

THE RING STEWARD: Who Is That Behind the Judge's Table?

by Linda Hazen Lewin

Most exhibitors' sole contact with a ring steward is to ask for their armband, for the photographer, or for the clean-up crew. Actually, the responsibilities of the steward extend far beyond just handing out armbands and bellowing into a walkie-talkie. A good steward helps immeasurably in keeping the judge on time, keeping the ring running smoothly, and averting the many glitches that dog shows are heir to. A badly-prepared steward can do just as much in the opposite direction. Following are a few things for which the ring steward is responsible:

1. Picking up the ring supplies from the superintendent and getting the judge's table prepared before the first class of the day. This includes unwrapping and arranging ribbons in the proper order, unwrapping and arranging trophy cards or money envelopes in breed order, having the judge's book or score sheets readily available, and having armbands ready to go for the incoming breeds. In the catalog, the steward checks off those numbers which have been picked up and marks reported absentees.
2. Ensuring there is an examination table in the ring if the judge is doing small breeds.
3. Ensuring there is no glass, sticks or other debris in the ring so the judge does not have to stop or re-route his classes due to flotsam in the ring.
4. Putting in requests to the hospitality staff for beverages and/or snacks for the judge throughout the day.
5. Calling for clean-up and for the photographer as needed.
6. Handing out armbands to exhibitors.
7. Calling entrants into the ring, by armband number.
8. Pulling ribbons for each class, matched with trophy cards and/or money envelopes as applicable.
9. In obedience, acting as a "post" for the figure eight, holding score sheets during the Stand for Examination, taking leads and retrieving articles from the judge or exhibitor as necessary, adjusting heights and lengths of jumps, escorting exhibitors to and from the ring for out-of-sight stays, and catching stay-breaking dogs.
10. Taking all ring materials, including the judge's book, along to lunch when the ring is left vacant.
11. Returning from lunch early to reopen the ring and get armbands handed out for the first classes.
12. Asking the judge about procedural items:
 - a) When (if at all) will the judge allow handler changes or latecomers?
 - b) Does the judge want the dogs in catalog order?
 - c) When will the judge do photographs: between classes? after each breed? at the end of the hour or segment? just before lunch?
 - d) Does the judge want the armband numbers of the placing dogs called out while he marks the book, or does he prefer to walk down the line and mark them first-hand?
 - e) Where does the judge want the entrants lined up upon entering the ring?
 - f) Where does the judge want the examination table?
 - g) In obedience, where does the judge want stays done? The figure eight? Where should the scent articles be placed?

Here are a few things the ring steward must not do:

1. Hold dogs, hold grooming paraphernalia, hold trophies or hold up classes. The steward is there as an assistant to the judge, and anything interfering with that job is verboten.
2. Write on the judge's book or score sheets. This is strictly the purview of the judge and these items should not be handled by others except for setting up the table at the start of the day and, possibly,

taking the book with the other materials along to lunch for safekeeping. Some obedience judges do like the steward to check their addition on score sheets, but this is only done at the judge's request.

3. Comment on or criticize the judge's decisions. Judges have been known to toss a loud-mouthed steward out of their ring for this. Stewards should keep their opinions to themselves.

Those are the basics. From the steward's point of view, there are three facets that need to be coped with: the judge, the exhibitors and the staff of the show-giving club. Just as one might expect, some judges are great to steward for and some are not. Judges are required to adhere to the schedule laid out by the superintendent or show secretary and a good steward can do a lot to help keep things moving. When time is a concern, the steward should call the next class of dogs to ringside so they will be ready to go right in as soon as ribbons are handed out. Also, the steward may bring a class into the ring while a photograph is being taken (always being sure they will not appear in the background of the photograph!), so that judging can recommence immediately. Having ribbons, trophy cards and money envelopes at the ready for each class is a must in these circumstances. With conscientious effort by the judge and some hustle on the part of the steward, unanticipated delays can be overcome.

Exhibitors can be superb or a superb pain; interestingly, it tends to run in breeds. Some people are notoriously disorganized - they show up at the last minute, don't know their armband number, are nowhere to be found when their class is called, and/or are insufferably rude. Others are the exact opposite - they are there promptly, know their armband numbers (and are pleasant in asking for them), and are ready at ringside for every class. Exhibitors can make things a lot simpler for a busy steward by knowing what their number is and asking for it by breed first, then the class, then the number, e.g., "Dalmatian, Open Bitch, #46". This is especially helpful when a steward is working a ring that has a lot of breeds with small entries, and is flipping back and forth through the catalog constantly to find each breed and mark in the numbers that have been picked up. If this is the case, please be patient! There is nothing more harrowing than having five people hanging over the ring gate yelling for numbers which are in four different breeds, while the judge is tapping his foot awaiting ribbons and the calling-in of the next class. Finally, remember that the steward is not responsible for bad grounds, bad parking, bad judging or bad weather. You, the exhibitor, only have to stay long enough to show your dog; the steward is normally there for the whole day and has enough to do. Please go gripe to someone else.

As far as the show-giving clubs are concerned, most are very conscientious about seeing that the judges and stewards are treated well. Most clubs use a system of "runners" for taking orders for drinks and snacks, and at the 30-ring shows it can be a while before someone gets to your ring. However, it often seems that the service is better at those shows than at some which have only 10 or 12 rings to cover. Ring hospitality is a very important part of the show for stewards and judges who are working all day in all kinds of weather, and clubs should be aware of it. Walkie-talkies, used to request the services of the photographer or the clean-up crew, are important and must be in good working order for a smooth-running show. The steward is not responsible for clean-up duty, although most are quite dexterous with a pair of discarded armbands when the occasion necessitates. Again, prompt response is dependent upon the club's assigning enough people to the task.

I hope this has given you a more complete idea of what is involved in working as a ring steward. Most stewards are not paid for their services and do it for enjoyment. They take pride in doing their job well and the rewards can be great, albeit intangible. Stewarding is a wonderful way to meet people and learn about breeds of dogs with which one is not familiar. It is an unparalleled opportunity to learn ring procedure and the rules of the game. Altogether, it broadens one's horizons immeasurably and gives a new slant on dog shows, judging and the directions in which individual breeds are heading. In a sport where too many people can't see past what's in their own back yards, such experience can only help! See you at ringside...

