

PASSING IT ON

The American Kennel Club first registered a Chihuahua in 1904. It's time to wish the breed a happy 100th anniversary!

I hope everyone can remember how they began their education in dogs—the misconceptions they had, the mistakes they made, those truly embarrassing moments, and, above all, just how stupid they sometimes felt as novices. It is those experiences that always come to mind when I meet people new to Chihuahuas and to the sport. Novices tend to think that small dogs will be easier to show than larger breeds; this is a misconception that is quickly dispelled once they are in the ring. The dog may be smaller, but the work and skill required are the same.

The first thing I advise new show people to do is to join a breed club. In Chihuahuas we have over 20 licensed clubs around the country, including our newest one in Hawaii. At their meetings, local breed clubs often have programs on showing, grooming, whelping, and many other subjects of interest. If there is no breed club in the area, I advise novices to contact the closest kennel club for guidance.

Most of our real education comes in the show environment, where we can observe practical situations we may have been taught as theory. Formal classes and seminars have their place in the dog world, and many provided by kennel and breed clubs are excellent, conveying a great deal of information on many dog-related subjects. However, actual participation in dog shows and related events is, and always will be, the best way to gain experience and an education in the world of dogs.

Many kennel clubs offer ring-manners classes or “show-and-go” events that simulate the dog show environment. These give newcomers a chance to learn basic ring behavior while dogs are put through the paces of the conformation ring. Such activities are worthwhile for new and old members alike, offering training for inexperienced handlers, and a chance for the more experienced to share their knowledge.

For those who are really serious about the fancy, I recommend becoming a ring steward. The perfect place to study show dogs and gain an understanding of the show process is from the steward's place at ringside. Novices will learn the rules and regulations regarding shows, be able to study judges' and handlers' techniques, and meet many people who are well versed in a great number of breeds. Stewarding requires training and dedication, but ultimately it will provide a great deal of insight into, and appreciation of, the sport. I tell beginners to contact their kennel club for information on stewarding organizations.

I realize I have only scratched the surface of this subject, and many of you will have much that you would like to say to newcomers—please say it. We all had mentors and guides when we entered the sport, and we owe it to them to pass on our knowledge and welcome these new dog people.

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