

Where Have All the Weimaraners Gone?

If you have been a Weimaraner enthusiast for any length of time, you must notice that there are fewer Weimaraners being shown these days. There are fewer at All-Breed shows, Specialties are smaller and a number of Independent Specialties have gone the route of having two shows on the same day. If you are the person who does “Puppy Referral” for your Club, you are hard pressed to help people find a litter of nice puppies since it seems that fewer people are breeding.

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It’s not your imagination: there are fewer Weimaraners at shows. A quick look at the number of championships is a good indicator of how the Weimaraner entries have waned. Last year, throughout the nation, 138 Weimaraners received conformation championships. If you look at the numbers for a decade earlier 207 championships were earned. While that comparison alone is dramatic, it is even more significant when you consider that the Grand Championship did not exist ten years ago and the AKC has found that the Grand Championship competition helps to retain people in the show ring. The number of competitors would be far less if it were not for the Grand Championship program.

Another good gauge of the number of Weimaraners being shown in conformation is the AKC Point Schedule. The points awarded toward a Championship are based on the actual number of dogs or bitches competing and as such, are a barometer of activity. For example, this year in my area of the country (Division 2: Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania) 4 dogs/6 bitches are required for a three-point major win. Just a decade earlier, there were so many more Weimaraners being shown, that 8 dogs/11 bitches were required for a major.

In discussing the reasons behind shrinking numbers in conformation, the knee jerk response is the “graying of the Sport.” Undeniably, if people stay in the Sport, we all see those around us aging and comparatively little younger blood is coming in. However, there are more factors at work that contribute.

Through the efforts of the Animal Rights movement, breeding dogs has become a frowned upon activity. The cultural imperative is fostered that we should be adopting dogs from shelters rather than further increasing the population. Resultant legislative restrictions make the keeping and breeding of dogs prohibitive in many communities. These factors in the Animal Rights agenda work against the future of the pure bred dog and entering in conformation is a bellwether.

Another factor discouraging participation in conformation events is that there are increasing demands on the use of our discretionary leisure time. Consider the complexities of scheduling time if you are raising a family and have the kids’ various sport and extracurricular activities to

manage. Balancing a myriad of schedules for family activities with the rigid schedules of the dog show world becomes frustrating if not impossible.

We are competing for scarce resources – time, energy, and money - when we ask a new puppy owner to become involved in conformation. If we are asking for a person's resources, we need to make sure that the activity is enjoyable and "addictive" in the best sense of the word. If it's not fun, why should they do it?

A positive step in this direction is the current process for registering a new puppy. In the past, the owner would send in a check, get a registration certificate in the mail and then...nothing more. Today there's an important follow through. New registrants receive an email from the AKC inviting them to an upcoming beginner's event in their geographic area. Does it help? Over the past few months, I've judged a number of matches and 4-6 month classes and in all of them there were some totally "green" people. I have been pleased to see some of the experienced dog show people going out of their way to encourage the new folks.

One of the most positive efforts in getting and "hooking" new people is the establishment of the 4-6 Month Puppy classes. According to the AKC, 25% of the owners who enter the 4-6 Month Puppy competition are new to the sport and 75% of these new owners go on to enter another AKC event. It is our job to encourage these new people and make an environment in which they want to participate.

The declining participation rate at conformation dog shows did not happen overnight and neither will there be an instantaneous turn around regardless of our efforts. However, we all can make our sport more inviting and inclusive. Keep working on it and hopefully we will no longer have to ask, "Where have all the Weimaraners gone?"

Carole Lee Richards

ymarcolumn@yahoo.com