

# Spring Celebration Llama Event 2007

## “Suri for a Day”

By Dale Peterson

The 2007 Spring Celebration (Celebrity) llama event was filled with one liners and original phrases the attendees used to describe what they saw and how they felt.

As one spectator said, “I watched llamas with traditional type fiber unload from their trailers one day. The next day I saw the same llamas and they were suri llamas.” Hence, the birth of the phrase and the buzz throughout this year's Spring Celebration (Celebrity) llama event....”Suri for a Day.”

As I walked the isles of llamas, many adorned with their “made for a day” suri fiber, it appeared that indeed many had had a little “help” making their fiber suri. It seemed many of those who created suris for a day were careful to hide or disguise their secret suri formulas. Even so, by simply closing one's eyes and taking a good sniff of the surroundings, one could imagine how it must smell in the swankiest beauty parlor on Hollywood's Rodeo Drive.

Friday morning began with the ALSA quad show and the phrase that several people chose to use for it was the “Grand Slam Cattle Drive.” The show kicked off with the suri classes. In short order it became apparent at that show, as well as throughout the entire weekend, that most - all but one Celebration futurity judge (a suri alpaca

breeder) - and no ALSA judges had a clue what real suri fiber was or wasn't. To judge suri fiber, or any fiber, a judge **must touch the fiber** and examine it thoroughly from front to rear of the animal. Only Connie Bodeker, the suri alpaca breeder, attempted to do that.

The ALSA show coordinator, Shawn Norman - as always - was very selective in hiring four judges (Phil Feiner, John Mc Dougall - who replaced Cathie Kindler - Danielle Wagoner, and Beth Myers) who were capable of having independent thought. These judges demonstrated their independent thought throughout the day. Rarely did they agree with one another on class placements.

It wasn't hard to understand why the ALSA show was dubbed the “Grand Slam Cattle Drive.” Different groups of llamas and handlers were in the ring at the same time. Some waited to hear results and receive ribbons. Others were in the process of being judged by the four judges. Even more llamas were stacked up outside the ring waiting for the next class to begin. When results were announced, ribbons were hurriedly dispersed. Other than hearing results over the loud speakers that a particular llama had received a ribbon, recognition for any llama's achievement in the ring was nonexistent. No celebration, no fun, no excitement. It was just a

hurried, confusing mess.

Saturday morning began with the presentation of animals from “Herd Sire Row.” One would naturally expect that Herd Sire Row llamas would be stalled in a segregated area like in years past. Not so this year. There was no Herd Sire Row. Some exhibitors wanted their herd sires to stay with the other llamas they had brought to the event, so Celebrity management decided that would be OK. One Herd Sire Row owner was overheard saying, “Had I known before I got here that the herd sires were not going to be on the same row, I wouldn't have wasted my time and money.”

Later came the preview of the sale llamas. Many were obviously lacking in llama phenotype, but nevertheless they all were required to be registered with the ILR as LL (pure llamas) before they were allowed to be entered in the sale or the futurity. For their stated ages, many of them were small with thin bone, wide set ears, unlevel top lines, dropped hip structures and low tail sets. As more than one viewer said, “That's a ring full of crossbreeds.” Even though I agree that many of the sale and show llamas appeared to be far from pure, does it matter? Shouldn't each individual be able to buy, breed, sell and enjoy the type of llamas they desire, regardless of the llamas'

phenotypic makeup? Unfortunately, being saddled with the current registration restraints in order to be accepted in auctions and shows appears to have led to some very creative paper work.

There were considerably more suri looking animals at this year's Celebration event than in years past. Maybe Tom Simmons summed it up as he was announcing during the sale when he commented that an animal that was currently on the stage to be auctioned had great suri fiber and "Nothing has been done to make him look suri."

The auction lasted a grueling eight hours. The buyers who were there at the beginning dwindled to almost none by the end. People left the auction and went to dinner. Some returned to the auction after dinner and some did not. Some were overheard complaining about the length of the auction, the quality of the animals and the low sales numbers. People were even commenting about how boring the auction was. One person said loudly outside the auction arena, "The Celebrity people don't care about llamas anymore." Several also commented that the Celebrity organization did little to promote the event - and it showed. Another person loudly commenting after the auction said, "Things have gotten so bad here that the only thing you get now when you buy a llama is a bill. What happened to the damn rose...does **it** cost too much?"

Probably the most memorable, disturbing and disgusting site of the entire auction was when Deone Townsend, a Canadian, openly gave a signal to the person in the audience who, one could only surmise,

he had running up the bid on his auction animal. Townsend, standing on the auction stage in plain view of everyone, held his animal's lead with one hand and took his other hand and quickly waved it across his throat, similar to what one would do if a person in the distance can't hear and you want them to cut off, shut off or stop something. This apparently was the signal for the person to stop running up the bid on the other unsuspecting bidder, because Townsend must have reached the number he wanted for his animal. At that point the bidding stopped. What a slap in the face to all who attended the auction. If Townsend wanted to protect his llama, he should have placed a reserve on it.

Hoping for things to get better, bright and early the next day (Sunday morning) the Celebration Llama Futurity got underway. The judges were Dan Goodyear, a notable retired llama breeder and now llama consultant whose dress suited his assignment. Connie Bodeker, a suri alpaca breeder, also was dressed very appropriately. Rick Avdich, a llama breeder from Canada, was the third judge. All the judges were breeders of llamas or alpacas and had their individual tastes as to what they like to see in a llama or in their breeding programs. However, to my knowledge, none of them are experienced llama or alpaca judges who have been trained to only judge what they see in the ring, at that time, and not to take into account their own personal preferences of what they like or what they breed for on their farms. But, then again, with the lack of any llama breed standard to compare against, it is anyone's guess.

This year's Celebration weekend left little to celebrate. The attendees saw nothing new from the event. There was no excitement, few happy faces, a long, boring auction; and for the most part everybody just seemed to be getting through the process.

Next year will be the 20th anniversary of the Llama Celebrity, and a few of us old timers that still attend the event are going to make some contacts and try to persuade some other old timers that attended the first few Celebrity events to return for a reunion. Maybe that is just what is needed to capture the excitement this event was once known for. If not, then maybe the Celebrity management team will decide that 20 years is long enough. I hope not.

The Celebrity event is a llama institution, and it was one of the primary events that marked the beginning of the modern llama movement as we know it in the United States. I encourage the Celebrity management team to do what they do so well and pick up the beat and return the weekend to a Celebration only event, thereby creating the much needed excitement and displaying - without preference toward any specific registries - some of the most unique and awesome llamas in America. Then we can return to yesteryear where llama enthusiasts from all across America couldn't wait for their long drive to end at the gates of Heritage Place and then had plenty of fun memories to talk about on their trips home.

Tom, Tim, Nancy, Teresa and Fred can make that happen.