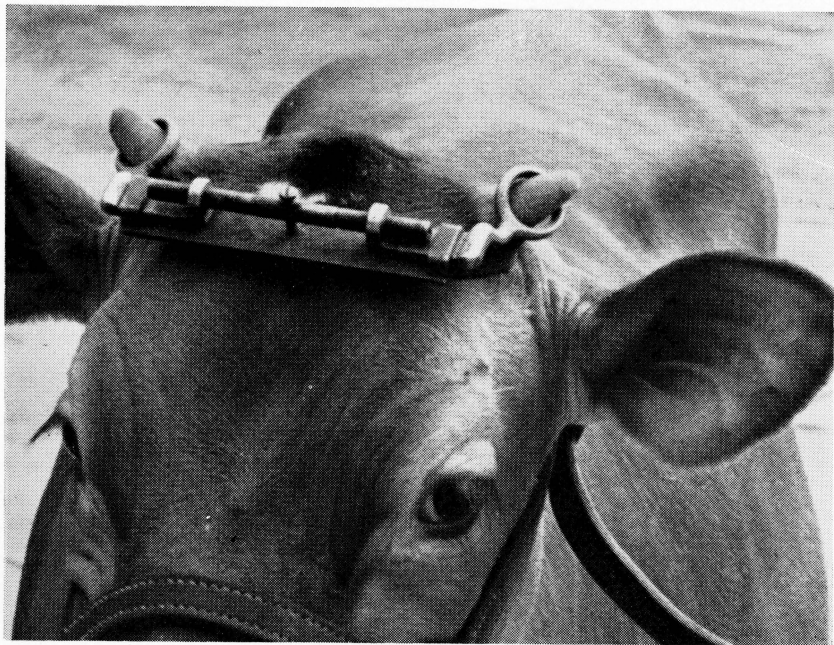


Fig. 6.1—This picture shows the metal horn trainer in place to curve the horns forward and in.

ever, the ice pick has the advantage of stopping any flow of blood and it will not break like a thin, brittle drill may when the animal moves its head quickly.

A wire (baling wire or slightly smaller) is run through the holes and the ends of the wires twisted together. To get the proper tension on the wires use a nail, pliers, or other tool as a lever to twist the cross wires where they meet halfway between the ends of the horns. Lead weights of varying sizes can be put on the

50 Fitting and Showing Dairy Cattle

wires between the horns to bring the horns down if they are growing upward too much.

If horn trainers are needed, they should be put on calves at about 8 to 10 months of age when the horns will be long enough so that either the mechanical or wire trainers can be readily fitted on. The horns are easily and quickly pulled around in the desired direction, and the trainers will only have to be left on three to four weeks at the most. Be careful when tightening the trainers, for if they are too tight they will cause the animal unnecessary pain. Horns that are turned too quickly will have a sharp place at the turn that is not graceful and will be hard to smooth out when polishing at a later date.

Remove the trainers when you think that the horns are pulled around or down enough. However, they often have to be put on for a short time before the animal is 18 months old to give the horns a bit more curve.

Training Horns on Ayrshires

A different method is used to get the typical Ayrshire horns. When the horns are about four or five inches long, the calf is put in a stanchion and a metal cone fitted over the end of each horn and held in place by a setscrew. These cones have a hole at the top to which a small ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch) rope about 12 inches long can be tied. The other end of the rope is run through a hole in the end of a stick and tied. The stick should be about one inch thick and about fourteen inches long, with a hole in each end for the ropes leading to the metal cones. Then tie a sash cord to the center of the

stick and run the cord up to the ceiling and through a pulley which is nearly directly above the animal's head. The sash cord next is run either backward or forward through another pulley, and down. Weights which may vary from 2 to 6 pounds are tied to this end of the rope.

These trainers are left on for about three or four weeks, or until the horns are curved outward and upward. Then, as the horn makes its natural growth out and around, there will be on the end of it the part that curves upwards and backwards, giving the Ayrshire its characteristic set of horns.

Preparing Horns for Polishing

Before the animals leave home for the fairs, work the horns for any of the breeds down until they are fine and smooth. This may involve shortening the horns that have become too long and coarse on some of the animals. This can be done by cutting the horns off with a pair of hoof nippers. Then use a half-round, curved, quick cutting beaver file. This file is flat on one side and half-round on the other, with long, curving teeth. It does a fast job of taking off the horn and leaves a much smoother surface than the ordinary wood rasp which is so often used.

Go over the horns thoroughly with this file, removing all the old, dried shell. If the horn is too thick, much of it should be removed. This will add to the quality appearance of the animal's head. Here again, especially in the younger animals, be careful not to go too deeply, or the horn will crack, or tear and bleed, leaving a sore spot. This is very easily done, especially on the back

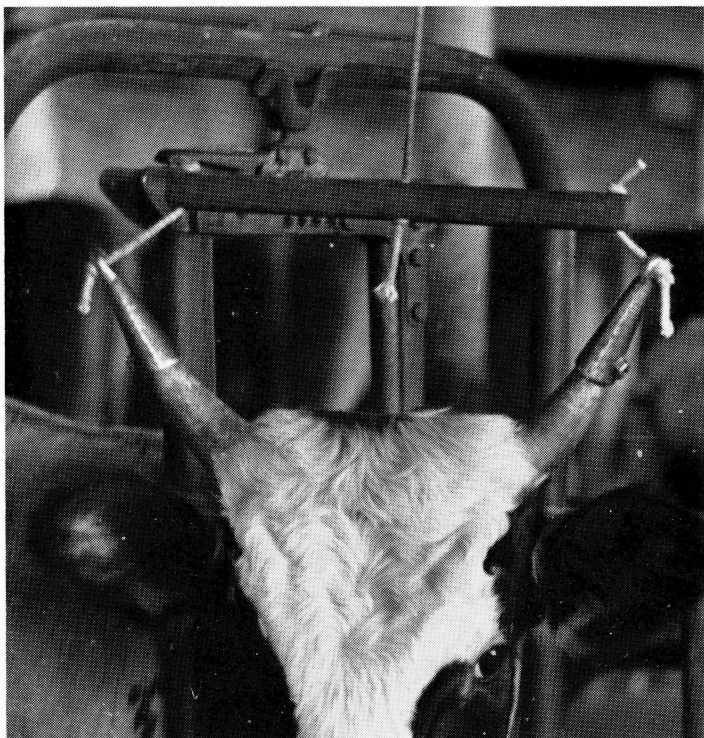


Fig. 6.2—The horn trainer in place on an Ayrshire calf. Here the metal cones are shown on the end of the horn and the ropes from these to the cross stick. The rope going up from this stick runs up to the ceiling through a pulley and back behind the animal (or in front and down through another pulley) and a weight is attached to this end of the rope.

part of the horn. The front part of the horn should be filed out as well as possible to give more of a curve to the horn. If it has a tendency to go up too high, take more off the top part of the horn than the bottom, and vice versa. Of course all horns are different, and by

prudent use of the file much can be done to give the animal a more attractive set of horns typical of its breed.

On young animals the horns are soft and have little lines or grains down in the horn, running parallel to the length of the horns. Do not attempt to remove these with a file. A scraper will smooth them out satisfactorily, although they cannot be entirely removed.

After as much as possible has been removed from the horn with a file, it should be smoothed out with a steel scraper. A satisfactory scraper can be made from a sheet of steel about 3 x 5 inches and about 1/16 of an inch thick, with square, sharp edges. Scraping irons also may be purchased in most hardware stores. Hold the scraper in the hand so that the edge or corners are against the horn and use quick, firm strokes to get a smooth finish.

This is about all that needs be done to the horns before the animal arrives at the fair, because the horns probably will be scratched in transit.

After arriving at the fair or show, go over the horns again lightly with the scraper and then with a piece of fine emery cloth, followed by a rubbing with steel wool to get the horns perfectly smooth.

Polishing

After washing the animal, the horns should be polished — this will generally be the evening before the show. There are many polishes on the market that will work well. Most of these are metal polishes. A satisfactory polish can be made by mixing Tripoli powder with sweet oil to the consistency of a smooth paste. Best results can be obtained when the horns are first gone



Fig. 6.3—The horns are being pulled in by the wire and down by the lead weights that are threaded on the wire and held in place by the twisting of the wire.

over with glycerine, and polished and rubbed dry with a clean, soft cloth. Then the polish of Tripoli powder and sweet oil can be rubbed on the horns and polished to a high finish with another soft cloth.

A high finish is hard to achieve. The horns must be clean and smooth, and vigorous rubbing and polishing is required. However, this gives a glistening appearance to the horn that will last for several days. Additional lustre can be achieved by going over the horns with a cloth to which a few drops of furniture polish have been added, just before going into the show ring.