

Handling and Sportsmanship

(by Kris Munday, Dogue de Bordeaux Breeder/Handler)

Some things I have learned over the years showing and from our former and current handling instructors, friends and our pro handlers.....

Training - Train your dog for the show ring and basic manners.

Class/Matches - Take your dog to classes, fun matches whatever to get your dog used to being around other dogs (and other breeds of dogs) and get it used to being in a show situation.

Move in a straight line - This will help your dog move at its best, if you are moving straight, your dog should move straight.

SMILE! - If YOU are smiling, it reflects on your dog and shows you are happy with your dog. Most judges will tune into this and so will the dog!

Dress nice - it shows respect to the judge. Just like in business, you would not go to an important meeting or job interview wearing jeans and a t-shirt!. I wear a pants suit always! I am not a skirt or dress person and have this horrible image of me in a skirt, doing my go around with my dog and falling or stepping on the skirt bringing it to my ankles, letting it all hang out for everyone to see.... It's just a fear of mine, I HAVE seen it happen at a show! Make sure you can move freely in your outfit, you do not want to split your pants in the ring! Have shoes that are good for showing. Some shoes are great for grass, some are great for carpet, some are not great for both, make sure you know before you go which ones will work best in your show. Also, if you are going to wear a skirt, get your dog used to it before hand so they do not think it's a tug toy in the ring. If you are "well endowed" do NOT wear low cut tops but always wear a really good support bra, bouncing does not look good and is very uncomfortable (I saw one lady "bounce" out of her top, it was extremely embarrassing for her, the judge and all of the other exhibitors).

No NAMES - Your dog is not allowed to wear a cool coat/towel anything with its name or your kennel name on it while in the ring, same goes for you, it's against AKC rules. If you have a cool coat for your dog with its name on it and you are going to use it in the ring, turn it inside out so your dog's name/kennel name cannot be seen.

Arm Bands - Make sure your arm band is on your LEFT arm. Not your right, not your lapel.

Be happy! - Try to be happy in the ring and not get frustrated with your dog. Your emotions go down your leash, if you are happy, your dog will likely be happy too!

Ring stewards - Treat them with the utmost respect. They are your link to the judge and are there to help you. If you have a problem, this is who will help you (like inform a judge that you are switching dogs or even help you with switching your armbands).

Talk to your dog - Tell your dog what a good girl/boy they are and how pleased you are and how much fun you are going to have. Do that in a normal voice level, not loud, your dog can hear you, everyone else does not need to. Do NOT say things (especially in ear shot of the judge) like "you're a great # whatever dog in the country", it's extremely rude. It's rude to the judge, it's rude to your fellow exhibitors (we saw a Boxer person do this recently "oh Pookie, you're the number whatever boxer in the country", the judge told the owner she did not need to know the dogs standings and basically shut her out of competition and afterwards, reprimanded her. The judge felt like the Boxer person was trying to manipulate her, so she shut her out). It's a BIG no no in AKC. Your dogs past wins, past/current standing are not allowed to be "bragged about" in the ring or within earshot of the judge, you can be reprimanded for this. This type of info is not supposed to be available to the judge, this is why they cannot see the catalog before they judge. This can put a judge in a compromising position if they know what your dog has won or what it's breed standings are. Never put a judge in that position.

Stack your dog - Outside the ring before going in, work your dog a bit, baiting it, getting it in show mode, having it "work" before going in the ring. It helps make the dog (and you) a bit more comfortable before going in the ring.

Use breath mints! - This helps hide your nervousness from the dog. When you are nervous, you emit pheromones, the mints will cover this (and especially if you are a smoker like me, your breath will not smell like an ashtray to the judge).

Stand up straight!! - This is super important, the straighter you are in your body posture, the better posture your dog will have. As my former instructor used to say "women, you have boobs, use them, push them out there, keep that back as straight as you can". Yeah, I told this to Tony last week and he was busting up laughing at me, but it worked for me. I no longer hunch when moving my dog. It seems to be working for Tony too, he is now standing up straight while moving the dog!

Do NOT lean over your dogs head! This often will make dogs hunch up a bit and could make them "appear" to be roachy.

Stacking the front. Always stack the judges side first, starting at the front. By lifting from the elbow, you can get the proper angle out of the leg and shoulder. If your dog is very large, you can "tilt" the dog to help you move the legs easier (put your right forearm/hand under the head and pull the dog towards you to stack the left side, then switch up and do the opposite for the right side). If your dog's legs/elbows are too big to get your hand around, have a handler show you how to stack from the chest. It's easy and it works (again tilting the dog and moving the leg pushing on the breast muscles). Make sure you do not stack out too wide in the front, they are not supposed to be bull doggie and it will make their chest look bad. If puppies are stacked a bit narrower in the front, do not worry about it, judges do understand that puppy structure is different than adult

structure. Do not constantly fidget with your dog. Always keep your hand on the collar or lead so you always have control of your dog.

Stacking the rear. Again, stack judges side first. Make sure the hocks are at the correct angle and at normal distance apart (you don't want them too wide, they will look out of balance, same if they are too close). On puppies, judges do understand that they may be a bit cow hocked in giant breed dogs. Again, do not constantly fidget with your dog. A trick for better looking rear angulation is to lift your dogs leg, bend it up all the way (like scissor lift, foot is even with the belly or touches the belly), then place the foot. This "tightens" the leg muscles and makes them bulge like a body builder getting ready for a photo shoot. For a dog that cow hocks in a little, twist those rear feet into the ground (inwards and not hard) so when you let go, their natural reaction is to straighten out the leg.

Keep your feet even when standing - Your dog "sees" you basically from the knee down when you are moving together, when you stop, put your feet evenly! Your dog will likely follow suit and place their front feet properly. The squarer you stand, the squarer your dog should stand and this gives you more balance and more control over your dog.

Keep gait - Learn what gait your dog moves best at and keep gait with them. Puppies will move at a different gait than adults. It's easiest (for me anyway) to walk fast with a pup than to try and trot with one.

Bait - Use bait sparingly. Use AFTER the judge has checked the bite, not before. Please don't throw bait, it's extremely rude and who knows, it may just come flying back at you! (last show, this happened, the Golden in the next ring over from ours where throwing bait all over, some came over in our ring and HIT our judge, he picked it up and threw it back at the exhibitor, beamed her in the head with it. If you drop bait, pick it up. You don't like it when your dogs nose in the ground, trying to get bait that other rude exhibitors have left, be courteous, pick up your bait! Additionally, a judge CAN excuse you for fouling his ring. If you use a squeak toy, also be courteous to your fellow exhibitors not to distract their dogs.

Use proper equipment - do not take your dog out on a spaghetti string lead that is meant for a 10 pound dog. Use something strong that is comfortable to use (I prefer leather and have my leads made for me). Do not have too much slack in your show chokes, make sure it fits snug so there is not a lot of adjusting. The choke should barely fit over the dogs head and should be a tad difficult to remove (and remove it one ear at a time, then slide off, thanks Val for showing me this!).

Pay attention to where the judge is at and be ready.

Listen and follow directions - Listen closely to the judge and follow their directions. We were at a show and the judge told the exhibitors "corner and back", the first exhibitor went across and back, all the other exhibitors followed what that exhibitor did, but it was not what that judge asked, that is what the judge the previous day asked. If you are not clear on direction or didn't hear what the judge said, ask nicely for more direction.

Keep dog in control - do NOT drop your lead. If you do not have your lead or collar in hand, you do not have control of your dog. They are DOGS, anything can happen. This goes for inside and outside of the ring. Your dog may be well trained, but do you know for a fact all the other dogs are? You never know what other dogs are going to do.

Keep room between dogs. This helps keep the dogs (and people) in the ring safe, some dogs get pissy about other dogs too close. Do NOT run your dog up on another dog, this is extremely rude and can cause/start a fight in the ring. If the dog ahead of you is slower and you know it, don't take off at the same time as they do and you won't run up on them.

Ask fellow exhibitors if they are ready! - This may seem small, but if you are first in line, by asking your fellow exhibitor who is behind you if they are ready for their go around, you are showing respect for your fellow exhibitor, if they are ready, go, if not wait a few seconds until they are. The judge sees this AND appreciates this. It's rude to just take off unless the judge says to move the dogs separately.

Get pictures - If it's a big win or you finish your CH, first points, whatever! Get the picture done! It shows the judge you appreciate their seeing your dog's potential! It can also be proof to AKC if the judges book is accidentally marked incorrectly.

Be gracious - Congratulate your fellow exhibitors on their wins.

Thank the judge - No matter what place you get or don't get, thank the judge and shake their hand and smile. They do remember!! Just be courteous and gracious. A little goes a long way!!

Above all, always be courteous to people at shows. Rude begets rude, nice usually begets nice. These are just some of the things that I have learned over the last 5 years of showing, I am sure more people can jump on with other insight and tips/tricks as well.