

Do you have what it takes to be an owner-handler?

The ring is satisfied with good dogs, and the competition is stiff. Your dog is presenting his heart out and you're on the other end of the leash. The judge prompts you to the front of the line. Your adrenaline is shooting. The crowd is applauding, and your dog just keeps impressing better and better. Finally, the judge points to you and the sensing is intoxicating.

This scenario plays out weekly at dog shows around the country. We've all had the dream; the excitement of demonstrating your dog can approach euphoria.

What does it take to be a successful owner-handler in a sport dominated by professional handlers?. How do you stay positive when someone wins with an inferior dog? How do you bring out the best in your dog?

The No. 1 priority is to have a high-quality dog if you expect to compete with an experienced of handlers. The scales are not always balanced in the ring and the owner-handler ordinarily must have a very nice dog to overcome the competition.

If you're just beginning, you may not have a prominent representative of your breed. Your dog may be sound structurally but he may have a kid, evident mistake that takes away from his overall typing. This can turn off a judge as soon as you walk into the ring. It can also quickly disillusion the newbie.

To add to the mix-up, you may not be totally objective because of the secure emotional relate you share with your dog. But if you're establishing and consistently placing near the end of the line, your dog may not qualify to the competition. Try to paying attention to others who know more than you - and listen with your mind, not your heart.

Finding a good dog to show may take years depending on your breed, the availability of puppies and young show scenes in your area, and the amount of money you're willing to invest. You'll need patience, but if you settle a responsible breeder and prove your good purposes, you should be able to buy a nice "hopeful."

If you're expecting for another dog to show in form, make good use of your "starter" dog and train him in obedience, where his performance will consider more than his looks. Your bind will compound as he gets the care he deserves.

Another choice may be an alternate breed. If you're in a popular breed where the point system is high, making it difficult to receive championship points, you may consider another breed that's easier to show.

Skill. Does your dog love to show? You may have a great dog, but if he doesn't love showing, or is tired with the game, you're fighting a losing battle. Sometimes training and meeting can improve his attitude in the ring. If he responds well to food rewards, you may be able to keep his attention with bait. But a dog with a ton of self-esteem and the innate "look at me" attitude is the result to a handler's appeal. Without that self-confidence, your dog may never look his most beneficial.

Prepare to succeed. As in any venture, preparation is the key to winner. Smoothness and assurance in the ring rarely come naturally. Your performance and your dog's performance are the result of diligent preparation.

Begin early training, training, and teaching your dog ring rule. Play with him and have fun as you study how to be a winning team. But be sure you keep control so he does flawlessly when you're in the ring. Nothing shows your inexperience like a fidgety dog that you must continually fuss over.

Observe a good training class and soak up all the tips you can collect from experienced handlers. Ask a friend or mentor to measure you and your dog as you progress.

Attend a treatment conference. Go to shows and meets in your area, and design to attend your breed's national or regional specialty shows. Emulate successful handlers. Study books and watch videos on handling, grooming, judging, and general topics such as behavior and psychology.

Talk to established breeders, handlers, and judges when you can on an informal basis. Rather than asking questions about your particular situation, discuss dogs in general.

Ask a professional handler if you might help him before a show. Offer to work for free. The knowledge you earn will be more valuable than any monetary exchange.

Move into condition. You may need to lose a couple of pounds and get yourself in better condition to be a contender. Enroll your dog in a fitness plan that will enhance his opportunities of winning as you improve your performance.

This persuades over into your daily activities with your dog and may help you avert bad joints and other disabling health problems. We're frequently more concerned with our dog's health than with our own. Just as your dog must be in peak physical condition, so should you. Conditioning is also mental. Focus on your dog instead of negatives in your life. Your mindset influences your dog's behavior.

Don't be whiner. Your dog may be better than the one that wins. Learn to deal with it. Judging is subjective, and the most worth dog doesn't always get the blue ribbon. To be successful, you must overcome the urge to criticize other dogs, their owners, their handlers, and the judge. Keep calm, be professional, and if you must vent your frustrations, do so privately.

Remember, if you plan for success, you have a reward over everyone else. You know your dog. You know his intensities and his weaknesses, and it's up to you to show off his best stages. You know you can do it!