

Meet . . .

Owner-Handler

Traci Knutson

Tolsina Great Danes



1) Number of years showing dogs. 16 years.

2) Your kennel name and how you got it. Tolsina. It is my middle name and a river in Alaska.

3) Where you live. Soldotna, Alaska.

4) Where do you travel to show? Anchorage and Palmer, 3 and 4 hours away.

5) How many shows do you attend in a year? Conformation shows 10-15. Obedience trials 15-20. Agility trials 6-12. Tracking, just one.

6) Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose? No.

7) What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes? I started showing dogs in obedience, then agility, so when I got my first show puppy, of course, I was going to show her myself!

8) What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs? For myself it is because I get to show off MY dogs. I get to present them and implicitly state 'this is my dog and I am so proud of her!'

9) What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs? I do not find that being an owner-handler is a challenge or disadvantage in Alaska. Because of our location, we have a limited number of shows and all the Dane people know each other very well. Nearly everyone owner-handles their Danes here, though occasionally someone will use a professional handler.

10) What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring? Their dog needs to stand still for the exam and not shy away from the judge. That is the biggest problem I see. They also need to be aware of what it looks and feels like when their dog is pacing. Quite often I will see a dog do a complete go-around or down and back and it is pacing the entire time.

11) 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. No, I have never felt like my dog was overlooked because of me being at the end of the leash. I have certainly questioned why the judge picked the dog they did, but I never felt personally slighted because of it.

12) Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain. Maybe I would feel differently if I lived in the Lower 48, but not in Alaska. Again, nearly everyone is an owner-handler.

13) What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game? Take an obedience class and make sure to train your dog the novice obedience stand for exam. Conformation classes are certainly valuable but I think an obedience class is more beneficial because you are developing more of an everyday working relationship with your dog instead of just training for the Breed ring.

14) What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler? She showed me how to stack my girl's rear so it accentuated her angulation and how to show off her lovely arched neck.

15) What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers? The free stack.

16) What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring? Not realizing when their dog is pacing and stacking the dog with their rear too far back.

17) What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler? I finished my first and only 'show' Dane in 14 shows with 4 majors and when she finished she went Best of Breed over 5 specials. She was a really nice girl!

18) What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you? Getting to show off MY dog and the thrill of winning. It is a lot of fun! I can't wait to have another dog to show!

19) Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route? I have handled a few other Danes for friends because I enjoy it. The dog show community is so small in Alaska and especially where I live that they isn't that much opportunity to get into the handling business. If friends want me to show their dogs, I would be happy to but as of right now I have no desire to pursue it for monetary reimbursement.

20) Who is your favorite judge and why? I am so very bad about paying attention to judges, so I have not opinion.

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? Oooh, this is a tough one...Julia Stiles!