

# Winning Solutions

## Click Your Way to Success in the Show Ring

### Problem Solving/Training Tips For Dogs Of All Ages & Sizes, Including Young Puppies

Use lots of soft treats and different kinds of dog toys. Save your freshly cooked liver for the ring so it holds your dog's attention in that most distracting environment, where you most need the help. Boneless chicken, hot dogs and cheese are often less expensive, yummiier and healthier than most commercial dog treats.

Enter young puppies in a few local shows to learn to love the excitement, but don't allow them to be overwhelmed or frightened. This early ring time is for learning; winning is incidental if you want a long happy career for your future winner. Take them to class and to events hungry, with lots of extra-yummy treats like the previously-mentioned fresh cooked liver at the shows.

Do not hesitate to leave your young or teenage pup at home at the last minute if he goes through a less-than-attractive growth spurt unless it will seriously affect the points available. There is usually no reason to feel bad about the available points dropping from 1 point to 2, but it is a big deal to break a major, which is a dog show win worth 3-5 points.

Fortunately, if you still want to show a lot when your dog is young, it is more important on most days, and especially with less-populous breeds, for your dog to look cute and show a bubbly personality than to stand perfectly still. For some dogs, with some judges, he just needs to be good long enough for the judge to get a glimpse of how lovely he is underneath all that juvenile behavior.

Your dog must have two major wins to finish an American Kennel Club championship. Smart handlers will exhibit good sportsmanship and cooperation to create and hold majors for one another.

### While your puppy grows up:

Concentrate on obedience, rally, agility training and of course his show training while he is maturing. Do no road work before he is 2, to prevent permanent damage to his growing body.

Bringing him out to show as a grownup will save you lots of time, money and aggravation in the show ring, and you will end up with that wonderful, now-trained and easy to handle dog that will easily attract performance as well as show homes.

Putting titles before and after your dog's name is and important for your show dog because you will have proof of your dog's ability to produce dogs of



sound disposition and appropriate specialized breed skills as well as soundness of body and breed type.

It is also important because owners of outstanding performance dogs are quite likely to keep their dogs forever, making it easier for you, as the stud dog or brood bitch owner that produced their dogs, to learn lots about the future of your canine bloodlines. How fast your line matures, recessive and dominant traits, food or skin allergies you would like to minimize whenever possible, structural strengths and challenges, temperaments and countless more information will be available to you.

Unfortunately some show homes, especially with someone in a hurry to succeed quickly, are more likely to place dogs that are not winning in pet homes, or to quit showing dogs altogether. Many new show and performance dog owners drop out of the sport in 5-7 years.

## **Eliminating problem behaviors**

Unlike some humans, a dog that knows he gets paid well for being right will waste little time on behaviors that do not earn rewards and attention.

Learn to enjoy the developing relationship with your dog, rather than insist on perfection the entire time, especially in beginning stages. Our time together with each dog is way too short to miss the joy that sent you down this path.

Reward him at first for brief moments and then longer periods of sparkling ring performance. Catch the moment when your dog is doing it right, then next time ask for a tiny bit more: leaning forward, arching the neck, holding the feet still for a nanosecond longer at first, especially for a pup.

Quickly click or say "click" when dogs finally offer what you are looking for, and immediately follow up with praise as you deliver a treat.

Try not to get greedy when looking for a new behavior. At first just click then treat your pup or older dog for standing still. Wait until he stops moving then click and pay. Now click and pay for holding still a second or two longer (count out loud, "Good dog 1, good dog 2" etc.). Click when there is no resistance for repositioning his legs or head, then next for legs *and* head.

## **Increased handler and dog confidence**

As your timing and communication skills improve with practice, you see visible confidence boosts reflected in your own and your dog's performance. Fewer corrections result in less overtly submissive behavior, ending with a dog with head held high, happy proper tail carriage and a sparkle in his eye.

Don't be afraid to break some cardinal dog show training rules, like letting your dog take a treat from the floor, but only when you give permission: "Get it!"

He can't touch nor pull toward the treat before the "get it" cue is given as you work on an automatic "leave it" for any item on the ground.

Practice gaiting past and then directly over dry kibble on the floor, mat or sidewalk. As he becomes more polished at the automatic "leave it" game you progress from dry dog food to slightly higher value treats on the floor.

He gets much better treats from you than from the environment, and will be far less likely to nosedive to the ground (taking you with him!) for a dropped chunk of liver in the ring.

Over the years I have seen that nosediving behavior from many dogs that were never allowed to have a dropped goodie. Those dogs learned to be sneaky and grab because that was the only way

to snatch a yummy, unlike the dogs that are sure that any time now their handlers will offer a game of “catch the goodies” if they gait a bit better or stand still longer.

For all of his show skills, continue to raise the criteria that earns him a click/treat. If you continue to reward him for a minimum level of behavior for an extended period, you are teaching the dog that he need offer no more improvements. Instead, break down that great show look into the various parts and ask for a tiny bit more in each training session. If you get stuck, get him hungrier and try it again in a quieter place until he has success at the new level.

## **Superior free stacking**

Even in the ring, there is no need to look perfect every moment – let him bounce and be cute briefly when the judge is not looking so you can catch your breath and keep his attitude high. You will gradually shape a perfect free stack at the end of gaiting on your individual work, and at any other time the dog stops for the judge.

It is most important for the dog to look cute and sparkle when the judge is looking, such as when you go around and then stop, and at times the judge often takes another look down the line of dogs, and when the dog behind you comes up after his individual examination so your star can catch the judge’s eye. If your dog is losing enthusiasm, when the judge starts to examine another dog, briefly step behind those in line and play with your pooch to help him relax. Then step back smartly into line when the next dog comes around so your now-freshly-energized dog can shine and catch the judge’s attention again.

Have the dog stacked and looking good whenever another finishes getting an individual examination and run-around, since many judges take a quick look back at other dogs in the lineup at this point.

Teach most free stacking at first off leash, so you learn how your hand and body movement affect the dog without the interference of a leash. Hold your treats directly at nose level at first, then just barely above nose level, gradually working with the bait hand higher once the dog is consistently standing with his head and nose parallel to the ground, and he is leaning forward into his stand.

Hold the collar up under the chin to help show off or create smooth throat lines. Grasp his slip or slide clasp collar and pull slightly upward and back so it does not tighten while he learns the routine, and creating opposition reflex that helps him show his arch of neck and lean forward into his stack.

## **Rear end awareness for better self-stacking**

Work on getting his rear feet to stop properly first.

Have a pup step over a parking barrier, a piece of vinyl gutter, an obedience jump or a 2-foot by 2-foot post laid down on the ground while you click then treat at first when his rear feet are aligned correctly. The click usually comes when his toes touch the sturdy foot target you have utilized, followed by the treat.

Have him take tiny steps forward, following the cookie lure or a moving target, until the rear feet touch the barrier if necessary, or, even better, when his feet align perfectly before they reach the barrier. Of course if he volunteers a perfect stop before his toes touch, you will reward him with a jackpot of bigger or better treats.

Continue to click (or say the word “click” and deliver tiny bites of a soft large bit of meat or cheese.

Stop feeding if his feet land in front of the barrier. No correction words nor sounds are allowed (No, stop, “enh,” ick – all forbidden!). You want the dog to feel brave enough to try the new things you are asking him to learn, not inhibit his learning.

Also use the food to teach him to back up, which is also helpful later to fine tune his place in the ring lineup.

Next step: Begin work on where he may stop and earn rewards with his placement of his front feet. It is harder to teach the rear, so doing that end first makes the complete picture fall into place faster. The front-feet stop will, relatively, often be a breeze after that.

This method also encourages the dog to lean forward with enthusiasm rather than rocking back. Leaning back creates an A-frame silhouette which is not a good look in a show dog, hiding his forechest and angulation.

At first pull back slightly on the collar that is not allowed to tightening, rather than pulling up on the lead, so the dog is not choking. Because he feels safer, he can balance more of his weight properly on his front legs and show his best profile.

## **Stacking**

Tuck your neatly-folded leash in your right hand before you start stacking.

For a wiggly pup or a new dog in training, firmly but with kindness and verbal reassurance wrap your hand around the entire jaw, from cheek to opposite cheek. Say “click” and give him a treat for every nanosecond of stillness at first so he decides this is just one more game that pays very well.

When stacking a dog that has a bit of practice already, firmly grasp the right side of his jawbone after placing your right hand under his head. Place your right thumb against his right cheek, with the rest of your fingertips tucked up on the inside of the jaw, as a pressure point to keep the head straight and level.

To control the body, you must control the head, or, even better, teach him to place it correctly himself. He is learning how to be comfortable in the traditional show poses as well as when standing on his own. Say “click” then treat each time he settles in quietly for you at first, then the verbal click/treat for leaning forward while his head is in your hands.

Cradle his head in the right hand while you place his left front foot (judges side) first; verbally click then treat. Shift his head to your left hand, and successively click then treat as you place his left front, left rear and finally right rear feet.

Another very efficient alternative order for stacking is to set the right front foot first, then change hands only once as you place left front, left rear and right feet in that order. When first training stacking, click and treat every time you pick up and set down a leg, so he learns to love this food-heavy learning curve.

When you begin to place his legs, keep your hands at the elbow or just above for the front legs, and gently above the hock or supporting the patella in the rear (time to get out those structure books!). Moving his feet without giving him the physical support of a safe grip on the larger bones above makes many dogs uncomfortable.

When first starting out, place one leg, then click/treat immediately before moving on to the next leg. Pretty soon your dog will be lifting his leg for you, and is likely to learn to place it properly all by himself. My own dogs over the years have trained many a novice handler by lifting the anticipated next foot as a reminder: "Here, human, this one is next." You can practically hear the dogs sigh in resignation as they patiently wait for their well-earned treat.

Front legs should go directly underneath the dog's shoulders, never moved forward. In most breeds, front and rear upper legs should be at about an 85 degree right angle, with the legs perpendicular to the ground.

Straightness or slope of the pastern is more variable between breeds so check your standard. There is rotation at the shoulder very similar to that in humans when the dog's front leg or your own arm move forward. To compensate with the desired straight feet when stacked, place the dog's feet slightly toed in toward center. When his weight goes on the leg the foot straightens.

In other words, gently pick up each front leg, one at a time, by the elbow or the upper arm and gently turn the foot slightly to the inside, toward the dog's body. The natural turn of the leg and the weight of the dog will put the foot straight. If you pick the foot up and then plop it straight down you're likely to make a good dog look like he toes out, which is of course incorrect in most breeds (though correct in some extreme-front dog breeds like bulldogs and dachshunds).

Also be careful not to go too far, to avoid popping or pushing out the elbows when you set the front legs in place. That is a common look in a young dog whose rib spring is not yet fully developed.

For the rear legs, pick up each just above the hock or what would be the ankle on your leg, still giving the same slight twist as you set the foot on the ground.

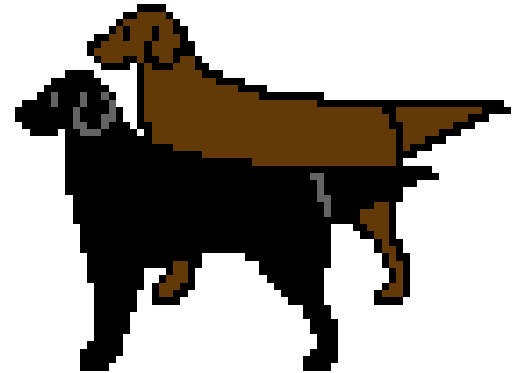
## **Stacking On The Grooming Table – The Handler's Secret!**

Start table training right away with every new pup. You may notice your pup is already comfortable with the game thanks to a diligent kind breeder who taught the tiny pups to love the table work already.

Any back foot movement after being positioned on the rear of a slide results in a safe, supported slide off the back of the table.

Use opposition reflex to have your dog push out his forechest. Grasp the base of the tail where the tail is the strongest to slowly pull back, then very slowly release the pressure so he leans forward without taking a step. Top lines clean up and angulation becomes visible as he gently rocks forward.

In a breed with little or no tail, push gently back on the center of the chest, slowly releasing forward for the same benefit.



In my own breeds (Irish setters and flat-coated retrievers) and many others, we want a prominent prow (breast bone) you can hang your hat on, as the phrase goes, and that's what a judge is feeling for when he runs his hand down the front of a dog.

While stacking his front, grasp his front legs one at a time at the elbow or by the upper arm. Place your hand squarely across his upper arm, pick a front leg up at the elbow, slide the elbow along the rib cage and right under his withers (the highest point of the shoulders). Imagine a straight line, like a surveyor/construction/picture hanging plumb line, running from the tip of his shoulder blades through the elbows to his feet.

When stacking the rear on the table, gently grasp the back legs at the hock to reposition, or reach under his tuck up (the highest point under the dog's belly) and gently cover and support his stifle while you position his back legs.

Gently push the dog's head away from the front leg you are setting, to the opposite side, to take weight off the leg you are wanting to reposition. It is then much easier to lift the leg on a big strong dog.

Feed treats from straight in front, not to the side toward you, or you will encourage the dog to turn towards you rather than stand straight. In early training we even stop and turn in front of the dog to feed when we stop while training gaiting.

## **Extend reach and drive through training**

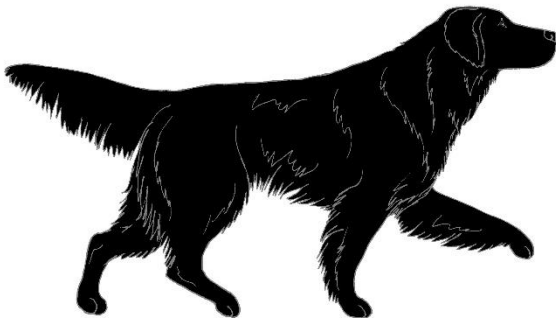
When going around the ring, the handler should alternate between glancing at the dog, then to the next corner or target, then at the judge.

Target work teaches your pup and older dogs exactly where to look when gaiting, presenting and stacked. You can effectively use targeting to present the best possible moving silhouette to the judge. An extended clicker stick is great for teaching the dog to look forward, not back at you and messing up his front movement.

Chair targets are also wonderful for practice. Place lawn chairs, traffic cones, footstools and other objects in the corners of your practice ring at first, and put a treat container (preferably open) in each corner on top of your target object.

To teach a straight down and back on the sides of the ring or on the diagonal of a show ring, let your dog lead you to each target/chair/traffic cone where your treats are stashed. Stop just before the dog reaches the chair where treats are laying, ask for a stand, then pick the treat out of chair and give it to the excited dog.

Your dog is learning to look away from you to stride purposefully to his four-legged target that is likely to be at the corner of every future show ring. He will move straighter going around the ring, and will start looking for targets on the corners. This helps prevent a dog from cutting the corner too soon and starting to crab or side-wind.



Work with four chairs, stopping at first at the single chair in each corner, until you get a straight line, then skip one chair, then two, continuing around the ring instead of stopping in that corner. Say "easy" and pull back slowly on the leash before you get to the corner, as

a cue to your dog that you will not be stopping this time so his gait remains solid and lovely around the corners.

Some days skip all four chairs, and some days do a couple of runs where you stop at all four.

Have a person sit in the chair with treats, and at other times have a person act as your judge, just like you practice in classes, by standing and examining your dog in front of one of the chairs.

Later place the chair outside the ring if you have the chance to practice in a ring setup. Reach over the ring to grab a treat for your dog.

### **How to run in a straight line:**

Avoid dizziness & wandering from side to side on the down-and-back: Look at the dog and alternately look at your target when going away from a practice judge or from where a judge would usually stand. On the way back or on the go-around, alternately look at the dog, the target (the ring corner, or any person who happens to be standing at the right spot) and the judge.

### **Smooth gaiting on a loose lead**

Running with your dog in the show ring is about as far as you can get from running with your dog for exercise. Dog show judges are looking for a smooth trot with extended reach (in the front) and drive (in the rear).

Reach out with your legs with your heels hitting the ground first. Bend your knees and then extend your leg from the hip as you stride out. Aim for enough lift that you actually get a moment with both feet off the ground between strides if you have a long-bodied, long-legged dog.

A modified version is appropriate for smaller dogs and puppies, but you still need to walk heel-toe, as you heel hits the ground first.

Practice the movement without your dog first, and you can click and treat yourself with chocolate or a cappuccino.

The courtesy turn, a small 360-degree turn to the right (clockwise) in front of the judge, is the mostly commonly used method to line your dog up for a straight path as you move away from the judge with your dog. You also usually use the same small circle with your dog at the corner when the judge has the dogs move in a triangle (most frequently seen at specialties).

Ditch the courtesy turn close to the judged, however, in favor of a 180-degree left turn if you have a dog with great movement, especially if you have a dog that is still looking at you rather than ahead to the next turn.

Of course some intense practice is necessary before you show off this, or any, new skill in the ring.

### **Side-Winding or Crabbing**

That means his rear end is moving parallel to the front instead of directly behind it. Common causes include having more drive in the rear and less reach in the front, short body length or long legs in proportion to body length.

Practice running him alongside a fence, wall or curb, and also work him on your right as well as your left side. You can move him on your right side going away from the judge and back to your left side for the return trip.

When you too often turn your head to look at your dog while gaiting, especially if you inadvertently encouraged eye contact from him, you will pull him off the straight line that will make his good movement most evident. It is necessary to alternately look at the dog, then ahead to the next corner to keep you going straight, then at the judge to make that necessary human contact in friendly, winning way. Glaring at the judge is most unpleasant, and gets some well-known handlers crossed off our list of recommendations.

Take it slow and easy, with long strides. Young dogs especially need you to slow down and help them learn a straight, extended course even in small show rings.

Start out first on a shorter leash if you must, then gradually let more leash out, and use targeting to teach your dog where and how to move when practicing on a puppy on a loose leash. Practice on a loose leash first if you can, even on breeds traditionally shown on a tight leash.

If your dog is pacing you may be going too slow, which can also contribute to crabbing. When walking for exercise you may have fallen into a habit of making the entire trip at a casual stroll, and that slow speed is forcing the dog into a pacing habit.

It is fine to spend some of your walking time with your talk on his heeling for obedience too. Just do short stretches of heeling, short stretches of gaiting, and some slow-down or even sit-down spots where you can catch your breath.

Add some faster stretches and click/treat the dog for moving up to a trot. Gradually slow down and let the dog discover that he can trot at lower speeds, with a click/treat jackpot to cement the idea into his practice.

You might also try a counter clockwise circle with the leash next to the dog's head (your hand moving between you and the dog) while gaiting. Give a quick light pull forward at nose level (not up). The circle catches the dog's eye and the slight check on the leash helps change the dog's lead leg.

Always running in left circles around the yard too often gets dogs pulling out when gaiting, so once in a great while also practice a backwards show circle.

## **Show judges what they want to see**

Point out your dog's assets; downplay his flaws. Where you look is where the judge will look, so focus on that lovely neck or his solid topline. Check to make sure his rear is perfectly stacked (and that he knows how to hold it) before the judge gets to you in the lineup.

Watch your judge's ring routine with other breeds before you go in the ring. Make a mental note of where the judge is focusing on watching the dogs going around together, and slow down or speed up before you get there to make sure your dog is going at his best speed at that exact spot.

Dogs may need a brief moment to relax in big classes, and then go back to their work with renewed vigor. The most important times to look good are:

1. When the judge first walks down the line of dogs in each class.
2. When the judge finished the individual examination of the dog in front of you (many judges cannot resist a peek back at the next dog).
3. When the judge is approaching and examining your dog.
4. When the dog after you is finishing up his individual moving. If your judge today is one of those that watches some or all of the dogs all the way back to the end of the line, you will want to grab attention by having your dog look super!



5. When the last dog in the group has gone around, and the judge turns back to the lineup to make cuts or final selections.

In between those time, especially with a young or soft-natured dog in a big class, step back slightly from the line and quietly play with your pup for a moment. When the next dog comes around, stack your dog again so he looks great.

## **Perfect head carriage**

Targeting is such an easy way to get perfect head position, without having to string your dog up on a tight leash. Teach him to follow an extended target stick out in front of you so he moves out ahead, head up, covering ground. As mentioned above, we teach this to puppies off-leash first.

When teaching him to stack or gait, say the word, “head” in a pleasant tone for his cue to hold his headpiece level for most breeds. Teach him to place his head in your cupped hand at the perfect height for practice.

During stacking, before you pull back at the base of his tail to get him lean forward, place your hand under his chin to lift up his head. Ever so gradually slightly relax the pressure holding his head up so he is starting to keep his chin up for a nanosecond on his own. Click, then treat forward and slightly up so he is getting his yummy item with good head carriage.

## **Show attitude on cue**

Happy wags are attractive. Practice praising until you figure out how to get a wag without a wiggle.

Don’t fuss and fidget with the dog when the judge is looking at you. Slow your hands down and remember to take a deep breath and enjoy the (sometimes wild) ride.

Use that exuberant attitude rather than lose it. If your dog’s excitement level is over the top, pair calm quiet praise with treats for slightly more focused moments.

When your young dog bounces around, rather than tell him “no” or “enh!” just shorten the leash temporarily, or if stacking, put your hand close to his collar so you can keep him away from your body just by straightening your arm.

## **How to beat the pros**

You can fine tune your performance for the needs of your particular dog, without needing to change for many others you are showing each day. Extra practice and advanced techniques can help your dog show even better for you than for anyone else.

If you enter your dog in bred-by-exhibitor or amateur-owner-handled and then have a conflicting emergency such as illness or injury, your dog can be moved to the open class on the day of the show, early in the morning before the show begins for all breeds. A friend or a professional handler can then take the dog in for you, though you may become ineligible for special prizes related to handler status.

## **When to use a pro, how to make it cost efficient**

Using a professional handler has advantages but is less fun and can be quite expensive. Many handlers spend so much of their time working on the required practice, grooming, handling kennel chores and travel of their profession that they don't have much time left over to study the newest training and behavior techniques. Your ability to focus on your dog's special needs can make you an awesome competitor.

If you have a very popular breed, with many dogs required for a major, it can be more efficient to hand your now fully-trained mature dog off to a handler with wise, gentle hands, strong legs and back, and a winning smile.

Sending a puppy off with a handler can backfire for a number of reasons, and is likely to end up costing you far more than if you had waited to use a professional handler when your dog had grown into his adult body and coat. Use that early time in the dog's life to get your training done and prevent bad habits that could sabotage your efforts later.

There is nothing wrong with deciding to take extra time and finish the dog yourself either, but in a big breed like Labrador or golden retrievers, boxers, Doberman pinschers and Great Danes, or with extensive grooming requirements like poodles and cocker spaniels, you may save money by hiring a pro for that extra bit of polish, especially if you are still working to conquer your ring nerves.

Of course, beating the pros yourself is even more fun!

## **Picky eating and fast weight aids**

Many dogs, and especially a show dog with a lot riding on his appearance, are accidentally taught to be excessively choosy about food and treats. It often starts with puppy teething that slows down hard kibble eating, going on to an owner who throws in every bit of super smelly food that can be found in an effort to get the dog to hold a good weight.

Some picky behavior can be a reflection of food allergies, and many show and pet dogs are fed too much food for their comfort levels. If your dog is at a good healthy weight and is turning down food, it is a clear sign you are trying to feed him too much. Do not substitute fat for mature muscle tone in an well-exercised dog.

With a young dog who turns up his nose at great food, the problem may well be that his gums are swollen and hurt from teething so he doesn't eat a meal or two. Then he quickly figures out that holding out makes great stuff appear in that bowl, or that a dog on the road gets more time out and more attention at meal time, so it becomes a pattern.

Soften the dry dog food by adding warm water 10 minutes before meal time. Repeat this for a couple of days. It will often do the trick without teaching the pup that a hunger strike makes wonderful food come out of the freezer and kitchen cabinets.

Thanks to Dr. Ian Dunbar for these great behavior tips for a poor eater:

1. He gets dessert for finishing everything in his stainless steel bowl – drop in a yummy treat, meat tidbit or scoop of canned food. Don't try to doctor a meal by adding gravy or yummy stuff to the actual meal.
2. If his bowl isn't clean after 5 minutes, your dog only gets ½ of the usual amount of dog food when you feed him his next meal.

3. Reduce the next meal by half again if he fails to finish the next meal too, so now the dog is down to ¼ cup. Continue to reduce by half following each unfinished meal until your dog is cleaning his plate, providing a treat for an emptied dish once he figures out the game.

4. Increase the amount by a small portion again if he finished the previous meal.

If you need to put weight on a dog quickly (on a dog that can tolerate grains on occasion), cook macaroni and mix with undrained canned dog food. Great Life has some nice canned products.

We mostly feed grain-free foods, especially avoiding corn, wheat and soy in dog foods. If using dry food, make sure you use premium dog foods or expect to supplement with more and better proteins than in many foods. Acana, Orijen and Great Life are what we currently use here at Best Paw Forward Inc., mixing in raw products as often as we can along with occasional canned products too.

In the long run, increase his muscular build appropriately with jumping and road work, after he is at least 2 years old. Pups under 8 months should not be asked to jump no more than pastern-height. From about 12-18 months he can go up to his elbow height. Full-height jumping and road work should start only when the dog is 2 years or older, even for future agility stars, otherwise serious damage to his structure may occur.

Medical and behavior issues can also be hard to diagnose and even fix in these dogs. Picky eating is something we try to avoid in a breeding program because it may reflect these issues.

## Structure Tidbits

- Overall, don't get so caught up in an obvious fault that you forget to showcase the good stuff. In a breeding program or in the ring, it's easier to work on one major fault than many minor ones.

- Rachel Page Elliott's Dog Steps book and DVD are a great place to start to learn about structure and movement, and Dr. Carmen Battaglia's books, especially those on breeding and genetics, are required reading for anyone showing and thinking about breeding. Get to every single structure, behavior, breeding and health program you can attend even if it means you have to skip a few shows. We are putting together our recommended show dog reading list for the web page soon.

- Front and rear angulation should be as balanced as possible in nearly every breed. Looking at sweet dogs with crippled straight rears will help you understand why this is so critical.

- You can, if you are lucky, knowledgeable and determined, fix a bad rear in a single generation, but it takes a long time to fix bad fronts because there are so many more components involved.

- The late Dr. Quentin LaHam taught us that ideal shoulder blade layback on a medium-size dog would show up as a width of about two fingers between the blades at the withers.

The tips of the fingers face towards the back of the dog's head. When you start checking dogs you examine you are likely to find that a four-finger width is common, reflecting far too many upright, steep shoulder laybacks on breeding stock. The scapula/shoulder blade should curve towards the spine as well as angle back from head toward tail on a well-built dog. The phrase "steep shoulder blades" means the scapula don't have enough curve at the top towards the spine so the scapula stand up rather than angle toward the center of the dog's back.

## **Good sportsmanship**

It should go without saying that both owner handlers and professional handlers are expected to always display the utmost in good sportsmanship. Please be a role model for and reinforce good behavior, and do not hire nor continue using a handler who has trouble with that aspect of dog showing. It will eventually reflect badly on you and your dog.

For example, do not use your dog's call name in the show ring. It is supposed to be neutral territory, not an announcement of who had the splashiest ad in the dog show magazines this week. It is perfectly okay in performance events like obedience, rally, agility, field, herding, nosework etc.

When competing in the ring, congratulate the winner if it is not your day, and do so sincerely. Compliment the dog and the team – you will want to hear nice things when it is your turn. After all, it must be a nice dog if it was good enough to beat your own lovely fur kid.

## **Major wins**

Majors are often hard to find and win, so exhibitors who are good sports try hard to cooperate and maintain them. If you have to miss an entered show, make sure you let other potential exhibitors know in advance if at possible, which is easier these days thanks to social media including club e-mail lists, Facebook and Twitter. Electronic trends need to be well-established for maximum impact – trendy is not always best.

You can save your fellow exhibitors needless expense and travel if the major will not hold or if there is not even a single point available. Leading by example can help show others how they can extend you the same courtesy.

## **Show pictures**

Get an official show photograph with your judge for points won, especially for major wins and on the day each dog finishes its championship. Also get one the first day your puppy ever goes into a show ring – it is fun to compare his grown up shots to where it began, and gives you a record of when he started.

The photo and carefully-saved ribbons may help prove a win if something gets messed up in the records.

While setting up your now well-trained dog you have a chance to chat with the judge and do a tiny bit of bragging about your national owner-handled rankings or how your pup's sire or half-sister just won the national specialty. Be honest, cheerful and low-key about it all, though.

## **Now get out there and show that dog!**

Keep the dog cookies flowing to keep canine attitudes up while you learn, and teach the next dog even more in what should be a long string of winners.

Again, above all be a good sport, as gracious in winning as you are in losing, helping newcomers, praising a competing dog's strengths rather than focusing on its weaknesses. You will feel better at the end of the day as you head home with your treasured canine companions.