

Chapter 9

Exhibiting Great Danes In Conformation Shows

Entering the world of dog shows is like stepping off the planet into a whole new environment! (There was a time I thought that dog shows were stupid and now I exhibit *and* judge!) So... if you think that dog shows sound interesting and that you might like to participate, read on. At least you'll make your decisions based on some knowledge.

The *intent* of the first dog shows was to select the best specimens of a breed. Those dogs would be the ones to breed and perpetuate the breed. To an extent, this is still the case today, but if the truth be known, most of us do this because it's fun, because we love dogs, and we like to win. A knowledgeable, non-kennel blind breeder does not need the opinion of a judge to select her breeding stock.

How do AKC dog shows work?

Basically there are two kinds of conformation shows. Specialty Shows and All Breed Shows. Specialty Shows are put on by a breed club. For instance, the Great Dane Club of California holds a Great Dane Specialty Show twice a year. Only Great Danes may compete in this show. All Breed shows are first divided into the separate breeds. Each breed is shown in a separate ring, under it's own judge, against other dogs of the same breed.

The classes are divided by sex, age and often, color. First all the dogs are shown and then all the bitches are shown. (The word 'dog' is often used to indicate a *male* while bitch indicates a *female*). The classes are as follows for each sex. (For more detail about each class, see the *Rules Applying to Dog Shows* booklet published by AKC. (www.akc.org))

6-9 month puppy (for puppies in this age range)

9-12 month puppy (for puppies in this age range)

12-18 month puppy (for puppies in this age range)

Novice (for dogs who have never won a blue ribbon
in any class nor won more than 3 times in Novice)

Bred By Exhibitor (handler must be the breeder/owner or co-owner)

American Bred (dam must have been bred in America)

Open (dogs of any age or color may be shown in Open. However, most shows divide this class into Black, Blue, Brindle, Fawn, Harlequin and Mantle).

The winning dog or bitch, from each of the above listed classes, then all reenter the ring to compete against each other. This is called the 'Winners Bitch' or 'Winners Dog' class, depending on which sex is being judged. Whichever dog wins this is the Winners Bitch or Winners Dog, and receives the points for that days' competition. If the class that the Winner came from had other dogs competing in it, then after the Award is handed to the

Winner and the Winner has left the ring, the dog that placed second to the Winner comes into the ring to continue competition for Reserve Winner. The Reserve Winner does not receive any points unless the Winner is disqualified for some reason. (Those of us who have done this for several years often refer to Reserve as Best of Losers).

Once all the dog and bitch classes have been judged, it's time for the Best of Breed class to be judged. (You will often hear this class referred to as the 'Specials' class and Champions are often referred to as 'Specials'). This class is open to Champions of Record and the Winners Dog (WD) and Winners Bitch (WB) on that day. They will all compete for Best of Breed.

Besides the Best of Breed award, the judge will also award Best of Winners (BOW) and Best of Opposite Sex (BOS). Only the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch compete for Best of Winners. If it so happens that, for example, the bitch goes Best of Winners (beating the dog) but there were more points in the dog classes, then the bitch gets the extra points. This means that she could obtain a major win that she would not have earned otherwise. Both the WD and WB are eligible to win BOB or BOS. (More about points later).

The dog or bitch that wins Best of Breed (BOB) is, in the judges opinion, the best example of its breed on that day. The judge also picks a Best of Opposite Sex. This animal must be the opposite sex to the BOB winner. If this is an All Breed Show, the BOB winner then goes on to compete in the Working Group. Should he/she win the Working Group, he then goes on into Best In Show competition where he competes against the winners of the 7 other groups. Obviously the winner of this group is Best In Show.

How does a dog obtain its championship title?

An AKC champion must win a total of 15 points. Included within these points must be two major wins under different judges.

How many points a win is worth depends on how many dogs were defeated on that day. There are different point schedules for different states and regions. The point schedules change yearly depending on how many dogs have been in competition during the preceding year and how many majors were available to those dogs.

A *major* win consists of from three to five points. Anything lower than this is considered to be *minor* points. So if, in California there are 18 bitches competing in a year when 18 are needed for a 3 point major win, the WB will receive a major. Should the judge excuse one of the bitches during the class competition, the major is said to have 'broken', and the WB receives only 2 points. Also, as mentioned earlier, if the WB receives only 1 or 2 points, but she goes BOW and the WD had won a 3 point major, then the bitch, too, receives a 3 point major win. There is even a way to win points by winning the Group, but I'm not going to get into that much detail here.

Once a dog has won enough points (15), including his 2 majors, he has earned his AKC championship. Perhaps it sounds easy on paper, but believe me, it's time consuming and can be very expensive!

Show Expenses

HANDLER & HANDLING FEES

Showing is not a cheap hobby. One of the most expensive aspects of showing is the use of a professional handler. Here in California in 2006 the average handling fee seems to be around \$75.00. What can you expect for this fee? With most handlers you get to see your dog in the ring for as long as it takes the judge to judge the class. Win, lose or draw, you still owe the handling fee. Very few California Great Dane handlers actually board, transport, groom and show the Danes anymore. The basic routine is that you, the owner, have the dog trained, groomed, bathed and ready to go into the ring. You hand this dog to the handler who then shows the dog for you. Most handlers will spend a little time working with a dog that has come to them for the first time.

Some handlers will bring exercise pens (*Why* do they call them this? How can a Great Dane possibly *exercise* in a space four feet by 6 feet?) and set them up so you can have a place for your dog while at the show. (More on show equipment later). If not, then you'll need to either bring your own pen, or hold the dog for the length of the show.

CHOOSING A HANDLER

Do you *need* to hire a handler? No, you don't. The reason for hiring handler is that most professionals do a much better job with the dog than the owner. Even the dog of an owner who is a capable handler will usually look better when the owner is outside of the ring instead of inside. This is because the dog is usually too comfortable and relaxed with 'mom'. If mom is *outside* the ring, the dog will often become very alert either watching the owner, or looking for the owner if the owner has been instructed to hide from the dog.

Certainly you can finish your dog's championship owner handled. Many people do. I've put championship titles on two of my bitches from Puppy and Bred By Exhibitor classes and put points on others. It takes longer because owner handled dogs usually just don't have the sparkle of the dog with the pro. Besides, most professional handlers are very skilled in the art of presenting a dog at its best.

People who swear that showing dogs is all politics are wrong! My owner handled champions are living proof that this is not so. No one knew me when I first started in Danes. I *know* I didn't cut any deals with any of the judges who put me up with my bitches. Most judges really *do* judge the dogs, not the handlers. Of course there *are* some judges who *do* cater to handlers, but in my opinion, they are *not* the majority. I've never been one to compete at Best of Breed or Group levels, so I cannot speak for how political these events may or not be.

Here in California, many handlers handle only Danes or, perhaps, one or two other breeds. Before you decide on which handler you'll use, watch them in the ring. Some handlers are very skilled with all dogs. Some do best with a dog that is naturally showy and others excel in handling dogs that are considered 'problem' dogs. Evaluate your dog and then make the decision.

When you first approach a handler, be sure and ask what his/her policy is regarding priority status. Most handlers will give priority to the customer whose dog they've been handling longest. This matters if the handler wins several classes with her dogs. Although most handlers are very good about backing each other up², it's best if your handler can stay on your dog for the Winners class. If a back up handler cannot be found, you may well find *yourself* back in the ring handling your own dog.

Tell the handler that you want her to handle your dog on a trial basis. Decide how many shows you'll consider to be the trial period. If the dog does not look good or perform well for the handler, you want an easy way to end the relationship.

Many handlers are honest enough to refuse to show a dog (and thus waste the owners money) who is not a good show specimen. But unfortunately, many are not. Their bottom line is the money. If your dog has not consistently been in the ribbons, preferably blue ones, for at least half the shows, ask your handler for their opinion of the dog. If you don't feel comfortable with this, ask 1 or 2 knowledgeable friends to critique the dog or, better yet, ask the opinion of several of the judges who have judged him. If, after 20 shows your dog has not taken any points you might reconsider showing him.

How do you enter a dog show?

Dog shows are put on by Specialty Clubs and All Breed clubs. There is either a Show Superintendent, or a Show Secretary to whom you'll return the entries. You need to contact the Superintendents who run the shows in your area and ask them to put you on the mailing list for the Premiums. You can locate them in the 'Events' section of the AKC Gazette or online at www.akc.org. Once you're on the mail list, you'll receive entries for all the shows that they manage.

The premium lists everything you'll need to know about the show. Show name, date, location, entry fee, directions, etc. Fill out the pertinent information and mail to the designated address along with a check to cover the fees.

The first thing you fill in on the form is the amount of the entry fee enclosed. Next is 'Breed', and of course you'll enter 'Great Dane'. 'Variety' can be skipped as it does not apply to Great Danes. For 'Sex' enter either 'male', 'female', 'dog' or 'bitch'. For the

² If a handler has several dogs that need to return to the Winner's class, she'll ask another handler who has no class winner to take one of her dogs back into Winners.

'Dog Show Class' enter the class your dog will be in. If it's an 'Open' class, simply put 'Open' and then in 'Class Division' enter the color of your dog, such as 'Fawn'.

'Additional Classes' will rarely be used. Although you *may* enter your dog in as many classes as he's eligible for, he must then *win* every one of these classes in order to be in the Winners class. Best to keep it to one. The only exception to this would be at a Specialty where you might put 'Sweepstakes' as an extra class or 'Parade of Champions' or something similar. If your dog is also entered in 'Obedience', this is where you indicate which class, such as 'Novice A'.

If the dog is to compete in a Junior Showmanship class you write down which class here. Name of Junior Handler and Juniors AKC No. are self explanatory.

Next you must write (best to print) the full registered name of the dog. For the number, check the appropriate box and then enter the Registration number. 'Date of Birth' and 'Place of Birth' are self explanatory.

'Breeder' requires the name(s) of the person/people listed on the dogs AKC Registration papers listed as Breeder(s). 'Sire' and 'Dam' require full Registered name of both.

Actual owner information is self explanatory. 'Name of Owner's Agent' requests the name of a handler, if any.

DO NOT forget to sign your name on the line and include your phone number. Make out the check to the appropriate party and mail with the entry to the listed address. Be sure to check closing dates. This is *a very strict rule* and will *not* be changed for anyone. There's nothing more disappointing than missing a show entry.

You should receive the entry form back from the Superintendent about a week prior to the show date. It will list the time of judging, the ring number, the total number of dogs entered and other pertinent information.

Show Equipment

For the comfort of your dog and yourself, there are several items you should take to the dog show with you. How much stuff you have to lug will depend on whether the show is indoors or out, the weather, if it's an outdoor show, and the length of time you'll be spending at the show. If there's only a small entry of around 15–20 dogs and the show is either indoors or outside in nice weather, about all you'll need is a folding chair and a soft blanket/bed for your dog. If it's very sunny, you should take one of those umbrellas that clamp to the back of a chair to shade your dog. Shows that have large entries such as a Specialty, require much more equipment, most important being an exercise pen. Listed below are items which make a show much more enjoyable and comfortable.

1. Folding chair
2. Chair umbrella

3. Beach umbrella that can be anchored in the ground. These are great for you and the dog ringside as they give lots of shade and protection in case of rain.
4. Exercise pen. For a Dane purchase one that is 4 feet high. They have 8 panels and make up a pen 4 feet by 4 feet. On days when you'll be at the show for several hours, this gives your dog a safe place to rest, have shade/shelter, drink water and relax. It frees up your hands too!
5. Kennel cart. To tote the exercise pen and a bunch more stuff.
6. Water
7. Water dish that attaches to the pen.
8. Poop scoop or plastic grocery bags to clean up after your dog. **USE THEM!**
9. Cool coat. These are dog coats made of terry cloth that can be wet down to keep the dog cool.
10. Warm dog coat if it's cold.
11. Spray bottle full of water.
12. Slobber rag
13. Bait, usually cooked liver.
14. 6 foot training lead
15. Show lead
16. Food and drinks for you if it won't be available at the show.

Your First Dog Show

Try and arrive at the show about $\frac{3}{4}$ hour prior to judging time. This will give you time to unload and set up your equipment, place your chair ringside and generally get settled in with your dog.

If you're using a professional handler, she will usually pick up the armband. If not, this is up to you. You may get your armband and rubber band from the ring steward who will be at the judges table at the ring entrance. Place the armband on your left upper arm. If the band doesn't have notches in the sides to hold the rubber band, make a couple $\frac{1}{2}$ inch tears. This will keep the band from slipping out from under the rubber band.

If you don't have to show in the first classes, you'll have time to watch the judges ring procedure so you have an idea of what to expect once you're in the ring. Be at the ring entrance as the class prior to yours is ending. Know your armband number as you'll probably be called into the ring in catalog order.

As you enter the ring (especially if it's a large class) take note of who you're following. If you're first in line, notice who is *last!* This is important because as the class is being judged, most of the handlers will bunch up under any available shade. Just as the judge finishes examining the last dog in the class, savvy handlers will be getting their dogs stacked up in line to be ready for the final decisions. If you are first in line, and don't know who was last, you'll not know when to get your dog ready. If you don't know who was ahead of you, you won't know your place in line!

As the class is judged, know when your turn to be judged is coming up. When the dog in front of you moves off to gait, bring your dog up and have him stacked and ready for the judge to go over when she finishes with the dog in front of you. *DON'T* give your dog a piece of bait just as the judge comes up to examine him. (When I'm judging I *hate* having to go over a dog with a mouth full of liver crumbs mixed with saliva and foam dripping from its jaws... well, you get the picture!)

The judge will do a hands-on examination of your dog beginning with the head, mouth, body, and manually check testicles on males. If you have a male who resents this, or who squats, gently take his sheath in your hand and prop him up a little as the judge goes over his rear. (Now don't laugh! It works!)

Next the judge will probably ask you to move your dog in a certain pattern. Most judges use the triangle but some will do a 'T' or an 'L'. (You'll learn about these patterns in handling class). Move the dog easily and on as loose of a lead as possible through the pattern. As you turn to come back to the judge, check to see where he is so you can bring the dog back to him in a straight line. Don't run over the judge when you come back at him. Stop the dog about 6 feet in front of him and pose him. When the judge tells you, gait the dog again to wherever you've been directed.

When you line up for the final exam, keep an eye on the judge. If he wants your dog for first place, you wouldn't want to be gazing into space and miss it! Another handler might take the opportunity to run over to the first place marker! No matter what your placement, take your ribbon from the judge with a smile and a thank you. Don't be one of these exhibitors who snatches the less than first place ribbon with a sneer. Also, don't be seen throwing your ribbon away on the show grounds. If you don't want to keep the ribbon, put it away and dump it when you get home.

Should you be lucky enough to win the class, remember that you still need to take your dog back into the Winners class to compete for points. If you had a second place dog, you might have to go back into Winners to compete for Reserve if the winner of your class is Winners on that day. So don't throw your armband away or leave the area until it's all over. This is actually an AKC rule!

If your dog wins the points, remember that you still have to compete in Best of Breed! You'll be in that class behind the entered champions, the Winners dog first and the Winners Bitch behind him. The judge will instruct you what to do. Now, if you're *REALLY* having a fantastic day and you take Best of Breed, you'll need to keep that armband on because your dog will then represent Great Danes in the Working Group. And of course (now it's *really* fairy tale time!) if you win the Group, you go on to compete for Best In Show. (Well, who knows! Stranger things have happened).