

Get Ready

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The elegant Lhasa Apso flowing with its flawless coat in the group ring did not get there by accident. The obedience, agility and rally Lhasas, achieving titles while entertaining spectators, did not come to these activities unprepared or without significant commitment from their owners and handlers. While many important elements contribute to the success of the canine athlete, two stand out: readiness and commitment.

Readiness is one of the most underrated success factors. Age and emotional factors control the right timing for a dog to successfully perform, be it housetraining, the long down or free stacking. This doesn't mean success just happens at some magic age. Rather, it means that human keepers need to understand their dogs' physical, mental and emotional states before expecting them to perform certain tasks reliably, happily and with confidence. It also means owners must be committed to doing our part to bring the dog to readiness.

What are the factors leading to readiness? First there are the physical attributes needed for the task. Is the dog a meritorious representative of the breed? One shouldn't take a dog into the conformation ring to determine whether it's a worthy specimen. Judges give only a subjective ranking of the dogs present that day. The exhibitor is responsible for learning the strengths and weaknesses of her dog before pursuing a championship title. Sometimes the evaluation is a painful learning experience, but an inferior dog will never be ready to win.

Is the dog sound and in condition? Bad joints, poor movement or lack of stamina due to improper exercise should not be part of the winning equation. Lhasa Apsos literally must be able to step into to the rigors of competition without risk of injury or breakdown.

Nutrition, oral hygiene, exercise and coat care are requisites to fully develop the potential of a championship contender. The Lhasa Apso's coat is a defining characteristic of the breed. A hard straight coat is not only correct, but is easier to maintain in proper length and condition than a soft coat. Regular bathing and proper grooming are non-negotiable when preparing a Lhasa for competition.

Lhasas are highly intelligent and do not like to embarrass themselves by playing the fool. They need to understand the requirements of competition, be it conformation, obedience or other performance events. They are highly opinionated, easily bored and many disdain repetitive drill. So training a Lhasa is a test in maintaining interest and enthusiasm for the task.

Emotional readiness and physical maturity are harder to define, but pose high hurdles in achieving readiness. Every dog deserves the time and opportunity to find its courage, to develop self-confidence and the mental toughness necessary to compete. Some dogs are born to it, some achieve it, others should be spared the experience. It's hard for a committed owner to accept that their quality Lhasa that simply refuses to perform in the ring is not a show dog. After all efforts have failed, accept the dog for what it is, not what you want it to be.

Maturity can be achieved, never rushed. Between the cute puppy and the elegant adult is an adolescent, frequently awkward, sometimes unpredictable, usually not quite "together". Then seemingly overnight the chrysalis opens and when all elements come together, the dog is ready.