

THE BREED SHOW RING AND JUDGING THE BULLMASTIFF

The Breed Show Ring is an intensely competitive area with both pitfalls and pleasures for the exhibitors and the Judges. It is also an area where everyone must observe the written rules. These rules are contained in the show manuals of the participating clubs and the KUSA Constitution. They are inviolable. There are also many unwritten “codes of conduct”, both positive and negative, that should be observed. Obviously all these are in the interest of both dogs and human participants.

For the non-professional handler here are some tips on handling that will help avoid some of the pitfalls of the Show Ring:

- 1 Have a clean well-groomed dog to present to the judge. With the Bullmastiff maintenance is minimal and a daily face wipe and groom of ten minutes can maintain the coat in show condition. Dogs that are attended to in these ways do not need to be shampooed. Short manicured nails are a must, as are clean ears and teeth. This can be done weekly. No colourants or substances that alter the coat texture may be applied to the coat prior to going into the ring.
- 2 Be ready and waiting in the marshalling ring or at the entrance to the ring when due to enter, with your dog close to you and your competition number displayed prominently. Failure to respond to three calls for your attendance can result in being marked absent.
- 3 Have the correct collar and lead on the dog. I recommend a sturdy choke chain of the correct length to just go over the dogs head, and a very short lead with the handle just long enough for the hand to fit through. This will give you complete control over your dog. A well-trained dog will respond to commands from your index finger, which will be right next to his cheek.
- 4 Do not, under any circumstances, manhandle your dog in the ring. If he misbehaves or displeases you, remove him from the ring and attend to the problem in private.
- 5 Do not fidget or fuss with your dog once it is stacked. He should be looking perfect as the judge approaches.
- 6 Appropriate dress is essential. Long flowing skirts, high heels and bangles have no place in the show ring.¹
- 7 Synchronise your movements to those of your dog when gaiting round the ring. Your knee and the dog’s head should move in sequence. Bullmastiffs should be gaited at a slow trot with a short but loose lead. They should never be strung up like some of the other breeds.
- 8 Be prepared to perform any of the ring movements required by the judge. The most common ones requested are the “away and back”, the “circle” around the ring and the “triangle”. Occasionally a judge may ask all the dogs to walk round the ring.
- 9 Always maintain a reasonable distance from the dog in front of you, whether gaiting or stacking and never run into the dog in front when the gaiting ends.
- 10 Do not be intimidated by the competition. If you want to be the winner, and have a Category A dog be positive and have a strategy. The owners and handlers of all the top-winning dogs have a campaign strategy.
- 11 Always congratulate the winner and if possible stay to support him / her in the next class. That is good sportsmanship.

¹ *KUSA Guide for Dog Show Judges*. Sept 1991. 2nd edition, p. 5.

- 12 If the judge is a friend, do not compromise him / her by any patronising behavior. A simple greeting will suffice.²
- 13 Keep the welfare of your dog in mind. Standing in the sun for long periods or restricting access to empty bowel or bladder is cruel.
- 14 Do not ever walk in or cross over the designated ring area before the show commences.
- 15 Always remove any waste products that your dog may leave on the grounds.
- 16 The Bullmastiff is one of the breeds with specific height requirements. At any time, while in the ring, the judge can take a measurement of your dog. This is done with a measuring stick at the withers and the dog should be able to tolerate this manoeuvre, just as he should be able to tolerate being examined by a complete stranger.

Uneven ground: Another common problem is the ground where the dogs are displayed. It is not always flat and even. There can be slopes, small bumps, holes and the grass can be uncut. A skilled handler will use the terrain to his / her advantage. For example do not stack your dog with his front legs in a dip and his rear end on an upward slope or bump. He will look awful.

Aggressive dogs: Any dog showing aggression towards the judge and / or other exhibitors and their dogs is a danger and can be ordered by the judge to leave the ring. Any responsible owner will not allow such behaviour.

Confined space: If the ring and surrounding area is small, rather remove yourself to a position further back than sit so close to someone else that relaxation is impossible. Remember your dog might be the most obedient dog there, but the one next to you, a hooligan. Dogs out of their home comfort zones and stressed by the entire sensory overload and stimulation may well fight in such a situation. Rather avoid the possibility of it happening by acting accordingly.

Baiting: If used judiciously, baiting can really bring out the best in a dog. Allowing the dog a treat just prior to it having its mouth examined is not a good idea. Some handlers use moon bags if their clothing does not have pockets. If standing in front of your dog with the lead relaxed and bait in your hand, be careful that you do not hold the bait too high otherwise you will alter the whole topline of your dog, and not necessarily for the better.

Double handling versus a change in handlers: Any handler within the ring may make a request to the judge in respect of a second handler taking over the dog if, for example, excessive running is a problem. It is up to the judge to approve or disapprove the request. This is totally different to a dog being double handled from outside the ring by a second party who tries to attract the dog's attention in various ways. Within the KUSA Rules and Regulations this is not allowed and any dog that is so distracted may be requested by the judge to leave the ring.

One of the greatest pleasures obtained from campaigning and exhibiting one's dog, is to chart the dog's process through its show career. This begins with the first show right through to the last show, and usually spans three to four years. If your dog is a big winner complete his show career while he is in his prime and at the top. There is something very sad and pathetic about dogs that are campaigned well past their "sell by" dates.

² *KUSA Guide* ...,op. cit., p. 6

The camaraderie and the atmosphere where friends get together at a show can be wonderful. Many exhibitors travel great distances and without the support of friends would find the show circuit a lonely place.

There is great pleasure in watching a good handler demonstrate his or her skills. Many of the professionals have come up through the ranks over the years and much can be learnt from them. With practice we can all be that good!

Of course pleasant weather is an advantage for everyone and bad weather can alter the atmosphere immediately.

Ring Procedure

1. Have the dogs enter the ring, and to break the ice and relax both dogs and handlers, let them proceed once round the ring. This is an ideal opportunity for the Judge to generally appraise what is being presented to her eg : phenotype, physical fitness, movement and muscle tone, general condition and spirit, response to environmental stimulation, colour, tail position and size.
2. Line up for individual attention.
3. Start with a frontal and non- confrontational approach and a greeting to the handler – and dog if you so wish. This is the time to check the position of the front legs and feet and the width of the chest.
If there is any indication from the handler that the dog may not be approachable then act accordingly. Remember should the dog show any overt aggression towards the Judge &/or other exhibitors then it should be excused from the ring. The Bullmastiff's heritage should be kept in mind when there is dog-to-dog intolerance.
4. From this front position continue with the assessment of the heads' size and shape, muzzle, stop, flews, eyes, ears, crown line, cheeks, nose and wrinkle, and then the bite. If desired by the Judge, the handler can be requested to show the bite. The Judge should avoid prolonged eye contact with the dog. Fawning over and excessive touching of the dog is unnecessary as all but the bite can be assessed visibly.
5. The Judge may now move to the side of the dog while the handler moves to the front of the dog.
6. Check the depth and width of brisket (chest) again if necessary, neck, front shoulder angulation and position of front legs and slope of pastern. Lift up the front paw and check the feet, nails and pads.
7. Check the coat quality while assessing the back / backline, ribs, underline, flank and loin.
8. The second thigh of the hindquarters must always be felt as well as the testicles. The rear view of the hind legs will show the Judge whether there is a problem with cow hocks or bowlegs. At the same time the tail length can be determined correct or not.

9. The only movement required is an “away and back” and a “circle” to the end of the line.

Judging the Bullmastiff puppy

The Bullmastiff puppy starts to change shape rather rapidly just as s/he qualifies age wise to go into the show ring.



*4 month old quality puppy
not yet out of proportion*



*5 month old quality pup with acceptable
back/ back line*

During the rapid growth period, which is generally between four and twelve months, the puppy, can change shape many times. The hindquarters tend to grow faster than the front quarters, which can leave the puppy looking somewhat unbalanced.



*An eight-month-old quality puppy with
distinctly uneven growth rates.*



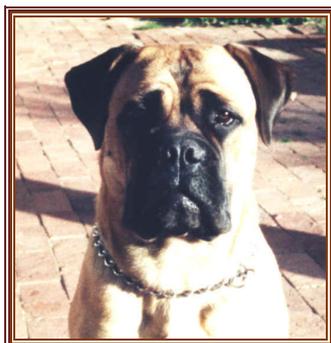
*A ten month old quality puppy with
an almost level back / backline*

Head and ears in the Bullmastiff.

As the puppy grows the ears are usually huge and are out of proportion to the head which in turn is small and out of proportion to the body. This of course changes. The three photographs of the same dog featured below illustrate the head growth and subsequent change of head shape.



Four months



Twelve months



Twenty-four months

Are the ears too long? You decide!

The Gait

The feet can be all over the place when gaiting but this is not necessarily indicative of a gaiting impediment. The Judge should not be fooled by the best-trained and handled puppy and really needs to draw on knowledge and experience combined with “that gut feeling” during this time.

Two extra criteria to keep in mind are the general condition of the puppy and whether it is re-acting positively to its surroundings or not. A skittish and withdrawn puppy or one that shows any sort of aggression is unacceptable.

Nicky Robertson
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Chizelhurst Bullmastiffs