

## Opening Space

### The Best (?) Judges

Who gets up before 4 a.m. to catch an early morning flight, spends most of that day at airports and the rest of the weekend at a fairground or exhibition hall, not able to exchange a whole sentence with anyone except perhaps at lunch, if you're lucky? It may be cold, it may be wet, you may be hot as hell, but you are dressed more for "looking appropriate" than for comfort, and you can in any case not relax for a second since your every move is watched, your every word bound to be misinterpreted...

After it's over you've probably made some person happy but inevitably many more disappointed, and even if they don't say so to your face you can be sure they will analyze any mistakes you made and find some far-out and perhaps less than noble reason for whatever you did.

It's a lonely job, but someone's got to do it — being a dog show judge, that is. Is the foregoing too negative a picture of that occupation? I don't think so, yet for some reason thousands aspire to it. Why? Is the power trip of passing judgment on your fellow fanciers' dogs so great that it outweighs the obvious discomfort, the lack of decent remuneration, the necessity to conform to AKC's requirements to dot your i's and cross your t's?

I hadn't thought much about the demands of being an AKC judge for a long time, no doubt mostly due to the fact that as a dog magazine publisher for 20 years I was not eligible to judge regular AKC shows. Now that I'm free to do so again I find that I am much less eager to judge than I was in the past. Maybe it's the shows that have changed or maybe it's me, but it astounds me that so many are so anxious to put themselves in the unenviable position of being judges.

The big question is whether AKC's current policy for approving judges results in the best candidates applying — or just those who are the most determined and eager to add as many breeds as fast as they can.

As far as I can see, the real appeal of judging lies in the intellectual challenge of trying to find the right dogs for the top spots, and that only happens if you a) know what you're doing, and b) have some really good dogs to work with. Neither is likely to occur unless you've got a much longer and deeper involvement in the sport than the average aspiring judge of today, and unless you have bigger entries than most of the contemporary AKC all-breed shows get.

I have been involved in show dogs full-time for more than 40 years, and I'm not nearly as eager to fulfill AKC's exacting and (in my opinion) sometimes trivial demands in order to add more breeds as I may have been in the past. Nor am I alone in this: the fact is that many of the people whose opinion I respect most in dogs just don't want to put themselves through AKC's approval process for judges.

Perhaps youth and ambition are more important than a vast, accumulated knowledge? Personally, I'm happy with my judging situation, but it's a pity that the expertise of so many others who might make good judges is wasted. Isn't there a way that the path could be smoothed for more experienced dog people to share their knowledge as judges with the rest of us?

### Biggest in the World

Crufts this year had over 22,000 dogs, many times more than any dog show in the U.S. and easily the biggest in the world. Whether it's also the best one can be discussed forever, of course. One thing that struck me in Simon Parsons' report in this issue is the fact that six of the seven finalists were almost unknown to the British fancy before the show. That's the opposite of Westminster, where almost all the seven Group winners were pretty easily predicted. Which is best — judging as a crap-shoot or judging "by the book"? What really matters is that the winners are good dogs — and I'll leave it to others to decide which show had the better winners.

By the way, the World Show in Stockholm this summer has over 15,000 dogs pre-entered, and final entries won't close for a few weeks yet. Will the Crufts record be broken? Watch this space...

Meanwhile, have fun with your dogs!

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