

NEW TO SHOWING?
A FEW BASIC DO'S AND DON'TS
FOR NEW EXHIBITORS

It is always a nerve wracking experience - the first few times in the ring - but there are things you can do to make it less so.

AT HOME...

Practice at home, once a day in the beginning, but only for 5 minutes. If you are going to "bait" him then get him used to expecting treats to appear from, say, your right pocket or your bum bag. This will help hold his attention in the ring - so when you say "do you want a biscuit" he stops what he is doing and looks at you intently to see if you are indeed going to give him a treat.

Pick your treats carefully, something soft you can break into small pieces or he can nibble on - say Schmackos (Pedigree Chum) - moving on to maybe cocktail sausages from Tesco - boxes of 40 sit happily in the freezer til the night before a show, and then eventually liver cake if and when they get fed up with the other two. Don't start with liver cake - usually too exciting for a new dog. Avoid cheese - it gets horribly greasy when warm - not a good look. Avoid stuff he has to stand and chew. It needs to be non-greasy and quick to swallow.

Practice moving him in a triangle - off lead - feed him a treat as you get to each corner - give him time to swallow it - go to the next corner - feed again - do the same for an up and down. Don't do it in the ring - he will then be keen to get to the next corner for his treat. Don't feed him on the move when showing - wait until you are back in your place. He will learn to move freely if you do this.

There are two ways to exhibit a dog. One is to "free show", letting the dog place his feet correctly under him and hopefully standing watching you, head up and wagging his tail. The other is to "stack". You teach the dog to allow you to place his feet, and then normally kneeling down, you place a hand under his muzzle or "bait" him with treats and hold out his tail with the other hand. Dogs small enough to be shown on a table are normally stacked. Dogs like Golden Retrievers can be shown either free standing or stacked. Labradors and Flat Coats are normally free shown. See what others do in your breed and decide what's right for you.

If you are going to stack him, and I recommend that you try not to, then he needs to get used to this too. If you can, set up a mirror so you can see what you are doing, or stand in front of some patio doors where you can see your reflection. The natural thing when stacking is to hold out your arms at the same level - what you need to learn to do is actually have the hand that is holding the head higher than the hand that is holding the tail. You must learn to do this otherwise you create a very strange effect with the tail held too high. The other problem with stacking is that, if you get it wrong, you may be holding him in a position where he is not looking at his best and that may go against you. If they are freestanding and moving a bit the picture changes.

What I do with mine is place their feet and then stand in front and bait them just enough to keep them standing still. It occupies their mind and helps stop them mucking about. Hopefully they will wag. Don't let other people give them titbits - these should only come from you - and don't feed other people's dogs either.

Resist the temptation to enter every class. Put him in the lowest class possible for his age/classification in the beginning and leave it at that. He will lose the will to live if you drag him through every class. If you want to, enter him in one Any Variety class, especially if it is under a different judge, and then take him home. He is there to enjoy himself, not be bored to tears.

Order a catalogue and at the show fill in the numbers of the placed dogs. It will help you get to know the names of the other exhibitors and their dogs. You will learn who wins consistently and you can try to work out why that is. Once at the show remember to check your entry in the catalogue. Have they got your name and the name of the dog correct? Are you entered in the right class? If there are any problems sort them out with the show secretary before you go into your class. If you are entered in an incorrect class she will give you a slip of paper to hand to the ring steward at the start of judging. It may be that you will be transferred to the next eligible class.

ON THE DAY...

Arrive in good time, go to the loo, find the ring, exercise your dog and clear up after him, and walk him around to settle him down if necessary. (Put poo bags in a bin, don't leave them under your car and drive off at the end of the day. If you do some poor committee member is going to have to clear up after you and that's not fair). Most people turn up 30 minutes at least before judging starts, sometimes an hour is better. Make sure you have a towel to rub him down if he gets mucky and a blanket for him to sit on - and a chair for you. Have a bowl and fresh water for him.

Buy a decent show lead for your dog. I use one from Hessonite - Julie Thomas - she's got a website. I use one with a cord lead and a leather handle. They have a swivel in the middle which stops the lead twisting up. Keep it for show days only. Again, check what is normal for your breed.

Wear something comfortable, presentable and with pockets. Or wear a bum bag where you can put your tibbits and a comb. I would never turn up in jeans and trainers. Smart trousers and a warm top and at a championship show maybe a smart jacket. At open shows a body warmer or, if outside, a suitable coat. Don't wear clothes that flap - "clean flowing lines" should refer to you as well as the dog. If you wear a jacket, do it up, don't let it flap in his face as you run. Nothing too garish, but you don't entirely want to blend in either - hopefully the judge will remember that "the lady in the red jumper" had a nice dog. This can, of course, work against you and they may remember "the lady in the red jumper" had an awful dog!

IN THE RING....

First of all - pay attention.... don't stand around chatting to people, especially when you are in the ring. Concentrate on your dog and what is going on around you. You can do your socialising when you have finished.

Make sure you have a ring clip and you know what your number is - it will be in the catalogue. (Normally you would expect to be able to buy ring clips from the trade stands at shows or if your breed club produces them you can buy from them). At open shows you usually collect your number from the steward in the ring. At a championship show your number is normally on your bench. At breed club championship shows that are not benched you may get your number in the ring or they may be with the ladies who are handing out catalogues. So check before there's a panic. Once in the ring go towards the back of the class if you can, so that you have time to take in what is going on around you.

Standard ring procedure is that once everyone is in the ring exhibitors are expected to present their dogs in show position and the judge will walk down the line looking at each dog. Do not assume once she has passed by that you can relax, she may come back again looking this time at hocks - keep your dog "showing" until the judge is back at the table. She then may ask all the exhibitors to run their dogs round the ring once, or maybe twice. If the class is a big one the steward may split the class and you will move in two halves. Try to judge your run so that your dog is moving smoothly as you go through the judge's sightline. Do not hold up the rest of the class - if you drop something leave it, go back for it afterwards. Don't run too close to the dog in front, it's bad sportsmanship to unsettle the competition - and when standing your dog in the line don't crowd the dog in front or the dog behind.

Watch what the judge is asking for from other exhibitors. Note where the others are standing their dogs - in front of the table? along the side of the ring? See how the judge goes over each dog.

Then watch to see where they move. A triangle and an "up and down", a circle and an "up and down", or an "up and down" and a circle? Every judge is different and you cannot take it for granted.

Pay attention to your own dog only, not those in front and behind you. Don't stand there chatting, making a fuss of some else's dog to then find suddenly it's your turn and now you're in a panic.

When it *is* your turn walk calmly to the table and "set" him up. Don't stand too close to the table, the judge may want to walk behind you. If you have practiced enough your dog will know what to expect. Let the judge look at him and resist the temptation to feed him just as the judge wants to look in his mouth - there is nothing more annoying than waiting for a dog to finish eating. Once the judge has looked in his mouth then do anything you can to keep his attention (the dog's) on you. Make sure his lead is sitting just behind his shoulders and hanging loosely down under his chest. Do not let go of it. The judge may move the lead as she goes over the dog, once her hands have passed you can place it back where it was.

As you prepare to move gather the lead up into your hand, so it is neatly tucked away, don't run with great loops of lead waving about - it's offputting for the dog, you and the judge - keep it cleanly tucked away.

Try to maintain some contact with your dog without "stringing him up". He should be able to trot along on a lead that is loose, but I like to maintain slight pressure so he is in no doubt as to where he is going. If there is no tension at all he may be confused as to where it is exactly he is headed and if you then jerk him he will lose his stride and it will take him 3 paces to regain it.

Because you have been watching you will now know what to expect when asked to move. You will have worked out which corners you are running to and what pattern is expected without having to ask or be told. Stand in front of the judge before you start your pattern, don't just go flying off when the judge is 10 feet away. Go to his feet and move from there. When you get back to the judge stand your dog again (although some judges don't take a last look) but you will also know this because you have seen what he has already done. Remember the judge is looking for front and rear action as well as a side view – go in straight lines at a steady pace. If the dog is really unsettled at the start of his run you may go back and start again, but the judge is not going to allow you to keep trying so get it right first time if you can.

Once this bit is over go back to the end of the line - but don't reward your dog until you get there otherwise he will start bouncing for a treat when you get back to the judge and that's not a good thing to end on. This is your "two minutes of fame" so make the most of it. Once you are back in your place you can give him a pat and a treat. Stay focused on your dog.

If there are "seen" dogs in your class, i.e. dogs that have been shown in a previous class, they may be in the ring with you. You need to stand in front of them unless told otherwise. The judge may ask the seen dogs to move again at the end of the class.

When the last dog is being seen get ready to set your dog up again for the judge to take another look. Be prepared to be asked to move again. If you are lucky enough to get placed move out to the centre of the ring and stand in your position – normally the steward will make sure you are in the right place. Make sure your dog is still "showing" - people have lost their placings if the judge suddenly sees something he doesn't like. Nothing is set in stone until you have the card in your hand. Don't let him sit down, scratch his ear, sniff the dog in front etc. until the winning exhibitor numbers have been called out by the steward and you have your card.

WAIT until all the cards have been handed out - don't go rushing out as soon as you have yours. It is polite to wait until all the placings have been announced and the cards and rosettes given out. Then leave the ring with some sense of decorum - not whooping and waving because you got placed!

If you get a 1st at an open show, or a 1st or 2nd at a champ show you are expected to remain in the ring, set the dog up again for the judge to write their critique. Keep on "showing" the dog until this is done - they may also want to take a photo.

AFTERWARDS....

If you are lucky enough to get a 1st or 2nd stick around. At the end of the breed classes you will be needed in the ring if you get a 1st, (and have not been beaten in a later class) and you may be needed if you get a 2nd so don't wander off. Do your shopping later.

All the unbeaten dogs will be called back in to challenge for Best of Breed. This takes the same format as the breed class except the judge may only ask you to move your dog, not "go over it" again. Best of Breed will then be declared. There may be a Reserve Best of Breed or a Best Opposite Sex, and if you were awarded a 2nd (and are unbeaten) then you may be needed at this point. (If there are separate classes for dogs and bitches with separate judges there will be a challenge for best of each sex, reserve best of sex and best puppy of sex). The winners of these will then challenge each other for Best of Breed etc. This all sounds complicated, but in time you will get to grips with it.

Do not brag about your placing when you are out of the ring - others will not have been so lucky. Also in the ring, always try to look pleased at being in the cards, not miffed because you are 3rd not 2nd.... applaud those in front of you and smile sweetly when you get your card - no matter where you are in the line up - people are watching. There are more judges out of the ring than in it....if you are going to have a moan wait until you are back in your car and get over it before you get home - nothing worse than a moaning wife coming home from a disappointing dog show. Get the next schedule out, work out where you are going and how you are going to make it better.

Try not to criticise - especially in the hearing of others - you don't know who is listening. Try to say something nice about every dog if you must say something at all. Try not to get embroiled in other people's moaning about a dog, a judge, a show, an exhibitor. Don't say anything about a dog that you wouldn't say to the owner's face. That way you stay out of trouble. Every dog is someone's pride and joy.

It is better not to accost judges at the end of the day to ask them what they thought about you/your dog/other dogs. You know their opinion - they gave it in the ring in their placings... if you really want to know ask your breeder or best friend.

Most importantly - enjoy it. This is yours and his day out - make the most of it. Don't go rushing off home once your class is done. Stay and watch the rest of the breed judging at least. See how others do it, for better or worse. You can learn a lot by watching from the ringside.

UNWRITTEN RULES

There are some unwritten rules that are worth knowing about... normally you pick these up as you go along so this will give you a head start!

1. Don't take an in season bitch to an open show. There is nothing in the Rules that says you cannot, but you will be extremely unpopular if you do. For championship shows it's slightly different because dogs and bitches (in our breed) have separate rings, or bitches follow the dog judging. However, keep her out of the way, in a cage if possible, until you show her and then get her back to your car as soon as you can. Don't flaunt her round the dog ring or you

- may get a mating you didn't plan for. I certainly would not even consider taking her on her mating days – no matter how good you think your chances might be.
2. Once a judge has given you a Best of Breed do not take that dog under them again unless at a higher ranking show. So, if you took a BOB at an open show you may go back under them at a championship show or breed club show, but not at open show level again.
 3. Don't leave home with a limping dog in the hope that by some miracle it will be sound when you get there – it won't be and everyone will notice.
 4. If your dog has anything remotely contagious – stay home – it's only a dog show and you will be in breach of the declaration you sign when entering if you rock up with a sick or coughing dog.
 5. Don't brag that the judge is a good friend of yours – if this really is the case then offer to steward for them. That way you will stay friends.
 6. If you are lucky enough to win Best of Breed then have the courtesy to stay and compete in the group. It's an honour to represent the breed, not a chore. Only if a true emergency arises should you leave and even then you should make your apologies to the show secretary and to your judge.
 7. If you do well in the group then let your judge know. They will be pleased to hear that their choice was appreciated by the group judge and they may mention your further placing in their critique.
 8. The order in which people stand in the ring is usually governed by either:
 - a. The order in which they enter the ring
 - b. The order in which they are given their numbers by the steward
 9. Don't barge in. If you want to be first in the line, make sure you enter the ring first or get given your number first. This is not a free-for-all although it may seem like it. Proceed with dignity.
 10. If you find you are being boxed in either politely ask the person in front/behind to move forward/back a bit or simply go to the end of the line. No pushing or shoving. If you have a real problem talk to the steward discreetly and ask them to sort it out.
 11. When the class is asked to move, be ready and keep your distance from the dog in front. Do not overtake it. If it stops then wait. The owner may indicate for you to go on, but if not, wait for them to get moving again. Remain in that order if at all possible.
 12. On very hot days some of the class may be invited to leave the ring and head for the shade. Make sure you know who was behind and in front of you – go back to the same place.
 13. Do not get sucked into handling other people's dogs, for whatever reason, whilst you are still learning to handle your own. You will have already discovered it is not as easy as it looks, even with your own dog – quadruple that when it comes to taking a dog you don't know, and who doesn't know you, into the ring. Not only will it not be "easy" despite its owners promise that it will be, it will probably make a fool of you by behaving like a lunatic because it has been separated from its owner. So politely refuse, saying you are a novice handler and that, really, they should find someone with much more experience. Being flattered at being

asked and then made to look like a raw beginner is not going to improve your confidence one little bit – so say “no”.....

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