

## SHOWING YOUR DOG – by Hilary Harrison

(extracted from Umfolozi Bull Terrier Club newsletter 2003)

This article is really for the novice Bull Terrier owner, however, having said that, it is always a good idea for the “old timers” to jog their memories and be reminded of the best way to present your dog in the show ring.

I think the most important thing to remember when showing your dog is that the judge will give you 3 minutes of his or her time before they move on to the next exhibit. If the judge has a large entry then this time could be cut to 2 minutes, so one has to be aware of the very short time that you have in which to show your dog to his very best advantage.

The first thing to do is to make sure your dog is TRAINED. Do not think about entering your dog in a Championship Show unless you have done your basic training at home. Not only will you embarrass yourself, and your otherwise handsome dog will look like a delinquent, but the judge will lose patience very quickly as you waste his time and it is doubtful if you will get a first placing. There are a few exercises that your dog has to learn – one is to trot on a loose lead on your left-hand side; another is to stand still in an attentive position and allow the judge to look at his teeth, feel his body and, if he is a dog, to check that he has 2 testicles.

Start training your puppy to stand and wait for you to give him a tit-bit, cheese or a biscuit will do. At first he will be very impatient and want to lunge at you for the food but be firm, and teach him to wait until you give it to him. Gradually extend the time that he has to wait for longer and longer periods until he will stand patiently for up to 15 to 30 seconds before you give him the “bait”. As he gets older he will wait for longer periods and it is by using this baiting method that you will get your dog to stand patiently in the ring with all four feet on the ground, ears alert and watching you all the time for that piece of biscuit. Some exhibitors rather use a ball as bait for their dogs, this is a common practise in America which works very well, only make sure that you do not drop the ball at any stage as you are likely to be pulled off your feet and will battle to get the ball back again! Make sure that you always present your dog side-on to the judge. Try to keep your dog still during this “close inspection” time. While in this stance, the judge is given the very best picture of your dog and he can easily decide what he likes about him.

After checking his mouth and having felt his body the judge will ask you to move your dog in a triangle and then move your dog straight up and down. Listen carefully to what the judge asks of you, and make sure you do just that! When returning your dog from the movement exercises always remember to stop short of the judge by at least 2 metres. This gives him enough space to see you dog for that last “look”

Train your puppy to trot by your side on a loose lead, always on the left and never on the right hand side, and he must not be allowed to pull ahead. Practice both on a hard surface, i.e. on the driveway, and on grass. When he has finished his inoculations you can then take him out onto the road and other public places where dogs are allowed, always on the lead. He will soon get used to all the different noises and sights and strangers bending down to make a fuss of him. Try to keep all training exercises fun, with plenty of praise and lots of tit-bits. The minute you feel you are about to get short tempered with him for not obeying you (again) then stop immediately and start again later.

From a young age keep opening your dog’s mouth and looking at his teeth so that when the time comes for the judge to do this, your young dog knows all about it. The same applies to a dog puppy, by touching his testicles and tail on a regular basis he will not cringe when the judge checks for 2 descended testicles.

Fortunately for us bully owners, grooming is a breeze. Make sure you bath your dog a day before the show, a white dog must be presented as such and a coloured dog must have white socks and collar, not beige! Chalking your dog is allowed in this country, however excess should be brushed out before entering the ring. Local judges are more lenient with regards chalk but overseas judges are not, so keep it to the barest minimum. Brush your dog’s teeth, trim his nails and end whiskers on his tail and your dog is ready for the ring. Some people also trim the whiskers on the side of the face and eyebrow hairs as well as any bushy hairs on the underside of the tail to provide a better and sleeker image.

It is always a good idea to take your dog to a few open shows so that both he and you can gain experience of what it is going to be like. Open shows are always more casual and fun and any mistakes you make are easily forgiven by the judge and these shows help to prepare you for the all important Championship shows. It often happens that your dog at home shows like a bomb and the minute you get him to a real show he forgets everything you have taught him. Some dogs take longer to learn than others to learn this, and then suddenly one day they will do everything right and they never forget. I have seen old granny and grandpa dogs that have not seen a show ring in 8 or 9 years pop back into a show and not put a toe-nail wrong! And love every minute of it!

And now for you – the exhibitor! After having invested so much time and patience in training your dog and bathing and preparing him for the show, please ensure that you also present yourself in a professional manner. The judge does not know you – show him by the way you dress and by your attentiveness that you are serious about wanting the CC or Best of Breed, you and your dog come as a package, one cannot be in the ring without the other, so make sure that you are both looking and showing your best.

I have been in the very fortunate position to have watched Bull Terriers being shown around the world and it amazes me that I often see experienced show people making silly mistakes, so to all novices that will be showing your dog for the first time, take heed, we all make mistakes – including myself!