

It is very important for a breeder to know that the results of a show are nothing more than the opinion of the judge of the day and it only reflects the way he/she sees things at that particular moment. Talking to them right after the show, one might pick up that “it was a close thing” and “on the day this dog was better than that one!”

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the experienced (and successful) breeder is the way in which he/she interprets losing at a show.

I think it is important to realize that judges sometime make terrible mistakes, especially when starting their careers. They are scrutinized from ringside (or even in the ring) by experienced judges and naturally feel intimidated and nervous and in the process might make basic errors.

Unfortunately even experienced judges at times do th strangest things, although it might be for totally different reasons!

I refer to things like past criticism; ongoing feuds; being in a position to pay back another judge for some injustice done in the past – a popular hobby/dislike leading to fault judging; an unhealthy focus on a particular virtue; ignoring a glaring fault; kennel blindness; focusing on the implication of his judging for competitions like the Major Trophy show / Stud dog of the Year etc.

The fact is that the best dog doesn't always win!

I will concede that the reasons can be less sinister than those mentioned above. It might be that the judge just lacks the ability to “see” a good specimen (i.e. doesn't “have an eye for a dog”). He might be extremely honest and confident – but that doesn't make him a good judge. He might even be knowledgeable and able to quote the Standard – or hugely experienced, having judged all over the world! The judge might even be from Overseas! But none of the above guarantees that the judging will be of the highest standard.

Which brings me to this point: If you want to be a good breeder, you should be able to judge the breed yourself!

Top breeders do not take their dogs to a show in order to get the judge's opinion of their dog – that is a fallacy. They go to will Best of Breed or the Challenge Certificate or best Puppy in show having made up their minds about the quality of their exhibit a long time ago! Some of them will not at any cost show a specimen they do not regard as the top of the range. So when you see them at the show, remember, they are not there to make up the numbers! They are not there to have their dogs assessed by another judge in order to know if it is good or not. NO! They are there to win!!!

Should these breeders not be the top sinners for the day, they will leave the show ring saying “What terrible judging – he doesn't have a clue does he?”

That, in stark contrast with the novice who will pack his second placed little star in his box and never attend a show again .... often to the relief of the class winner who knows very well that next week he himself might not be as fortunate!

So take note:

Knowing the Breed is not only important for judges. Nearly every breeder of note has a mentor in his past that guided him through the pitfalls of the first few years. It is important to develop an eye for correct construction, true movement, type and the virtue of balance. The best way to get there is having someone at the ringside showing you the good, the bad and the ugly. Another is attending hands-on seminars where you can learn what the breed standard call for – in practise!

It should be someone you can trust and whose knowledge has been proved by breeding quality dogs over a period of time. I fear that unfortunately there are not too many of those around. There are a lot of talkers that will sound like they know it all, yet their record often reflects a different story; breeding 1 champion in 10 years while breeding 2 or more litters a year, is not indicative of a breeder that knows what he is doing – so be careful who you lend your ears to.

Even when you find such a person, talk to different people. Do not believe everything you are told, but listen carefully and widen your frame of reference.

I was so lucky to spend time with the late Colin Koen of the KEON Kennels when I first started out. I know that he mentored many more breeders before me and I know today how fortunate I was. We would sit talking for hours and reminiscing on his planning of litters, line breeding, great stud dogs and the great breeders of yesteryear. He would tell me about great moments in the ring, sharing little secrets in the art of showing etc. More important though, he would let out a dog or two and then he would show me good heads, good movement, good ears, correctly placed eyes etc.

So learn as much as you can from other people. Attend seminars, surf the internet, read whatever you can lay your hands on, watch videos and listen and learn some more.

But then: Go and judge for yourself!!!

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