

## Judging Uncommon Breeds at Group Level

### How do judges compare one dog breed to another in the ring?

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Since so many dog shows have been broadcast in recent years, I get quite a number of questions from friends about the judging process. How do you compare common and uncommon breeds such as Afghans versus Otterhounds (the proverbial apples-and-oranges conundrum of judging the Group)?

Each breed has a written standard of perfection, and it is the judge's mental picture of that description that we apply to the dogs before us. We also bring a unique background to our judging. What breed did this judge come from? Did she own an Afghan and an Otterhound? It's a lot easier to evaluate a breed you've had running around your house, but as a judge progresses it becomes impossible for her to own one of every breed.

Judges must have a solid background in dogs to begin with: a minimum of 12 years is required for judges who come out of the breeders' ranks – and that's just the beginning. The judging process is a lifelong commitment to continuing education. From fellow breeders and judges alike, we learn the nuances of the various breeds; that little extra something that separates one dog from another.

When I judged the Rhodesian Ridgeback National Specialty, friends asked me how I can tell all those brown dogs apart. The truth is that, although the dogs are all much the same color, each dog looks a lot different from the one beside it...if you're ready to judge that breed.

After I judged the Pharaoh Hound National Specialty approximately 20 years ago, I became much more aware of the breed's virtues. A refresher course, so to speak, was offered later on, when I had the opportunity to judge a large entry the day after the National Specialty in Southern California. The preparation one does to judge a breed with a large entry sharpens the judge's knowledge of the details of a breed. The judge also sees just how good a Pharaoh Hound the winner is, as opposed to many of the others that were nice, but didn't have the same "wow" factor.

I can say the same thing for the Otterhound. I've judged several large entries of Otterhounds at the Louisville, Ky., cluster. Entries of 30 or more Otterhounds give a judge an opportunity to compare a quite uncommon breed and hopefully see several outstanding specimens. If you later find yourself judging a Hound Group, and one of the superior Otterhounds from the previous large-entry group walks into your ring, obviously it has a better chance of winning or placing than do the breeds that the judge does not have as much experience with.

This year I had the pleasure of judging the Scottish Deerhound National Specialty, with an entry of more than 200 dogs. Spend two days judging a breed and you develop an understanding of the state of the breed's quality. A single Deerhound came into my ring at a recent small show in the South; she pleased me very much and earned a Group placement even though she was a class bitch entry of one. My mental gauge was in place, and I quickly knew what I thought of her overall quality.

Earlier this year, I judged the Rhodesian Ridgeback National Specialty, which was three days of judging more than 550 Ridgebacks. Through my placements, I showed what type pleased me, and I ended up with a brother and sister for Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex. I learned later that their brother had sired the Winners Dog, their sister was the dam of the Winners Bitch, and the Best of Breed dog sired the Reserve Winners Bitch (a puppy that had also gone Best in Sweepstakes). I was pleasantly surprised, because they were all shown by different people. Whether you agreed with my choice of winners or not, at least as a Ridgeback person, you now know that if you had this type of dog, it would be a good one to bring to Mrs. Stenmark in the future.

For the last 31 years, I've had Dandie Dinmont Terriers running around my house, so I feel comfortable with any long-and-low breed. All achondroplastic (dwarf) breeds share common structural characteristics, so a Dachshund or Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen that motors by effortlessly tells me there is a lot right with this dog, and it is worthy of a second look.

Seventeen years ago I judged a Hound show in New South Wales. I saw a striking (English) Foxhound wandering the grounds with its owner and was eager for him to walk into my ring. Was he really as good as he appeared to be from a distance? He was. I have never looked at an English Foxhound again without remembering that eye-catching dog, and

ever since have mentally judged all English Foxhounds against him.

Sometimes it is the rare members of a group that do a disproportionate amount of winning, considering how few of their breed is registered with the AKC. The Ibizan Hound and the Otterhound fall in this category. A few years ago a beautiful Ibizan Hound bitch became a top hound, even winning the Group twice at the highly competitive Westminster Kennel Club show under Hound specialists. The Otterhound bitch that was campaigned heavily around the East a few years ago set the standard for the breed very high, winning several Hound Groups at the Louisville cluster, the site of America's largest AKC show. The campaigns of some of these successful dogs make it easier for the good ones that follow them to place in or win the Group.

Are you wondering if a Black and Tan Coonhound or an American Foxhound would have difficulty placing in the Group judged by someone like me? I haven't judged a particularly large entry of either breed, but when a wonderful example of one of these breeds comes into my ring, I am going to take a long and hard look at it because this dog is clearly above the norm for the breed.

Of course judges are ordinary people, and they bring certain prejudices and favorites of the four-legged variety into the ring with them whether the breed in question is common or uncommon. It is human nature. If we all judged exactly the same, there would be no need for dog shows.

Betty-Anne Stenmark is AKC approved to judge the Hound and Working Groups, as well as assorted Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding breeds.

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