

Are Great Show Weekends a Thing of the Past?



Susan Casey
Editor

Recently a group of us from Colorado went to Albuquerque for the Southwest Futurity weekend. We always enjoy going to those shows. Well maybe not the going so much - it is early April after all and for Coloradans that sometimes means driving through a snowstorm to get there -- but once we're there we enjoy it.

Most of us take dog shows for granted. Not just the Colorado dog fanciers, but most all dog people. Many of us have a short list of shows that we always at least consider attending. Our decisions are made mostly by who the judges are. Others routinely attend certain shows regardless of who is judging. Regardless of how we decide which show to attend, we take for granted that the shows will go on. That's not always true. There are clubs that used to be a part of the fabric of our lives, but no longer exist. Some of the shows we remember fondly aren't there anymore. That's the new reality.

We also assume that when we get to a show, the local club will have provided for most if not all of our needs. There will be adequate parking, restrooms of some variety or another, beverages for sale, lunch for sale, trophies for the winners, a convenient hotel where someone has pre-arranged for us to have our dogs. Oh yes we want to have a photographer available too.

What some people forget is how much work goes into providing all the essential elements of a show as well as all the extra niceties. As the old axiom goes "Many hands make short work" and when clubs were bigger there were many hands to help with the preparations. These days however clubs are smaller, members are getting older and the remaining folks are busier than ever before. That too is part of our new reality.

That's why it was so amazing to see everything the Central New Mexico club was able to do for their show weekend. Not only did they host the Southwest Futurity and their club's two major-pointed specialty shows, but they offered a Temperament Test, and they held Obedience trials and Rally trials on both Saturday and Sunday. They had coffee and doughnuts available in the mornings, they served lunch mid-day and they had a big raffle as a fund raiser for Rescue. And then on Saturday night they hosted a great hospitality at the hotel, with enough really good food for everyone.

Sounds like they must have a big club with lots of helpers, right? Wrong. Like a lot of small clubs they have more people on their roster than actually are willing or able to do the work it takes to put on

a show. But they find helpers where they can. For instance Russell and Vivian Godby's grandchildren took care of selling coffee and doughnuts, water, and lunch. Not only did they provide an important service, I'd venture to say they probably were responsible for increased sales, just because they were so darn cute!

We are fortunate that our remaining specialty clubs are willing to put in the extra effort to provide us with great show weekends. But how long will these clubs be able to continue? How much longer will the few workers in each club have the energy to do all the work? And what, if anything, can we do about it?

Some will say the answer is to recruit younger members. That's a good idea if you can do it, but the younger generations seem not to have as much free time as we did 20 or 30 years ago. Family leisure time is filled with soccer games, little league, swim team or a host of other youth-oriented activities. Many others are having to spend more and more time just to make a living, and have little time or disposable income remaining.

Others predict that the future of dog shows lies with performance events. That may be true. Our performance events are drawing more and more entries each year. What is it about them that appeals to more people? Maybe it is because they are more participatory activities where dogs and owners work together to accomplish a goal; perhaps it is because success in the performance arenas is measured objectively, while winning in the conformation ring is the result of subjective evaluations.

Whatever the case, it would seem that we might be able to attract new (and hopefully younger) members to our clubs through performance events. If we can get new people interested in doing things with their dogs, perhaps they'll join our clubs and become a part of a band of willing workers. Then along the way we can educate them about our breed, the standard and the purpose of conformation showing. We know many of our members came to us through the performance arena; maybe that's the way to attract them once again.

We don't pretend to have the answers, but we know there are some tough questions to be answered if we want to keep our clubs and shows alive and well. Has your club been successful in recruiting new people who can carry on when the older generation steps aside? Tell us your stories, your ideas, what has worked and what you're going to try. We have to start now to preserve the future of dog shows.

NOTE: In this magazine we have printed the Breed Standard, Membership Code of Conduct and By-Laws of the GSDCA. These documents usually accompany the Membership Roster, however this year the Membership Roster will be printed in the June *Review*, so we are providing the other documents in this issue.



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