

IT'S A RUFF LIFE

They're our best friends, and they can sure provide memorable adventures.

BY PAMELA BRITTON-BAER

Horse-show dogs: Life on the road wouldn't be the same without them. Have you ever noticed that dogs rarely match their humans—or what you think their human should look like? That tiny little chihuahua usually belongs to the biggest man on the show grounds. You just can't judge a dog by its owner.

Now, I'm not one to gripe about dogs running loose at horse shows. I know they shouldn't, but I'm usually more concerned with remembering it's a 360-degree pivot in my trail pattern, not a 180. I just wish owners would teach their canines how to use the facilities. If a fire hydrant is a dog's first choice of *le toilette*, then the corner of a hay bale is a close second. *Gross.*

If you can't judge a horse-show dog by its owner, you can't judge a dog by its cuteness, either. There's nothing worse than spotting a sweet little Ewok-faced dog outside your stall, bending down to pet it and having it turn into that alien from the movie "Predators." I'm insulted when a dog tries to take my face off. How *rude.*

Once, I took my dog to a horse show, always careful to tie her up or lock her away when I went to show or exercise my horse. There I was longeing my horse when my four-legged friend came tearing around the corner of a barn aisle, her leash flapping behind her like some kind of tiny Chinese dragon. I don't know how she found me, but she made a beeline for me in the center of that arena. One look at my dog, and my horse decided his life was in mortal peril. I tried my best to become a human telephone pole, but I left skid marks, a longe whip and probably a few years of my life in my wake. All the while, my furry friend danced around my feet, clearly delighted to have found me. Yeah, I leave my dogs at home now.

That reminds me of the dog who took a victory lap with her human when their horse won jumping at the AQHA World Show a few years ago (see photo at left). After the rider received her world champion neck ribbon, she started her victory lap, and this brown dog came from the alley and happily barked and loped around the arena with her to celebrate.

Horse-show dogs serve a very important purpose. Nothing calms my nerves better than rubbing their soft ears or gazing into their loving eyes. And when I blow a pattern, no creature understands better than my furry friend. A dog doesn't care about a lousy lead change or a botched pattern. They're just happy to be with you. I don't know a single human who would be content to spend every second of every day by my side, but my dogs would.

Maybe I should chuck it all and open a horse-show doggy daycare. That way, I could combine two of my favorite things. Except with my luck, I'd end up becoming a human dog sled, dragged behind a pack of dogs in my sparkling new show jacket right through the middle of the grounds.

Maybe I should try bringing a cat, instead? *Nabbbbb.* A cat would glare at me in judgment if I went off pattern. **U**

Pamela Britton-Baer's humor column focuses on the ups and downs of horse ownership. To get a message to her, write to aqhajrnl@aqha.org.

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