



Handling Tips by Norman Berry (Rendorn)

With the recent discussion on handling here is a copy of the notes I wrote for my delivery at a seminar some time ago which still apply today.

Due to its great popularity over the last twenty odd years or so, the 'Stafford' has become one of the most competitive breeds to exhibit.

With an aim to improving your chances in the ring, consideration should be applied to two requirements. Firstly, your dog must attain a standard of breed acceptability and you to acquire the expertise to assist and improve your dog's presence during the time it is in the ring.

Bringing a well-trained dog into the ring, a knowledgeable handler will enhance its status and presence and install a feeling of complete pride of achievement in his or her handling ability. Ring presence and character is a great asset. If a dog is happy and comfortable when being handled it is likely due to the rapport between yourself and your charge. The difference between an experienced handler and a novice is exemplified by the method of application. You must enter the ring with a positive attitude by thinking 'mine is the best' not asking yourself the question 'is mine the best?' and demonstrate this by your seemingly apparent confidence.

Many newcomers make the mistake by using a slack collar. This can prove a hindrance. Make

sure before entering the ring the collar is properly adjusted, allowing you greater control over your dog, I would never recommend slip leads these can be a big disadvantage if your dog is a little unruly.

Various forms and ways of standing your dog can be applied. You may squat, kneel, or, if you have a well-trained dog, you may wish to highlight the fact by standing upright behind him and holding the lead in an outward fashion. The latter may seem impressive and appear influential; unfortunately, you may be magnifying faults you may not be unaware of from your lofty position - for instance; unaware of a steep upper arm or over loaded shoulders - causing the elbows to protrude, or perhaps, the top line having dropped a little. These discrepancies are more easily rectified from a kneeling position.





A further fault I see, handlers standing in front of their charge when being examined from the rear, by doing so they push the head back causing the top line to dip. I recommend that you stand to the side of your dog, pull the collar upward and forward if you think your dog needs further enhancement.

Handlers have various methods of standing and placing their dogs. Adjust the front legs first in the correct position before proceeding to the rear quarters remembering to place each foot separately. I find it is far better to place each leg individually to its designated place. Avoid making the mistake of placing your hand between the back legs to position them; this can cause the dog to stand with a straighter rear angle than its natural stance.

A further fault to be avoided is stretching the front quarters too far forward and the rear end too far backwards causing the dog to give a veritable imitation of an old fashioned rocking horse resulting in an unwanted dippy top-line.

'So far, So good' - not quite so - check the head is correctly angled and looking straight ahead. Refrain from lifting the muzzle too high; this can lose sight of definition and expression. Be aware not place your hand over the animal's face, doing so you are likely to obliterate your dog's greatest asset.

Emphasize your dog's finer points and try to disguise faults. Look on it as a contest between you and the judge. They hold most of aces and you really shouldn't succeed, however, it happens.

We in the U.K. have the fortunate option of being able to choose our own position where to stand on entering the ring, unlike some other countries where the alphabetical order system is used. If your dog isn't the best of movers, stand somewhere in the middle of the line or near the beginning, avoid being at the end. By the time the judge has completed the task of going over each exhibit, it's possible your animal's definable frailty has been overlooked. Most judges make their final choice during their last assessment anyway and it is quite likely your dog's faulty action has long been forgotten by then.





I have always found that a dog looks its best after immediately being stood for presentation. During a large class I find many exhibitors posing their dogs long before necessary. When the judge starts his/her final assessment it seems to alert a signal for many to stand their dogs, even those at the back end of the line up who are unlikely to come under the judges eye for possibly a further ten minutes or more. In this time your dog starts to relax, moves a foot; drop's its top-line or performs some other unwanted displacement - wait and watch the judge, anticipate the right moment when to stand your dog for its final assessment.

Most judges will come up with an overall appraisal. Others perhaps, a little 'picky' on certain points and will eschew a fault they have encountered in their own stock . It is most wise and prudent to discover what these foibles are. Knowledge will eventually be gained from past experience. Other than that, keep open a cocked ear during conversation with seasoned exhibitors you find this valuable information can save yourself a few quid/dollars before writing out your intended expensive entry.

On entering the ring, settle your dog down with a comforting pat and a quiet word of assurance before standing or the call to move him. This can achieve a soothing affect. Don't be afraid to stop if your dog sets off too fast, reassure him by a gentle pat and start again. Movement is a most important point to consider. Find your dog's best walking speed. Ask a knowledgeable friend to assist by pointing out any obvious faults. Should the animal walk with a padding or hackney action, or moving close behind, try moving at a slower pace or faster speed until you find the best to suit your dog.



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A further tip – find the biggest mirror available by practising in front of it you will see yourself as others see you and allows you to iron out a number of faults and mistakes.

Many people find it is most uncomfortable standing the wrong side of their dog. Many prefer to use their natural hand side. Problems surface when they are required to use the side they are unaccustomed to. Being ambidextrous in this department is most advantageous. You will find from time to time judges require this awkward task to be performed by wanting a side on view. They also may wish to have dogs standing face on or perhaps back-to-back. If unprepared, this will be the time for you to curse your cak handed performance and possibly the loss of that coveted C.C. or even meritorious Best in Show.

Mats at indoor shows are usually provided. These are for your dog's assistance by allowing more stability and grip to the floor surface. Take cognisance of the fact it is dog which should be taking advantage of the mat and not the handler. Much to my amusement have seen this little indiscretion applied many times with the dog scrambling about on the polished floor. During a large class; room on the mat may become a premium. Again, it is prudent to make sure you manage to obtain your own little square of operation rather than find yourself pushed off the



mat then trying to stand your dog with a great degree of difficulty on the same highly polished surface.





The following are Do's and Don'ts.

Don't let your dog bark incessantly at other dogs while other dogs are being gone over and are under the immediate eye of the judge. They may well be as feisty as your dog and possibly this distraction may prevent them from showing at their best. I feel it is bad manners and most unsportsmanlike, the odd spat can be overlooked.

Make sure you have entered the right class and always have your ring number in a prominent place!

Beware in a large class of which is the last dog to be seen -meaning, being aware and ready to prepare your dog for the final inspection, especially if you are among the first few in a large class.

Finally, great pleasure is gained by winning. No one enjoys the misery of losing. In the past I have experienced my share of the latter. Always keep in mind dog showing is supposed to be a pleasure. Avoid taking the whole matter too seriously. Try to look on the bright side although you have been less than successful on the day. - Next week, 'another show - another judge' perhaps with a different view and opinion - bringing further optimism and hope for future shows.





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