



Preparing Your Savannah for a TICA Show

By Cassie Hale

Well, I thought I'd share my experiences with ya'll on getting a kitten ready for show. Some of the more laid-back breeds require less preparation, but the more athletic, high-energy breeds need to learn patience when dealing with the constraints and demands of the show hall.



The most important thing is to start EARLY, at the age of six to eight weeks, if possible. I start carrying my kittens around the house, stretching as I walk (I mean stretching the kitten of course). If you have a kitten that does not like to be held, try putting a tiny amount of turkey, beef, or chicken baby food on a teaspoon. Let the kitten smell and taste it, then pick the kitten up and let them eat the baby food ONLY while being held. I have found this to work really well, and even the most stubborn kitten will give in to this treat. The most important thing I have found is to be patient, loving and diligent in your training.

Next, the kitten must become acclimated to many different sounds. I make a lot of noise and play the TV or radio constantly to get them used to noise, since the show halls are filled with strange, often loud and unexpected, sounds. When I am gone from the house, I put the television on MTV or some channel that will have a variety of pitches and sounds. The show hall is very noisy and the kittens need to know that noise is not a threat to them.

Third, you need to have a cage similar to a judging cage. I have two judging cages, so can place them side-by-side, which is even more similar to the showing atmosphere. A similar sized metal cage may be purchased at Petsmart, or you can purchase them at a TICA show – just contact whoever brings in and sets up the cages. At about ten weeks old, I begin putting the kitten in one of my show cages with litterbox, food, water and toys. I take the kitten out every 20 minutes or so and walk all over the house with the baby (much as I would taking them to the Judge's Ring at a Show). I then place the kitten in one of the judge's pens (When first training, I place toys in the cage to make this a fun experience). I leave the kitten in the judge's cage for five minutes at first, and gradually increase the time by five minutes each week. It is important to leave the kitten in the cage until it calms down. If a kitten is removed when it is fussing and scratching to get out, it's rewarded for the poor behavior. Always remove the baby when it is calm and well behaved. This may take a few trial runs, but the kitten will calm down and be okay with the confinement after a few tries.





While the kitten is in the judge's pens I play with him using both feather and glitter wands, since different judges prefer different varieties of wands. Take the kitten out of judge's pen, and place him on a table that resembles judge's table. Be sure you ALWAYS take your kitten out of the judge's pen rear end first. This is how the judges always do it, and you want the kitten comfortable with every aspect of the show routine. Stretch him; gently hold head to check profile. Turn him around and hold him up to see tummy, petting

and talking to him all the time. Also, be sure to play with kitten with wands to keep his attention and to reinforce that the showing experience is a fun one. He will enjoy the attention, the playtime, and will be comfortable with the activity since it has become a part of his usual routine.



When I go to a show I walk around to each judge's ring and look to see what wands they are going to use. If I do not already have what they are using, I go to the show vendors and buy one of each. I then play with my kitten at my benching area so he will be used to this new toy. I had a kitten once that had played with every type of wand - except feather. One of the judges used a feather wand and the kitten was scared and hissed. It is very IMPORTANT to use as many different kinds of wands to train your kitten as possible.

Socialization is a very important final step in the training process. I socialize my kittens by taking them on short trips to any store that will let us in. Many Wal-Marts will allow your kitten in a carrier, especially if you go thru the garden area entrance. Shopping Malls are great as they are noisy, and people see the carrier and always want to look and touch your kitten. I stay clear of Petsmart or other pet stores, as I feel there is a much greater risk of disease, and fleas may be transmitted there. Even the shyest kitten will begin to love the attention. This socialization process needs to be repeated several times a week till show time.

Now it is time for your kitten's first show. You have done everything possible to prepare your kitten for the show ring, and more than likely the hard work will pay off. Unfortunately, you will not know for sure how your kitten will show until you get to the ring because just about all kittens can be socialized to people, but there are those that simply become over-stressed by the smell and sounds of other cats. If your kitten is stressed, often a few relaxing first shows – maybe putting the kitten in only a few rings – will allow the kitten to learn that nothing is going to hurt him. You can try to get the kitten used to other cats by introducing him to good-natured cats and most importantly, raising him with other cat friends at home, but I have found that some cats just do not like other cats.



Remember, showing is fun and a wonderful way to make new friends. I would like to wish everyone the Best of Luck, and I look forward to seeing you all at the shows.