

## One Year Later: The Amateur Owner-Handler Class

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The AKC initiated the Amateur Owner-Handler class on January 1, 2009. The class is meant for non-champions at least six months of age which must be handled by their registered owners. No owner may have been a professional handler, an AKC-approved conformation judge or employed as an assistant to a professional handler. It is an optional class, offered or not by show-giving clubs at their discretion.

I must confess I do not know anyone who has shown dogs in this class. My friends and acquaintances – some better handlers than others – enter their youngsters in the Puppy class and their adults in the Bred-by-Exhibitor, American-Bred or Open classes, depending upon eligibility. (Champions, of course, are entered in the Best of Breed class.)

Even the less-polished owner-handlers figure they can get by showing a decent dog themselves and in most breeds, a competent judge will find a good dog eventually, even if it isn't handled by a VIP.

Most people assume the Amateur Owner-Handler class will eventually replace the little-used Novice class that is seldom supported by exhibitors and feels a bit degrading to many. We hope we can blend in showing a good dog adequately; does anyone really want to announce their newbie status in print by entering Novice?

Yet many exhibitors contend that the Amateur Owner-Handler class carries the same stigma.

Everyone stumbles over the word "amateur" and its many connotations. Interestingly, in the world of professional sports, participants in past Olympic Games were all of amateur designation because they received no payment for training or participating in their particular sport. However, most were every bit as skilled as their colleagues with professional status, and performed at the top of their game.

Many successful owner-handlers are good enough to make a living showing dogs but choose to enjoy the sport strictly as a hobby. Some owner-handlers, on the other hand, complain that the deck is stacked against them showing in the same ring as the pros.

For them, the Amateur Owner-Handler class has been created where they can compete in a ring full of other owners. But whoever wins the class then moves on to Winners where there will, in all likelihood, be professional handlers sharing the ring.

If all you need is a ribbon won without the pressure of competing against pro handlers, then the Amateur Owner-Handler class can help you claim one. I suspect, however, that most competitive owner-handlers are proud of their dogs and want to show them to the best of their ability under knowledgeable judges. No crutch offered by the AKC and no two-tiered system.

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