

## BREEDER/EXHIBITOR, BREEDER/JUDGE

By Linda Hazen Lewin

Why does a breeder/exhibitor become a judge? The reasons are many, and the motivations to do so are largely specific to the person you ask. Most often, they can be distilled down to an ongoing love of the sport, a fascination with beautiful dogs, and a desire to contribute to the betterment of one's favorite breed(s) through a different avenue than the whelping box. That's not to say a judge cannot go on breeding and showing – many do. However, the perspective one develops as a judge is somewhat different from that of the breeder/exhibitor. Following are some of my thoughts, gleaned from my own experience as a breeder/owner/handler since 1971, and as a judge since 1990.

One of the things we breeders are prone to is the formation of sets of “absolutes”. That is to say, in our eagerness to create our ideal dog, we tend to set down boundaries over which we will not step. We insist on those things that are important to us, in our breed. For instance, one might say “I must have a good-moving dog with a pretty head; I will not keep a puppy that does not show these attributes, and I certainly won't breed a dog that doesn't have them”. These absolutes are a necessary factor in helping us to stay on the straight and narrow as breeders, and help us focus our bloodlines into something recognizable and unique.

By comparison, a judge finds he or she often has to put these absolutes aside. This new life consists of one compromise after another. There are no absolutes, and one can never say “never” or “always”. Why? Because while we keep that image of ideal in our heads at all times, perfection is rarely, if ever, presented to us in the ring. Choices are made among whatever group of dogs is entered that day, all of which may answer adequately to the Standard but none of which may represent what the judge thinks of as ideal. In a particular part of the country, all the exhibits may have your “never” and none may have your “always”. This is when one really sets one's priorities and becomes a judge.

Similarly, breeders can indulge in personal preferences or “fetishes” which emphasize a particular trait or traits that do not necessarily conform to the letter of the Standard. These preferences within a private breeding program may be ones of coat or eye color, head style, or type of topline, as examples. For instance, in Dalmatians, the Standard says that blue eyes are acceptable and on a par with brown eyes. Liver-spotted dogs are on a par with black-spotted dogs. A breeder may make the personal decision to only produce brown-eyed, black-spotted Dalmatians because those are his favorites. Over time, he may conclude, almost subconsciously, that the “best” Dalmatians are brown-eyed and black-spotted.

However, once one puts on that purple badge, these “fetishes” must be left behind. While breeders are free to go off on whatever tangents they will, the judge must adjudicate the whole dog in accordance with the Standard. You may, as a breeder, prefer brown-eyed black-spotted dogs, but if the best **Dalmatian** presented to you on the day is a blue-eyed liver, then that dog **MUST** be awarded Best of Breed that day. It is the job and mandate of the judge to adjudicate in accordance with the Standard, written and endorsed by the parent club, and voted upon by its members. The judge must lay personal preferences aside, and may only permit himself or herself to indulge in them if the quality of the entry demands that a choice be made between two or more dogs of equal merit. And dogs of “equal merit” almost never present themselves together at the average all-breed show, although they may at specialties.

Another slant on this is that breeders tend to fault-judge dogs, while judges are constantly abjured to judge virtues. In our attempts, as breeders, to create perfection, we often think about a dog in this manner: “She has a nice enough head, topline and hindquarter, but I hate that front”. Emphasis is placed, and decisions are made, on faults, and what it takes to eliminate them. If a breeder produces a dog which exhibits the fault that is the breeder's bugaboo, that dog will not participate in the ring or in the breeding program, despite its virtues. By contrast, knowing that the perfect dog hasn't been bred yet, the judge is required to think about the same dog thusly: “She has a poor shoulder, but just look at that typey head, strong topline and driving rear!” Emphasis is placed, and decisions are made, on virtues. Why this difference in perspective?

We breeders tends to be geared, naturally enough, toward improvement of our own line and strengthening of our own gene pool. We may ignore certain obvious weaknesses which don't bother us particularly; we may overpenalize weaknesses that disturb our eye badly; we may overemphasize virtues that we are pleased to see in our dogs. When we look at a dog, we naturally take the long view. What does this dog have to offer? How will its virtues strengthen my gene pool? How would I breed this dog to improve it? How will its faults impact my breeding program, and how difficult are its faults to breed out? In other words, the thoughtful breeder's opinions tend to be personalized while his/her thinking is futuristic in nature, spanning generations.

The judge, on the other hand, is presented with a number dogs at once; products of diverse breeding programs governed by breeders with diverse priorities. We must judge each dog as it stands in front of us on the day. We normally have about 2 minutes to concentrate on a given entry, mentally assess the dog standing and moving, and give it some kind of "score" as against our image of ideal. We cannot possibly know the breeding plans accorded to each exhibit by its owner(s), and therefore cannot place the dogs with an eye toward assumed future improvements gained in the whelping box. We see each dog VERY briefly and have to make an assessment in accordance with the Standard and the competition on THAT day, in THAT ring, at THAT show. Since we cannot speculate on future events, our opinions must necessarily be impersonal and our thinking concerned only with the present.

I hope that this paper has helped the reader to understand a bit more about what they see happening at dog shows. Becoming a judge has certainly been an eye-opener for me over the years, having been a breeder/exhibitor for so long before applying for my first judging approval. It has brought home to me more clearly than any other event in my life the old adage: 'before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes'. I believe you will find this true yourself, on that day when you decide to stand in the middle of the ring rather than around the perimeter!

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