



# a Tiger is a Tiger not a Lamb

by Lisa Dubé Forman

*"You have to understand the way I am, Mein Herr."*

*"A tiger is a tiger, not a lamb."*

*...from "Cabaret" the musical*

**I** believe we are playing with fire as we commingle disparate dog breeds dangerously near one another at many all-breed shows. Specifically, I am referring to judging programs with often risky breed ring scheduling and cramped show grounds. These factors force breeds of contrasting temperaments into reckless proximity creating potential disasters that are avoidable.

I sense that superintendents, show chairs, and exhibitors often overlook that foremost our show dogs are animals. Albeit animals that developed a bond with humans. They have aided mankind in various tasks such as protection, tracking or stalking, maiming, holding at bay, running down and the outright killing of prey. There is no disrespect intended for our toys and some of the non-sporting breeds---the majority being wonderful companions. However, it is these and other small breeds along with many other situations that are the subjects of my concern.

We often have many overcrowded indoor shows due to today's limited availability of spacious and affordable venues. Depending on the entry size, many of these shows have nearly impassable aisles filled with seated spectators, exhibitors and a menagerie of dogs. Need I even describe the grooming and crate areas with dogs stacked upon dogs and side-by-side to one another?

In my experience we often have objectionable and unsafe breed scheduling of not only assorted sizes but breeds having varying demeanors. This ring scheduling requires intermingling dogs outside show rings in hazardously close quarters. For instance, giant hunting breeds with small or miniature

breeds underfoot.

Outdoor shows are not always more helpful as the weather may be an issue with hot, blazing sun, record temperatures or rain showers. There are numerous outdoor show tents which are elbow to elbow as exhibitors and their dogs jostle for position waiting for their breed judging time. Again we have the same plot with contrasting breeds bumping into or passing perilously close to one another. Under normal circumstances, reasonable and prudent dog people would not likely allow these breeds to cross paths. Into this mix we occasionally have the problematic and distressing issue of ring programs with perhaps as many as 30-40 entries of assorted breeds scheduled. This can result in wait times of 75 minutes or more. This time may be longer, if the judge begins to run late, and there may be many backed-up breeds waiting. Even when programs are running on schedule it is risky to have many of our breeds coming before or after one another forcing them together.

We spend countless days traveling from show to show with our wonderful dog(s) who is our cohort and bunk partner. We all need to bear in mind that depending on the breed, this dog(s) is not a toothless, defenseless baby. Dogs will be dogs and sooner or later inherent traits may surface at the most unexpected moment.

I recreate the scene as frequently it is stressful. More often than not we consider it a medal-worthy feat to successfully circumvent the chaos to reach a ring entrance. Please envisage yourself doing so with a 200-pound giant breed as many contemporaries will confirm it can be harrowing. At some outdoor

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shows the barking from the crated dogs piled up under the tents can be grating and overpowering. Typically, this is mere feet from the ring and its entrance. When attending indoor shows the often ceaseless barking coming from crated dogs reverberates throughout a building and can be deafening. If it is stressful for us, it is very stressful for our dogs.

Many exhibitors/handlers are desensitized to our show's clamorous environment and many of these same people claim their dog(s) is also accustomed to the stimulation. Upon hearing this I sense many people are misguidedly bestowing human qualities upon their dogs. Dog shows are stressful. A dog that is not behaving excitedly is not an indicator that he is stress-free. This is true for even the most veteran exhibits. Dog show stress is seen and unseen and can take a toll on all our dogs in many ways. Some dogs may be quiet in their crate or wait by your side but we should not misinterpret this. Often enough these dog's sensors are on alert with many on a hair-trigger switch; and I have seen such explosions.

Crated dogs barking incessantly at shows are vocalizing in dog language. It may or may not be a sign the dog has relaxed if he ceases barking when removed from his crate. Barking is a form of communicating an excited state or condition expressing agitation. Yet agitation is also expressed in many other ways.

Not all dogs are supposedly anesthetized to the noise and the crowds. We place far too many unrealistic, human expectations on our dogs and naively disrespect instead of respect our dog's behavioral instincts. Instincts and functions for which they were originally bred dictate their behavior and the reality is that many were not meant to "get along" with every other animal under the sun. Foolhardy judging programs require exhibitors to bring dissimilar breeds together in tight quarters and this could result in predictable heartbreak.

Undeniably, the ability to read a dog's body language at a crowded dog show can be a life-saver. However not everyone has the experience and ability to do so. Many times this skill eludes inexperienced dog people but also those who lack "dog sense" which is comparable to "horse sense." I typically

recommend "Cesar Milan, the Dog Whisperer" as a good source for learning "dog sense." The show appears on the National Geographic Channel and he also has a website with DVD's. Cesar Milan discusses and teaches invaluable lessons on dog body language and instructs owners on how to observe their dogs for subtle cues in posture and movement. This is critical because unnoticed threatening or challenging behavior can escalate. Milan underscores our dogs have canine rather than human needs and we all have particular breeds of dogs with breed-specific behavioral instincts.

Many will note the AKC requirement that owners or

agents shall be responsible for the care and safety of their dogs. Exhibitors are always to be in full control of their dogs, if they are not capable of doing so then they should not be exhibiting their dogs. I agree with this reasonable expectation but unfortunately we do not live in a perfect world. Certainly, we have exhibitors who pose risks as often as we have poorly managed show set-ups. When we attend dog shows nothing worries us more than a preoccupied exhibitor/handler. Some pull their dogs along and may fail to notice if their dog is startled, initiates or reacts to another dogs posturing. Typically, these people are too busy elbowing their way through the crowd and the injustice is blaming the dog. I certainly concede there are some aggressive dogs or what Milan calls "red-zone" dogs that require rehabilitation. However, these dogs are not often seen at AKC show grounds as they would be too

destructive to even enter the show grounds.

Personally, some dog shows can be construed as a canine set-up; entrapment. Many of today's dog show environs are setting up our dogs to make a mistake. If and when they do, the hand of justice is swift and heavy. What about taking a hard, long look at many clubs' poorly arranged judging programs? Depending on the size of the show, one should also consider the unreasonably close quarters as a mitigating factor. The truth, many breeds are not well-suited for close quarters. Add in crowds, risky breed ring scheduling, clamorous and tense environments, throw in inexperienced or inattentive owners/handlers and bang! you've got trouble.



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While attending a packed, indoor all-breed show I watched as an owner cautiously guided their giant breed dog through a jam-packed aisle. The owner had the dog on a very short, taut lead and was in control. In a split second the giant dog, guilty only of demonstrating his breeds' characteristics, eyeballed a toy breed held in the arms of a spectator standing in this narrow, crowded aisle. The giant reached up, grabbed the toy breed's head but immediately was caught by his owner. Thankfully, the toy dog escaped injury but easily the giant could have killed him. He may have been responding to prey perception or possibly just trying to grab what he thought to be a stuffed animal toy. This was not a case of aggression and the giant is blameless. Look at the circumstances.

A source informed me of another incident. An exhibitor was navigating through an all-breed show and their very large, working breed dog broke its leash and escaped. This dog headed straight for a nearby giant breed dog. Fortunately, the owner of the giant breed dog was alert and stepped in front shielding their dog from harm. The escapee bit the owner instead of their dog. Why fortunately? Without full disclosure, in my experience the owner may have averted disaster when stepping in front to shield their giant breed. Contingent on this targeted dog's nature, it could have been a calamitous and haunting incident for anyone within the nearby radius.

Here is a good description of what seems to be a typical show nowadays. In recent months we attended a large, crowded, indoor show cluster. The ring entrances were all located in the center of the building so people had to navigate through long, narrow, crowded aisles. These long aisles had seated spectators, exhibitors with dogs and they also bordered the draped-off grooming/crating areas on three perimeters. Most of the dogs arriving throughout the day entered the building through side doors and were funneled into these same aisles. This show was crowded. Even outside we had to navigate restricted concrete walkways to the building doorways because exhibitor's set-up X-pens on both sides and some contained unattended dogs. As is typical, especially for a giant breed exhibitor, I ran RECONN inside the building to find a safe place to wait before bringing in our dogs. Once inside we could scarcely find a large enough space to wait within visual distance of our ring for us and our two giant breed dogs; one weighing about 200 lbs. We waited and waited but not in any comfortable manner.

In ridiculously close quarters our routine is best described as watching a wild tennis match. In this case, it was a 1 to 1½ hour match because the judge was behind schedule. We have calm but vigilant surveillance with our heads quickly looking left-right-down-up. We are always observing dog's body language as they pass by while their owners/handlers tug them along sometimes coming too close for comfort. We scrutinize body language regardless of size as oftentimes the smaller

breeds may instigate trouble. As people approach we are robotic always scanning the ground around them looking for a dog and always looking up to see if they are carrying a dog. Painfully on both of these days the judges ran behind schedule; one extremely so and various-sized breeds were piling up around the ring perimeters.

As a rule with sighthounds and also other giant breeds, one does not wait until the last minute to proceed to your ring entrance. We have to proceed even if areas around the ring entrance are teeming with smaller breeds as rushing can be upsetting for these dogs. These giants require time to collect themselves before going in the ring otherwise we may have an amped-up, nervous and flighty exhibit regardless if the distance is only 25 yards. If not, we may "go for a ride" in the ring and all our time, travel and money will be for naught. Besides, covering those 25 yards can be time consuming with people and obstacles all the way and then the ring steward is calling out your number with the judge waiting.

The choreography is memorable to reach the vicinity of the ring entrance as one has a death grip on the dogs through those packed, long aisles. It is very distressing for sighthounds and some giant breeds to walk through congested corridors especially as people are gesturing and there is a lot of activity occurring above the dog's head. Sighthounds usually will react to such sudden motions. For this reason a skilled judge approaches with hands under instead of above the hounds eyes and head. Occasionally, because of the stimuli, some hounds may startle and spin around all the while knocking people aside with their huge size and weight.

Before our breed judging and all around the ring entrance were Dachshunds, some waiting to go into the ring and those remaining after their judging concluded. Now we are waiting again but with quite a few giant hunting breed entries, some visibly stressed and Dachshunds are all around. I surveyed the scene and my husband simply shook his head in disbelief. I suspected that a few Dachshund owners were blissfully unaware that some giant dogs were fixated on their feisty scenthounds. Another ring program had our giant breed immediately following 13- and 15-inch Beagles. I dread scenes like these along with other scary dramas playing out at shows throughout the country. I firmly believe these are disastrous set-ups. It is foolish to schedule small dogs with large hunting hounds and giant breeds. It is also unwise scheduling dissimilar large breeds especially in compact areas with no room to maneuver.

I agree that depending on the breed, competitions such as Schutzhund, agility, obedience, and field trials have well-trained dogs conscious of their owner's expectations. This is also true in households with owners firmly in position as the alpha. On the other hand, hound breeds have strong hunting instincts still very much intact despite the eons that have

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passed. We refer to this as strong prey drive. This instinct many times is overpowering and is not exclusive to just hounds as there are many non-hunting breeds that exhibit this drive as well.

Invariably, strong prey drive is unfamiliar to some small breed owners in addition to non-hunting breed owners and “mentor-less” exhibitors. However, unbelievably, there are enough obtuse owners/exhibitors who find this concept bizarre believing that conformation shows are simply shows—beauty contests—and all our dogs should be compatible as one big, happy family. Not to be outdone though, we also have breeders, owners, and exhibitors who actively deny their breed’s heritage. Their mistaken conviction is that evolution has diminished their dogs’ instincts over a short span of several hundreds of years.

AKC describes Lure Coursing with eligible sighthound hunting breeds as a gauge to measure a sighthounds coursing instincts. This is to preserve and develop the coursing skills inherent in the sighthounds and to demonstrate that they can perform the functions for which they were originally bred. I refer to it as demonstrating prey drive. The hunter gives chase, runs down and tries to capture its prey in the form of a lure. Despite this, some of these hound owners expect their dogs will follow all-breed show communal rules. I regard this as unrealistic. While at stressful conformation shows they rely on their dog, an animal, to comply with their expectations he will suppress his instincts to seize or capture smaller dogs similarly sized to prey. What about the dogs with no lure coursing experience? Or entertainingly, the hounds that have tried and failed in the sport of lure only because they assessed the situation and determined that chasing a lure bag was uninteresting? Nonetheless, these dogs may have very strong prey drive and occasionally a few owners realize this too late. On a related note, my husband and I regularly have experienced our sighthounds alerting to people wearing real fur coats, boots and even horsehair boots while walking in our mountain village resort. Their prey drive is indisputable and although we are in complete control you should see the looks we get.

A tiger is a tiger, not a lamb. I believe that if those responsible for scheduling breeds were to witness an Irish Wolfhound or Scottish Deerhound run down, kill and eviscerate a deer they would avoid programming any small dogs before, after or near the Sighthounds. These dogs are hunters and they instinctively kill prey, large and small. Small breed dog owners and exhibitors should exercise caution when approaching hunting hounds at shows. Some approach because they lack breed respect and experience. Many times though they are forced to do so because of improper schedules and/or no alternative routes at crowded shows. We have a 20 pound terrier and despite her experience--she raised most all the hounds in our pack--we always exercise caution with her at home and elsewhere. At shows I will not allow her to walk

near or within striking distance of many breeds and, if available, I will take a respectfully circuitous route around them. I don’t tempt fate and I suffer no delusions about dog’s capabilities. I do not subscribe to the theory that dogs attending conformation shows cannot experience instinctual relapses and snatch my terrier.

Although I have limited experience as a show chair, having served two-terms for my national breed club, I am very aware of the complexities overseeing an all-breed show. All-breed shows that typically have multiple judges and also the potential of having 190 AKC eligible breeds. The latter is extremely rare but possible at large, familiar all-breed shows. My friends who have served decades as all-breed show chairs inform me that assembling judging programs with the various breeds can be tricky but they manage. Thankfully there are other “breed savvy” show chairs that prefer to schedule their own shows and are well-versed in respectful and safe breed scheduling.

I understand many extensive grooming breeds require or prefer later judging times. I appreciate the convenience of having judges remaining at their ring to complete their multiple breed assignments but not when this poses risks for the dogs. I am also aware that occasionally judges will request early ring times to expedite their assignments so they can leave the same day. Some show chairs will try to accommodate by scheduling these judges’ approved breeds together. I certainly take issue with this if it leads to unsafe breed programming.

When accepting assignments, judge’s obligations are to prioritize our dogs safety. We lack this assurance when we have various giant and hunting breeds intermingling with small and miniature breeds or even combining other larger breeds with divergent temperaments. Besides, multi-breed exhibitors have to wait for various ring times throughout the day so a judge can as well. On many occasions one of my breed’s scheduling was early to mid-morning and then the other breed later in the afternoon. One frustrating reality is oftentimes there is only 1 point awarded in one or both breeds and often in advance of the late scheduled breed may be 30-plus assorted breed entries. We endure the wait and delays as we have no choice. We stay even with a 6-hour drive home ahead of us and if the exhibitor waits, then a judge can wait.

No one wants to witness a dreadful incident. While attending shows we require appropriate, respectful breed scheduling that does not pose hazard or risk for dogs. If the problem of finding and affording spacious show sites is now the norm, then attention and caution should be paid even moreso to safe scheduling of breeds to prevent heartache and injury. Even one tragic incident is too costly. Again, blame will fall upon the dogs and it certainly is not their responsibility. These are animals; no matter what you believe they are not human. They do not always understand and they easily make mistakes. Except that when they do, it can be a life-changer.