

## Stepping From Field to Show

By Bernee Brawn

German Wirehaired Pointer enthusiasts love to complain about “dog shows” and how this sport is ruining the breed. I am a firm believer that it’s not “dog shows” that ruin a breed, but rather it’s the people involved that do so. Let’s be honest, winning is fun. In this country, competition is the highlight of our lives whether it is in sport, business or our personal lives. It’s just not good enough for us to be good; we have to be the best! In order to be the best, the greatest, the winningest, there are often things that get overlooked or ignored.

In the world of dog shows today, winning Best of Breed is only a stepping stone to the almighty Group. After all, winning Best In Show is what dog shows have become “about”. Racking up group points, gathering BIS’s has become more important than being the Best GWP. I think that is unfortunate and not good for our breed, or any breed for that matter. Now, don’t get me wrong, a Best In Show is a wonderful achievement and anyone receiving one should be very proud of their dog, trust me, I would be! But should it be the most important thing in our shows today?

In the world of flashy show dogs, the GWP has always been the step child. This is not a flashy breed, it does not have a beautiful flowing coat, it doesn’t have silky shiny hair, and it’s not what you would call cute breed. Now of course those of us that love the breed think they are the best thing in the world, but flashy? Cute? Nah! It was never a breed sought out by those who only wanted to own a “show dog”, but that trend appears to be changing.

The GWPCA has always put a lot of emphasis on the “Dual Champion” (DC), and since it’s inception the Champion/Master Hunter. This is a dog that can compete in both the show ring and in field trials or hunting tests and do well enough at both to finish it’s FC (Field Champion)/ MH (Master Hunter) and it’s CH (Champion) titles. It’s a difficult goal to achieve and takes a dedicated owner to accomplish.

Unfortunately, many think that bringing a Field Champion to the show ring and expecting to

compete is impossible. It certainly should not be. While the vast majority of GWP’s will never set foot in a show ring, there certainly are more of them that could, and should. For some reason, field people think that as soon as a dog has a CH in front of their name, it makes the dog useless for the field. They also believe that unless their dog is flowing with coat, has extreme angles front and back and drools for bait, they don’t have a chance. The other side of that coin, are the “show only” folks who love



to make statements like “it’s not bad, ... for a field dog”. There is only one standard for the breed and it makes no distinction between “field” dogs and “show” dogs. While the standard describes the ideal GWP we all know that there are quite a few “types” that fit the bill. Too many believe that all field dogs are leggy, rangy and short coated—not so. Too

many believe that all show dogs are stocky, thick bodied and long coated—not so. There are good and not so good in both venues, and it’s our job to produce and promote the best.

The GWPCA has an ongoing education program that attempts to educate judges to the nuances of our breed. One of the things that this stressed in the seminars is that this is a working dog, a dog expected to hunt fur and feather, to climb chuckar hills, plow through the swamp and negotiate the forest. In order to do these things a GWP must be mentally and physically sound, it must be tough enough to fight furry critters and retrieve them to its owner but tender mouthed enough to also bring a quail to hand in one piece. Its coat was designed to be as no nonsense as the breed itself, protective and utilitarian. No feathers and flowing coat on this breed.

It can’t all be up to judges however. Breeders and exhibitors must strive to bring dogs that fit the standard to the ring. The dog with the coat that must be continually stripped to “appear: short and harsh is not correct and we are only hurting ourselves when we promote these dogs. Judges can only judge what is brought to them and if that is all they see... well, whom then can we blame? On the other hand, we certainly rely on our judges to keep

the whole dog in their mind when they are judging, and we ask that they judge the breed for the breed, not for what they can go on to achieve in the group ring. We also ask our judges to remember what this breed was put on this earth to do and to judge them with that as the utmost priority.

If you are considering bringing your working dog to the show ring, there are few things to do beforehand. First, if you are not familiar with the breed standard, find someone who is and have them evaluate your dog. Be open-minded and listen to their comments. Remember, no dog is perfect and everyone one of them has a flaw here and there. If you think your dog has enough positive things to merit it becoming a Champion, go for it.

While our breed should be mostly a natural coated breed, all will benefit with a good grooming before walking into the show ring. This does not mean it needs to be stripped and fluffed up, (this is totally improper for the breed) but a good bath, thorough brushing and overall neatening won't hurt. All wire coated breeds need to have that dead hair removed at times, so make sure you give your dog a good going over.

The dog should be in good physical condition, he should be fit and in shape. All GWP's that walk into the ring should be in good working condition. A fat sloppy dog does not fit our standard. Remember, this is a breed that should appear athletic, ready to go, and go all day long. A dog that looks like it has been half starved is not in good condition either. Ribs and hip bones should be covered, but not hidden under a layer of fat. Dogs that are being actively campaigned may be heavily muscled in the shoulder and thigh area and these areas may appear or feel lumpy. A good judge will use their hands and eyes to decide if this muscling is appropriate and proper or hiding poor structure underneath.

While a dog that self-stacks and moves at the end of the lead is impressive, it really has nothing to with quality of a dog. Teach your dog to stand still; especially wile a judge is examining it. Some dogs

may need some exposure to being examined so it feels comfortable with a stranger in such close proximity. Wires are jealous of "their space" and many don't like people (or dogs) in their faces. A GWP should have a brave and upstanding temperament and while they may not appreciate a judge going over him, he must prove his stability by allowing it. Any GWP that refuses to be examined or that show aggression or fear in the ring should be excused.

Teach your dog to gait calmly and boldly on a lead.



Your dog needs to move both away from and back to a judge in a straight line so its movement can be evaluated. A GWP should have free, clean and ground covering movement. A properly built GWP should have a tight body, free of rolling and shuffling. A dog that does not (whether by poor training or by improper structure) or cannot reach with its front, and drive with its rear is not covering the most ground with little effort. Your dog will also be asked to move around the

ring so the judge can evaluate his side movement. A dog that is calm and sure of itself will certainly look and move better than one that is straining and fighting the entire way around the ring. Remember, the judge needs to see how the dog is using himself, if they cannot see the legs and feet, they cannot judge it.

When the ribbons are handed out, win or lose, remember to be a good sport. You may not agree with the judge's decision, but once they are made, it's over. As breeders and exhibitors we have a choice to enter or not enter our dogs. It's our responsibility to know which judges truly understand our breed, and which judges simply view them as "filler" breed. Just as in the field, there are judges who put more emphasis on certain characteristics; there are judges who are more knowledgeable than others. And then there are judges who really should not be judging dogs. It's up to us to know which is which.

Our breed has a pretty darn good record of producing Dual Champions (considering how few are registered each year) and for that we should be very proud. We have not gone the route of the

Setters and Spaniels, show vs. field, and every GWP should be a “field dog”. It’s what the breed is! Our goal as breeders, exhibitors and judges should be to make sure that this trend continues, that the German Wirehaired Pointer continues to be one breed, mentally and physically fit to do whatever task is asked of it.



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