

JUDGES STUDY GROUPS

Doing It Right

by Linda H. Lewin

Is your club currently holding, or considering holding, a Judges Study Group? Do you cringe at the thought? The Greater Washington Dalmatian Club has given a series of Judges Study Groups on the Dalmatian over the past ten years which have achieved a reputation for excellence in the judging community. I thought it might be helpful to pass along our methods to other clubs who may wish to host a study group in the future.

The foremost issue to consider is: Can your club provide the dogs necessary? From what we hear from our attendees who have been to other study groups, the GWDC program is unique in that we show the breed nuances on real live dogs. Our Study Group Chairman sends a mailing out to all club members asking them to volunteer their dogs to illustrate both good and bad points of the breed. Volunteering one's beloved dog to illustrate faults takes character and maturity, but it is felt that the education of our future judges is far more important than ego. And, since we stipulate that the dogs used in the study group must not be current exhibits in the breed ring, it ends up being quite fun for everyone as they bring their breed ring retirees, their obedience dogs, their pets and their "pound puppies" for illustration. Showing faults on live dogs is, in our experience, critical to the learning process, and the appreciation expressed to us by the participants for doing so underscores its value. So many of our attendees have said, "I've been to other study groups and all they showed us were good ones -- it didn't help at all." Take note!

Another critical issue to consider is: can your club provide the people necessary? The GWDC study group is an all-day, all-hands event, involving approximately 20 people and 30 dogs. We have four experienced breeders and/or judges forming our panel of presenters (people not only with depth of knowledge in the breed but who also can speak well, make their points clearly and be tactful), a moderator (to help keep us on track and on time), one or two people organizing the site and the flow of dogs on and off the presentation floor, one or two people managing food for everyone, and 10 or 12 people handling dogs. In the morning, someone is needed at the entrance to greet the participants, hand them their name tag and study materials, and offer morning sustenance. Likewise, around lunch time you need someone free from other responsibilities to set up and prepare the food. In short, it takes a lot of people! If you can't drum up the manpower, don't attempt a study group of this type, as you will appear disorganized and unprofessional.

Finally, a successful study group demands an appropriate site. You need a crating area for the dogs, preferably in another room so noisy dogs don't interfere with your presentation. The presentation area itself must be large enough to bring several dogs out together for comparison purposes, and large enough for gaiting. You also need electrical outlets and the equipment required for showing your visual aids (VCR or DVD player, CRT, overhead projector, slide projector, etc.). Depending on the flooring, you might need mats. Obviously, you will also need tables and chairs for your participants, arranged so everyone can see the dogs and the videotapes. Direct access to the outside is very helpful to your workers for getting dogs and crates in and out. The GWDC has used a hotel, a county police department public room, a volunteer fire department building and an armory with equal success.

So, you've got the dogs, you've got the people and you've got a site. The first thing you need to do is publicize. Call the AKC first and get your study group listed in the Gazette. Remember, the Gazette needs a long lead time. The AKC will send you a package of materials with suggestions for putting on your study group. These are not carved in stone! Some of their suggestions are just not appropriate to what we prefer to do, so we don't use them. Have a plan and use your own judgement. The AKC will also send you address stickers from their data base of judges by any criteria you request, so you can

mail out flyers. The GWDC asks for address stickers for all judges currently licensed in any Non-Sporting breed(s) except Dalmatians, living in a 5-state area around and including Washington, DC. Interestingly, however, we have found that most of our participants hear about our study group through our independent mailings to organized judges' associations such as the Dog Show Judges Association. These organizations will send your flyer out in their mailings to their membership, and they cover a much wider area than you might think to mail to yourself. In addition, we hand out flyers at dog shows, and we picked up a couple of attendees in this manner. Get your publicity out there early enough to meet your sign-up deadline and so out-of-state people have time to plan a trip (about 2-1/2 months ahead).

You will need to determine a format and schedule for your presentation, and include it in your handout materials so people know what's happening when. Our club begins the presentation at 9:00 am with an introduction by our moderator which includes welcoming the participants, explaining our goals for the study group, explaining our format and any particulars about the site, and introducing the presenters. We then show the AKC Dalmatian videotape. Afterwards, we review the Standard, point by point, with our handlers bringing out dogs showing examples of good and bad in each section.

Each speaker talks about a different section of the Standard, rotating throughout the day, so participants don't become saturated with one speaker over a long period of time. After each section we address questions. These can be asked of anyone on the panel, not just the person who spoke on that section. We progress through the Standard in this fashion, breaking at a scheduled time for lunch. We normally leave the Color & Markings section for the end, since we have found we get more questions in this section than any other. Before the Color & Markings section, we show the DCA videotape on color in the Dalmatian.

After going completely through the Standard (usually by about 2:30 pm), we set up a "show ring" and have a hands-on judging session. We bring out five or six champions which the participants have not seen critiqued previously and ask the participants to choose a "Best of Breed" and a "Best of Opposite Sex". We then have them tell us why they chose the dogs they did for each placement, and why their BOB choice was placed over their BOS choice. This helps the participants organize their thoughts and make conscious differentiations among the dogs, just as they would do in the ring. We do tell the participants that all the dogs are champions, so no matter which one they pick, there are at least three licensed people out there who would agree with them. This takes some of the pressure off!

After hearing everyone's choices and explanations, and answering any remaining questions, we thank everyone for coming and ask them to fill out our study group critique sheet (which often gives us nifty ideas for next time). In exchange for the completed critique, we give each participant a certificate of participation, signed by the president of the club. Judging applicants need these certificates to prove to AKC that they have fulfilled the requirement for breed education, so make sure you have them made up.

We have a rather good collection of written materials for each participant to take home with them. These materials have been gleaned from diverse sources and include articles written by prominent breeders, a "picture book" of Dalmatians illustrating good and bad points, a recommended bibliography, and several after-show critiques by national specialty judges. Your study group committee should get together and determine what kinds of materials you want to assemble for this purpose. Having something to take home and study on their own time serves as a reminder and refresher for the participants.

All in all, holding a breed study group is a lot of work and demands the best your membership can offer in the way of organization, cooperation, and physical labor. It is every bit as taxing as putting on a show. However, the GWDC believes that anything we can do to help stop misconceptions and

mistakes before people are licensed will only help improve judging in the future. We think that makes it well worth the effort.