

SHOWING YOUR BULL TERRIER

*Victoria Corse
Corsaire Bull Terriers
Marshfield, Mass. USA
April 2008*



You can add another dimension to your relationship with your Bull Terrier by venturing into the wondrous world of dog showing, provided that you have nerves of steel and skin like a rhinoceros. If you are sensitive to slights, or quickly stirred to rage by perceived injustice, you may decide instead to take up sky-diving, spelunking, or some other activity less risky to the equilibrium.

It is advisable to first seek expert advice on the overall quality of your Dear Friend; not as your companion, but as a Bull Terrier as described in the Standard of the Breed, which is available from many sources. In England, the home of the

breed, you will easily find the Standard on the Kennel Club's website at <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/68>. In the USA, go to the website of the Bull Terrier Club of America for the Illustrated Standard. Please keep in mind the two most significant differences between the USA and the rest of the world where the Bull Terrier Standard is concerned; firstly, White and Coloured Bull Terriers are shown separately, and secondly, the subsection on mouths allows for a level bite as well as for scissors. The novice will find a lot of the terminology confusing and extremely subjective; the line drawings by Cynthia Lord Ruddy in the Bull Terrier Club of America's Illustrated Standard are a huge help in understanding the language and descriptions in the Breed Standard for Bull Terriers in any country. Visit the BTCA web site at <http://www.btca.com/> and click "Education".

Before you ever walk into a show ring you should park yourself ringside at several Specialty Bull Terrier shows with an experienced Mentor, or Mentors, and listen to a running commentary on structure, type and movement. Allow for individual interpretation to some extent, but knowledgeable



Bull Terrier Fanciers should all be able to recognize breed virtue in any number of dogs, whatever their style, sex or colour. While it is unlikely that any two judges will select exactly the same animals in their placements, they should be ending up with the same top three or four animals in each class. After listening carefully and watching intently, go home and look over your darling... ask yourself, "Does Spot have an egg-shaped head, or is that an eyebrow ridge I see? Does he have a short, straight, back or are his hips three inches higher than his shoulder?" Be honest with yourself, but before you fall into despair, contact your Mentor (who is hopefully also your breeder) and



ask them to evaluate your guy for you.

Should you all conclude that it's worth a shot, the real work begins!

RINGCRAFT

People like to complain bitterly about trickery in the show ring... instead of whingeing about it, learn how to rise above it or how to beat the tricksters at their own games. Handling, or "ringcraft", classes are offered by many kennel clubs on a local level, both as a service to their members

and as a way to raise funds for the Club. Contact the primary Kennel Club in your country for a listing of local all-breed and breed specific Clubs in your area, or ask that Mentor of yours for referrals to local classes. No amount of classes will compensate for the training and socialization you do at home and out in your community. If Spot is a perfect show dog in the garden, but becomes a shrieking lunatic the minute other dogs come into view, you are doomed to frustrated defeat. If Spot is animated and pleased with himself at the public park, but suddenly turns into the "poor little beaten orphan dog" the minute you cross into the ring, you might as well save your entry fees for chocolate to sooth your lacerated nerves. Showing has to be FUN, or Bull Terriers just won't do it. Bribery and practice are key components to successful show-ring training. Your goal is a dog who trots briskly around the ring on a loose leash and stands attentively, with wagging tail and ears bang up on his head, looking at you with adoration and intensity. Many other breeds "string up" their dogs, using a taut lead both on the move and stacking. This is not what we want to see in



the Bull Terrier ring; strung-up Bullies will get even, one way or another... being “strung up” is NOT fun. Never discipline your Bullie for an extra bounce in class or the ring; encourage them to keep all fours somewhere near Mother Earth, but realize that joie de vivre is the reason that that Specialist Judge has Bull Terriers, as well as you!

Here’s another tip... *NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOU!!* (errrr... *except your poor dog!*) This isn’t about YOU, it’s all about Spot. No one’s actually looking at you, unless your trousers are covered in chalk or your shirt’s cut so low that your undergarments, or lack thereof, are on display (more on show ring attire later). Chant the showing mantra to yourself, “I am the bridesmaid, no one is looking at me” and focus on making your dog happy and excited to be in the ring.

As promised... show ring attire. To be fair, as long as you are clean, neat and covered, you should be able to wear anything you like in the ring. Realistically, there is an



expectation that you are dressing to complement your dog and demonstrate respect to the Sport of the Dog Show. I began showing dogs in 19-never-you-mind, as a Junior Handler in a 4-H Dog Club Program. It will be a cold day in hell before you see me exhibiting in trousers, with my hair in my face, or chewing gum. I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Miss LaPointe, my former 4-H leader, would rise straight out of the ground and strike me dead with a lightning bolt. I prefer a skirt suit, with a skirt long enough that I can bend gracefully and short enough that my dog is not battling ten yards of fabric flapping in its face as we move. Many women show in smart pant-suits or divided skirts; it’s a matter of personal preference. For men, a pair of presentable khaki or grey trousers, with a polo shirt and jacket, or a suit with tie, are a

safe bet. Keep in mind that a dark dog will utterly vanish against black or dark grey legs. A white dog will contrast brilliantly, but any excess chalking will be exposed to the entire world. In many countries, exhibitors show in jeans, high heeled boots, ripped tee-shirts... it’s all a matter of “When in Rome” but neat, clean and respectful attire is always the best bet.

GROOMING FOR THE SHOWRING

Hopefully, your Bull Terrier is always ready for head to toe examination with short toenails, clean teeth and ears, a gleaming coat without calluses, stains or dandruff and hard, fit muscling on a frame covered with exactly the right amount of weight.

(hahahahahaha!!!) OK, reality check... that's about as likely for the average best-loved-friend as that you yourself are always perfectly maintained.

For basic supplies before you present your darling to the World's critical eye you will need:



1. A block of "French White" grooming chalk.
2. Very sharp little scissors and very fine (at least 36 tooth) one-sided thinning shears
3. A human hair dressing product called "cholesterol"... I use "Queen Helene".
4. A dog product called "Chalk Mate".
5. "Gold Bond Extra Strength Medicated Powder" (in the GREEN bottle)
6. Human "Clown White" makeup from a theatrical supply company. I use "Mehron" in an 8-oz tub.
7. "Loose" White Chalk in a big tub, (I use "Winners Circle" Terrier Chalk or "Gator", if I can get it.) and a human cosmetic brush or velvet pad applicator
8. A bottle of "Waterless Shampoo" (a purple liquid you can use to clean without water), and a spray bottle to apply it with.
9. Several hand towels and washcloths, and a bath towel to cover the grooming table or crate.

Bathe your Bully the day before the show. When (s)he is almost dry, lightly work the cholesterol into the coat, all over. This will make her/him shine, and keep them from getting flaky dandruff, which shows up something awfully on a dark coat.

Clip the facial whiskers with scissors, or use a beard & moustache clipper if you are fortunate enough to own one, and do NOT forget the ones above the eyes, or on the cheeks. Trim the toenails... I use a 2 speed cordless Dremel grinding tool; it's more precise and has less risk of drawing blood. Using the thinning shears, very slowly trim the underside of the tail so that there is no "feathering" on it, just a thick, tapered-to-a-point "whip". Do the same down the back of the legs, especially if your dog has a tendency towards "feathering" like a setter. You should look at any areas where hair growth changes direction; the backs of the legs and throat are the most noticeable. You are NOT trying to cut all the hair off, just making it so that none sticks out. If you are at all unsure of what I'm talking about, wait & ask for help at the show from someone who has done this before.

On the morning of the show, get there early and buy most of these products at the show. They will be cheaper than online or at a pet store, and you can see what you are getting. In the NorthEast USA, "CherryBrook" is a good stall to start at.

To make up your Bully for the ring, start right next to the black part of the nose & lips spreading the clown white smoothly into the skin over any pink/white areas of the face, working up towards the eyes, and always in the direction of the hair growth. This should not be "caked on" but a well worked-in film of whiteness. Using the puff, dab the loose chalk all over the white and Clown-whited areas. Vigorously blow off any loose chalk, or use a soft brush to get rid of the loose stuff; it is a BIG no-no to have "foreign substances" on your dog. Use a cloth moistened with dry shampoo to clean any white stains off any colored parts of the face.

Rub the white legs and feet with the Chalkmate so they are barely damp, then sprinkle them well with the Gold Bond. It is very "menthol-y" so DO NOT put it on faces, yours or your dogs'! (But boy, does it cover foot & leg stains!) Work it in with your fingertips, vigorously, roughing up the hair on the foot & leg. Lightly smooth more cholesterol on the body and wipe down really well with a terry-cloth hand towel. Do NOT use any chalk or other loose stuff on the body, just on the face and legs. Before you actually go in the ring, blow on the face again, and make sure there are no clumps of "goo" or areas of caked-on chalk... this is the ultimate in "natural" make-up! Bring a baggie, and break off a piece of the block-chalk for your pocket so if needed you can do a really sneaky touch-up just before you go in the ring. It is extremely embarrassing to have a dog shake in the ring and vanish in a white cloud of illegal substances. Don't do it to yourself, or the judge. Slinking out of the ring because you've been "excused" is no way to start a show career.



After much trial and error, I use a light weight metal choke and a white bridle-leather show-lead for the boys. The collar is much larger than recommended, because I want it to drop well back on the shoulder when the dog is standing. My girls are usually shown on a white latigo-leather lead, that looks like it wouldn't hold a Chihuahua, but I am so extraneous to their efforts in the ring that I could show them on dental floss. I don't like nylon either for collars or leads; it saws at your hands and at the dogs' necks, but if you are going to use it, use a round white nylon choke and

matching lead. I always have several sets in my tack box, because they are very strong. Many people like to use a round white rope slip lead. Several exhibitors in the US and UK will have some to sell; ask around if you see them being used at a show and want to try them. For bait, buy frozen sliced beef liver. Thaw it slightly and simmer it in enough water to cover for about 15 minutes. Then lay it on Tin Foil (VERY important!!!) on a cookie sheet. Spread a thin layer of chopped garlic on it. I use the stuff in the jars that they sell at the supermarkets; it's very concentrated and a

little goes a long way. Bake it very slowly at about 300 degrees, turning it every 15 minutes or so until it is dried out. Cut it in small cubes, and freeze it in manageable size baggies. It'll keep a long time in the freezer. It STINKS. Use the baggies in your pockets to keep the liver from wrecking your clothes. You will eventually want to own a grooming table as it saves your back, and a set of wheels to haul your crate & other paraphernalia around on... possibly also an aluminum tack box. Start with the basics, though, before you spend a fortune on the "trimmings".



At the heart of showing your dog must be that it is a pleasure; that you are presenting to the world your Bully, who makes you proud and joyful, and that you are participating in a sport that is designed to showcase the best Bull Terriers that breeders and exhibitors can produce. Go forth and conquer graciously, or lose with a smile and a handshake. Never forget that every exhibitor loves their own dog as much as you love yours; to criticize the judging is to imply that somebody's Darling didn't deserve to win, not just that you believe that YOUR Darling did. Go home and weep into your pillow, or kick the door, just don't do it where anyone else can see or hear you. If you win, don't gloat! The only thing uglier than a bitter loser is a smug winner... tomorrow may be a very different day and no one ever forgets the disrespect of the arrogant. It's just a dog show, in the end you had best be happy that you are going home with the dog you arrived with in the morning.

See you at the Shows!

Victoria & the Corsaire Bull Terriers

