

Baiting Dogs in the Show Ring

Handlers use tasty morsels of liver or chicken to keep the dog looking alert.

By Allan Reznik

Q. Whenever I watch a dog show on TV, it looks like the handlers are holding something in their mouths, then take it out, and kind of tease the dog with it. What is it? What is it for? Does the dog ever actually get to eat it?

A. What the handlers have in their mouths is “bait,” used to animate the dogs, keep them looking alert and standing four square during their time in the show ring. Typically the tempting morsel is liver, but it might also be cooked chicken, a hot dog, or cheese. The bait is kept warm in the handler’s mouth and quickly available as needed, a small sliver at a time. Some handlers and owner-exhibitors prefer to keep the bait in their pocket or a small bait bag pinned or clipped to their belt loop.

Judges prefer that bait be used sparingly and never when they are about to examine the dog’s mouth. The thought of examining a dog’s teeth when they are coated with flecks of liver is not pleasant nor do you want the dog’s face wrinkling up as he anticipates a bite of his favorite treat.

Savvy handlers give their dogs a small taste of bait intermittently, but they know baiting isn’t about feeding a dog lunch to keep him standing still. Baiting a dog does not take the place of consistent show training done at home.