

Meet . . .

Owner-Handler

Mary McSparen

MaryMacDanes



- 1) **Tell us your whole name.** Mary McSparen.
- 2) **Number of years showing dogs.** 12 years showing, just 2 years as an owner -handler.
- 3) **Your kennel name & how you got it.**
MaryMacDanes. Mary Mac has been my nick name for years.
- 4) **Where you live.** Peoria, Arizona
- 5) **Where do you travel to show?** California. It's always a good excuse to stay with and visit my friend, Vicki Kimbell.
- 6) **How many shows do you attend in a year?** Normally about 2 weekends a month.
- 7) **Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose?** Yes! I started out 12 years ago wanting to owner-handle. But let my nerves get the best of me.
- 8) **What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes?** VICKI KIMBELL!!! She was going to show my girl for me one day, and after she moved her a bit, she told me that she thought Jett would be happier, and look better if I was on her. I put a major on her that day! My first!!! I never looked back after that. It was like Vicki pushed me into the pool, and after I didn't drown, I LOVED it. There's nothing like the feeling of winning all by yourself.
- 9) **What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs?** I can show where ever I feel like I want to!
- 10) **What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs?** For me, the biggest challenge is ME. I have to remind myself to stay confident. It's easy to do when you're winning. But you don't win all the time, and I have to remind myself that as long as we have done well, and had fun, that is what counts. That is what makes it worth doing. It is a hobby after all.
- 11) **What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring?** If you want to be competitive, I think you need to WORK for it. Practice, watch handlers (pros or owner-handlers) that you respect, dress professionally, put on a pleasant and confident face, and NEVER LET THEM SEE YOU SWEAT!!
- 12) **Do you feel your dog has ever been over-looked in the ring by the judge because you are an owner-handler and if yes please describe.** ABSOLUTLEY! Politics are a part of the game. But I don't think it happens as often as many people believe, in the classes any way. Heck, I've lost to politics with a professional on my dog. They just weren't the pro the judge was looking for that day. Some days the politics work FOR you too! If a known handler is going to get Best of Breed with a less than stellar dog, I've seen the judge award Winners Dog and Winners Bitch to others and Reserve the bigger win for the Pro. It does get more political in the Breed ring. And VERY political in the Groups.

13) Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain. In the last 2 years that I have been handling, I haven't felt like that from anyone.

14) What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game? Same answer as number 11. Well one more thing, don't let yourself feel like everyone is watching you! They aren't, they are watching their own dogs! Sometimes stage fright can hurt you, and really, no one is really that concerned with how you are doing as a handler.

15) What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler? Only once I got advice from a pro that I thought was valuable, and it was while I was in the ring and I thought the judge wasn't looking. I was kind of playing around with my dog, and the handler said to me, "Pay attention, he's watching you, and I think he's going to do something with you." He did, and it was a big win for me. Great advice!! PAY ATTENTION.

16) What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers? Looking confident even when your dog is misbehaving, or if a handler is playing games with you, keep smiling, and don't let it show on your face if you are rattled.

17) What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring? Not dressing like a professional. Bumping into, and stepping all over your fellow exhibitors and dogs. Not paying attention!

18) What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler? Finishing my own girl, then, going on to finish her Grand Championship with multiple Best of Breed wins. One of the biggest successes has been feeling like we have done a little bit better every time we've been out there, or at least, learned something new each day.

19) What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you? The feeling of pure joy when the judge points to me and my dog. We win as a team. There is just no feeling as good!

20) Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route? For me, it would no longer be a fun hobby. I would not want to take the responsibility of someone else's dog. I'm critical enough of myself with my own.

21) Who is your favorite judge and why? Diane Collins. As a new owner-handler, I was VERY nervous showing my girl in our Specialty. I was letting my nerves get the best of me. She was very patient with everyone, and she just looked like she loved being there. At one point, I was trying to get my girl to stack, and I was shaking. My girl was picking up on it, and everything began to snowball on me. Diane walked behind me and very quietly said, "Take your time, you're doing fine, it's only a dog show." Something about what she said has always stuck in the back of my head, especially when I feel like we're just losing it! I will play that sentence in my head sometimes when I need to settle myself.

22) Bonus Question! (Please answer!) If the mockumentary movie "Best in Show" made a sequel with you as one of the characters, what famous actor/actress would play YOU? This is the toughest question! I'd have to say Sandra Bullock! She was hysterical in Miss Congeniality!! She plays the cop who goes in under cover to a beauty pageant LOL!! Being an ex-cop, I think that would be funny.... I can just see it now!