

Beginning to Show Dogs

Junior handler wants to step out of the junior ring but doesn't know where to begin.

By Allan Reznik

Q. I am a junior handler and I was wondering this: What are the benefits of co-owning dogs to show, and how do you start co-owning? I am limited to my current dogs (I cannot buy anymore due to city laws), and not all of them are "show quality" – as I would like to take a step out of the junior ring and start handling dogs in real shows.

So, where do I begin? How do I find someone who can mentor me and teach me show grooming tactics for different breeds, and let me co-own dogs to show in the junior ring as well as outside? What are the benefits of co-owning? How does it work?

A. Co-ownership essentially is sharing a dog, with each co-owner contributing something to the dog's upkeep, or show or breeding career.

If you have been participating in junior handling successfully, you've probably been watching breed judging of those breeds that interest you. You could certainly approach a breeder whose dogs you admire, express your interest in the breed, and ask if you might help them at the shows with their dogs. If you and the breeder strike up a nice relationship, they'll probably let you help groom the dogs and perhaps take one in the breed ring as well. You don't have to co-own a dog to show it in the breed ring, and the grooming advice and mentorship you receive from the breeder is priceless in terms of furthering your canine education.

Joining your local kennel club and volunteering on a committee is a great way to expand your network of breeder-friends, learn about different breeds and their grooming needs, and handle different breeds.

Depending upon your age, many professional handlers use junior assistants at shows on the weekends or help at their kennels during the summer holidays and school breaks. Again, you'll be learning a great deal about grooming and the preparation of dogs for the show ring.