

## Conformation Shows 101

By Linda Kieres

*Showing your dog is not as complicated as you might think. However, there are a few essential things you need to do to prepare yourself and your dog for the show ring.*

First and foremost – your dog **MUST** travel freely at heel on a leash. I can't emphasize this strongly enough. The judge cannot evaluate what he/she cannot see. If your dog is lunging and pulling, jumping up and down, or has its nose glued to the ground you might as well stay home. Also, make sure your dog doesn't have issues with other dogs being in close proximity.

The judge is looking for two things: the conformation of the dog and how well it fits into the breed standard; and secondly, how the dog moves. If the dog is not put together correctly – it won't move correctly. The dog must move naturally.

So to get your dog ready for the show here is a short list of things to do.

- Teach your dog to travel freely at heel with its head up. You don't have to have a fancy show lead but make sure you can control your dog. Pinch collars are **NOT** allowed and leather hunting collars are not a good idea. The shorter the leash the better so you aren't fumbling about fighting 6 feet of rope instead of focusing on presenting your dog.  
Teach your dog to stand quietly for examination (get someone the dog doesn't know to approach the dog and put their hands all over its body.)
- Teach your dog to show its teeth. 99% of the time **YOU** will open the dog's mouth for the exam – so **PRACTICE** doing this. (They look not only at the front teeth and how they align, but also at the molars to make sure there aren't any extra teeth or missing or misaligned teeth.)
- Make sure your dog is **CLEAN**. Some people don't like to bathe the dog right before the show (it can make their hair do funny things), but **PLEASE** don't take a stinky/dirty dog into the ring. (A side note: if your female is in season, please have the courtesy to inform the judge **BEFORE** they examine the dog. EEEEEwwwww!)
- Take a look in the mirror at **YOURSELF**. Please show respect for the judge by presenting yourself appropriately as well as your dog. Formal attire is not required, but t-shirts and shorts are inappropriate. Wear something your mother would approve of and that you can run in.
- Wear sensible shoes. Nothing is more embarrassing than taking a header in the ring.
- And last but not least **ALWAYS ALWAYS** keep your dog on your **LEFT** side – between you and the judge. They aren't looking at **YOU** – they want to see the **DOG!**

And last but not least – try to have fun! Your nervousness conveys directly to your dog and it will think something horrible is going to happen. So **RELAX!** and **GOOD LUCK!**