

June 2019 *AKC Gazette* (rerun from December 2013 issue)

## **Entering the Show Dog World of the Chihuahua**

You've been to the shows and seen the darling little creatures prancing around the ring. What fun to see, and it certainly doesn't seem too hard—"just walk the dog around in a circle."

Well, I remember riding a transport from the hotel to the show grounds and sitting beside a Border Collie owner who showed her dog in obedience. Being true to her breed, her hair was half white, as if to have a full white collar on the top, and the rest was dark like the body of the Border. Of course I noticed it immediately, but I never remarked on the unusual hair. Dog people are "unusual." Like all dog folks do, we struck up a conversation and she told me what she did and asked what breed I was showing and what sport. Proudly, I told her I showed Chihuahuas in the conformation ring. She quickly came back with her statement saying, "Oh, you're lucky, you don't have to do anything but walk around the ring." I bit my tongue but returned with a quick, "You obviously don't know much about showing conformation."

Big dog or little dog, we work hard in those few minutes we are in the show ring. We've spent thousands of hours training for this day. No one walks into the show ring expecting to lose, but lose we do. Unfortunately, losing is a fine art, and to lose graciously is not an easy task. Most newcomers enter the show ring with great expectations. When they lose to a seasoned handler, bystanders will tell them that it was the handler the judge always chooses. But in actuality, the handler has trained for years and honed his craft to perfection. He/She is a professional. Others in the ring will range from new, somewhat seasoned, and seasoned show people. They don't handler others people's dogs but love the sport and love showing their own dogs. This is the owner/handler. AKC is now offering an owner-handler BIS award for those wanting to compete there.

Getting into the show world takes patience, stamina, and above all, realistic expectations. The sport is costly, so beginning with the best dog possible is suggested. This will alleviate a lot of disappointments down the road.

Take your time when purchasing a dog for the show ring, and do your homework to find quality breeders. Go to dog shows, and talk to exhibitors once they've finished showing their dog. They will be happy to talk about dogs! It's their life and rarely do they think about much else.

Once you have your new bundle of joy, search out a conformation training class. Most local kennel clubs can help you with this and answer many questions. Be sure your breeder can be counted on as a mentor to help you through your first year.

First-time jitters are normal. In fact, they last for a few years but one day you'll notice that you handle very well, your dogs love the ring, and you have a whole new group of wonderful friends. You still lose, but you win too. You realize that losing is part of any sport, and that you too graciously congratulate the winner, then kiss your dog and prepare for the next show.

—Virginia (Jenny) Hauber, 2013