

Meet . . .

Owner-Handler

Megan M. Strickland

Omega Danes

1) Tell us your whole name. Megan M. Strickland.

2) Number of years showing dogs. 12 years.

3) Your kennel name & how you got it. Omega Danes.
After a divorce shattered my previous kennel name (Triple M), I decided that 'the end' was my new beginning.

4) Where you live. Chandler, Arizona.

5) Where do you travel to show? Arizona, California, New Mexico, Colorado. I would like to add Nevada and Utah to the mix eventually.

6) How many shows do you attend in a year? Depends on how well my dog is looking, if I can afford the cost of the show and getting the time off work to travel. On average I go to about 28 shows a year, 12 weekends.

7) Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose? I have never hired a professional handler to show my dog, but I do attend handling classes taught by professional handlers to learn the tricks of the trade and better my skills as an owner handler.

8) What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes? When I was a little girl, my Mom took me to my first dog show to spectate. It was then that I decided I wanted to show dogs, and more specifically, have a Great Dane. I enjoy working with my dogs and having that bond as a working team.

9) What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs? It keeps the cost of showing down, for one. The establishment of trust from knowing my dog on a daily personal level, and the ability to practice often and study my dog to learn its faults and best traits to perfect their presentation.

10) What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs? Not being able to attend as many shows as I would like because of time or cost. Being over-looked by a judge simply because I'm not a professional handler.

11) What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring? Look the part! Dress like a professional. Learn the presentation tricks of a professional. Act like a professional. Have good sportsmanship both inside and outside of the ring.

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. Absolutely! There have been times when my dog wasn't even really examined or movement watched, but the professional handler's dog was. The judge and professional handler were quite chummy with each other, laughing and chatting; I didn't stand a chance!



13) Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain. Yes, it feels like there is an invisible level of quality set up. Like, your dog MUST be good because so and so handles it and yours is of lesser quality because you do the job yourself as the owner. But, I will say it is getting much better now that more owners are stepping up as owner handlers.

14) What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game? Invest in a professional wardrobe and attend handling classes regularly for lots of practice.

15) What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler? Breathe. Don't rush. Before moving out, take the time to take a deep breath, adjust the collar to the appropriate spot on their neck, and take some grace steps before fully moving out. Watch yourself in a mirror. You will see the picture that you are presenting to the judge and be able to see where to make adjustments. That way when you are in the ring you will know how it feels and looks like because that is how you practiced it.

16) What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers? Where to stand when presenting and how to set your feet, arms, and hands so you don't look sloppy. And what to do with your leash when stacking and when moving.

17) What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring? Not paying attention. Not being aware of where the judge is and what the judge is looking at. Not practicing with their dog to present a pretty picture.

18) What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler? Placing well in stiff competition. Even if not for points, it is a job well done if my dog showed well for me and we had fun doing it.

19) What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you? Time spent working with my dog. The joy of knowing I earned every ribbon with hard work and determination.

20) Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route? Time and money quite honestly. I show sparingly as it is with my own dogs, and would love to be able to get out there more. I have handled some of my friends Danes when they need an extra pair of hands; that is always fun!

21) Who is your favorite judge and why? I really like Leon Reimert, Bill Stebbins, and Jane Treiber. I like a judge that gives you an honest exam every time, and makes you feel like your entry was valued.

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? I've been told I look like Keri Russell and Nicole Kidman, so I guess one of them to play my role.