

SHOWING YOUR BRETON

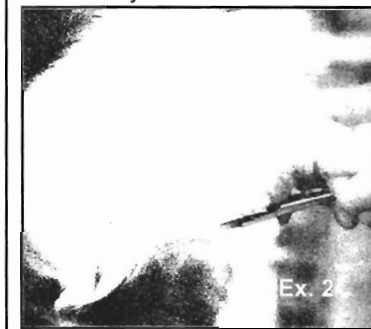
by Lynda Kieres

Part I - Grooming Your Breton

Grooming your dog properly before presenting him/her to the conformation judge is very important but really not that difficult. A good bath and proper combing is usually all that's necessary. With the proper coat for the breed, excessive trimming should not be necessary and electric clippers should definitely never be used on a Breton - you should never shave the neck of a Breton. The Epagneul Breton should be presented as naturally as possible, after all these are hunting dogs and their natural coats must be adaptable to the field.

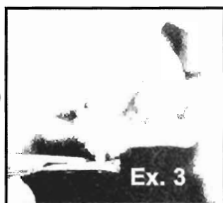
Begin with a good bath and make sure they're dry prior to brushing. Start at the head and work back. Make sure there are no mats anywhere on the dog, pay particular attention to behind and under the ears (Ex. 1) and their "private" areas.

Grooming can be accomplished with a few basic tools: regular scissors, a brush (I like a slicker brush) and nail trimmer. You may want to use thinning shears to tame thickened winter coats if you find that necessary. You can trim the feathering to even and neaten it if you desire to do so using regular scissors. (Ex. 2)



Trim the toenails back to the quick but not too short, you don't want your dog to be lame from a sore toenail (Ex. 3).

If it's necessary, trim excess hair from the feet by gently pulling the longer hair up from



between the toes. Use regular scissors to snip the hair even with the top of the toes, don't snip between the toes as you risk nicking the web. (Ex. 4) To do the bottom of the paw, clip excess hair from around the pads. (Ex. 5).



A little tuft at the end of the tail is fine, but if it's grown long you should trim off the excess growth. (Ex. 6)



Part II - Showing Your Dog

There are several styles of show leads available. Some have a very fine chain collar and others are a straight nylon noose type. You will have better control over your dog and will show the head and neckline

better than using Rover's regular hunting collar. If you don't have

a show lead, a light choke chain collar is better than a wide webbed collar. Use the narrowest and shortest leash you have. The color of the lead should complement your dog's color - hunter orange is not recommended.

As for yourself - comfortable shoes with good non-skid soles are probably the most important part of your attire. You could be traveling on any variety of surfaces from concrete to grass so a non-slip sole is important. For the gentlemen, slacks and a nice shirt are usually appropriate. The higher the level of the show, the more formal your attire should be so a tie may or may not be required. In the highest level shows a sport coat is appropriate. (note: these are not required at our show). Weather should be taken into account as well.

For the female handler, shoes that you can run in that won't slip off or cause you to twist your ankle are essential. Tennis shoes might be acceptable in a regular show, but only with slacks. If you wear a skirt or dress it should be of a functional length (no mini skirts) but also not so long that you get tangled up in it when you kneel to stack your dog.

Jeans and a sweatshirt or shorts and a t-shirt are not appropriate attire for showing your dog. Your attire should show respect for the judge as well as complement your dog. You do not want to draw attention away from your dog to yourself, so understated is always preferable.

First of all, be sure to potty your dog before you enter the ring. No baiting is allowed in the ring - which means you cannot use food or treats - and no grooming tools are allowed in the ring. You want the collar to set just behind the dog's ears so you can lift slightly and encourage him to carry his head properly. Your dog needs to travel with his head up - not sniffing the ground. Sometimes a task with hunting breeds and something you'd do well to practice prior to showing.

The dog needs to travel easily at your side - he should not be way out in front dragging you and definitely you should not have to be dragging him along behind you. The dogs are shown at a free moving trot and you should be able to "trot" as well. It takes a bit of practice to move yourself and the dog consistently. You need to be able to keep one eye on the dog to assure that you are showing him at his best and also keep track of where you are in the ring so you don't run into anyone and so you're moving in a straight line.

The judge will first ask all the dogs in the class to move around the ring at a trot. Try to space yourself adequately from the dog in front of you so your dog's nose is not in the other dog's behind. Ring etiquette is very important and you need to adjust your speed accordingly. You want the judge to be able to see your dog and his movement without intentionally blocking his view of another dog.

After the judge has watched all the dogs move, you will line up and wait your turn. Don't try to chat - you're expected to speak only when spoken to and remember that the judge's word is final, even if you don't agree. The judge will call each handler forward individually. You will be asked to present your dog moving away from the judge and back again toward him. This is where it is important that you and your dog travel in a straight line so the judge can easily see his gait. When you reach the opposite end of the ring, turn around and bring your dog straight back to the judge in a straight line. If you're zig-zagging it makes it difficult for the judge to see the gait and he can't judge what he can't see. You will probably also be asked to take your dog

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“once around the ring”, which means you leave the judge with the dog at a trot at your side, travel around the full length of the ring and finish back where you began.

The judge will ask you to “stack” your dog, which means standing your dog squarely so the judge can go over him from nose to tail. Your dog needs to be comfortable with a complete stranger approaching him and running their hands over his entire body. Males are checked to see that they are intact and “all there”. Depending on the judge, you will be asked to show the judge his teeth or the judge will check himself. He will be checking the bite and checking for missing teeth. The dog must stand quietly while the judge goes over him, he should not jump or roll over and definitely should not show any aggression.

When you “stand” or “stack” your dog, his front legs should be perpendicular to the ground and evenly spaced in the front. The hind legs can be spaced slightly wider than the front, but the hocks are also perpendicular to the ground - not stretched out way behind him. Both hind feet are placed squarely as if he were standing in a box (not with one forward like a Shepherd). You can place each foot individually but your dog needs to learn to leave his feet where you place them and stand quietly for several minutes. His head should be parallel to the ground. You can either place your hand under his jaw and hold his head up or use the lead to lift his head slightly, don't pull on it so his nose is pointed up. If you prefer you can kneel beside your dog during the stack, which sometimes makes it easier to set the dog up and keep them in place.

After the judge has viewed each dog individually you will need to stack your dog again in the line so the judge can

look at all the dogs together. While the judge is viewing the other dogs individually you can let your dog relax, but keep him under control at all times. There should be no leaping about, barking or playing or pestering the dogs next to him. Even when your dog is not being individually judged keep in mind that the judge may look your way so he should present himself well the entire time he is in the ring.

When you are practicing make it a happy time. You don't want your dog to cower or look resentful of the situation. Make it fun.

Conformation is a critical part of creating the “total dog” and is recognized throughout the world as an important measure of the dog's conformity to the breed's standard. We are very pleased to be able to provide the opportunity for our members to show their dogs, not only in our breed specialty shows but now at UKC sanctioned events as well. This article is intended to help you represent our breed in these arenas and we encourage you to participate whenever and wherever you can. Showing your dog in conformation shows can be exciting and rewarding. Both you and your dog should have fun. Good luck!

Editor's Note: The breed standard is in this issue for your reference. Also, please familiarize yourself with the UKC conformation rules, which you can access on their website: www.ukcdogs.com then click on Rules & Regulations. You can find what UKC events are available by checking the Events page on their website. Any shows listing the breeds eligible for competition as: ALL BREED, GUN DOG or our breed specifically-EBRTN are shows that you can enter your dog in beginning immediately.