BMDCA Info Series

BMDs, Conformation & Junior Showmanship

2011 #17

Introduction ► The primary purpose of a conformation event, commonly referred to as "dog show," is to evaluate how closely the dogs conform to the breed standard. Each breed has a standard by which it is judged. These standards describe the characteristics that allow the breed to perform the function(s) for which it was bred. They also include specifications for structure, movement, and temperament.

With respect to the Bernese Mountain Dog, the American Kennel Club (AKC) standard for this breed was originally a direct translation of the FCI (Fédération Cynologique Internationale) standard at the time the breed was recognized in 1937. (FCI is an international federation of kennel clubs based in Belgium.) The first BMDCA revision, made in 1980, and the second revision, made in 1990, reflected changes made to the FCI standard as well as incorporated various AKC requirements. Major changes included raising the BMD's height on the lower parameter and adding a section on movement.

In conformation competition, the role of the judge is to give awards in accordance with how closely each dog compares to the judge's image of the ideal or "perfect" dog as described in the breed's Official Standard.

Organizations Offering Conformation Competition ► For most competitors, breeders, dog fanciers, and spectators alike, the AKC is the most recognized purebred dog organization in the U.S. "The American Kennel Club is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its Registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Founded in 1884, the AKC® and its affiliated organizations advocate for the purebred dog as a family companion, advance canine health and well-being, work to protect the rights of all dog owners, and promote responsible dog ownership." The official written standard for each breed is maintained by the breed's parent club (for Bernese, this is the BMDCA) and is included in **The Complete Dog Book,** which is published by the AKC. A copy of the **Bernese Mountain Dog Official Breed Standard** also can be found on the BMDCA (www.bmdca.org) and AKC (www.akc.org) websites. At (http://www.akc.org/events/conformation/), the AKC's Conformation Home Page, you will find an abundance of information, which includes how to locate upcoming dog shows, a listing of national and regional specialties, information about AKC's *New Exhibitor Mentoring Program*, *A Beginner's Guide to Dog* Shows, and far more. Be sure to check it out.

Many BMDCA members and other Berner enthusiasts enjoy traveling to Canada with their dogs to compete for Canadian conformation titles. The Canadian BMD Breed Standard and event information can be found on the Canadian Kennel Club's website (CKC — www.ckc.ca/).

The BMDCA, an AKC Member club, does not endorse any other club as a registry other than foreign registries accepted by the AKC, such as the Canadian Kennel Club.

Types of AKC Conformation Dog Shows ► There are three types of conformation dog shows. **All-breed shows** offer competitions for all of the breeds and varieties of dogs recognized by the AKC. Some of these are televised, such as the Westminster Dog Show. **Specialty shows** are restricted to dogs of a specific breed (such as the Bernese) or to varieties of one breed. The annual BMDCA National Specialty usually is held in May, and its location changes each year as different clubs and consortia serve as hosts. Regional BMD clubs also sponsor specialty shows throughout the year. Information about these specialty shows can be found on the BMDCA and AKC websites. **Group shows** are limited to dogs belonging to one of the seven groups, such as the Working Group, which includes BMDs.

Eligibility for AKC Conformation Competition ► As stipulated by the AKC, to be eligible for conformation competition a dog must:

- be registered with the AKC;
- be 6 months or older;
- be a breed for which there are classes at the show;
- conform with eligibility requirements that are in the breed's written standard; and,
- not be spayed or neutered.

Understanding The Basics of AKC Conformation Competition ► Most dogs entered in conformation competition are striving to earn points to become an AKC "Champion of Record." To achieve an AKC championship, a dog must obtain a total of 15 points with at least two major wins under two different judges. A major win is worth three, four or five points. At least one other judge must award some of the remaining points. The number of points that can be awarded at a dog show is determined by the number of dogs that are competing for points – the greater the number of dogs

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competing, the greater the number of points awarded up to a maximum of five. The point schedule can vary by AKC division across the country. To learn more about counting points go to http://www.akc.org/events/conformation/counting_points.cfm.

At AKC dog shows males and females compete separately. Dogs that are not yet champions are entered into one of the seven classes listed below. (For more information about these classes and conformation in general, go to AKC's ***A Beginner's Guide to Dog Shows*** – http://www.akc.org/events/conformation/beginners.cfm)

- Puppy
- Twelve-To-Eighteen Months
- Novice
- Amateur-Owner-Handler
- Bred By Exhibitor
- American-Bred
- Open

After all of the classes have been completed for that sex, the first place winner of each class is brought back to compete for the designation of Winners Dog (best male dog) and Winners Bitch (best female dog). These winners then compete in the Best of Breed Competition, which includes dogs that already have earned their AKC championship titles. Usually, at the end of Best of Breed Competition three awards are given:

- **Best of Breed** – this dog is determined to be the best specimen of its breed.
- **Best of Winners** – this dog is determined to be the better of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.
- **Best of Opposite Sex** – this dog is the best dog of the opposite sex to the Best of Breed winner.

The Best of Breed winner then advances to compete in the Working Group competition, which is one of the seven AKC group classifications. The others are Sporting, Hound, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding. Should the Berner place first in the Working Group, it again advances, this time to Best in Show competition, where the first place winners from all of the Group competitions compete for the Best in Show designation.

The AKC has added the Grand Champion title, which is similar to the traditional Champion title but requires a champion to continue showing, earning 25 points under at least 4 judges, with 3 majors, and defeating at least one other champion. There are four levels of Grand Champions – Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum (http://www.akc.org/grandchampionship/).

The AKC also offers a New Exhibitor Mentoring Program (http://www.akc.org/public_education/mentor_intro.cfm), which "is designed to help recent registrants of AKC dogs or those thinking about getting an AKC registered dog meet experienced dog fanciers and breeders to assist them . . . . in entering the exciting world of AKC competition."

AKC Disabled Competitors Policy ► As stated in the AKC *Rules, Policies & Guidelines for Conformation Dog Show Judges*, the "AKC complies with the Americans With Disabilities Act and wants to provide to all the opportunity to participate in its events. In the case of conformation judging, where decisions are based solely on the quality of the dogs, the judge may modify the regular judging procedure to reasonably accommodate a disabled exhibitor. If a modification of normal judging procedure is required, you need only to determine that the accommodation would not inhibit the ability of other handlers in the ring to show their dogs." For more information go to http://www.akc.org/pdfs/rulebooks/REJ999.pdf to locate the entire *AKC Disabled Exhibitors Policy*. Exhibitors with questions and/or those who wish to request an accommodation should contact an AKC Field Representative or the Legal Department.

About Junior Showmanship ► The future vitality and longevity of our wonderful breed, dog-related sports, and dog clubs alike are dependent upon our youth, who will be the breed stewards, adult handlers, and club leaders of tomorrow. Fortunately, both the AKC and BMDCA have long-standing and active youth programs to engage, develop and recognize this critically important population within the purebred dog fancy.

The AKC offers specific Junior Showmanship classes. Any boy or girl who is at least 9 years old and not yet 18 years old on the day of the show may compete in these classes. There are six junior classes, which are divided by age and the number of wins. These classes are Novice Junior, Novice Intermediate, Novice Senior, Open Junior, Open Intermediate, and Open Senior. In junior showmanship, competitors are judged on their ability to handle their dogs rather than the quality of their dogs. Dogs eligible to compete in Junior Showmanship classes must have an AKC PAL/ILP, Full- or Limited-Registration, and be owned by the junior, a member of the junior's family, or a member of the junior's household. Spayed or neutered dogs are eligible for competition.

Some additional facts about the AKC Junior Showmanship program are noted below. (For more information go to http://www.akc.org/kids_juniors/jr_getting_started.cfm.) There is also a "Kids Section" available at this AKC site that contains activity sheets, *Kid's Corner* (an online newsletter), a coloring book, safety around dogs information, and more.

- It was established to encourage participation in the sport, teach good sportsmanship, and educate the next generation of the purebred dog fancy.
- AKC's Junior Showmanship Recognition Program recognizes Juniors who obtain titles on dogs in Companion and Performance Events.
- The AKC offers a Junior Showmanship Scholarship Program.

In addition to Junior Showmanship, Juniors may participate in Conformation, Obedience, Agility, Rally and Tracking without any age limits. They are allowed to compete in the regular classes with all of the other exhibitors at the trials and tests. And, Juniors can obtain the same titles and awards as their adult counterparts.

The BMDCA has welcomed Junior Members since the club formed in 1968. Junior Showmanship has been enthusiastically endorsed over the years. Many of the adult faces we see in competition of all kinds, and as breeders and club leaders, are our juniors of yesteryear. This is a wonderful activity for young people and their canine companions. Contact your regional BMD and nearby all-breed clubs to join in on the fun! Also, the BMDCA has a Junior Advisor Group and e-list where topics of interest to the members are discussed at BMDCAJuniors@yahoogroups.com.

Juniors and their Berners at the 2009 BMDCA National Specialty