

What's the big deal about Conformation?

So what's the scoop on dog shows anyway? - Who Cares?

Why should I care about some beauty pageant critique of my Lab? Our dogs are Labrador Retrievers - it's a full meal deal. If they don't look like Labradors but are great for hunting then they are retrievers but not necessarily a LABRADOR RETRIEVER. If they're beautiful and ready for a calendar photo shoot but won't go out and bring back the bird then they might be labradors but not a LABRADOR RETRIEVER. The standard describes a dog that is built for a certain purpose. For instance our standard says:

"The most distinguishing characteristics of the Labrador Retriever are its short, dense, weather resistant coat; an "otter" tail; a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws; and its "kind," friendly eyes, expressing character, intelligence and good temperament."

These features are important because they allow the Labrador to do the job it was bred to do:

The Labradors distinctive coat allows it to retrieve in and out of water all day long without getting cold and wet. It sheds water, burrs, brambles and other undergrowth easily when the dog is working in rough cover.

The Labradors head should not only express it's wonderful, willing temperament but specifically needs to be built in a certain way in order to pick up a duck, goose, pheasant, etc. and carry it back through whatever terrain encountered (streams, banks, low fences) to it's owner without damage.

But I'm only going to hunt / do agility / play fetch with my dog - why should I care. The Labrador Standard specifically outlines what every breeder should be striving to produce in their Labradors. A dog that is built right (balanced, good shoulder angulation, elbows in the correct position, short coupled, strong correct hindquarters, etc) will remain sound and will be less likely to break down when put under stress. A dog who has conformation flaws will be more likely to suffer an injury.

So how do I find out more about dog shows?

AKC - A Beginner's Guide to Dog Shows

Show Superintendents - to find out when and where the local shows are.

Join your local breed club - PSLRA

Join an All Breed club