

Handling Hints and Procedures

By Dave Gordon

If you don't take anything else away from today's training class, it is my hope that you will log one thing into your indelible memory banks – **YOU NEED TO BE SHOWING YOUR PUPPY WITH THE THOUGHT OF "HAVING FUN", LEARNING AND NOT CARING WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE!**

GENERAL COMMENTS AND FIRST STEPS;

I have said a thousand times that the show lead is a telegraph line directly from you to your puppy. I can't impress this enough. If you get nervous, your puppy is going to get nervous! If you are calm, your puppy will do better. All dogs will react to the vibrations that their owner is putting out.

While your puppy is growing and waiting for that time to enter your first show, it is very important to socialize your puppy. If your puppy's first time away from home is also its first show, your puppy could get frightened from the noise, the many dogs and the crowds of people. If that happens, there could be a chance that your puppy's show career could be over. There are ways to recover from a bad show experience if this happens but it is always better and easier to start out the right way.

It is also very important to practice at home. You can play with your puppy and have lots of fun, but when you put the show lead on your puppy, playtime is over. You need to encourage your puppy to get excited about going for walks, but under control.

Practice gaiting, turns and baiting and when your puppy does what you want it to do, give it lots of excited praise. Your puppy will very quickly figure out how to please you. Remember, puppies have very short attention spans, so don't go through long training lessons. AND, never quit a training session when your puppy is doing something wrong. Figure out something that your puppy knows and get it to complete that task correctly. Then give your puppy lots of praise and quit. If you quit while your puppy is whining or acting up, your puppy is training you.

By not caring whether you win or lose, you are taking the pressure off of yourself. You will enjoy the showing experience more and actually you will be opening up your mind to be able to see, absorb and learn more from your surroundings. Make mental notes from your show experience or even written ones. Then ask someone for an explanation. The fastest way to learn is to ask questions. No one in this training class will think you are stupid for asking a question. Everyone here had to start somewhere. The first thing that a new exhibitor needs to know is the standard of the particular breed that they will be showing. Get familiar with the conformation of your breed, the grooming required and the speed at which your breed should gait. When you are walking or running with your puppy, depending upon your standard, try to take your

steps in rhythm with your puppy. The Judge is looking for the perfect gait but stomping directly on the other side of your puppy would be distracting for the Judge.

STACKING;

The next thing to learn is the positioning of the legs or stance when your breed is set up. Know where the head and ears should be held, and finally know where the tail should be. There are ways to make your puppy look better and there are ways that you can mess up your puppy. A good way to practice at home is to set up your puppy between you and a mirror. You can watch and see if you are doing what is recommended for your breed.

FIRST SHOW;

Once you have entered your puppy in the first show, go to the show early and walk your puppy around and let it get relaxed and acclimated to the surroundings. Puppies under six months old are not allowed on the show grounds. Then go to ringside and watch the Judge while he/she is judging other breeds and get familiar with what he/she is expecting from the exhibitors. Whatever the Judge is asking others to do in the ring, he/she will be asking you to do the same, unless your breed standard calls for something different. If a Judge speaks very softly or with an accent, you will already have an idea of what he/she is asking you to do.

Unless you are in the “six to nine puppy dog class”, you will even have time to observe what the Judge is expecting from your breed. Don’t just stand there at ringside and chat with your back to the ring. Kenny Roger says *“You never count your money while you are sitting at the table. There’s plenty of time for counting when the dealing’s done.”* There will be plenty of time to chat after the judging is done. Some people are capable of talking and observing at the same time, but that is rare when you are starting out.

SHOW RING;

When you are in the ring, be very courteous to the Judge and other exhibitors. It should be “Yes Ma’am” or “Yes Sir” when the Judge asks you to do something. ONLY, when you are the first in a line of exhibitors and the Judge asks the whole class to go around the ring, turn to the person behind you and ask “Are you ready?” Sometimes the Judge may ask everyone to go around the ring, one at a time. When moving around the ring in a group, never crowd the person in front of you because it could throw off the movement of their puppy. This is part of good sportsmanship.

Speaking of good sportsmanship, when someone beats you, always congratulate them. When you are courteous and a good sportsman, your competitors, that have been doing this for a while, are more willing to help you. When the Judge hands you your ribbon, ALWAYS thank them! Remember, it does not make any difference whether he/she gives you a fourth place ribbon, say thank you. You will probably be showing under that judge again someday. You do not want to burn any bridges!

Another important thing, especially for our junior handlers, is to be in a good mood. Smile and look like you are enjoying what you are doing. I don’t ask everyone to smile

as much as I ask the juniors, but if you are not enjoying showing dogs, you won't be doing it for very long. AND the Judge will realize that you do not want to be there and less likely to give you a win.

Remember – Not everyone can win the first time showing, especially if you are showing a puppy. There are some judges that refuse to put up puppies for points. But, your puppy needs the experience and the ring training. No matter how much you practice at home or in a training class, the actual show experience can be very different. If your puppy acts bad, don't get mad. Your puppy will remember a bad experience from the show. This is what I tell people. The first time in the ring with a new puppy is a learning experience. Whatever your puppy does wrong or even whatever you may do wrong, that just tells you what you need to practice on before the next show. My take from a particular show is not whether I win or lose, but whether the puppy that I am showing has shown well. Not everyone can win every time. If they did, the rest of us would quit showing.

When you first go in the ring for your class, the ring steward will usually ask you to line up by arm band number. Set your puppy up on the floor or free bait until the Judge says to go around the ring. If you are first, ask if the one behind you is ready and take your puppy around the ring and set up. If you are further back in the line, wait until the one in front of you has been examined and starts its movement. Then set up your puppy on the table or the floor.

HANDLING SUGGESTIONS;

JUNIOR HANDLERS ONLY – WAIT WITH A SMILE UNTIL THE JUDGE ASKS YOU TO PRESENT YOUR DOG.

1. Set your puppy on the table or on the ground with the lead around your neck or hidden in your hand. Never leave the lead dangling. It is a distraction for the Judge and just plain looks bad. I never use bait when I am setting up a puppy. You want to teach your puppy to stand where you put it, with the head straight to the front. If you have bait, your puppy will be constantly looking for a treat.
2. If your breed is a table dog, try and set the puppy close to the Judge's side of the table and right at the front of the table. If you use the front of the table as a guide, the feet will always be straight, looking from the side.
3. Quickly move the back and front legs into an approximate position.
4. Clean the neck, keeping the collar up high behind the ears and the head up high.
5. Take the collar in your right hand and reach over the shoulders with your left hand. Set the front left leg by taking a hold of the elbow. Point the toes straight ahead and the leg straight up and down. You can use the head to help you set the feet straight, in case your puppy is toeing in or out.
6. Take the collar in your left hand and set the front right leg by taking a hold of the elbow. Point the toes straight ahead and the right foot should be the width of the chest away from the left foot and the leg straight up and down.
7. Take the collar in your right hand again. Keep the head high and pointed straight ahead. Using your left hand, reach back and set the back left leg with your first finger on the inside of the hock. Set the left leg a little wider than the hips and

from the hock to the table or ground should be as perpendicular as possible to the table or ground. The toes should be pointing straight ahead and the hocks straight back.

8. Still using the left hand, set the back right leg in the same manner.

NOTE: MAKE EVERY ATTEMPT TO SET THE LEGS ON THE JUDGE'S SIDE FIRST BECAUSE HE WILL BE WATCHING YOU AND YOU WANT YOUR PUPPY LOOKING AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE.

9. Make sure that the ears and tail are in the correct position and signify to the Judge that you are ready.

NOTE – SOME JUDGES WILL NOT WAIT FOR YOU TO GET READY, SO YOUR MOTIONS SHOULD BE QUICK AND FLUID. IF THE JUDGE APPROACHES AND STARTS CHECKING THE BITE, CONTINUE SETTING UP THE REAR.

10. Always be calm and talk to your puppy. Use a one word command like stand or stay.
11. When the Judge is approaching you puppy, be ready for the puppy to move. If they move, keep setting up as best possible. Many Judges expect puppies to move, so don't panic.
12. Always say "Good Morning" Or "Good Afternoon" to the Judge.
13. After the Judge finishes checking the bite and head and starts down the side, move to the front and hold your puppy's head in the correct position. You want the judge to see a long straight arched neck and a straight line from the back on the head to the tail.

IT'S NOT MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY;

I started this section with "Handling Suggestions". "Suggestions" is the key word. I would never tell anyone that they needed to show the same way I do. I will tell you what works for me, what I think makes your puppy look better or things that might make it easier for you to handle. Other people may say something entirely different. Don't argue with someone else and say that Dave said this. Listen to what they have to say. There is no one way that is going to be the gospel. You can try different things and see what works the best for you. This class is by no way a dictatorship.

A FEW MORE POINTERS;

1. One point that I like to make is that you want the Judge to see a long clean unbroken neck. We have several different color leads that we use; depending upon which dog we are showing. Try and get a lead that will blend into your puppy's neck.
2. When the Judge asks you to move your puppy down and back, there are several ways to get there, but always make sure that your puppy is straight in front of the Judge before you start moving. Junior handlers must always do a courtesy turn before they start the down and back. Also, make sure that you have your puppy's attention before you start moving. Move down and back in as smooth of a motion as possible, without the lead dangling from your hand. If you start out and your puppy starts acting up, it is perfectly acceptable to return to the Judge and start

over, as long as you have only gone a quarter of the way down the ring. After you have gone down and you come back to the Judge, stop about six feet away, turn your puppy slightly so the Judge can see the side view and bait your puppy. This is where it becomes a benefit to watch the Judge before your breed shows.

Some Judges want your puppy to bait on them so they can see the expression. If that is the case, run your puppy up a little closer to the Judge and let the Judge do the baiting. When the Judge tells you to circle around the ring, return back to the starting corner and move around the ring. Keep your eye on the Judge. If you are half way around the ring and the Judge turns to examine the next puppy, then keep going to the end and praise your puppy. If the Judge really likes a puppy, the Judge may follow you all the way around the ring. If that is the case, when you get to the end, stop and bait your puppy like you are really showing it off.

3. This is for juniors and everyone, always be alert and watching what the Judge is doing. If the Judge is glancing around the ring between the time he/she is examining other dogs on the table or floor, always have your puppy ready and looking good.

JUNIOR HANDLERS;

The best advice for juniors - always be prepared in the ring.

When you are standing in a long line and the Judge is still examining other puppies, sometimes you can relax your puppy. But if the Judge is on the last puppy, you should have your puppy set up on the floor and ready for the Judge to make his/her final examination and placement in the class.

One last point today for juniors - Do everything possible to keep the puppy you are showing between you and the Judge.