

## WHY SHOULD I ENTER THE W/S/G CONTEST?

Linda Kolassa

Why should you enter a Skein and Garment Contest? To show off, of course! To learn, have fun, and promote angora rabbits. You should be proud of your talents, just as you are proud of your rabbits. There is always room for improvement, and just as an ARBA judge guides you to where you need to improve your rabbits, so a fiber judge does the same thing with your fiber skills. If you are isolated, as many spinners are, a Skein and Garment contest gives you a chance not only to get an opinion on your own skill, but you can see how it compares to someone else's work. It is also nice to see what other people are doing and a great way to get inspired!

Now that you have decided to enter – what to do next? Most major wool festivals sponsor a Skein and Garment contest, and the NARBC holds one with every ARBA convention and most National Angora Shows. Write for a copy of the contest rules from the contest chair or the festival committee. This will tell you what the classes are and you can decide which ones to enter. The rules should also tell you how the entries are to be prepared. Each contest is different, so read carefully! The best way to learn how a S&G contest works is to volunteer at one. Extra hands are always appreciated.

When entering a raw wool class, be sure to note what the fiber sample should weigh. They may say “wool to be at least a quarter ounce”, and that is what they mean. It can be over, but not under! If you are not sure what your fiber weighs, take a trip to the post office and use their scale, or better yet visit an office supply store and get an inexpensive hanging postal scale. What type of container to place your fiber in may be stated in the rules. If not, a cardboard box with a removable lid is a good choice. Make sure it is big enough for your entry, and that no wool sticks out under the lid. Don't use too big a container or the angora will slide around inside and get messy. You can line the box in tissue paper but don't cover the fiber. If there are lots of entries, unwrapping them will take too much of the judge's time. Contrasting paper will make the angora stand out, and blue tissue will make white angora look whiter. Don't use a plastic container as it may cause static to build up and make the angora “sticky”. Never use a deli container with a pop open lid. They keep popping open! As for the fiber itself, choose angora that is uniform in length and color. Make sure that the sample has the right ratio of guard hair to wool for the breed. There should be no dirt or dander in the fiber. This should be your primo fiber.

Some S&G committees are very specific as to how they want the skein entries prepared. Check the rules to see if they specify how long the skein should be, and how it should be tied. If there are no guidelines, here are some suggestions. After your yarn is spun and plied, or not plied if you are entering a singles class, it should be washed. The yarn should be in a skein which looks like an oval race track. You can wind it on a niddy nody, or if you don't have one, wind it around two large cans set on your table. A friend with long arms can be useful, too. My skeins are 62” around, which means friendly hands or cans need to be 31 inches apart. You can make yours longer or shorter, but too long and they tangle, too short and you can't see how the twist in the yarn lays. Tie the skein loosely in several places so it won't get tangled. Lay the yarn in a tub of warm water with a squirt or two of dish soap or shampoo. Squeeze the water through, and then let it set for 20-30 minutes. Rinse in the same temp water and roll in a towel to remove excess water. Lay flat on a dry towel, or hang to dry. Some people like to dry their yarn under tension. If you want to do this, lay your skein over a towel bar, leaving the towel on the bar for padding. Place a plastic jar filled with water in the bottom loops for weight. Or you can use hooks and coffee cups. Don't make it too heavy as you don't want to stretch your yarn. After it is dry, you should re-skein the yarn. This will make it look neater. There should be no knots or breaks in an

entry skein. To check for shedding, shake the skein over a contrasting paper or table. A quick trip in the dryer on air for 1 or 2 minutes will help remove loose hair. Don't add a dryer sheet. You want static to help the yarn halo.

In the skein competition, the judge is looking for yarn that is evenly twisted and plied. The twist tends to go to the thinner areas, so thicker parts in your yarn won't have much twist. This can put the thin spots under tension and make them more likely to break. If it is a "thick thin" yarn, slubs will be consistent through out, not just a few here and there. If you made slubs on purpose, make sure to state that on your yarn description. The judge is also looking to see if your yarn is suited for its purpose, such as a hat. 100% angora would not work in a watch cap, because the yarn has no elasticity and the hat would fall over your head like a bag. Socks made out of all angora would sit around your feet. Wool would need to be added to make the yarn appropriate for these items. That is why the end use on a yarn entry is so important.

It feels great to finish something out of your handspun, and in the garment class "finishing" can be the key to a winner! Make sure all loose yarn ends are worked in as inconspicuously as possible. Try to do this at a seam or an edge as it won't be as noticeable there. Make sure seams are straight and sewn neatly. Garments should be washed and blocked if necessary, and it usually is. The last contest I worked at the judge asked me "Doesn't anyone block anymore?"

When you are wearing your garment, there are places on it no one will see. When it is in the contest, the judge will see everything! One of the things the judge is looking for is consistency; in knitting and weaving, and finishing. You should use the same techniques throughout your garment. Knitting stitches should be the same size so keep checking your gauge. If you sew the side seams of your sweater with the back stitch, the sleeve seams should use that stitch also. Hems and edges should be even. The yarn should be consistent throughout the garment. With angora, often one section of fiber has many guardhairs, the next could be mostly underwool. It is very important to mix fiber well before spinning to even out the halo. Carding really helps. I have seen garments that would be beautiful except one sleeve was hairy and the other wasn't, or there was a stripe of darker yarn (more guardhair) in the middle.

If you have made your entry from your own design, great! State that on your entry form. Judges like original designs. It is all right to use someone else's pattern, but be sure to give the designer credit in your information. Most published and commercial patterns are for your personal use. If you intend to sell the item you should get permission from the designer.

When filling out entry forms, read carefully. Be sure your description is clear. State the color, fiber percentages, and the techniques used. Don't be afraid to write a little about your entry. If you spun a nubby yarn, make sure the judge knows you did it on purpose! Be sure to remove any labels or tags that would identify you as the maker. You need to remain anonymous until after the judging. The next time the opportunity arrives, take a chance and enter.