

Smile!

We've all seen this one...the judge moves the class of Weimaraners around the ring and the gaiting is going well. The class comes to a halt and the first handler in line stacks their dog for the individual examination. Things are still going well, but as the judge starts the hands-on examination of the first dog things rapidly fall apart. The dog reacts to the mouth examination as if the judge's hands are electrified. Handler and judge have a quasi wrestling match with the dog to accomplish the mouth examination. It's not a pretty sight.

Why do we encounter resistance to the mouth examination?

First, invasion of the mouth is a big deal for a dog. We as humans deal with much of our environment by using our hands; dogs control and manipulate their environment by using their mouths. From the dog's perspective, the mouth exam is akin to being asked to cede control to a total stranger. Looking at it from a dog's perspective, it's easy to see why a dog would resist.

Secondly, the Weimaraner standard has lengthy and exacting requirements when it comes to the teeth and mouth. It is the judge's responsibility to evaluate using all of the standard's criteria. Our standard states the teeth should be well set, strong and even; well-developed and proportionate to jaw with correct scissors bite, the upper teeth protruding slightly over the lower teeth but not more than 1/16 of an inch. Complete dentition is greatly to be desired. Further, the judge must take into consideration deviations from this ideal mouth. A "Major Fault" is defined as badly affected teeth; more than four teeth missing; or a bite that is badly overshot, or undershot. A "Very Serious Fault" is a black mottled mouth.

With all of these requirements for evaluating the mouth, it's easy to see why cooperation by the dog is important in the Weimaraner ring.

"Showing the bite" in Weimaraners is really much more than a quick flash of the front teeth. In order to properly examine a Weimaraner's mouth, the front and sides of the mouth are shown as well as opening the mouth.

What's a handler to do? As in any sport, you train for the worst and hope for the best. We should train our dogs to cooperate and that's no small task. Ideally, examination training should start at a very early age by getting the dog used to having their bodies touched. Touching the mouth should be part of this routine. At first, the mouth examination should be minimal and slowly it should be worked up to a full exam. When the puppy is teething, and has an achy, sensitive mouth, you should stop the mouth exam training. Once the new secondary teeth make their appearance then it's time to reintroduce the mouth examination training.

The judge has the option of asking the handler to "show the bite" or to do the examination without the assistance of the handler. There are pro's and con's to both methods and I'd be interested in hearing from the Weimaraner community about your preferences and also tips on how you train for the mouth exam. Please send me your thoughts to ymar_column@yahoo.com I'd like to share this information and pass along useful training tips in a future column.

Carole Lee Richards
PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ 08108
ymar_column@yahoo.com