

When asked to write this article I had to spend a bit of time thinking how one explains this subjective evaluation and commendation of a dog that is normally loved by their owner, and in many cases is a child and not a dog. Have you ever attended a baby show or entered your kid in the show only to be beaten by another kid who you think is ugly??????

Well this is almost the same thing for judging Bull Terriers the exception being, that there is a clearly defined standard laid down by the Kennel Union and every judge should be familiar with this. I always find it refreshing to review the standard the night before I judge. As with anything subjective, the interpretation of the standard is up to every judge and new worldwide trends with that particular breed need to be considered. Improvements in a breed are considerable, and not having seen or judged Bull Terriers for five years can imply that a dish headed dog is placed first while an exceptional headed dog is not, basically because the judge is totally unfamiliar with this. It is therefore critical for a judge to be up to date on trends or problems in the breed and judge accordingly.

For a new exhibitor it is important to note that the judge does not know what or whose dogs have been entered in a show. The first time that the judge knows an animal has been entered is when the dog enters the ring. It is not allowed for the club to tell the judge who has entered.

I believe that first impressions are what often determines the winner – when the dogs enter the ring, the one that catches your eye and stands above the rest of the exhibitors invariably ends up being the winner or at least placed. A clean, neatly presented and well shown specimen is more acceptable than a dirty poorly presented dog.

When judging each specimen individually I divide the attributes into 2 distinct parts – the first being the head and temperament and the second confirmation, body and movement. Being a “head” breed, a well constructed powerful head with a good bite is critical, coupled with a good temperament, these two closely related. A bad temperament results from the brain with teeth causing the damage. I do not tolerate a bad temperament and will easily disqualify an aggressive dog. In many cases the dog may not be naturally aggressive but too often a dog is entered in a show never having been on a lead, outside of its property or socialized with other animals and people. It is the owners responsibility to do this (Not only novices but experienced handlers included) I have been bitten in the past and have noted that dogs cower away when a man approaches or react to sounds and movement, try to protect their owner, normally a woman, by biting the offender, the judge or other animal. (The smell of other dogs on a judge's hand can also cause a dog to nip the judge so I try and wash my hands as often as possible)

Talking of washing hands pre show grooming is important to ensure the best presentation of the animal. This does not mean using copious amounts of powder and chalk on a white animal to hide the dirt or coat flaws and leaving this on the dog when it enters the ring. What happens is when the dog shakes itself half the ring and judge disappear in a cloud of powder, or the judge when he examines the dog ends up being covered in chalk/powder. Brush all excess powder out of the coats before entering the ring. There are judges who refuse to judge dogs drenched in powder. Oil on coloured dogs presents the same problem and can be life threatening to the dog on a hot day.

Before I start judging I instruct the ring steward as to what I want the exhibitors to do and this pattern will be repeated per class. I look at the animals entering (First impression) and then examine each dog independently starting at the head. The head should resemble an ostrich egg, the exception being two small piercing eyes, erect ears, black nose and good teeth. Teeth are critical and acceptable bites are scissor and level. Personally I will rather overlook a poor mouth (slightly undershot) if the rest of the animal was excellent (judging virtues not faults), however this problem should not be present in SA today. One area of concern with mouths today is impacted canines which I believe is a major fault – not only because it causes immense pain for the animal (Canines pushing into the palette) but also result in a weak narrow lower jaws contrary to the standard. This has been prevalent in Europe for a number of years.

Colour also plays an important part of judging heads e.g. a patch over an eye can cause the perception of a dip in the profile or a round eye which needs to be eliminated. Too often judges overlook an excellent head of a coloured animal (solid with poor markings) and put up a dog with a mediocre white head.

Once the head has been examined I generally run my hands down the neck and onto the back identifying the connection with the shoulder blades to determine the layback of the shoulder (I believe to judge properly you have to use your hands to feel the construction, coat and head of a dog.) It is easier to feel in many cases than to see. Running your hands over the animal, coupled with the examination visually allows you to identify all the attributes that each and every dog has like bone, substance and coat.

Finally, movement is the judged. It is no coincidence that movement and confirmation go hand in hand. In many cases an exhibitor can hide structural faults when the dog is stacked, but these weaknesses become apparent when the dog moves. Shoddy top lines, weak elbows, straight stifles seem to stand out when movement is judged. I believe that dogs should be on a loose lead and move at the optimal speed for the size of the animal. (This requires training before the show and lateral, front and hind movement must be examined. A tip is to: video the movement, practice using a mirror, or ask a bully friend to assist.)

Once each animal has been judged I build up a mental picture in my head about the placing of each animal based on its attributes. In the final line-up I look for anything that may have been overlooked and confirm my placing mentally. When I am unsure, I will check certain aspects like head, top line and movement again. Once happy I give the steward the placing ... and on to the next class.

The final judging for Best of Breed (BOB) etc is based on my perception of the following:

- ❖ A dog or bitch I would like to take home (A bully that fits my subjective understanding of what a bully should look like)
- ❖ A dog or bitch that can take the breed ahead from a breeding perspective
- ❖ A dog or bitch (mainly in Puppy Classes) that exhibits the characteristics of greatness when they mature
- ❖ I judge the dog on that day and how they compare to the rest

I do not have problems after a show when people ask me why I did this or that? I do have a problem as to which was their dog. In other words a low cut top showing cleavage, tight jeans etc. etc does not play a role.

Can I sleep at night????????? Yes, knowing that I did what I believed was correct, based on my subjective understanding of the perfect Bull Terriers and my overall obsession with improving the breed

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WPBTC Editor's note "Thank you Dave for sharing this with us, and allowing me to publish your very valued knowledge"