

“Theatre of the Canine”

Notes for the owner-handler part3

Previously, I wrote about creating a picture, actually a series of pictures, when presenting your dog to the judge. This exercise begins as soon as you enter the ring with either your first pass around the ring, or on the table should you have the only dog in the class.

FIRST PASS:

Most judges are bringing the classes into the ring in catalogue order, so your control over where you are in the lineup is minimal. You must work to turn this to your advantage. If you have studied your judge for the day, you will have noticed just where the judge is focusing on his class on the first pass; there will be an area of the ring where you will want your dog moving at the speed which gives the best picture of side movement. Unfortunately, the speed of the dog in front of you can inhibit your ability to achieve this goal. The trick here is to quickly assess the speed and ground coverage of the dog in front of you and in the case of a slower exhibit, give yourself enough room to bring your dog to optimum gait as you arrive at the judge’s area of focus. The slower exhibits usually cut the corners of the ring. In order to give your dog more room to move, go deep into the corners; this gives your dog a chance to make the entire pass at a swift and pleasing gait without crowding or running up on the exhibit in front of you. This may sound a little tricky, but with a little practice and experience, it will come naturally. When you have a dog with good reach in the front and drive in the rear, you want to present that picture to the judge. First pass equals first impression—make it a good one.

THE TABLE:

Don’t rush the table. Your approach and setup on the table should be done in the same manner and rhythm used in training sessions, so that you do not confuse or alarm your dog. If you have observed your judge, you should know just how much time you have between the previous dog leaving the table, and the judge turning back to look at your dog. This is the picture moment. If you know that you have a good profile stack, but a foot is slightly out of place, don’t fuss with it! Once the judge has seen the profile, then you can worry about the specifics. A word of caution here; in a ring where the table has been placed very close to the diagonal mat, the previous handler will be passing very close to the table as they finish their ring pattern. If you are already set on the table, your dog can be distracted and break stack when the handler passes the table. In this case it is best to wait until the distraction is past to solidify your stack.

These techniques will only be of use in conjunction with a good training program and the proper socialization of your dogs. There are no shortcuts; good handling takes time and practice. The next column will complete the “notes” series and deal with a couple of special ring situations.

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