

Chill Out at an Aussie Show

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It's wonderful that Americans are now exposed to televised dog shows on a regular basis. Each and every one provides an educational opportunity for you to view the best specimens of popular and rare breeds alike, in the comfort of your living room.

However, you may not be aware of the many dog shows held throughout the country that are governed by registries other than the American Kennel Club.

I don't happen to own Aussies but I have friends who do, and I find Australian Shepherd Club of America shows a fun, informal and educational venue to hang out at. I recently attended one such show in the desert north of Los Angeles, and to me, it really illustrated what Aussie people appreciate about these events.

Breeders and owners tend to show their own dogs, which I think definitely makes for a more laid-back event. You don't have busy professional handlers with 20 different breeds to show, frantically racing from ring to ring.

The action here takes place in a single ring, and I appreciate the judges who take the time to put a nervous novice at ease and speak reassuringly to an inexperienced puppy.

After all, none of us was born knowing all the moves, and we've all depended on the generosity of mentors to upgrade our presentation skills. Newcomers are made to feel welcome in a non-threatening environment.

Many exhibitors bring their families to ASCA shows.

In fact, there are a few three-generation families represented in the Aussie breed, with grandchildren showing in Junior Handling – and doing it in a very polished manner, I might add! – while Mom and Grandmom are grooming dogs, selling raffle tickets, or mentoring others new to the world of dog showing.

The ASCA is the largest single-breed registry in the U.S. Along with performance events such as herding, ASCA holds many conformation breed shows around the country. Many breeder-exhibitors of Aussies take advantage of the opportunity to enter ASCA shows and compete for ASCA titles, in addition to participating in AKC events.

The judges tend to be experienced Aussie breeders approved by ASCA although AKC judges are also invited to officiate, thus providing important feedback as well-informed but non-Aussie dog people.

Whereas we see many "generic show dogs" in the high-stakes world of AKC dog shows – the trend is for big dogs, big coats, lots of hair product used, and handlers racing around the ring in whatever breed – we tend to have more moderate dogs of correct size competing at the ASCA shows.

Add a homemade lunch and big elegant rosettes, and you have the makings of a very enjoyable dog show.

I'll be looking forward to attending my next ASCA show soon.

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