

A novice's guide to dog showing

Many Coton de Tulear owners show their dogs at organised shows but the idea of doing so can be a little daunting for owners who are unfamiliar with the world of dog showing. This guide is intended to help the dog showing novice to understand a little about:

- Dog showing – what is it?
- Considering showing
- Types of dog shows
- How to find and enter a show
- Classes
- How to prepare a Coton de Tulear (and yourself) for showing
- Arriving at the show
- Showing your dog

Dog showing – what is it?

Dog showing is an exciting, competitive activity in which dogs are judged to determine how they compare to the dog's breed standard. The breed standard is set by the Kennel Club and effectively describes the attributes and characteristics of the "perfect" specimen of that breed, so for example, it details the ideal size, weight, dimensions etc. The Coton de Tulear breed standard is detailed on the Club website.

Dogs older than 6 months of age compete against one another and can win prizes or awards as their dog showing career develops. Dogs compete in different "classes", which are groupings for dogs of different ages or numbers of wins. The classes are explained further below.

There are different levels of show, ranging from companion shows to championship shows (the most famous of which is Crufts), which are detailed later in this guide. To enter a formal show, your dog must be a pedigree and registered with the Kennel Club. However, cross breeds can enter companion or fun dog shows and these can be a great way to socialise with your dog and show off his or her skills.

Considering showing

You should start training your dog as soon as you consider showing him. He will need to walk nicely on a lead alongside you without becoming distracted and he should be comfortable when handled by strangers as the judge will feel his bone structure and check his eyes and teeth etc. Getting him accustomed to this from an early age is important as it will also be of benefit if the vet ever needs to check him over.

When showing a Coton de Tulear, the dog is placed on a table for the judge to assess him and you can easily train him to stand nicely at home.

Consider purchasing a show lead – the Coton de Tulear is a small dog so a lightweight lead is ideal. Get him familiar with the lead at home as it will feel different to his usual collar and lead.

Many societies or dog training clubs offer ringcraft classes which are exactly that – they train the dog and the handler (you) how to behave and walk in the show ring. If you are considering showing, find out if there are any local ringcraft classes and go along to see what it is all about. They are very sociable so they are a great way to meet other dogs and their owners.

For more information, you could look up a Facebook group called “Ring Craft Clubs UK (KC only)” (not associated with the Club).

The Kennel Club regularly organises “have a go” sessions to offer experience to the show novice. These will give you and your dog the opportunity to experience what it is like to show your dog in surroundings similar to an actual show. Details can be found on the Kennel Club’s website: www.thekennelclub.org.uk.

You should also consider attending an organised show to meet other Coton de Tulear owners and exhibitors and you can see how the breed is presented in the ring. There is a very friendly atmosphere among the Coton owners at shows so you will undoubtedly make some new friends, but just be mindful not to disturb exhibitors when they are preparing their dogs, or are just about to go into the show ring.

The Kennel Club has a set of show regulations so you should become familiar with them – they can be a little confusing for the novice, but you can use them to ask questions at ringcraft or of other exhibitors as you get to know people at shows.

Please note that if your dog has undergone a medical procedure or has been spayed / neutered, you may be required to inform the Kennel Club prior to showing – check any requirements on their website.

Types of dog shows

The various levels of dog shows are briefly outlined here, in ascending order of competitiveness (more information can be found on the Kennel Club website):

1. Companion dog shows – These are a lot of fun and are organised to raise money for a charity or cause. Cross breeds as well as pedigrees can enter these shows and there might be classes such as “Dog who looks most like its owner” or “Waggiest tail” so your dog can show off his many talents!
2. Limited shows – A show for which entries are limited. For example, you may need to be a member of a specific dog club, or reside in a certain area to be able to enter.
3. Open shows – These are less formal than a championship show and can be an ideal starting point for the novice exhibitor. Shows may be for a small number of breeds, or for any breed but your dog must be a pedigree and registered with the Kennel Club. This is also a good format for you to meet other owners and ask questions as the atmosphere is very relaxed. If your dog wins best in show, reserve best in show or best puppy in show, he will have qualified for Crufts.
4. Premier open shows – These are similar to open shows but larger and more dogs are eligible to qualify for Crufts.
5. Championship shows – The highest level of dog show for pedigree dogs at which they have the opportunity to qualify for Crufts.

Dog shows will be:

- For a single breed (usually organised by the breed club, such as the Coton de Tulear Club of the United Kingdom); or
- A group show, such as the Toy group in which the Coton de Tulear breed competes against all other toy group dogs; or
- A general show for all dogs breeds in each of the seven groups (Hound, Pastoral, Utility, Toy, Gundog, Terrier and Working).

How to find and enter a show

Companion dog shows and fun days will be advertised locally, so look out for social media postings or other advertising in your area.

The Find a Show area of the Kennel Club website lists all open, limited, premier and championship shows, many of which will use one of the two primary dog show entry websites: Fosse Data and Higham press. You can use these websites to identify shows you may like to attend and which have Coton de Tulear classes; additionally, there are various Facebook groups that detail upcoming show information (not affiliated with the Coton de Tulear Club).

Single breed and group limited, open and championship shows will each issue a show schedule, detailing the time and location, classes available to enter, the judges and details of how to enter and make payment. You can request a copy of the schedule from the show secretary or if available, they can be downloaded from Fosse Data or Higham Press.

Please note, that if you are attending a show as a visitor rather than an exhibitor, you may be required to pay a fee so you should ensure you check the show schedule. Additionally, the schedule will detail any requirements regarding visiting with dogs that are not being exhibited.

Once you have identified a show to enter, complete the entry form and send your payment (unless it is a companion show which may have alternative payment arrangements). You will need to identify which class or classes you can enter (see below). Make sure you do not miss the entry closing date which is detailed in the schedule or on the dog show entry website.

Ensure you receive confirmation of your entry and if entering online, look out for any emails advising that your show passes are available to download from the website.

Classes

Classes are based on either the age of the dog or the number of wins it has gained. The classes available for each show are detailed in the show schedule but can be confusing for the novice exhibitor.

If you are entering an inexperienced puppy or young dog, the typical classes are:

- Minor puppy – for dogs of 6 months and not exceeding 9 months.
- Puppy – for dogs of 6 months and not exceeding 12 months.
- Junior – for dogs of 6 months and not exceeding 18 months.
- Yearling – for dogs of 12 months and not exceeding 24 months.
- *Note – ages refer to the age of the dog on the first day of the show, which might not be the day your class is held.*
- Classes for older dogs are based on how many wins have been obtained so if you are unsure which to enter, ask someone who is more experienced.

If the show you are entering does not have classes for the Coton de Tulear breed, there is likely to be an “Any variety not separately classified” (AVNSC) class that you can enter instead.

Special beginners – The Kennel Club sponsors a special beginners competition so you may see these classes available to enter; you should read the class definition in the show schedule to ensure you qualify for entry. Each special beginner breed winner is then eligible to compete for the special beginner group competition at which there may be prize money available.

Please note that you can enter as many classes as you wish, provided you are eligible. For a dog new to showing, entering too many classes at a show may tire him (and you!) out.

How to prepare a Coton de Tulear (and yourself) for showing

The Coton must be shown in his full coat, so if you are considering showing, you should avoid cutting his coat to enable it to grow naturally.

He should be shown freshly washed and groomed so again, get him accustomed to this routine from an early age. There is a guide to grooming a Coton on the Club website. You should not use any products in the coat when showing and the use of hair clips or bands is not allowed. If you have watched a Coton show previously, you will agree that they look beautiful gliding around the show ring in their full coats.

Decide on your outfit and wear comfy shows! Note that some shows are held outdoors so you may need a waterproof.

Pack a bag containing your show passes, confirmation of entry and classes entered, grooming items, show and normal leads, water, food and bowls (for him and you), treats (for encouragement in the ring), poo bags and a safety pin or clip to attach your ring number to you. Wet wipes and a towel can also be handy. You may also consider taking a folding chair for yourself as they are not always available – you can always leave it in the car when you arrive and get it later if you need it.

If you have observed other Coton de Tulear exhibitors at shows, you will have noticed that many have special trolleys or tables for grooming and preparing their dog while at the show. These are also a place for the dog to rest while at the show. However, these can be expensive so you may wish to avoid purchasing one until you are certain that you will be showing your dog regularly. In the meantime, consider how you will groom him at the ringside (for example, a folding chair might be useful) or where he will be able to relax (you may need to bring a bed).

Arriving at the show

Many shows will have issued an intended order of showing so you can determine what time your classes are likely to begin. If you are the second or third breed into the ring, this can be difficult to estimate so ensure you arrive with plenty of time to spare – you don't want to miss your opportunity to show.

You may be required to show a car park pass on entry to the showground, so have it visible in your car. Have your entry pass and catalogue voucher (if you have purchased one) to hand, so you can give them to the stewards. You can purchase a catalogue at the show if you did not order one at the time you entered. Note that there may also be a removal pass which you will need to produce when exiting the show.

If you entered online, the website is likely to have issued details of which ring you will be in so you should locate the ring on arrival.

The larger shows will have a dedicated area for your breed to occupy while preparing to show and this may include benching on which you will be able to locate your ring number (which is detailed in the catalogue). Your ring number will be provided to you by the ring steward at open shows.

Make yourself and your dog comfortable in the area and chat with the other Coton de Tulear exhibitors.... You will get to know them well if you are attending future shows and they have lots of experience that you will benefit from.

One or more of the Club committee members are likely to be at each of the championship shows, so please say hello.

Listen to announcements regarding when the Cotons are likely to start showing and groom your dog in preparation. All other exhibitors will also be preparing their dogs so you can be sure you don't miss the start of the competition.

Showing your dog

Now it is time for you to put all your hard work and practice on display!

The judge and steward will guide you regarding what to do in the ring. For Cotons, this usually involves standing in a line with the other dogs in the class, all walking in a circle around the ring, then presenting your dog to the judge on the table. Finally, the judge will ask you to walk your dog in a pattern which may be straight up and down, or a triangle for example. You will have practised these at your ringcraft classes.

It is a good idea to watch a prior class so you can see what this specific judge is asking the exhibitors to do, so you are prepared before entering the ring.

When the judge has observed each of the dogs in the class, he will award the placings which are usually first to third, then reserve (fourth) and very highly commended (fifth). The five selected will line up in the ring and if you are not placed, you leave the ring. The judge will ask the first and second placed dogs to wait in the ring while they complete some notes to enable them to write a critique.

If you have come first, you will be required to compete for the best dog or best bitch so keep your dog ready while the other classes take place. Other Coton owners will be on hand to help out if you're unsure what is going on!

If you are then awarded best of breed, you will be required to enter the Toy Group or best in show competition (depending on the type of show), so make sure you know which ring it is taking place in and when.

If you achieve a placing at a championship or premier open show, your dog may have qualified for entry to Crufts which is a great achievement – check the qualifying criteria on the Kennel Club website.

Finally, relax and enjoy the new experience and remember that whatever the result, you are taking the best dog home!

Conclusion

This guide is intended as an introduction to showing for the complete novice – there is a lot more information on showing, competitions, awards etc available on the Kennel Club website.