

Outlook on Lifestyle

Noah's Ark on wheels

Trucking in for Royal Winter Fair

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Thomson News Service

There was a mass exodus of animals and farmers from Prince Edward Island on the weekend

Transport trucks carrying livestock - Noah's-Arks-on-wheels - started to roll towards the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair here

"A lot of the farmers get together and we hire cattle trucks," says George Boswall, a Kensington, P.E.I. farmer, who sent his grandson's Ayreshire calf to the Royal's annual Contact Hays Classic 4-H competition.

About 5,500 animals from across Canada and parts of the United States are expected at the 27-acre fair complex for the 12-day exhibit, which opens today.

More than 320,000 visitors - dressed in anything from blue jeans to tuxedos - are expected to attend the fair, now in its 66th year.

While today's adult admission of \$6 is quite a bit more than the 25-cent ticket of 1922, organizers hope they've put together a package which will retain the exhibition's national flavor.

Exhibitors of all ages have gathered to show products such as honey, pickles, flowers and vegetables. There are livestock classes for everything from sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and rabbits to Shetland ponies and huge Percheron workhorses.

Boswall's grandson, Steven, 11, one of 25 youngsters entered in this year's Contact Hays Classic for 4-H members, will be showing for the first time.

"I guess my first Royal was in 1946," said George Boswall, in a

telephone interview. "I've been there quite a few times since," said the farmer who last visited the fair three years ago.

BEST IN CANADA

"You're seeing the best there is in Canada - and quite often the United States," said the P.E.I. resident.

His grandson's Ayreshire will be part of a large Royal Winter Fair dairy herd. Last year, the herd produced 53,000 litres of milk during the fair.

If 1986 is any indication, officials can expect the rabbits on display will go through one ton of special protein pellets. There are 600 bales of hay ready for other four-legged competitors to consume.

One of the main attractions is always the Royal Horse Show, which brings world-class show jumpers from Great Britain, France, the U.S. and Canada for a 10-day meet which culminates in the Mercedes-Benz World Cup Grand Prix - a black-tie event for much of the audience - on the fair's final day.

The Royal is also home to the World Field Crop Championships and a new international sheep shearing competition.

Northern Ontario farmer John Phillips of New Liskeard will have his top barley seed entered in this year's crop championship.

A pedigree seed grower since 1947 on his 400-acre farm in the New Liskeard clay belt, Phillips says the key to championship seed is to pay special attention to your crop.

"My wife and I still rove the field to make sure there is no foreign matter in our grain. People don't do that anymore. They're more likely to go hunting or fishing," said the farmer, now aided on the farm by sons Jack

and Terry. "The first Royal I went to was only about three years ago," said Phillips. He was disappointed with the quality of soup peas being judged at the fair. "We could have cleaned up in that category," he said. Phillips raises barley, oats and wheat.

"The Royal's a wonderful thing. The fair's a real eye-opener. If you went every year, I think you'd still enjoy it."

Phillips won't be attending this year's fair. Like many farmers, the travelling distance, cost and never-ending farm chores will prevent his attendance. He sent some of his best seeds though.

Draught horse breeder Don Swanson of High River, Alta., will be there - at what he estimates will be his tenth Royal.

GOOD PROMOTION

"It's very good promotion for us," said the breeder, who sells his stock across North America.

This year, he's entering one Percheron in competition. "She's a two-year-old filly. Last year, I had her down and she came second in her class," said the exhibitor who attends shows regularly in the U.S.

Swanson has entered as many as 10 horses at past Royals. "Until this year, there has always been (provincial) government assistance, but they've cut that out," said the breeder, explaining why only one horse from his Highview Percherons stable will make this year's trip.

He said the Royal is "still one of the main events" for breeders in North America.

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