

The art of presenting a competitive show dog

By Rosemary Sutton



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INTRODUCTION: To the dog show world.

I have enjoyed and profited from the dog show industry in many ways both emotionally and financially.

Emotionally: Through all of my wonderful experiences, accomplishments, and good friendships together with a lot of fun times. Finding a passion I love that has fulfilled many of my dreams. It's allowed me to be able to enjoy my dogs in work and play.

Financially: Through the success of our Summerwinds Business that has supported us for 27 years. Plus, the handling of many dogs in different breeds professionally.

If you are taking the time to read this, I would presume that you have a dog maybe and Afghan or another long coated breed; or perhaps a curly or harsh wiry and even a short coated breed for that matter. Maybe your dog is a pet or a rescue that you and your family just love and don't show but enjoy seeing him in a beautiful coat and want to do the very best by him/her. Your dog might be a show dog that you think would be fun to show occasionally to try and make him/her a champion and are interested in learning how to train and groom him for the shows. At this stage, you would be called the hobbyist. You might find out that you will enjoy showing your dogs so much you have (as we say), been bitten by the dog show bug. If your dog is competitive and begins to win a lot, you may even experience an ado fin rush that sometime accompanies a big win. Now I'm warning you; if this does happen to you, hang on tight because this is when the dog show sport or game, according to the terminology, becomes a whole new adventure. The sport of showing dogs is in itself is a subculture. We have our own rules, laws, language and terminology. You will quickly find that one dog isn't enough. Your house and car isn't big enough, and don't be surprised if you end up moving out in the country where you can have kennel faculties. According to how ambitious you become, your life is in for a big change. I call it "after I went to the dogs".

In my experience, the people we refer to as high profile people, those that win a lot and most people know of them, have many of the same things in common. They are very ambitious, committed, intense, driven constant, passionate, not to mentioned obsessed and not at all afraid

of a little hard work. Of course, this would also apply to any high profile person in any field. No matter how ambitious you are or aren't, there is a place for you and your dog at the dog shows.

One of the blessings at this point in my life is to be able to share some of my experiences and knowledge gained over the many years of participating in the dog show industry. I have been called both an expert and an authority (among other things...oops). I am not sure if this is a fact, but what I have learned is that an expert is someone that lives a long ways away from you. So, what I am about to share are methods that I have found that work for me.

I purchased my first Afghan hound in 1968. Over many years of trial and error, I have found short cuts that gave me the same results as other methods that were very time consuming. Choosing the Afghan Hound breed alone is a very labor intense breed. If you too have chosen Afghans as your breed, let me warn you right now, you can find some short cuts, but truthfully, you are in for a ton of work and grooming. So you might as well get use to it. The acronym KISS (keep it simple stupid) means learn simple steps how to do it right, and it doesn't matter whom you learn it from as long as it works for you. Many years ago, I had a friend that use to say, "check the record" that would be the best advise I could give you. I took a little from this person and a little from another.

One of my favorite saying is, "when you're green you're growing, when you're ripe you rot!" I try and learn something new every day; as you are never too old or experienced to learn. What I love the most about a really sincere novice is their ambition, they are like mental sponges and so eager for information and want to learn all they can about how to groom and do it right and what products will give them the best results.

Anyone who knows me knows me well enough to not ask me a question if you don't want an in-depth answer. To say that detail and full explanations is my forte would be an understatement. Some people are very good at Reader Digest responses; there are others that like the "Gone With The Wind" type answer. For some of you who like to cut to the chase, I have made this article and its contents with subtitles so you are able to skip over what you aren't interested in and still go away with a little more understanding and knowledge than before you took the time to try and read this. The rest is for those who always have a million more questions after I think I answered all of them. I have gone into more depth and detail for those with inquiring minds that "really want to know". I find that one of the hardest subjects to teach people are the subjects that they aren't inquisitive about; from the basics to the extravagant. Yet, they want to know how to complete a task and be good at it before they truly understand the whole structure of the project. If you understand the total basics of why something is like it is and how to keep it protected and remain in good condition, the easier it will be for you to accomplish your goal. My effort here is to try and share with you how to be a winner and give you the ability to exhibit and put down a dog in pristine coat condition, and well trained and behaved to make showing dogs a rewarding and pleasant experience for you and your dog.

Training, grooming and discipline and all things pertaining to cultivating and caring for a dog, and the proper method of achieving the best results is according to who you talk to and the different breeds you are talking about.

When discussing grooming and grooming products for example, in every breed you will find as many different opinions as you will find breeders, owners, handlers and groomers on how to achieve the best and easiest methods and products to cleanse, condition coat and skin, protect and de-mat coats to produce a competitive show coat in their breed. Let alone when we talk about so many different breeds and textures of coats from very fine, straight or curly to harsh and wiry to short and smooth with each breed standards describing what is the proper coat type for that breed. Your goal is achieve your breed's desired coat in the best way you can. What to believe and whose advise to follow can be a very puzzling dilemma for a novice. My advice here is to find someone you admire that has achieved what you want in your breed or just in general. You will be given a lot of advice, both free and sought after. A great place to start is from your breeder and if he/she is a good mentor. Free advice, perhaps from a novice or a long-time breeder/owner or professional handler of who each might have a different way to groom, condition and protect coat. Your job is going to be to weed through all the advice and find out what's really truth or fiction. The fact is that I know many long-time breeders/owners that never

really get how to put down a complete show coat. This can be the difference in your dog being a winner or a filer. A filer is a dog that attends each show event that never wins, but fills the class to make points for the dogs that do win. Your goal is for your dog not to become a filer due to your lack of knowledge and to be able to put down a dog in complete condition. Just because a dog has a long coat, doesn't mean the coat is in good healthy condition. It might be dull and faded. There are many ways to skin a cat so to speak. No one-way is the best way and nothing is written in stone. Whatever it takes to achieve the results you will need to win is what you need to learn. And your goal should be to make you and your dog stand out from the others.