

Meet . . .

Owner-Handler

Nichole Bartlett

Enzodane



- 1) **Tell us your whole name.** Nichole Bartlett
- 2) **Number of years showing dogs.** 8.5 years
- 3) **Your kennel name & how you got it.** Enzodane (named after my first Great Dane: Enzo CD RE CGC). Any dog that I bred starts Enzo's.
- 4) **Where you live.** Currently, Tucson, AZ; but I have lived in Phoenix and Newark since I have been in Danes.
- 5) **Where do you travel to show?** Currently, I show mostly in AZ, CA, NM, CO and TX, but I have been to many other states for good judging panels and for the National shows.
- 6) **How many shows do you attend in a year?** Depends on who I have showing and how competitive they are at the time (roughly 12-24 show weekends a year).
- 7) **Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose?** Yes, when I lived on the east coast, I used Barbara Waldkirch at times for my natural blue girl and when I had my fawn girl showing out west, I used Mari Lynn Davisson for help. Both women have gentle hands for the dogs but have equally precision in their ability to present the dogs to show off their best attributes. I often put my dogs with handlers while they are young to avoid mommy-itis, except when showing in Bred By.
- 8) **What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes?** For me, it's a hobby and something fun to do with my pet. I enjoy showing off my fur kids and I rarely have a ring conflict doing it myself. 😊
- 9) **What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs?** Since I have done the training, I am more prone to know how the dog is going to react to a particular situation. Also, I am more likely to display the strengths and downplay a fault, as I take pictures of my dogs at most camera angles while they grow up. The camera shows what the eye does not always. I study the pictures to be sure I know the best angle for my dogs and what looks good or bad when handling for that dog, since each dog needs to be presented differently.
- 10) **What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs?** Sometimes younger dogs have a hard time differentiating that you are serious and want them to behave in the ring. When a stranger takes them in the ring, they quickly learn they have to behave with that person. When mommy is at the end of the lead, they have to learn that sometimes it's okay to play and sometimes not.

- 11) **What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring?** Consider being serious about grooming, presentation and being a good sport. It also helps to practice a lot and have someone you trust give you feedback on your handling skills.
- 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.** Yes. There are judges out there with preferences for pro handlers, but to be fair, there are judges out there who also prefer O/H. When trying to make a decision between a couple of dogs that they like, it can be easier to go with the familiar face.
- 13) **Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain.** No. I do think it is harder, as there are more judges that prefer pro handlers than O/H and a lot that don't appear to have a preference. At the end of the day, if you have a nice enough dog, he/she will get noticed.
- 14) **What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game?** Get a good mentor ... or two or three. Not just for health and training tips, but to help guide you on your handling skills. Often the best mentors for handling tips are not people currently showing their own dogs. Ask people you trust to watch you and give you advice. When people give you feedback, don't argue. Say thank you and then think about the feedback you got and what parts of it you want to use or not. Sometimes the feedback is solicited, sometimes not, but this is where your mentor(s) can help. You can tell them what you heard and ask for their opinion. Some of my best mentors have been people who have other colors than myself.

Buy national videos and ignore the dogs. Just watch the handlers and what they are doing to best present that dog.

Watch junior handlers. They are learning the same as you. Also, some judges will openly give feedback to a junior in the ring, but are less likely to do so to an adult. If you see the mistake they made and hear what the judge tells them, you are also getting valuable tips.

- 15) **What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler?** Take your time. Relax. And smile.
- 16) **What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers?** At the end of the down and back, take the time to fix the dog (if needed)
- 17) **What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring?** Keeping a clean neck with the lead
- 18) **What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler?**
- Putting a CD on my very first Great Dane
 - Winning my class at the National against pro handlers and breeders
 - Putting a CGC and an RN at 6 months of age and having good enough scores to be ranked in the top 25 with those puppy age scores
 - Finishing my first CH without any points coming from pro-handlers as well as O/H her to a GCH and a BISS

- Finishing my first home-bred dog completely from Bred By Exhibitor and then the following month taking him to the National and winning Best Junior Dog in Futurity as well as an AOM in breed (at 14 months of age) and helping his mom take 2nd place in Brood Bitch

- 19) **What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you?** I love being the one who developed the bond, trained, shown and won with my own dog. I get excited every time that I am handed that purple ribbon.
- 20) **Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route?** I have no interest in becoming a pro handler. I am happy to help pro handlers in winners or show my friends dogs, but this is just fun for me.
- 21) **Who is your favorite judge and why?** I really don't have one favorite. I do prefer judges who are consistent in what they award, will give a serious look to every dog shown and are open to color and owner handlers. That said, I must admit that Chris O'Connell and Sharon Stecklar hold a special place in my memory, as they both have given me BISSs when the top winning dog was present. They were able to go with what they liked vs what was ranked.
- Dana Cline is another judge that seems to like similar type of dogs as myself. Win or lose, I always seem to appreciate his selections. And of course, Linda Tonnancour, who gave my Derek and I an AOM at the National.
- 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?** Charlize Theron. She has a broad range of acting ability. I can be pretty silly outside the ring, but focused yet smiley in the ring. I think she would do a good job being 'me'.