

I was reading the critique of a local restaurant the other day in my local paper. The critic was talking about the food, the prices, the décor and what made it unique. When evaluating the entrées there was a specific mention of the “Presentation” of the meal itself.

Being curious I looked up presentation in food evaluation. The description I found was that “Presentation is the art of modifying, processing, arranging, or decorating food to enhance its aesthetic appeal.”

The definition brought me back to an experience I had several years ago while living in Memphis, Tennessee. I had the opportunity to be a part of a team that was cooking in the world famous “Memphis in May” Barbecue contest. During the competition I learned just how important “presentation” was involved in the over-all scoring of the team. I was surprised to learn that if any of the sauce itself dripped onto the plate it was a DQ for the dish. There have also been times when I have watched one of those Chef Shows on cable TV and again the presentation of the food carried a very high value in the evaluation process.

You are probably wondering what does this have to do with dog shows?

Just look at the definition “The ART of modifying, processing, and arranging to enhance its AESTHETIC APPEAL.” Is this not what we all do when showing our dogs.

Just like food we start with the main ingredient our dogs. Then through a variety of ways we work toward presenting that dog in the best possible way to appeal to the judge.

The first part comes through raising happy, healthy, sound animals with good temperaments. Hopefully we follow that up with training, and conditioning building strong muscles and a very good basic physical specimen.

Once our exhibit has the basics solved, we move on to the other phases. Enhancing virtues and minimizing faults in the eyes of the judge. So, I guess you could say we only want the judge to see the good parts and hope we can fool them from seeing the not so good parts. This can and is done in many ways.

Let’s start with a coated breed. Coated breeds can offer you blessings as well as difficulties in the presentation phase. If you are blessed with a dog with enough coat in quantity and texture you may have hit the jackpot. Coat can be used to create many illusions to the judge that fails to search the coat to see what is under it. Some examples would be a dog that when standing naturally is east and west in front or maybe cow-hocked in the rear. A skillful groomer can use scissors and other techniques to make it appear that when the dog is stopped and standing naturally, he appears to be truly perfect. Hopefully a skilled judge feels through the coat to find the faults or is

good enough to pay attention to the pads of the feet to pick it up while the dog is in motion. Likewise, an animal lacking in neck can be enhanced through stripping out coat or even clipping it at the withers and having the neck hair lay over it to make it appear much longer than it is. Toplines can be altered through numerous approaches to make them appear not what they really are so the judge must use his hands and his eyes to get a true evaluation. Even though the coated breeds are often a lot of work a skilled person knows how to use that coat to their advantage.

Keeping the nails trimmed properly is another important part of the puzzle. There are times when the nails are so long you can hear them clicking on the mats on the down and back and in some cases this can lead to making the feet themselves look very bad.

Many people use special shampoos, chalk, hair dye and other substances to alter or enhance the animal under their care. The secret to this is being sure it's done correctly and does not come off onto the hands of the judge or leave white spots on the mats or even a big puff of smoke when the dog shakes out inside the ring. Foreign substance found in the coat gives the judge the right to immediately excuse the dog from the ring. All judges will tell you two things they hate are dirty dogs and dogs that when they are examining them have a bunch of gunk in the coat that comes off in their hands.

If you have a smooth coated animal, you don't have as many opportunities, but you can still do things to be sure you know what you need to do to make your dog look its best. Start by being sure you are stacking your dog properly to present a picture to the judge of the balance and type of your dog. How you hold the head, and the tail, being sure the front is set properly under the dog and the rear is not over stretched or under stretched make a difference in what appears to the judge. Also being sure the topline is being shown properly for that breed is equally important.

Everyone needs to learn how to properly show the bite and should make sure the dogs' teeth are clean and look white and healthy. When practicing showing the bite remember your showing it to the judge not looking at it yourself so don't block their view with your head.

Assuming you have done all the correct things regarding health, coat care, and proper set up the most critical part of the equation is next.

How should I move my dog?

Obviously, all dogs have some type of movement described in their individual standard. Learning the different gaits and how to recognize and understand them is important.

One of the better books out there to talk about gait is "Dogsteps" by the late Rachel Page Elliot. Page Elliott was one of America's most respected authorities on dog gait.

She presented lectures and videos to audiences all over the world and through her books and videos many people have gained a better understanding of the Natural Gaits, The Walk, The Amble, The Pace, The Trot, Hackney Gaiting, The suspension or “Flying Trot” the Cantor and The Gallop. The book will also help you to understand that good performance is the test of good structure.

Hopefully, in preparing your exhibit for the show ring you understand the proper gait for your breed. Assuming your dog has the proper gait style the next most important part of the equation is the tempo or speed in which you exhibit.

How fast or slow you move your animal has a great deal to do with the overall presentation to the judge. While in movement the judge is evaluating many different things not just reach and drive. They are looking at topline, tail carriage, head carriage, rolling of the body and so on.

I am a proponent of the saying “Speed Kills”. Normal canine movement can show numerous faulty actions such as “Crabbing”, Crossing over in the front or rear, Weaving, Moving close, Cow hocks, paddling, knitting and purling, tied at the elbows, or out at the elbows, as well as other faults that can be minimized or as in most cases maximized by the speed at which they are shown as well as the placement of the lead and the control exerted by the handler.

In most cases dogs are raced around the ring because for whatever reason people think it looks showy, flashy and gives the appearance of good reach and drive. Often what racing does is throw off the top line and make it look like the animal is working very hard to go nowhere fast. On the down and back it often causes the exhibit to appear to crab or sidewind and in some cases cause the dog to be pulling to side and throw the front or rear out of rhythm. As the handler or presenter, it is your job to practice showing your exhibit on a loose lead at the speed which makes him or her look their very best. Again, know the proper gait and preferred speed for your breed and adapt accordingly. Good judges know proper movement and try to evaluate the whole dog while in motion. In evaluating movement, they are also assessing if the dog has the proper structure and ability to do the job for which he is bred.

Hopefully if you are serious about the presentation of your exhibit you will do your homework and do all the little things that make a big difference. Remember presentation is the art of creating an enhancing aesthetic appeal it can.