

## A Beginner's Guide to Dog Shows

Ever been to a conformation show and wonder what the heck is going on? Dogs come in the ring, dogs leave the ring, go back in, come back out and finally some are awarded a ribbon for.....something? This article, produced by the American Kennel Club, and modified where appropriate to reflect the Canadian show rules, will hopefully unravel some of the mysteries of the conformation ring.

Dog shows (conformation events) are intended to evaluate breeding stock. The size of these events ranges from large all-breed shows, with hundreds and hundreds of dogs entered, to small local specialty club shows, featuring a specific breed. The dog's conformation (overall appearance and structure), an indication of the dog's ability to produce quality puppies, is judged. Spayed or neutered dogs are not eligible to compete in conformation classes at a dog show, because the purpose of a dog show is to evaluate breeding stock.

### Types of Conformation Dog Shows

There are three types of conformation dog shows. All-breed shows offer competitions for all the breeds and varieties of dogs recognized by the CKC. The Westminster Kennel Club show held in February in New York is an example of a very famous all-breed show and is the type often shown on television

Specialty shows are restricted to dogs of a specific breed or to varieties of one breed. For example, the Golden Retriever Club of Canada National Specialty is for Golden Retrievers only but the Poodle Club of America's specialty show includes the three varieties of the Poodle - Standard, Miniature and Toy.

Group shows are limited to dogs belonging to one of the seven groups. For example, a Sporting Dog show features only breeds belonging to the Sporting group.

### The Role of the Judge

Judges examine the dogs, then give awards and placements according to how closely each dog compares to the judge's mental image of the "perfect" dog described in the breed's official standard. The standard describes the characteristics that allow the breed to perform the function for which it was bred. These standards include specifications for structure, temperament and movement. The official written standard for each breed is maintained by the breed's national club.

The judges are experts on the breeds they are judging. They examine ("go over") each dog with their hands to see if the teeth, muscles, bones and coat texture conform to the breed's standard. They view each dog in profile for overall balance, and watch each dog gait ("move") to see how all of those features fit together in action.

### How a Dog Show Works

Each dog presented to a judge is exhibited ("handled") by its owner, breeder or a hired professional. Most dogs in competition at conformation shows are competing for points toward their AKC/CKC championships. In the US, it takes fifteen points, including two majors (wins of three, four or five points)

awarded by at least three different judges, to become an American Kennel Club "Champion of Record." In Canada, dogs must obtain 10 points, under two different judges and must have earned at least one three-point major to earn a Championship.

### Guide to Dog Shows

The number of championship points awarded at a show depends on the number of males ("dogs") and females ("bitches") of the breed actually in competition. The larger the entry, the greater the number of points a male or a female can win. The maximum number of points awarded to a dog at any show is 5 points. Males and females compete separately, within their respective breeds, in a number of different classes including:

- Junior Puppy Dog - For dogs between six and nine months of age, that are not yet champions
- Senior Puppy Dog - For dogs between nine and twelve months of age, that are not yet champions
- Bred By Exhibitor - For dogs that are exhibited by their owner and breeder, that are not yet champions
- Canadian-Bred - For dogs born in Canada from a mating which took place in Canada, and are not champions
- Open - For any dog of the breed, at least 6 months of age
- After these classes are judged, all the dogs that won first place in their class compete again to see who is the best of the winning dogs. Again, males and females are judged separately. Only the best male (Winners Dog) and the best female (Winners Bitch) receive championship points. The Winners Dog and Winners Bitch then compete with the dogs who already have their championship for the Best of Breed award. At the end of the Best of Breed Competition, three awards are usually given:
  - Best of Breed - the dog judged as the best in its breed category.
  - Best of Winners - the dog judged as the better of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.
  - Best of Opposite Sex - the best dog that is the opposite sex to the Best of Breed winner.

### The Road to Best in Show

All of the Best of Breed winners (e.g., the BOB Golden, the BOB Labrador etc.) advance to compete in the Group competitions. Each CKC-recognized breed falls into one of seven group classification:

- Sporting - These dogs were bred to hunt game birds both on land and in the water. The breeds in this group include Pointers, Retrievers, Setters and Spaniels.
- Hounds - These breeds were bred for hunting other game by sight or scent. These breeds include such dogs as Beagles, Bassets, Dachshunds and Greyhounds.
- Working - These dogs were bred to pull carts, guard property and perform search and rescue services. Among the breeds in this group are the Akita, Boxer, Doberman Pinscher and St. Bernard.

- Terrier - This group includes breeds such as the Airedale, Cairn Terrier and Scottish Terrier. Terriers were bred to rid property of vermin such as rats.
- Toy - These dogs were bred to be household companions. This group includes little dogs such as the Chihuahua, Maltese, Pomeranian and Pug.
- Non-Sporting - This diverse group includes the Chow Chow, Bulldog, Dalmatian and Poodle. These dogs vary in size and function, and many are considered companion dogs.
- Herding - These dogs were bred to help shepherds and ranchers herd their livestock. The Briard, Collie, German Shepherd Dog and Old English Sheepdog are some of the breeds in this group.

### Guide to Dog Shows

In each group, four placements are awarded. The first-place winner from each group then advances to the Best In Show competition where they compete for Best In Show, the highest award at a dog show.

### How Do I Get Started Showing My Dog?

The best place to start is by joining a local kennel club, whether an all-breed kennel club, such as the Ottawa Kennel Club, or contact the Conformation Director of the OVGRC. There are often training classes for the show ring being offered in our area or "Matches" where you and your dog can test your skill in the ring

While training classes offer the best hands-on way to practice for the show ring, attending shows and observing your breed is also a great way to gain understanding of what judges and other competitors do. If you do not wish to handle your dog yourself, or have a friend or family member do it, you may contact a professional handler who charges a fee for showing your dog.

You're on your way! Showing and handling your dog is an exceptional and enjoyable experience. From the grooming table to the show ring, you and your dog will develop a bond. You will make many friends in the sport, and will enjoy your dog and your new hobby for many years to come.