

It's Show Time!

(or is it?)

If you are reading this column there's a huge probability that you have experienced what I'm about to describe....

You are head over heels about your new puppy. You can't wait to get your new show prospect into the ring. Starting a show career is an exciting part in your puppy's young life and you are ready to get going. But wait a minute, consider a few things before "the launch."

Is your puppy physically ready to be shown? Here's where you need to separate your hopes from reality. Objectively evaluate where your puppy is in his or her development. Some puppies grow up like perfectly proportioned little adults and they are cuter than a button. On the other hand, there are puppies that start out gangly with chaotic growth patterns that look like they were determined by a disorganized committee. Can you be objective and separate your aspirations from what your puppy actually looks like? It's hard to do and it might be a good idea to get a educated second opinion if you doubt your own objectivity.

Is your puppy mentally ready to be shown? The world with all its unique sights and sounds is a brand new experience for your puppy. It's hard to remember, especially for a large breed like ours, that even though they are physically big they are still inexperienced babies. Has your puppy been exposed to a wide enough variety of situations, people and other dogs to be able to handle the hustle and bustle of a show? Going under a big show tent is no big thing to you but the puppy probably has not experienced anything like it.

Individual personalities also play a part in launching a new puppy. If the dog show gods have smiled upon you, your puppy is a behavioral "old soul" that seem to know exactly what you want and is more than willing to conform to your wishes. (Notice that I started the last sentence with an "if"). In my experience, puppies are more likely to be uncoordinated little dervishes that strive to do only what they want. Yet another personality type is the fearful puppy that can be easily overwhelmed by new situations. For those, it is our responsibility to recognize and avoid circumstances that are just too taxing for a young animal.

What can you do to make the start of a show career the best that it can be? It's a combination of objectivity and logistics.

First, be honest with yourself about your puppy's physical and mental development. Know the pluses and minuses of your puppy and then make sure you get your puppy into appropriate situations. Know when your puppy needs more practice or time to mature to be prepared for the rigors of the ring.

Second, there's a whole raft of logistical and equipment decisions you can make for a puppy's debut. What kind of collar does your puppy accept when gaiting? Metal? Cloth? Choker? Martingale? How much time does your puppy need to settle into the ring environment? If you are using bait what works best for your puppy? If doing an outdoor show, are the weather conditions good for your puppy? If your puppy detests rain and it's pouring, will this situation sour your dog on the show ring?

You are the one who makes the decisions on when and where to start a show career. While it is unlikely that the “perfect” show will exactly coincide with the when you want to start your puppy’s show career, try to maximize the opportunity for a good experience. If you must, consider waiting a little longer for a show that is ideal for a beginner. A short delay can really pay off. A careful choice of your first show will make the adventure far more pleasant and will leave you looking forward to the next show weekend.

Carole Lee Richards

Weimaraner Club of America

zarsweimaraners@yahoo.com