

## LOWERING STRESS @ SHOWS, & TRAVEL: BY SHER JENNINGS

**STORY:** I had a hen on Champion Row this weekend that took reserve in the American Class. As I stood there contemplating whether she needed sprucing up while other birds were still being brought up to the Row, the exhibitor who owned the class champion, a gorgeous white rock pullet, walked up to the other side, pulled her out of the cage, and began touching up her comb and legs. Within seconds I watched her seize up and die in his arms. She apparently had a heart attack and much as he tried to sooth and revive her, she finished seizing and went limp....right there in front of us....on Champion Row.....under her beautiful plaque. Dead.

**MORE:** At another show I watched someone (who had driven 1500 miles w their large fowl and bantams stuffed in cardboard boxes) coop in. A beautiful large Giant hen flopped over dead in her cage almost immediately. There are 2 additional incidents w acquaintances where ea had a bird drop and die on Champion Row.

**DISCUSSION:** I absolutely have no facts about the actual cause of death for any of these birds. It very easily could have been any number of things including genetic issues. But each time I hear or see a bird die like that at a show, I am reminded that STRESS kills.

Our Giants spend their days happily foraging and munching on their buffet of feed, mash, fruits, vogs, grass, bugs, and treats. They take dust baths, mingle, flap wings, and power nap. So we need to remember when they are suddenly plucked out, handled, fondled, washed, oiled, separated from "family", crated, travelled, cooped in along w hundreds of strange birds & noises, oiled, trimmed, and handled multiple times more before being crated back up, travelled back home and the put into isolation for 4 weeks ....or dragged to another show.....  
.....that is STRESSFUL if not terrifying.

Be AWARE and take some easy extra steps to reduce each Giant's stress. Here are some things to consider:

1. HANDLE your Giants before the shows. Once in a while, pick them up, gently examine them, and gently put them down so they learn they aren't going to be eaten or hurt when picked up.
2. Don't RUSH. At least not when handling the Giants.
3. Bring the WATER they are accustomed to drinking. There are great digestive disruptive differences between all waters, even with well water.

4. Bring the FOOD they are used to eating. Including and ESPECIALLY their usual culinary treats. Don't get cheap by using show food. It can actually cost you.
5. Add a little ELECTROLYTE/vitamin powder to their water (unless they are white... could stain feathers).
6. Give them decent transport SPACE...don't stuff them together, especially long distances. They need fresh cool air circulation.
7. Do your MAIN SHOW PREP at home including oiling, where the environment is less noisy and stressful. Then you are just touching them up at the show.
8. GIVE THEM A BREAK during long distance transport. Stop the truck, open doors, food/water etc. You need a break, they need a break. They won't normally eat or drink in a moving vehicle.
9. Use your own CAGE CUPS for food and water. Big ones. Keep them topped off at the show until judging, so they can graze.
10. Bring CARDBOARD pieces to insert between your group and other birds. This is not "framing". It's preventing fights and bickering....and exposure. I even purchase a couple extra cages on my entry so that I can have space between my Giants and someone else's, especially if you are showing males. Just before judging I draw a line through the coop card on the empty cage (so the judge knows it's a scratch).

There may be other things you can think of but the point here is THINK. You have a lot invested in your Giants. Don't get sloppy and mindless when showing your treasures. Be a supportive part of your Giant Show Team.