

Is My Dog A Champion?

By Kerri Danskin

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A colleague of mine has a beautiful 5-month-old Shiba Inu who is currently raising the question: To show or not to show? For someone in the dog show industry, this is a sensible question when a dog is growing into an excellent representation of breed standard and has a delightful temperament like this one does. For most of us, the concept has never occurred to us. Dog shows are for other people, we might think. Those people are crazy, we might say (especially after a viewing of Christopher Guest's film *Best In Show*). But is it really so crazy? How do those "other people" get into it in the first place? Everyone has to start somewhere, right?

Getting into the dog show scene obviously requires a strong interest in dogs not just as pets, but also as something more like a fine work of art. Many of us are struck by the beauty of our pets on a daily basis, but the more you learn about your dog's breed, the more you might appreciate the way she walks and moves, the shape of her head, the texture and length of her coat and other factors. These are some of the things on which dogs are judged at these shows.

People who are interested in starting in the show dog circuit would of course have to start with a registered dog. A good first step would be basic training classes, which are offered in so many places, including stores like Petsmart and Petco and also through breed clubs registered with the American Kennel Club (AKC). The AKC's Canine Good Citizen training program is a good introduction to obedience training. Working with the breed enthusiasts in your area might be enough to pique your interest in showing.

If your dog is not a purebred or not what is considered a good representation of the breed standard, there are many other options. When I get my dog (which I blogged about two weeks ago—looks like that will be happening in two weeks!), I am going to check out the agility competition scene. A white Boxer can't compete in a regular dog show because the breed standard dictates a fawn (reddish brown) or brindle (brown and black) coat. More than 1/3 white disqualifies them. But since this pup will be exceedingly well-bred despite her pigment challenge, I am hoping she can be trained to be quite an athlete. This will be fun for her (Boxers, after all, are known for their energy) and for me. I am very much looking forward to socializing with other dog owners at the competitions and spending lots of time training.

Purebred dogs also compete in obedience trials. Here's what the AKC website says about obedience:

"AKC Obedience Trials demonstrate the usefulness of the purebred dog as a companion to man. Obedience trials showcase dogs that have been trained and conditioned to behave well in the home, in public places, and in the presence of other dogs. AKC trials and tests allow exhibitors and their dogs to enjoy companionship and competition as they proudly earn AKC titles."

While you still might look at "those crazy dog show people" and wonder what makes them tick, dogs are absolutely benefiting from all of the extra attention and training from their owners. And the relationship between dog and human can only benefit from increased interaction.