

In the Ring

Rick Beauchamp on the in's — and out's — of judging procedure.

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One can't have been showing dogs very long before the subject of judging procedure comes up in discussion. If one didn't know better, one would have to think that it is the most important aspect of judging purebred dogs. I've heard exhibitors, even AKC officials, gush on about so-and-so's marvelous judging procedure. It's as though the subject judge was being guided by divine inspiration.

In most cases what is being talked about should actually be called ring procedure. It's all the observable things a judge does and what enables the AKC field representatives to keep busy and make those indecipherable little squiggles on the forms they hold while sitting at ringside. Ring procedure is about things like arriving on time, wearing proper attire, marking the judge's book properly, arranging dogs in the ring in a sensible manner, and finishing one's assignment on time.

These are all things that can be taught the new judge very quickly, and have little or nothing to do with having even the slightest knowledge of dogs. In all fairness, however, I should say that this part of judging procedure is of some value to the new judge. Deciding in advance where the dogs will be placed in the ring, how cuts will be made, how the judge's book should be marked and where to point one's toe while taking pictures does save time. Time saved can then be spent by the uneducated in trying to remember which of the 20 Black Cockers in the ring was Number 1 in the breed at last count, or by the fellow who has done his homework on the fine points of Cocker type.

As far as the average exhibitor goes, however, I don't think he or she is even remotely concerned with how the judge goes about finding the right dogs, just so long as the right dogs are found and rewarded accordingly. The judge could stand on his head to get the job done as far as the exhibitor is concerned. Granted, textbook ring procedure looks good, but one does have to stop and ponder just how great a contribution a judge's looking good actually makes to good judging.

Then too, those who have been around long enough to remember the late Billy Kendrick will also remember his arranging his finalists in the pattern of X's, T's and reverse Z's. Kendrick was hailed as a gifted judge, X's, T's and Z's notwithstanding.

Another thing that is lumped under the heading of judging procedure is what is generally referred to as "breed-specific" examination. That is, putting one's hands or fingers in the places that will help determine if certain characteristics are present. Breed-specific examination is not massage therapy, however. The knowledgeable Pekingese judge holds and lifts the Peke in both hands to check the size of the ribs and feel the weight of the dog. The less knowledgeable individual will pick the dog up because he's seen someone else do the same thing.