

## YOU WANT ME TO WHAT.....? Your First Judging Assignment

By Linda Hazen Lewin

One day, it happens: the telephone rings and a voice at the other end asks if you would be available to judge at their club's upcoming show. You are pleased and proud and honored and stunned, and somewhere in the middle of all that...you accept!

After you hang up the phone the realization dawns that you have never judged before in your life. Ever. Sure, you know what you like and all, and you're pretty good at picking the good ones from ringside, and maybe you've even mentored a newbie or two in the breed ...but stand in the middle of the ring and pick through other people's dogs? Place the dogs and hand out ribbons, in front of God, the AKC, and everybody? Will you just "go blank"? Will you make some terrible procedural faux pas which will bring the wrath of the AKC rep down on your head? You're beginning to wonder why you told that club you would judge!

As a breeder/exhibitor myself since 1973, a ring steward since the mid 1980s, and an approved judge since 1990, I've pretty much "been there, done that" regarding most of this stuff. So, before you run screaming from the room with your hair on fire, allow me to share a few tips which may help you, as the first-time judge, fend off disaster for yourself, your entrants, and the club for which you have agreed to judge.

### Before the show:

1. **Know the AKC rules** as they apply to judging non-AKC events (Sweepstakes, Futurities, etc.) in an AKC setting. Several of the rules are different for non-approved judges judging non-AKC events than they are for approved judges judging regular conformation classes. Did you know, for instance, that you do not disqualify when judging a Sweepstakes? You would **excuse** a dog disqualifiable under the breed Standard, not disqualify it.

That's just one example, so get a copy of the AKC "Rules Applying to Dog Shows" (Chapter 7) and "Guidelines for Conformation Judges", and read both carefully.

2. **Review the breed Standard.** Oh, I know – you've had this breed for umpty-ump years and you know what the Standard says. Review it anyway. It can't hurt, and it might surprise you to rediscover some of the details which have escaped your notice for a few years.

### At the show:

1. **Upon arrival, check in immediately with the superintendent/show secretary** to let them know you are there and pick up your judge's badge. The AKC Field Rep may wish to speak with you beforehand as well, so arrive with time to spare for check-in before you are expected in the ring.
2. **Do not loiter near the ring in which you will be judging prior to your start time.** It's not good form for you to appear to be "fraternizing" with exhibitors or checking out the dogs which will be shown to you before you see them in the ring. Remain at the superintendent's desk, in the Judges Hospitality area, or somewhere at a good distance from your ring until it is time for you to begin judging.
3. **Enter your ring about five minutes before your start time**, so you will have time to review your judge's book and instruct your steward on procedure. Do not engage in chit-chat with exhibitors or take obvious notice of the dogs on your way there; just smile and nod 'hello', and get into the ring.
  - a) Do a quick walkabout of your ring and think about where you want the dogs to enter and stand while you take attendance (and yes, YOU take attendance, not your steward), how you will move them for the first go-round, where you want them to stop for their examination, and where and in what pattern you will move them for their individual gaiting. Remember that all exhibits in a given class (and, preferably, throughout your entire assignment) \*must\* be gaited in the same pattern, over the same ground, and viewed by the judge in the same way, so no exhibit is perceived as having an advantage of any kind.

- b) Outdoor rings should be checked for terrain and the natural environment of the region, giving thought to where the dogs will be set up and where they will be gaiting. Most breeds really don't look right when they're pointed downhill and stacked on top of a fire ant colony, for instance. Indoor rings are generally level, but may have bits of bait in them or errant balls of hair recently escaped from the grooming area. These should be tidied up before you start judging so your entrants don't go around the ring diving for food or pouncing on "tumbleweeds".
- c) Your steward is there to help you, but he or she needs to know what you want. Instruct him or her regarding where you want the dogs to come in and stand, whether you want catalog order or not, and how you want late arrivals, handler changes and absentees handled.

#### Judging tips:

You have reviewed the Standard and you \*know\* this breed, so even if you think you might freeze up and forget what your name is in the ring, be assured that you won't! Your peers had the confidence in you to vote for you to judge – they know you can do a good job, and so should you! Three items to keep in mind:

1. **Judge the dogs!** Yes, friends and prominent breeders and maybe a few professional handlers will be showing dogs to you. However, if you stick with assessing the dogs, forgetting who is at the top end of the lead, you will be able to justify your placements completely, both privately and publicly (should you feel the necessity), and will be able to look at yourself in the mirror the next day. This one axiom is probably the single most important guideline any judge needs to follow.
2. **Don't get bogged down in details** when ordering the dogs into placements. Remembering that the perfect dog hasn't been bred yet, your first impressions are usually correct – trust them. Those who get caught up in trying to choose between various exhibits' minor faults end up "fault judging", rather than selecting dogs based on their virtues. Remember what really matters in the breed, and make your placements according to the **virtues** displayed by each exhibit, not the faults.
3. **Judge strictly in accordance with the breed Standard**, i.e., leave your own personal preferences at home. Example: the Dalmatian Standard accords equal value to brown eyes and blue eyes. You may, in your own breeding program, prefer and select for brown eyes; as a breeder and exhibitor, you are entitled to that preference. However, as a judge you must judge by what the Standard says. Therefore, if the best Dalmatian shown to you on a given day has one or both blue eyes, you are obligated to put it forward. It is never the purview of the judge to ignore the Standard or apply personal preferences in defiance of it.

#### Notes of Importance:

1. **Control your ring!** You have your procedure set in your mind and have instructed your steward accordingly. However, an astounding number of exhibitors don't watch what has been done before they came into the ring; they will come in and set their dog up where they choose, or will gait their dog down and back even though 49 dogs before them did a triangle. In these cases, you should move the exhibitor to the correct starting point \*before\* you judge them, or have them re-gait their dog in the prescribed pattern. Do not just let the exhibitor do any old thing without correction. If the AKC rep is watching, he or she will certainly be rating how well you manage your ring.
2. You will most certainly have people showing to you whom you know. However, **you should not address anyone by name**. Use "sir" or "ma'am" when you are giving instructions. Also, do not chat with exhibitors while you are examining their dog. A simple "Good morning/good afternoon" is fine, and then proceed with the job at hand. I often say hello to the \*dog\* as I approach and look at the bite and head, which serves to relax everyone involved much of the time.
3. **Remember, you are working on a schedule**, and it is likely that there is another judge coming into the ring after you. If you run late, the next judge starts late, and the entire show is held up. This is especially critical if you are judging as part of an all-breed show. So, move right along through your classes, do not waste time standing and staring at the dogs, nor chatting with your exhibitors or your steward. Socialize afterwards.
4. **Upon completion of your assignment, check through your judge's book carefully** to ensure that all the classes are marked properly, including absentees, and that you have filled out the cover properly with start

and finish times, and signed it, before turning it in to the superintendent/show secretary. Class markings may be double-checked with your steward if any question arises.

I hope this article has given you the guidelines you need to step into the ring with confidence, and helps to reduce your “butterflies” a bit. Good luck with your first judging assignment!