

So you want to show your dog 1: Selecting your show dog

January 27, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

You may already have a dog you're considering showing, or you may be looking for that first show dog. Each requires a somewhat different starting point.

Generally speaking, the show life is short, especially compared to the life of your dog. You want your dog to be your companion, with a show career on the side. Choose a breed that suits your life, then start the search for the breeder.

FIND A GOOD BREEDER

Your breed's national breed club is a great starting point and the Internet makes it easy to access the information available from these sources, right in your own home. The information concerning ethical breeders on these sites will give you perspective.

Remember, not all breeder websites are equal. Read them armed with the knowledge the club sites will give you.

WELL-BRED DOGS

Your search for a potential show dog should centre on breeders who have a background in the sport. After all, any registered pup with no disqualifying faults can, technically, be called a show dog. But there is far more to it than that; quality is always the determining factor.

Good breeders are a suspicious lot when it comes to someone requesting their first show pup. There'll be a lot of questions, expectations and perhaps some strings. This is usually a good sign of someone who cares about the future of the pup.

The way to win a breeder's trust and respect is to be trustworthy and respectful of the sport and the breed.

Accepting the breeder as your guide is the best way to success. The breeder who doesn't want to be there for you in the long term isn't a wise choice.

You'll usually find it easier to get a good-quality male pup or young dog. Breeders tend to keep fewer males than females.

ARE YOU CONSIDERING SHOWING THE DOG YOU ALREADY HAVE?

Your dog needs to be registered with [The Canadian Kennel Club](#) to compete in conformation shows, and to be eligible, cannot be neutered or spayed. Make sure your dog is show quality, which means competitive and able to win points.

If your dog was not originally bought with showing in mind, take a look at your breeder's participation in the sport: Do they show their dogs and routinely win championships?

Ask them for guidance; perhaps take the dog to them for an evaluation. Again, use the national club's website to help your learning curve.

You can also contact someone at a show, and ask them to suggest someone in your breed to go over your dog before you get involved. Make an appointment for the assessment. If you offer to pay for an evaluation, it will be money well spent.

Next up: [Raising a show puppy](#)

Laurie Savoie breeds Corgis, and has 28 years experience in the sport of conformation showing. She has owned and/or trained the top Corgis in conformation, obedience and herding. She is also a photographer and journalist specializing in the world of purebred dogs.

Photo courtesy of Laurie Savoie

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So you want to show your dog 2 – Raising a show puppy

April 12, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

Read part one of the 'So you want to show your dog series,' [here](#).

Raising a puppy with an eye to the show ring sounds like a daunting task. Fortunately, all the things you do to foster a well-behaved, nicely socialized puppy will help you create a future conformation star. Here are 10 tips and tricks you can use for transitioning your dog from the puppy pen to the show ring.

WHAT EVERY GOOD PUPPY SHOULD KNOW

1. Start with a soft collar and leash, letting the pup lead you about the lawn. When he is acclimatized to his collar and leash in a fun way, leash training will come easier and be more enjoyable.

2. Have your puppy eat, sleep and travel in a crate. Take short trips to fun destinations at first.

3. Include in your play-training sessions little exercises in which you examine his body. Get your pup comfortable with hands near and in his mouth. Remember, he may be teething at this time, and his mouth may be sensitive, so always make it a pleasant experience. Use positive conditioning and just take a quick look now and then.

For the boys, part of pat-and-play should be a light pass over the testicles. Just a gentle "Yes, they're still there, good puppy." If your pup is unsure, offer a small treat with one hand, while the other hand checks the testicles. By the time he hits the rings, even that will be old hat.

4. As your future star is growing and learning, daily practice sessions with you should be short, and always sweet. Let him think he's playing.

5. Puppy kindergarten classes are excellent for general socialization and experience for you both. Ask your breeder's advice about appropriate classes. The class will teach basics like Sit and heeling, but make sure you also learn Stand and gaiting on a loose leash. Explain your show plans to the instructors and they'll help you modify your training slightly.

6. Once your pup is vaccinated, start taking him out in the world. Make the excursions to general places, not always dog-specific destinations.

Regular walks to stores that accept leashed pets are ideal. I rely on my bank, local hardware stores, and church parking lots when the congregations are going in or out. All these offer a varied experience in sounds, sights and smells, with a wide cross-section of folks who come and pet the pup and those who will ignore him. All are positive experiences.

Puppies aren't ready for the dog park. Bad experiences at a young age can cause fear and shyness.

LEARN YOUR PART

While all this is going on, and your youngster is growing and learning, continue with your info gathering.

7. Join [The Canadian Kennel Club](#); you'll gain a wide source of information and contacts.

8. Contact local kennel clubs. Ask if they offer handling classes or seminars in your area. If you join clubs you'll meet experienced show folks who will be a good source of information.

9. Subscribe to dog magazines and watch major shows like Westminster on TV or online. Subscribe to your breed's national newsletter, in Canada and the U.S.

10. Remember to enjoy these very precious days. You may be working toward a specific goal, but along the way you will be strengthening your bond and raising a great companion.

Next up: [Learning the basics](#)

So you want to show your dog 3: Learning the basics

April 12, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

Read part one of the 'So you want to show your dog series,' [here](#).

Once your pup is working well on a leash and has lots of social experience under his belt, it's time to move toward your show ring debut.

It may seem like a big leap from your puppy bopping around playing with his leash, to the images you see on TV, of a handler and beautiful dog gliding effortlessly around the ring to applause. But you can get there by taking things one step at a time.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Now's the time to start handling classes or, if none are available in your area, working one-on-one with someone who knows the ropes.

Ask about sanction matches in your area. Matches are informal practice shows, and the best place to break in the act. You and your dog will get a feel for the show environment and interaction with a judge. There are no points, but lots of practice to be had.

SURVEY THE SCENE

Find a regular show and plan to attend. Leave your dog at home this time. It'll be great familiarization for you, and it's the best place to buy good equipment and get helpful advice. The vendors at dog show vendors are good sources for equipment; they're also knowledgeable and helpful.

The grooming tools and show equipment you'll need can vary by breed. Find someone with your breed and watch their grooming routine. Ask your dog's breeder for advice.

MAKE FRIENDS

Be friendly and talk to exhibitors – just wait until after they've finished showing their dog. Most show attendees love what they do and want to share the experience with others.

This would be a good place to pick up a [Canadian Kennel Club](#) booklet on dog show rules. You can also order them from [The Canadian Kennel Club](#), but see if any are available at the show. You will also find premium lists for upcoming shows.

WATCH AND LEARN

Watch some classes. In general, a judge asks for the same thing from each dog. Some common patterns include:

“Take them around”: Typically this happens at the beginning and end of your time in the ring. The judge wants to move all the dogs together around the ring. If you are first in line, be sure to ask the person behind you if they are ready to go. Always move around the ring in a counter-clockwise circle, with the dog between you and the judge.

“Give me a triangle please”: This is one of the two most common patterns you will perform after your dog has been examined. Start off by going halfway around the ring, then cut diagonally through the centre of the ring, back to the judge. Stop your dog two or three metres from the judge in a 'stack.'

“Down and back”: This is the other most common ring pattern you will perform solo. Take your dog up to the farthest corner of the ring and then back down to the judge. Again, stop your dog two or three metres from the judge in a 'stack.'

“Round to the end”: After the judge has seen your dog coming and going, he will want to see his side movement. Take your dog around the ring, to the end of the line.

‘Stacking’ is simply having your dog stand still, balanced and looking his best. Ask someone with your breed to show you the proper stack position as it varies slightly for each breed. **‘Free stacking’** is when your dog sets himself up without you touching him. Every time you gait in the ring, end with a free stack to look polished. Gradually, you'll both learn all the patterns and tricks and will acquire that 'professional' look you desire.

Never ask too much of your dog, you want him to always think this is fun. After all, in the ring he has all your attention, plus free food and adulation. It doesn't get much better than that.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Winning Edge: Show Ring Secrets by George Alston
Winning With Pure Bred Dogs – Success By Design by Dr. Alvin Grossman & Beverly Grossman
Going for the Blue: Inside the World of Show Dogs and Dog Shows by Roger A. Caras
New Secrets of Successful Show Dog Handling by Peter Green and Mario Migliorini
Handling Your Own Dog for Show, Obedience, and Field Trials by M. C. Thorne

While these books provide a good overview on the mechanics of ring procedure, note that rules change over time and differ slightly in the U.S. Check the CKC rule book for clarification.

So you want to show your dog 4: Preparing for the ring

May 25, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

Read part one of the 'So you want to show your dog' series, [here](#).

So you are planning to enter your first dog show. It's an exciting time... but now what?

FIND A SHOW

Your first step is to find shows in your area. Start at the events section of the [CKC website](#). Shows are listed by province. When you find one in a desirable location, look the club up online. Look for the exact location and download a premium list.

The premium list includes all the relevant details and entry forms. Contact information will be there too, should you have questions. It's a wealth of information, so be sure to read the premium and keep it handy.

ENTERING A SHOW

Fill in the entry form carefully and decide which days you want to show and in what class.

There are numerous classes available in your dog's breed and sex, but only enter one class per dog. Which class? A full explanation of various classes, as well as how points are awarded will be found in your CKC Conformation Rules handbook. Young dogs and novice handlers would be well advised to start in the appropriate age class.

Entries usually close approximately three weeks prior to the show. See the premium list for the exact closing date and time.

You know the old saying that there are two absolutes, death and taxes? Add one more: closing dates. On the date a show closes, they will no longer accept entries. A show can be severely penalized if it accepts entries after the set time. Enter early and phone the show secretary (contact information will be listed in the premium list) to confirm your entry.

PLAN AHEAD

If you will need to stay overnight near the show site, make your accommodation reservations early. A list of nearby accommodations should be on the premium list and often a host hotel will give a price break to exhibitors.

Check out the route you'll be taking. Having map and coordinates ahead of time is just one more thing to cross off your 'to-do' list. The idea is to make it all as stress free as possible.

Next: [What to pack](#)

So you want to show your dog 5: What to pack

May 26, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

Read part one of the 'So you want to show your dog series,' [here](#).

After show entries have closed, the judging schedule will be released. This tells you when you'll be in the ring and how many dogs in your breed and sex are entered. You won't know who is entered, just how many.

This schedule is mailed to exhibitors, but often does not arrive before you leave for the show. Check online regularly for the judging schedule. A few days before the show, compile a packing list. Here are some recommendations of what to pack:

FOR YOUR DOG:

- crate
- x-pen
- plastic drop cloths for under the pen
- bed, blankets and towels
- grooming table and arm
- grooming equipment, remember an extension cord if you use anything electric
- Baggies to pick up poop and pee pads if your dog uses them
- Consider bringing water from home; your puppy may get a jumpy tummy from drinking new water
- Your dog's regular food (remember to pack a can opener if you use wet food)
- [First Aid kit](#)

FOR YOU:

- A chair and other items that will add to your comfort and help you pass the time
- Snacks, perhaps sandwich makings, all in a small cooler is very handy
- A wheeled dolly for transporting everything from the car to show area
- An easy-up tent to provide shade if you're attending an outdoor show
- Extra jackets, rain gear and boots, just in case
- 'Show' clothes (Suitable attire would be suits or sport jackets and ties for men, skirts and blouses, dresses or tailored pant suits for women. You want to be able to run, kneel and bend over without clothes restricting you or revealing too much. Pockets are a must-have for bait. Many folks arrive at the show site each day in their 'work clothes,' carrying their show clothes in a garment bag.)
- Shoes should be flat or very low heel, with good support and that will be comfy after a long day on your feet

The premium list will state what time the building opens for set-up, usually the night before. Plan on arriving as close to this time as possible, have a little peek around and decide where you want to set up camp. Close to rings, but not too close, not on top of the restrooms, but accessible, that sort of thing.

Drop your large items off to signify 'taken,' and head back to the car for the remainder. Set yourself up, walk your dog around to get both of you familiar. If you are staying overnight, make sure you have your dog's food and other overnight necessities before you head out. Remember that travelling with your dog is half the fun.

Next: In the ring

So you want to show your dog 6: In the ring

June 14, 2011, By Laurie Savoie, ARTICLE, [ACTIVITIES](#)

Read part one of the 'So you want to show your dog' series, [here](#).

It's the big day. All of your planning and training has brought you to this point, and will get you through the day. You might feel both excitement and stage fright, but remember that a little apprehension can be a good thing; it keeps one alert and focused.

PLAN AHEAD

Your best friend today is your dog. Your job is to make this debut a positive thing for him, so don't be too rushed today. Extra time will allow you to prepare both your dog and yourself.

Grooming requirements vary depending on breed and coat, so a good gauge is the time it takes you to do a full grooming, plus an hour.

GET READY

On arrival, take your dog to your set up, get him settled in his crate, then go straight to the Show Secretary's table to pick up an armband. Your number will be in the catalogue; a copy is always on the desk. Check your number to make sure it is correct. You can purchase a catalogue here if you'd like one. Don't forget to pick up a few rubber bands; they're by the numbers. The rubber bands are used to keep the number secure on your left arm. Slip two or three on your wrist.

Confirm what ring you will be in, and head over for a good look. If judging is already underway, and this is the judge you will show under, watch his **ring procedure**. Take note of where he wants handlers to go when they first enter the ring, where to stack or table, and which pattern they are performing. All this will reassure you once you enter the ring.

The ring steward is the other person in the ring with the judge. Introduce yourself and explain this is your first time. Ask for a rough estimate of the time your breed will be in the ring. Stewards are very good about taking care of novices.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Go through your grooming routine. Before you add the finishing touches, take your dog out and make sure he relieves himself. Change into your show clothes if you haven't already done so.

Keep track of the time, head to ringside about 15 minutes before your breed is scheduled to show. Make sure you remember your bait. Slip the show lead on your dog. Watch others handlers, settle in ringside, but be ready to go.

At ringside, keep your dog close to you and be aware of other dogs around you. Be handy to the ring entrance, but make sure others can come and go. Finally, when your number is called, head into the ring.

IN THE RING

Be aware of what the judge is saying and doing. Presenting yourself and the dog with a positive attitude goes a long way. The way you feel goes straight down the leash, so make sure the message you send is positive. If your main concern is that the dog is happy and confident in the ring, that's the picture you will present to the judge.

Should the judge point to you for a placement, smile happily and go straight to the number marker. Thank the judge, get your ribbon and head out of the ring smartly. Stand by, as you may be going back in. Keep watching and follow the steward's instructions. You may even pick up your first points.

IN CONCLUSION

Don't worry if you didn't get a ribbon. Did you feel you did a good job? Did your dog's tail keep wagging? If yes, you did well. Tomorrow's another day, and you have your first experience to build upon.

Showing your own dog may be more difficult than you expected. There's no denying it requires hard work and commitment. The too-common attitude that "only the professionals succeed" is a loser's mantra. Owner-handlers willing to do the work, and learn their 'trade' will do well with a good dog. The owner-handler is the backbone of the Conformation ring. You are in good company.

You and your dog are a team and the days you spend together on the road to a championship, you'll remember forever. That's a pretty good 'trophy.'

Laurie Savoie breeds Corgis, and has 28 years experience in the sport of conformation showing. She has owned and/or trained the top Corgis in conformation, obedience and herding. She is also a photographer and journalist specializing in the world of purebred dogs.

Photo by Todd Foley