

I've been showing uncropped dogs for quite a while now and there are a couple of things I hear quite often. One is that people are glad that we can now show uncropped dogs. I have to inform them that there has never been a standard that disqualified an uncropped dog. People generally seemed surprised by this. I should inquire on this further sometime. I have to wonder if they are surprised because if people can show uncropped dogs, why don't we see more of them.

The other reaction that I get is that people seem to need to justify cropping. Reasons typical are that they don't think they can win unless they have a dog with a cropped ear, they think the dogs get more ear infections and/or hematomas on the ear when they are not cropped, they don't think their dogs have the right ear set and/or length to show them uncropped.

Of all those reasons, the last is really the only one that I consider valid. I've done a fair share of winning owner handling uncropped dogs – including a BISS win from the veterans class over an entry of 117. None of my uncropped dogs has ever had a hematoma on an ear. And the one dog that I had that did have chronic ear infections was cropped....and problem ears were the least of his health ailments.

Proper ear set and length is important if you are going to show an uncropped dog. I did have one bitch that was cropped that had quite a good run in the show ring, finishing young and doing fairly well as a young owner handled special. She was an AKC Ch, ranked in the top 25 and was awarded an IABKC BIS before she was 2 years old. But she had such a long, low set ear, I doubt I could have ever finished her uncropped.

In general, I've found very few judges to have a bias based on ears. I can count the few I'm certain would hold back awarding an uncropped dog on one hand and have some fingers left over. We aren't losing because our dogs have their ears (or are the wrong color or pattern) in most cases. Face it, ears are just one part of the dog and a given judge is just as likely to have a pet peeve about a low croup, loose eye, or be hypercritical about some other part of the dog when judging. Ears do not make or break a good dog.

I have encountered judges that want the uncropped ear to lie perfectly and will comment if there is even a slight lift or tilt. I've also seen dogs with "fly away" ears win and even finish their championships. I've also had judges penalize my entry (and tell me so) because its *cropped* ear didn't stand. I can remember one special that was in the Top 10 that had ears that didn't stand any better than hers. So the variation in importance placed on the ear, whether cropped or not, is quite extreme.

There have been quite a variety of reactions to being the only, or one of the few, uncropped exhibits. I've had judges make casual comments about my uncropped dogs when approaching them in the ring. It's always fun when I can see the transformation from casual to serious consideration in their expression as they examine my dog. I had one judge joke with me about my Rottweiler as he approached for the individual exam. I told him this was not a Rott and he should take note because he was going to see more and more of Danes with ears as time goes on. His mouth literally dropped open when we returned from the down and back and he saw how lovely her expression was, ears and all. He ended up awarding my puppy

bitch first place in a very large class entry and taking a good look at her in winners.

Another judge gave one of my dogs BOB from the classes over specials and could not say enough about how lovely his head was once she saw past the ears. It was quite amusing because as everyone else went up to schmooze with the judge during pictures, all she would talk about was how lovely that head was once she got over the fact that the ears weren't cropped. 😊

I recently was awarded a win with an uncropped bitch by a breeder judge who told me that they would never own an uncropped Dane, but that would not stop them from putting one up.

Cropping and a preference to cropped ears, is just that – a personal preference and taste of an individual. Liking the look of the cropped ear on the Dane is just as valid a reason for cropping a dog as any reasons for not cropping.

I had one bitch that had such unbelievable ear cartilage that her ears were going to stand on their own if I didn't crop them. At 11 weeks, she had perfect ears for a Collie! I was never going to get those ears to lie correctly and her head conformation wasn't as correct as some of my other dogs, so she was cropped. It is an individual decision based on personal preference and the specific conformation of the dog in question.

During teething, uncropped ears can do some wild things. Some of my dogs have had to have their ears taped so that they lay correctly. This procedure is nothing like taping a cropped ear to stand. For one, I use a single length of tape to wrap one layer around the head so that the front of the ear flap is taped flat against the side

of the head. The other significant difference is that I only leave it on for 48 hours and I typically only have to do this once or twice in the entire life of the dog.

If you are hesitant about leaving your dogs uncropped because you are not confident that the ear size and set will be appropriate, here are some guidelines. Take a look at the relatives of the dog. If there are any uncropped relatives, so much the better. But you can even look at the cropped relatives and see how their ears are set. You can also inquire about the crops – is it a very long crop? If it is, then you know this is a dog with a long ear. If it isn't, you can inquire as to how much length was taken off when the dog was cropped. If you see a proper length of ear and good ear set in the relatives, you can be pretty sure your puppy is going to have a pleasing ear. Use the breed standard as your guide!

The personality of the dog might be a variable to consider as well. A few of my dogs have been so laid back and uninterested in showing that I was teased that it was a good thing they were not cropped, as they would never use their ears!

Whatever your reasons for cropping or not, don't let the perception that it is harder to finish an uncropped dog stop you from leaving a show prospect with ears intact. Even those few exhibitors, spectators or judges that have a strong preference are apt to be more accepting of our uncropped dogs as they see more and more of them.

Peace!

Laura