

There is nothing that can be more enjoyable, or in some cases more frustrating, than showing a young puppy. I am speaking mainly about pups in the 6 to 9 month class, puppies with very little experience who are beginning their show career. Keeping in mind that these young dogs are not seasoned, and every ring experience is new to them, we need to take actions that will make these youngsters as comfortable in the ring as possible. This means that they must be completely and properly socialized before they ever see the ring. They should be completely lead-trained, and used to being gone over on the table. The interesting thing is that you can do all of the right things and still have major problems in your first real shows with a puppy, because the nature of puppies is to embarrass the handler in any manner that they can. They don't do this on purpose, it just happens—a product of the puppy attention span, which we all know can be of very short duration, depending on the time of day and which way the wind is blowing.

With this in mind, we enter these youngsters in the 6 to 9 month class, knowing that the judges generally are a little more forgiving with young, inexperienced dogs. There has been a trend, and it is understandable, to enter young puppies in the Bred by Exhibitor class, in hopes of finishing from that class and earning a Bred by Exhibitor medallion for the new champion. I think it is wonderful that so many people are using the Bred by class, but in the case of a 6 to 9 pup, this can, on occasion, be a big mistake. Most notably, at shows with a large Bred by Exhibitor entry, an inexperienced puppy will stick out like a sore thumb, or be completely lost among the more seasoned dogs. At our National show, I have seen people win the sweepstakes from the 6 to 9 class, and watched that same pup get lost in the Bred by class the next day. If they had stayed in the puppy class, they might have had a chance to progress a little further. Look at it logically—if you have a great puppy, competing with other puppies, your chances are better at getting to winners competition and at least being considered for the points, than it would be trying to come out of a large class of older dogs that possess more maturity and poise.

The main concern is that we don't push our puppies too hard, and that we allow them to learn to show before moving out of the puppy classes. Using the Bred by class at smaller shows is a tactic that can work for you; however at larger shows, and especially large specialty shows, it is usually better to stay in the puppy class. If you should be fortunate enough to take a large major from the puppy class, you and everyone else will still know if you bred that dog, even if you don't have the Bred by medallion.

Every puppy is an individual, and develops at its own pace; only you can tell when the pup is ready to come out of the puppy class. When you begin to compete in Bred by Exhibitor class, do it because your dog is ready, not for the medallion.

Bruce E. Shirky

