

Dog Fanciers in Europe

European registries insist on soundness as well as beauty in breeding stock.

Alison Strang

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Each national kennel club is responsible for judges' education, but follows a similar pattern. In Norway, the licensing and education of conformation judges is the responsibility of NKK, which acts on recommendations of the group clubs. After an interview, a course on canine structure and movement is followed by a written and oral exam on the breed chosen.

The candidate, with 10 years' experience breeding and competing in dog events required, must then serve as an apprentice under two different licensed judges, who write a report on the prospective judge's performance. The candidate must also pass a practical exam, judging 60 dogs, writing critiques, and suggesting placements. This must be done under the supervision of two licensed judges, and the work is assessed and critiqued by the judges committee. This whole process must be repeated for each subsequent breed, minus the initial tests.

While procedural differences do present some difficulties for a European judge coming to North America, and vice versa, a dog show is still a dog show. As outspoken and respected Swedish judge Moa Persson says: "I think that you can have a ring full of good dogs, but the main issue is that you have a person in the middle of the ring with the capacity to find these nice dogs!"

Persson is critical of what she calls "the plastic and glamorous world of American dog shows," but is more displeased with the variations she finds in standards, and within breeds. She feels that a dog who earns the title champion should be able to compete anywhere in the world, and still be considered worthy of his titlean excellent point for those espousing worldwide breed standards. Karelian Bear Dog breeder Dawne Deeley, of Sydney, British Columbia, Canada, often travels to European shows and stays in touch with fanciers in Finland, her breed's home country. With much experience in North American dog shows, she tips the scales in favor of the FCI's group distribution and critiquing system. "There's little room for a judge to hide inexperience or lack of knowledge when everything must be dictated to and written down by a steward," she says. She adds that in Finland, judges are required to read their critiques aloud for the native Finnish breedsdefinitely not for the faint of heart!

Deel ey also finds a different outlook among exhibitors. "Professional handlers are few and far between," she notes, "so amateur presentation in general is not quite as polished, but there is little effort wasted on 'the human impression.'" Interaction with judges is expected and encouraged; there is none of the 'hands off' attitude we see in North America ... I think it is beneficial for those who wish to understand the 'why's' and 'how's' of a placement.