

Getting Started in Dog Shows

Begin your dog showing adventure by choosing a show-quality purebred.

I walked onto the grounds of my first dog show in the fall of 1967 quite by accident. I was into horses at the time, and had been training a horse stabled at Ox Ridge Hunt Club in Darien, Conn. One Saturday in October, I arrived to ride my horse and found the polo field filled with bright yellow and white tents. When I asked what was going on, I was told that the Ox Ridge Kennel Club dog show was being held that day.

I was amazed because I didn't know that dogs were shown with the same intensity as horses. That day changed my life. I realized that the sport of breeding and showing dogs was what I wanted to do with my life, and I did not know it existed until I went to my first show.

A breeder is born

Since that day, I have bred more than 100 litters, produced 72 breed Champions (carrying my kennel name, Heronsway), shown my own dogs in the ring for 40 years and personally finished 62 Champions in my chosen breed of Pembroke Welsh Corgis. Licensed by the American Kennel Club to judge four breeds and Junior Showmanship, I have judged dog events all over the United States and in five other countries, and have met wonderful friends in all corners of the world.

I never regretted my decision to become a dog breeder, and I've had many memorable moments over the years. The best moment of all was on Dec. 1, 2007, when I walked out into the big ring at the AKC/Eukanuba Championship Dog Show as AKC's 2007 Herding Dog Breeder of the Year.

One of the aspects I've always loved about showing dogs is that it is open to everyone. Anyone can enter and show a dog. The only qualification is that your dog must be purebred and of a breed recognized by AKC, the United Kennel Club or the American Rare Breed Association.

So, how do you get involved in this wonderful sport?

Read all about it

You can read many excellent books about the sport of conformation. Some discuss the sport in general and others explain how to show dogs. Here are some suggestions:

Best in Show: The World of Show Dogs and Dog Shows by Bo Bengtson (Kennel Club Books, 2008). A comprehensive overview of dog shows.

The Complete Dog Book, 20th Edition by the American Kennel Club (Ballantine Books, 2006). A listing of the breed standards and other breed traits for the AKC-recognized breeds.

The Winning Edge: Show Ring Secrets by George Alston (Howell Reference Books, 1992). Written by a successful professional handler – a must-read for anyone starting out in the sport.

New Secrets of Successful Dog Handling by Peter Green (Alpine Blue Ribbon Books, 2002). Also written by a successful professional handler – another must-read for those new to the sport.

Dog Showing for Beginners by Lynn Hall (Howell Reference Books, 1994). An excellent book for beginning dog handlers.

Surf the internet

What we have now that I did not have in 1967 is the internet. What a fantastic tool it is! You can find anything you want to know about dog showing: the people who do it, the dogs that win, where the shows are and how many entries of your breed will be there, as well as who is judging and what their qualifications are.

For information about specific dog shows, I recommend using www.infodog.com; it will give you complete information about all shows held on a given weekend throughout the United States. Show listings can also be found at www.akc.org, www.ukcdogs.com and www.arba.org

Choose the breed for you

The first step toward showing dogs is to own a purebred dog of one of the breeds currently recognized by AKC, UKC or ARBA. Maybe you already know which breed you want to show or, perhaps, like me when I started, you don't have any real preference. In either case, a good place to learn about the different breeds is a dog show. Use www.infodog.com to find a show (preferably two days long) close to you.

Go to that show and plan to spend the first day looking at all of the breeds present. Stay for the Group competition, which

usually starts in the afternoon, so you can see which breeds are related, in terms of original purpose. By the end of the first day, you should be able to zero in on the breeds that most appeal to you and best fit your lifestyle. Come back the second day and concentrate on those breeds.

Single out one or two exhibitors to talk with about those particular breeds. Don't be shy; breeders love to talk about their breed, but only after they have finished competing for the day. Ask specific questions such as: Does this breed have any particular health problems? What type of temperament does the breed have? What are the grooming and exercise requirements? Is this breed often owner-handled or mostly professionally handled? Are there any serious breeders in my area? Are there any regional breed clubs in my area?

Dive into the breed

Once you have chosen the breed you would like to exhibit, go back to the library or bookstore and find the latest books on your breed. The internet will likely provide the most information.

Every AKC-recognized breed has a national parent club, which is responsible for the welfare of that breed in the United States. You can find the website for your breed's parent club by going to the AKC website and clicking on "Breeds," then "National Breed Clubs," then your particular breed. Contact information for that breed's parent club website will appear, and you will be off to a great start. To find information about UKC or ARBA breeds, visit the registries' websites.

Your next two steps in getting into showing dogs are to purchase a show puppy and find a mentor. To learn how, check out next month's "In the Ring" column.

Anne H. Bowes has been an owner-breeder-handler of Pembroke Welsh Corgis since 1968. She is an AKC judge for four breeds and Junior Showmanship, and was awarded AKC Herding Group Breeder of the Year in 2007.

Want to read more about dog shows and performance events? Visit dogworld.com today!