

Performance Booster

Can judging for type serve working dogs?

Richard Beauchamp

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Well over 20 years ago I was introduced to the Anatolian Shepherd Dog by Skip and Marilyn Harned of Alpine, Calif. At that time the breed was literally unknown among exhibitors in America. I was immediately intrigued by the noble breed and fascinated with the stories I had heard and read of the breed's great courage and unswerving devotion to its owners and the flocks it was entrusted to care for in its native Turkey.

Back then most Anatolians were owned by individuals who kept valuable livestock and were using the dogs in the capacity for which the breed was developed. Devotees of the breed, however, also felt the breed deserved recognition by the American Kennel Club and worked tirelessly toward that goal.

In my capacity as editor and publisher of Kennel Review magazine I was able to bring the breed's sterling qualities to the attention of the all-breed public here in America. Simultaneously I was given ample opportunity to judge the breed both here and abroad. I also had a good opportunity to observe the dogs firsthand in the homes and ranchlands of their owners.

AKC recognition was awarded the Anatolian Shepherd in 1996, and the breed has fared well in the show rings throughout the country. However, owners and breeders of the Anatolian have been steadfast in respect to the breed's origin and purpose, and to this day, a preponderance of the dogs here continue on as working guardians. The dogs winning in the ring are often those that stand guard over livestock throughout America. The Anatolian has yet to be swept up in the rage for records.

In 2004 I was given the distinct honor of judging the Anatolian Shepherd Dog Club of America's National Specialty. I have always considered judging a specialty show of a breed as important a task as could be given a judge, and judging national specialties an even greater responsibility for it is at the national that fanciers of their chosen breed gather to exchange information, plan their future breedings and look to the outstanding dogs that might figure into those plans. Winners at these events earn national acclaim and often help breeders decide the direction they will take in their breeding programs. If the entry at a national show represents the best the breed has to offer, the winners should reflect the intent of the standard as closely as possible.

The question I asked myself as I approached my task that day was, how effective would be my normal preparation for judging a breed in maintaining the integrity of the Anatolian, whose primary purpose was that of a working guardian? Type stands paramount in the decisions I make as a judge. Would the criteria I use for determining type excellence in breed character, silhouette, head, movement and coat also result in rewarding dogs capable of excellence in performance?