

## Opening Space

### Democracy in Action • Taking the High Road

It's a great privilege to have this space available to address concerns I feel are important in the sport of purebred dogs every month. It's a great responsibility, too, because there are so many issues that need to be discussed. It's never a problem finding something to write about, but Opening Space is limited to 1,000 words in order to fit on the page, and it's difficult to scratch more than the surface of the many complex matters facing our sport in just one single page.

What I try to do is help raise awareness of what's going on. If I can make someone stop for a second and think — that's something. It doesn't matter so much if you agree: the main object is to start a dialogue, not necessarily with me but between you and your dog friends. Free and open discussion is the life blood of any activity, and what dog people are talking about today will eventually form a sort of general consensus — and that opinion will slowly work its way up to the top and result in actual change. It's not a quick process, but I've seen it in action many times, and it really works.

#### A LAUNDRY LIST

So what are the current hot topics? The following is a laundry list of what I think are some of the most urgent concerns affecting our sport, ranging from the general to the specific.

**Anti-dog legislation.** The California AB 1634 bill had hardly been withdrawn before new spay-and-neuter laws were drafted in various areas of Los Angeles, and they keep cropping up all over the country. Why is it so difficult for non-dog people to realize that spaying and neutering won't achieve the desired result? Why have we not been more successful in reaching the opposition? Are we too unwilling to compromise? In the real world you have to accept that if you want to achieve something, "the perfect is the enemy of the good."

**AKC's financial problems,** caused primarily by a continued free-fall in registration figures. Dogs are more popular than ever, so why is AKC's share of the total diminishing? What can be done to ensure that a much higher percentage of purebred dogs are AKC registered?

**Good breeders/bad reputation.** I get more hate mail about breeders than about anything else: all they care about is winning, they only do it for the money, they won't sell puppies to "regular people," etc., etc. I know this isn't true, but the general public doesn't — so how do we raise the status of hobby breeders? Do we need a Dog Breeders' PR Association?

**Too many shows,** or more specifically, too many average shows and not enough memorable events. Westminster and AKC/Eukanuba qualifications, as well as all the ratings systems, favor dogs that are shown non-stop all year, tipping the scales against good dogs which are not heavily campaigned. It must be possible to devise a more sophisticated point score that levels the field a bit.

**Judges' education.** To serve the increasing number of smaller shows AKC needs ever more judges. Are there enough people out there who know enough about all these breeds? I doubt it. Are some well-qualified people turned off by the application process? I think so.

**Record-keeping.** Who are the all-time top winners? With 3,744 AKC all-breed and specialty shows held in a year at last count (2006), it's now incredibly difficult to keep track of the records at the different levels of competition.

If the above sounds like a litany of woes, the fact is, I think, that the sport of purebred dogs is not in great shape right now. However, thousands of concerned people are working to address the issues above, and I promise to devote a future editorial to all the positives this sport offers — and there are lots of them.

#### TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

We're a pretty tolerant lot here at Dogs in Review. We believe very strongly in the "live and let live" principle — whatever you want to do is fine with us as long as you don't hurt anyone in the process. Life's too short to spend fighting, unless it's something you really care about and believe it's possible to achieve a positive change.

That includes our colleagues in the dog-show publishing world. We have no beef with what they do; it may not be what we



like, but it's their choice and that's fine with us. However, one of the "other" monthly journals has recently published an editorial that is such an obvious attempt to hurt Dogs in Review that we need to respond in some way. In a sense, it's a back-handed compliment: obviously this publication is very worried about the success that Dogs in Review enjoys; by the wonderful response we get from the judges, handlers, breeders and exhibitors who have the welfare of our sport at heart; and perhaps also by the fact that when you put an ad in Dogs in Review your dog is seen and noted by so many who care, because unlike most other dog magazines this one is so often kept, saved and read again.

The editorial suggests that we dog people should be concerned about what we spend our money on, and that we should worry about the future of our sport. We couldn't agree more — but quite frankly, that would really help us and hurt them, wouldn't it? Objectively speaking, doesn't it make more sense to support a publication that publishes a lot of interesting editorial material, instead of one that prints half as many articles and twice or three times as many ads? And which one do you think really is better for the sport?

I love beautiful ads and find the ratings game as fascinating as the next guy, but without the articles and special features which Dogs in Review has become famous for it wouldn't be a magazine I'm proud of.

I enjoy hearing from you, whether you agree with the above or not. You can contact me at [bobengtson@impulse.net](mailto:bobengtson@impulse.net) — I promise I'll do my best to respond.

Meanwhile, have fun with your dogs.

Bo Bengtson, Editor-at-Large