

A Dog Show Primer

So you're all set to attend your first local dog show. What's on the agenda? It's a great idea to go the first time with no dogs and just watch. You'll find that dog shows in person are quite different than what you see on TV. For one - they're not usually formal, and you'll find they don't show on fancy carpet - but if inside on mats or outside on grass or dirt.

You'll find there are two types of conformation shows out there - All Breed Shows and Specialty Shows.

All Breed shows are open to all AKC registered dogs and you will find over 150 breeds at most shows. These shows can range from a small area show with 800 dogs entered to a large metropolitan area show that might have 3000 dogs showing that day. All breed shows can be found in more populated areas on a fairly regular basis. In the Seattle area you can find an all breed show at least twice a month if you're willing to drive a couple of hours. Each day at the show is a new show, a new chance, with new judges in each breed.

Specialty shows are for one breed only and are often judged by a respected breeder. Specialties are hosted by breed clubs and so there are usually only a few a year in any given area. Because they are a great opportunity to visit with old friends, meet new ones, show off your breeding program, and scope out what other breeders are doing, exhibitors will often travel long distances to attend a specialty. Most specialties have much larger entries than your average all breed show.

Try checking with the superintendents website (Infodog has most show info even if they aren't the super) to find a judging program which will tell you what time and in what ring the breed you want to watch will be showing. Next it's important to know some basic rules - Only dogs that are entered in the show are allowed to be on the grounds. Dogs must be registered with AKC (if an AKC show) and must be at least six months of age. In dog show language a dog is a boy and a bitch is a girl. This is one of the few times that it's ok and actually correct to use the word bitch.

So what's going on when you arrive? Each breed is shown separately. The judge will be judging each breed based on that breed's standard (a written blue-print of the breed). The judge will choose the dog that, in his opinion, most closely represents the standard on that given day. So while it seems that the same dog should always win - it often doesn't happen that way.

At the Labrador ring (and all other breeds) the classes are separated by sex and then broken down further by age, who is showing the dog, and possibly where it was born. The first class in the ring will be 6 to 9 month dogs (boys), then 9 to 12 month dogs, 12 to 18 month dogs, Novice (can't have won more than three

classes), Bred By Exhibitor (must be owned and shown by a breeder of record), American Bred (bred in America), and Open (any dogs). In Labradors the open classes are usually broken down further into Open Black, Open Chocolate and Open Yellow. Then they will bring back the first place dog from each class and choose "Winners Dog". This is the dog (boy dog) that in the judges opinion is the best of the boys. Winners dog is the only dog who will earn points toward his championship that day. Now they start all over with the girls and go through the same progression. Once a Winners Dog and Winners Bitch has been chosen there will be one more "breed" class and that is Best in Breed. In this class you will find the two winners and also dogs (boys and girls) that have already earned their championship who are called "specials". From this group the judge will choose the very best Labrador of the day and name him Best of Breed. If this is a specialty then we're done. If this is an all breed show the dog who is awarded Best of Breed will continue on to compete in Groups, and possibly onto Best In Show.

AKC has designated all breeds of dogs into one of seven groups. Sporting consists of the dogs who hunt, retrieve, point, and flush, and is home to Labradors and 25 other breeds. Championship points can only be earned by winners dog and winners bitch. Points earned are based on the number of entries in the breed that day, with the more dogs defeated the more points earned. The maximum number of points earned on any given day is five. It takes 15 points to earn an AKC Championship. While this sounds like a minimal number of points to earn it has been estimated that the average Labrador Championship costs the owner between \$8,000 and \$12,000 to earn.

Don't be intimidated. Showing your dogs is a great way to get out and meet others in your breed, to see how your breeding stock measures up to the breed ideal and have a ton of fun!