

# RSVC QUARTERLY NEWS

Established in 1972 to serve Vizsla lovers in Arizona



## Calendar of Events

**Hunt Training** - September 3rd and 4th at Smith Tank near Parks AZ. See website for directions.

**General Meeting** and Pizza Party October 1st at the Kirkpatrick's 2055 E Woodman Dr Tempe, AZ  
**Specialty**

November 12th at Rillito Park Racetrack (Tucson area) details TBD  
Linda Kelly, Chair  
Onofrio superintendent

**Double-Double Hunt Test**  
November 19-20 at Robbins Butte (Buckeye Area). Marian Kirkpatrick to chair ([kirkpatrick@cox.net](mailto:kirkpatrick@cox.net))  
Debbie Maher, Secretary ([ramaher@juno.com](mailto:ramaher@juno.com))

## Your RSVC Officers and Directors

### Officers:

President- *Marla Molvin*  
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Vice President- *Linda Kelly*  
([brassielindal49@gmail.com](mailto:brassielindal49@gmail.com))  
Secretary- *Marian Kirkpatrick*  
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Treasurer- *Doreena Wiegert*  
([jerry-doreena@cox.net](mailto:jerry-doreena@cox.net))

### Directors:

Jim DeWoody  
Pam Edwards  
Jen Jewel  
Jude Nau  
Amy Pongratz



## President's Message

**It's back! Welcome to our first newsletter in many years!!! I don't know about you, but I miss seeing the photos and the updates and I may be a little old school.....**

We are excited to have you here. Now that the Covid 19 protocols have been lifted, we are making plans to resume our regular events and maybe even some new ones. Watch for Socialization & Obedience Classes, Fun Days, Hunt Training, CGC Training & Testing, Specialties, VCA Versatility Tests, along with our General Membership Meetings. Please go visit the [RSVC.net](http://RSVC.net), along with Facebook, emails, and [RSVC.net](http://RSVC.net) website. Our goal is to keep you updated so that we can all get together once again!

Let me give you an update on what we've been doing lately. The August Hunt Test was held outside of Parks, AZ at a small area called Smith's Tank. We had many success stories. Several of the dogs finished their titles, while others completed a leg of their journey toward a title. Our next events include hunt test training, Pizza Party and General Membership meeting, November Double Double Hunt Test, and our Holiday Party. Looking forward to seeing everyone!

**Marla Molvin**  
**RSVC President**



## Litter Announcements

Please email Janet  
**(janetlaman2019@gmail.com)**  
for new or expected litters. You  
must be on the RSVC approved  
breeder list to qualify. Please  
contact Linda Kelly for details  
**(brassielindal49@gmail.com)**

## RSVC Merchandise



**\*\*\* FIRE SALE\*\*\* Only \$5**  
Ladies M/L/XL (runs small)  
To purchase contact Pam  
Edwards  
**(liesel.weiss@aol.com)**

## RSVC SUCCESSFUL HUNT TEST

Another Hunt test in the bag for RSVC. It was so fun despite the challenges of downpours, mucky terrain and a cow in the field (literally). Nothing like a good laugh to ease those nervous jitters. Many thanks to our outstanding judges Jim Kirkpatrick, Marla Molvin, Amy Pongratz, Tim Kulish, Rick Maher and Jim DeWoody! Also thanks to our Hunt Test Secretary Debbie Maher, Gunners Jerry Edwards and Jeff Jarvis, Line Marshall and Marian Kirkpatrick who chaired the event. A special thank you to Jerry Wiegert who made the amazing (and damn good) pulled pork for the sandwiches.

**Without each and everyone of our gracious volunteers we couldn't have done this.**

Besides the cow in the backfield here are a few highlights....

Congratulations to newly titled Master Hunter

GCH DESERT SKY TRAX DUSTY ROSE, MH (Dusty) owned and handled by Lisa Ashton

and newly titled Junior Hunter

MIRA'S 20 GAUGE CRIMSON MIRACLE, JH (Tui) owned and handled by Bill Watt

Other passes included with their handlers

Master Hunter Advanced

DRYCREEK'S KICK EM UP RAZZLE-DAZZLE MH (Razz)-Melody Starr

GCH KORONA HERCEG PHOENIX, MH, CGC, TKN (Phoenix)-Phyliss Alvarez

Senior Hunter

MEHAGIAN'S GOLDEN SON (Mickey)-Marla Molvin

MEHAGIAN'S CHARMING CHARLIE (Charlie)-Amy Pongratz

Junior Hunter

GCH MEHAGIAN-VALHALLA'S STAR OF SOL, BN, RI, SIN, CGC (Stella)-Susan Shorb

GCH VALHALLA'S NEED FOR SPEED, RI, SWN (Maverick)-Janet Laman

VALHALLA'S CHARLOTTE ROSE, SWA, SCE, SEE, SBE (Charlee)-Mike Winters

STARPATH'S DAYLIE DOUBLE (DAYLIE)-April Rexroad

VALHALLA'S STAR ALLIANCE WITH A SILVER LINING (Star)-Sandi Winters

## Congratulations to All

Next hunt test will be a double-double down at Robins Butte in November. Looking forward to seeing more new titles

# NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Braggs and Cries

Please email your activities to Janet

**janetlaman2019@gmail.com**

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## GETTING STARTED IN RALLY

*taken from AKC*

You and your dog are a team. You do almost everything together – take walks, eat, veg out, even sleep together. So think of the fun you'd have showing off what a great team you are at an AKC Rally® event!

AKC Rally® is one of the newest AKC sports and participation increases every year. Whether you just train or decide to compete, Rally develops better teamwork between you and your dog. Just as importantly, it will sharpen your dog's obedience skills and behavior – at home and in public.

Here's what you need to know to get started:

### **Know the Basics**

AKC Rally® is all about teamwork. You and your dog navigate a course together, side-by-side, at your own brisk pace. You move him through a course with signs where he performs different exercises. The courses are designed by the Rally judge (10-20 signs per course, depending on the class level) that include various turns and commands such as sit, down, stay, etc. Unlimited communication from the handler to the dog is to be encouraged and not penalized. While touching isn't allowed, you can use verbal commands, clap your hands, pat your legs and use hand signals to praise and encourage your dog.

Scoring in Rally is less rigorous than in other competitions like traditional [obedience](#) or [agility](#). You begin with a perfect score of 100, with points deducted along with way. If you retain a score of at least 70 points, you will qualify toward earning a title. As you qualify the required number of times, you will move onto the next level.

### **Where to Begin**

If you haven't yet seen AKC Rally in person, we encourage you to do so to become familiar with ring procedures. You'll see first-hand how much fun it is – and you'll be able to ask questions of owners who are experienced in AKC Rally events.

### **Take a Class**

As it is with any sport, we highly recommend getting involved with your local [AKC Club](#) and taking a class. Prospective students are usually welcome to observe a class before signing up for a training course. When you attend a class with your dog, instructors will show you how to train your dog and will expect you to practice at home. The younger the dog, the shorter the practice sessions should be. For the best results, both you and your dog should enjoy frequent short sessions, combined with some play and rewards.

### **There are five levels of Classes in AKC Rally:**

**Novice** is for those just getting started:

\*All exercises are performed with your dog on leash.

\*There are 10-15 signs

\*Exercises vary from turning 360 degrees to changing paces during the course.

\*You May talk , clap your hands and/or pat your legs to encourage your dog.

\*To earn a title it takes three qualifying scores. Intermediate or Advanced is the second level with more challenging exercise:

After Novice, handlers may choose which class they are ready to participate in, either the Intermediate or Advanced level.

All exercises are performed on-leash in the Intermediate level and there is no jump required.

All exercises are performed off-leash in the Advanced level and there is one jump required.

There are 12-17 signs.

To earn a title it takes three qualifying scores

**Excellent** is the next level of competition. The course is similar to the Advanced level (above), but with some more challenging exercises.

All exercises are performed off-leash.

Handlers are not allowed to pat their legs or clap their hands to encourage the dog.

There are 15-20 signs.

Dogs must jump twice.

To earn a title it takes three qualifying scores.

**Master** is the highest level of competition. The course is similar to the Excellent level (above), but with some more challenging exercises.

All exercises are performed off-leash.

Handlers are not allowed to pat their legs or clap their hands to encourage the dog.

Dogs must jump once.

There are 15-20 signs.

To earn a title it takes ten qualifying scores.

### Enter a Rally trial

You've both worked so hard and it's time for your first trial ("competition"). The official announcement of a club's event is called a "premium list." It contains all relevant information regarding the trial, including date, location, classes offered, and judges — as well as an entry form. To enter a rally trial, the owner of the dog must submit an official AKC entry form, which can be found in the premium list or on the AKC website. The entry form should be sent to the trial secretary or superintendent of the trial listed in the premium list. You may find rally trials using the AKC Event Search on the website. After the entries have closed, a program showing the schedule for the judging of each class will be mailed to you along with all relevant information about the trial. To be eligible to compete, your dog must be:

- 6 months of age or older
- Have an AKC number via one of the following:
  - [AKC Registration](#) as one of the 195 recognized breeds.
  - [AKC Canine Partners](#), which is for mixed-breed dogs and dogs ineligible for AKC registration.
  - [Purebred Alternative Listing \(PAL\) program](#), which is for purebred dogs that cannot be fully registered with the AKC to participate in AKC events.
  - [Foundation Stock Service®\(FSS\)](#), which is for recorded breeds on the road to full AKC recognition.
- Spayed females and neutered males are eligible to participate but females in season are not.
- Dogs that are deaf are allowed to participate, but dogs that are blind are not eligible.
- No dog can compete if it is taped or bandaged or in any way has anything attached to it for medical purposes.

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## THE HISTORY OF OUR CLUB

The Rio Salado Vizsla Club is a non-profit organization that operates under the rules and regulations set forth by the American Kennel Club.

Rio Salado Vizsla Club (RSVC) was founded in the early 1970's by a small group of Vizsla Fanciers. In those days Vizslas were few and far between. We managed to attract about 35 members. The Club has continued to grow as the Vizsla breed has become more well known. Today we have more than 100 memberships.

RSVC has hosted the Vizsla Club of America National Events three times – 1980, 1986, and 2002. Each year we regularly hold four Hunting Tests and two Specialties and Obedience Trials. We also hold several Versatility Tests and Canine Good Citizen Tests each year.

Our members are very involved in training their Vizslas for show, obedience, and field. We have a fantastic training support system where our more experienced members help out the newcomers. Our members' dogs are very successful in all three areas – confirming that Vizslas are truly a versatile breed.



# Comparing NAVHDA, JGHV, and AKC Hunting Dog Tests

by Jennifer Wapenski

Director of Operations for Project Upland

August 15, 2022

## Learn about the various hunting dog testing systems from the puppy level to the finished level.

“Would you be willing to run her in the spring puppy test?”

The emailed question from the breeder seemed harmless enough. I didn't really know what a spring puppy test was, but it didn't sound unreasonable. She explained that hunt test data is useful for ensuring that natural hunting abilities are preserved within the breed. We were new hunters and soon-to-be first-time bird dog owners, wide-eyed and naïve, but I typed back, “Sure!” Boy, was I in for a surprise. The puppy test itself was not a big ask at all, at least not beyond the 12-hour drive that it took to reach our closest test. But that simple agreement unleashed a way of life that nearly consumed our next four years—and we (and our dogs) are all the better for it.

## What is a hunt test for dogs, and what organizations are involved?

It's easy to get lost in the acronym alphabet soup, but there is a method to the madness.

At their core, hunt tests are simply a standardized evaluation of a hunting dog which can assess their natural hunting abilities along with their ability to be trained in particular subjects. Note the difference between hunt tests and trials: tests are a pass/fail evaluation while trials are a competitive event. At a field trial, you can expect to see a winner crowned and places awarded based on each dog's performance relative to the others. At a hunt test, one dog's results have no bearing on the others—in theory, every entered dog could receive a passing score and a top prize at the end of the day.

The three largest organizations that administer hunt tests for [pointing and versatile hunting dogs](#) are the [American Kennel Club \(AKC\)](#), the [North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association \(NAVHDA\)](#), and the [Jagdgebrauchshundverband \(JGHV](#), German for “Hunting Dog Association”). These organizations have slightly different test subjects and eligibility rules, but they are generally aimed in the same direction. There is also some overlap in eligibility for these tests. For example, our dogs are registered in all three systems and have participated in all three brands of hunt tests, giving us the unique opportunity to compare the different approaches

## Should you try hunt tests with your dog?

We found our way into hunt tests like many other puppy buyers—because we made a commitment to a breeder—but there are many other good reasons beyond simple obligation.

First and foremost, preparing for and running hunt tests can be really fun. Sure, test day can be stressful and things will never go exactly as you'd planned. I'd be lying if I said I didn't repeatedly lie awake at three a.m., worrying about blind retrieves. But if you take a step back from self-induced pressure, the bottom line is that you're out there working with your dog, meeting other people, and staying active in the off-season. Hunt tests are a great way to extend your hunting season and solidify the bond you have with your bird dog. Since hunt tests aren't competitive, you can expect to find an environment where handlers are cheering each other on and hoping for success across the board.

For us, hunt tests are mostly about the means to an end: developing a great hunting dog that is well prepared for any hunting situation. All hunt tests are designed around typical hunting scenarios, which means that training for a test will ultimately pay off when you hit the field next season. A dog who understands how to search a pond for a duck will be able to relentlessly pursue a wounded bird and reliably recover it for you. A dog who learns to be [steady to wing and shot](#) will be a much safer dog to hunt with when a covey of birds gets up in the field. By working toward success in hunt tests, you'll be able to have a much better dog when it counts on wild birds. And finally, yes, hunt tests provide valuable information for breeders and breed clubs, so they are useful in making breeding decisions and selecting future breeding stock.

## Who is eligible for these hunting dog tests?

In order to participate in a hunt test, a dog must be registered in that organization's recognized registry. There may also be membership requirements for the owner and/or handler. If a dog isn't registered but is otherwise eligible, applying for a registration number with that particular association is usually straightforward.

The exception to this is JGHV testing, which is restricted to dogs that are registered with the [Fédération Cynologique Internationale \(FCI](#), French for “International Canine Federation”)—a worldwide kennel club that serves most countries except for the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Some dogs in North America are registered with the FCI from birth if they are from a breeder that is affiliated with an international club such as [Deutsch Drahthaars](#), [Deutsch Langhaars](#), or [Deutsch Kurzhaars](#). In North America, most JGHV tests are run by Drahthaars just based on population numbers, but you'll also see breeds such as Langhaars, Kleine Munsterlanders, and others. 🐾

## What subjects do hunting dog tests cover?

All three organizations offer a series of tests with increasing difficulty for both the dog and the handler. Each of these tests cover subjects relevant to pointing and/or versatile hunting dogs.

While the individual test subjects and scoring criteria vary among the systems, the structure is very similar with a sequence of puppy, intermediate, and finished level tests. Puppy tests focus on a dog's natural hunting abilities, and do not evaluate trained subjects. Handlers prepare for these by exposing a young dog to typical hunting scenarios, but generally not with formal dog training. Intermediate and finished level tests require extensive training and practice in order to successfully pass them.

There are, as always, certain exceptions and circumstances granted in certain cases, but this provides a general overview of the tests. In addition to the test scenarios that are administered over the course of the day (or two), dogs are also scored in general subjects such as obedience, use of nose, desire to work, and so on.

### AKC Pointing Dog Test Topics

AKC Pointing Dog	Puppy Level	Intermediate Level	Finished Level
	<u>Junior Hunter (JH)</u>	<u>Senior Hunter (SH)</u>	<u>Master Hunter (MH)</u>
<u>Field</u>	Field search Pointing	Field Search Pointing Steady to wing Retrieve of shot bird	Field search Pointing Steady to wing/shot Retrieve of shot bird Honor brace mate
<u>Water</u>	N/A	N/A	N/A

### NAVHDA Test Topics

NAV HDA	Puppy Level	Intermediate Level	Finished Level
	<u>Natural Ability (NA)</u>	<u>Utility Prep Test (UPT)</u>	<u>Utility Test (UT)</u>
<u>Field</u>	Field search Pointing Live pheasant track	Field search Pointing Steady to wing Retrieve of shot bird Retrieve of dragged game	Field search Pointing Steady to wing/shot/fall Retrieve of shot bird Retrieve of dragged game
<u>Water</u>	Swimming	Heeling course Steady by duck blind Marked retrieve Duck search	Healing course Steady by duck blind Remain by duck blind Marked retrieve Duck search
<u>Field</u>			<u>Invitational</u> Field search Pointing Steady to wing/shot/fall Honor brace mate Retrieve shot game
<u>Water</u>			Double-mark retrieve Blind retrieve

### JGHV Test Topics

JGHV	Puppy Level	Intermediate Level	Finished Level
	<u>VJP</u>	<u>HZP</u>	<u>VGP</u>
<u>Field</u>	Field search Pointing Live rabbit track	Field search Pointing Retrieve of dragged duck Retrieve of dragged rabbit	Field search Pointing Steady to wing/shot Retrieve shot bird Retrieve of dragged duck
<u>Water</u>	N/A	Marked retrieve Blind retrieve Duck search	Marked retrieve Blind retrieve Duck search Independent search without duck
<u>Forest</u>	N/A	N/A	Heeling course Blood tracking Independent search Dense cover search Down stay Steadiness during driven hunt Retrieve of dragged rabbit Retrieve of predator over an obstacle Retrieve of dragged rabbit

## What does passing a hunting dog test accomplish?

Generally speaking, passing a test—which is an accomplishment to be celebrated at any level—results in either a title or a prize. This indicates that the dog demonstrated competence in each of the test subjects. Some breed clubs use the testing systems as a basis for their breeding rules, too. This is most common in the JGHV where breed clubs have specific requirements prior to breeding (for example, receiving passing scores in both the VJP and HZP); other clubs have similar requirements or recommendations based on NAVHDA or AKC test results. Note that any requirements related to breeding are managed by the breed clubs and not by the testing organizations.

AKC hunt tests are just like other AKC performance titles in that a certain number of passing scores must be achieved to receive a title. This means that a dog must attempt and successfully pass each test multiple times as qualifying legs in order to earn the title of Junior Hunter (JH), Senior Hunter (SH), or Master Hunter (MH). There is no limit to the number of times that a dog can attempt each test. It is also possible to receive an advanced level of each title by achieving higher scores and completing additional legs.

NAVHDA tests award a score and a prize of I, II, or III based on the total score as well as certain minimum scores for each subject. Any prize denotes a passing score. Dogs who achieve a Prize I in the Utility Test are exclusively invited to the following year's Invitational Test. The Invitational awards the prestigious title Versatile Champion (VC) to passing dogs.

JGHV tests are scored and denoted as pass or fail based on the final score as well as minimums for each subject. Only the VGP awards prizes of I, II, and III. Unique to the JGHV is the rule that a dog may attempt each test only twice; two failing scores make the dog ineligible for any further attempts at that particular test.

## How to choose a hunting dog testing organization

Once you've decided that you want to give hunt tests a try, how do you choose which flavor of tests to run? Unless your breed club sets requirements for testing in a certain system, the choice of which test to run is up to you.

The decision starts with the question of eligibility, so start by understanding where your dog is registered. In my opinion, any hunt test is better than no test at all—especially if your goals are simply to evaluate your dog and set some training goals for the off-season—so start with where your dog is eligible and don't sweat the details. If you decide to register your dog with a different organization, you should check with your breed club to ensure that doing so won't run afoul of any club regulations, especially if you have plans to breed or become active in the club.

The second factor is test availability and accessibility. AKC tests are by far the most frequently held and offer the greatest geographic reach within the United States. On any given summer weekend, there is likely to be an AKC hunt test in your general area. NAVHDA testing is the next most accessible option, with chapters located around the country and each chapter typically hosting two or three test weekends per year. Tests often fill up quickly, so you'll want to be in contact with your local chapter's test secretary well ahead of time to understand the registration requirements and deadlines. JGHV tests are the hardest to find, since the testing population is much smaller than NAVHDA or AKC. The VJP is also limited to areas with enough of a wild rabbit or hare population to conduct the tracking evaluation for each puppy, making suitable locations somewhat few and far between.

Finally, consider your goals for testing your dog and the style of hunting that you enjoy most. You'll find that each of the systems represents a slightly different style of hunting with your dog.

AKC hunt tests for pointing dogs exclusively evaluate field work on birds with two dogs in the field at a time. For the majority of upland hunters, that's an accurate representation of a typical day afield. The brace work is especially helpful in preparing your dog to hunt with—and respect—another dog that they may or may not know. It lacks the water and tracking elements of the versatile dog tests, though you can find those subjects in other AKC performance events.

NAVHDA, like the JGHV which inspired its creation, places a strong emphasis on the recovery of game after the shot. This is consistent with the expectations of the versatile dog breeds. NAVHDA also features a significant amount of water work, which is important for versatile hunters who enjoy both upland and waterfowl hunting. I especially value the focus on retrieving and tracking work that mimics typical hunting scenarios. The skills a dog learns in the NAVHDA system will prepare them for just about any bird hunting situation they can expect to encounter in North America.

The JGHV offers the most variety in testing subjects, including the use of furred game. Granted, the average North American bird hunter is never going to need their dog to conduct an independent forest search, retrieve a fox at the end of a 400-meter track, or remain quiet during a driven hunt. But I believe that the system is more about the learning opportunities that it affords the dogs. Learning how to track a blood trail taught our dog how to slow down and really focus on a detailed task. Training a fox retrieve reinforces the idea that all retrieves must be completed, even if the dog doesn't much care for the object itself. I watched Piper and my husband develop an incredibly deep bond over the course of training for their VGP and it's hard to substitute anything else for that experience.

If you're still undecided, take some time to visit a hunt test and watch how the event is run. It's much easier to picture yourself at a test with your dog if you've had the chance to see one in person before you're feeling the pressure to succeed. You'll find regional differences in club culture and personalities, too. You may find that you really connect with one group over another, in which case, the decision becomes simple.

## Looking back on our hunting dog test journey

That simple agreement with our breeder to run our new pup in the VJP quickly got out of hand. In the four years since then, Piper has received a Prize I in the VGP, the title of Master Hunter in the AKC, and the title of Versatile Champion in NAVHDA. She's likely in rare company to have reached the top of all three testing systems. Her success is a product of her genetics as well as the hard work that went into her training and development.

And yet, Piper is a pretty unassuming dog. Nobody would ever call her flashy, and she stands no chance of ever winning a field trial. Her superpower is consistency. What the German versatile system really excels in—and, by extension, the modern hunt test system that we have today across all the organizations—is producing consistently talented dogs with all the tools they need to be excellent hunters.

Above all, regardless of the flavor, each of these systems offers an opportunity to have a team of judges evaluate your dog based on a set of standards for hunting performance. As an individual, this can help you set realistic goals in your journey as a handler and a hunter. On the whole, these standardized evaluations are invaluable in making breeding decisions that determine the future of our hunting dog breeds.

And who knows, it just may open doors into a whole new chapter of your life's journey, too.

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## How Do I Get Started in Dog Shows?

By Denise Flaim

Nov 18, 2021



Participating in dog shows can be beyond daunting for newcomers. It's tough to be the new kid on the block, especially when it appears everyone else has been taught a secret set of dance steps while you bumble along, oblivious to the judge's instructions or the rules of competition.

The good news is that feeling will soon pass. After all, everyone is a beginner at the start. Following the tips below, you'll soon find your bearings and get caught up in the contagious camaraderie that defines the very best of the dog show world. Once you do, remember that now it's your turn to help the next [dog show newbie](#), just as someone did for you.

### Find A Mentor

For plenty of people, the sport of dog conformation is a family affair. Many involved are just the most recent generation of breeders, handlers, or judges in their families. If you weren't born into this sometimes insular world, however, there are lots of knowledgeable people who will help you learn the ropes, if you know where to find them. If you already own a purebred dog, a good place to start is the breeder from which you acquired them. If that isn't a possibility, reach out to the nationally-based parent club for your breed to inquire about membership, as well as mentoring opportunities. Alternately, look up [local all-breed kennel clubs](#), which are made up of fanciers across many breeds. Clubs today are often looking for volunteers and potential new members to keep younger generations involved in the sport. Another excellent resource is the [AKC Exhibitor Mentoring Program](#), which is designed to connect experienced handlers or breeders with newcomers to AKC sports and events. Dog shows themselves are also a great place to meet people and absorb knowledge, but remember that timing is everything. Approaching a handler before they enter the ring, or while they're in the middle of grooming a Poodle, is probably not ideal. If you're unsure, ask the handler if it's a convenient time to talk. If it isn't, simply return at a time that works better for them.

### Buy A Catalog

Sure, print catalogs are becoming somewhat anachronistic in our increasingly digitized world, but they are still sold at every conformation show. They contain the name of each dog entered, as well as their owners and breeders, and are therefore an invaluable resource in researching potential mentors, both in your breed and outside of it.

## Get Some Class

Handling class that is. Though showing a dog looks easy, it takes some time to get the routine down. That's what [training](#) classes are for. There, an experienced instructor will teach you and your dog exactly what is expected from you in the ring, from how to "stack," or pose, your dog to how to show the judge the bite, or teeth. There's a lot of jargon to learn, but your fellow handling classmates will help get you up to speed.

## Groomed For Success

Some breeds are "wash and wear," requiring only a quick pass with a hound glove or damp cloth to get them looking their best. Others, such as terriers and most long-coated breeds, need a [grooming](#) regimen to make sure their coats are appropriately maintained. Job one is finding someone who knows how to groom your breed for the show ring. For serious conformation competitors, the average pet store groomer likely won't be much help here. Again, ask your breeder's advice, or work on cultivating a mentor who can share their hard-earned knowledge in this area. All dogs need to have clean teeth and well-tended nails, so training your puppy to accept tooth-brushing and nail-clipping as a regular part of his grooming routine is critical. And if your dog's breed is one that is regularly groomed or examined by the judge on a table, gradually train him to be very comfortable standing on one — always supervised, of course.

## Get an Honest Opinion

Not all dogs are show-dog material, and there's nothing wrong with that. A true mentor will honestly assess your dog's virtues and faults — and, yes, every dog has both. If a career in conformation is not in the cards for your canine, consider an [AKC dog sport](#). [Obedience](#), [Rally](#), [Agility](#), [Coursing](#), [Tracking](#), [Tricks](#), and [Performance Sports](#) are all excellent activities that will enhance the bond between you and your dog. Before diving in, [Canine Good Citizen](#) training is a smart first step for teaching your dog good behavior

## A Dog-Eat-Dog World?

Dog shows and the people in the world of conformation are competitive — that's a fact of life. However, AKC rules make a point of emphasizing good sportsmanship, and you should strive to be gracious in victory as well as in defeat. Realistically, more people lose at a given show than they win, so don't make winning your sole objective. Instead, establish a more attainable goal for yourself. Perhaps it's engaging in a conversation where you learn one useful tip, or identifying one part of your presentation in the ring on which you can improve. Those aren't as tangible as a blue ribbon, but they can turn out to be even more valuable in the long run.

## Stick Around

In the past, most dog shows were benched, which meant all dogs were required to stay for the day, and fanciers became a captive audience, learning a lot about their breed and others, if only by osmosis. At all but a handful of today's shows, exhibitors are free to leave after their breed is judged, and most do, especially if they didn't do any winning. It's up to you to buck that trend. When possible, stay and watch other breeds being judged. Pay particular attention to the professional handlers. Watch how they put their hands on their dogs, where they stand in the ring, when they let their dogs rest, and when they turn them on. A lifetime of experience went into honing their conformation skills, so why not learn from watching the best?

## Have Fun!

Amid all the first-time jitters, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that dog shows are supposed to be enjoyable. Whether they are or not entirely depends on your attitude, which in turn gets transmitted right down the lead. Chances are your dog doesn't know if they've won or lost. All they know is they're out having a great time with their human. At the end of the day (while this may be a cliché, like most clichés, this one's true), no matter who wins [Best in Show](#), the best dog of the day is the one you take home with you.



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