

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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## AN APPROVAL PROCESS BASED ON PREPARATION & EVALUATION

In each breed there exists a breed-specific body of knowledge that must be learned to consistently do a competent job of judging that breed. With well-constructed written and oral tests one's mastery of such knowledge can be assessed.

While a certain level of mastery of breed knowledge is a necessary prerequisite for judging the breed, it is not sufficient. There are numerous other considerations that contribute to one's ability to competently judge a breed. Included among these are such considerations as temperament, self-confidence, mental agility, visual acuity and aesthetic appreciation to name a few. Although we can easily measure one's grasp of a breed-specific body of knowledge, measuring a complete list of the traits that enable one to translate knowledge into a competent judging performance is probably beyond our capabilities at this time. Fortunately, such measurements are unnecessary since it is the judging performance itself which will demonstrate whether a judge has what is both necessary and sufficient to do the job.

The final question then is, "How many new breeds can a particular judge adequately handle?" This may be answered in the same manner as the question regarding one's ability to competently judge a breed. That is, by evaluating how successfully a judge has handled various numbers of new breeds in the past. All competent judges are not equal in this regard. Some judges may only do an acceptable job in a few new breeds at a time, while some of their peers may be capable of competently judging an entire new group of breeds. For most judges the rate of new

breeds that one is able to successfully judge will fall somewhere between these two extremes.

### Preparation

In today's world how does a judge of purebred dogs acquire the breed-specific knowledge necessary to adjudicate additional breeds? There are many proven ways to learn about a breed. Certainly the very best way is the experience, over time, of having bred, raised, conditioned, trained, groomed and successfully exhibited a breed. This implies an emersion in the breed not merely having one's name listed as breeder. It involves the normal interaction between breeders, the independent study of one's breed, involvement in kennel clubs, specialty clubs and parent clubs. The second best way is to have been a successful professional handler of a breed. A successful handler must learn as much as possible about a breed to condition, groom, train and handle the breed successfully. This is another type of emersion in a body of breed knowledge and involves more than simply being at one end of the lead with an occasional ringside pickup.

The above in-depth experiences are usually unavailable to a judge beyond one's first few breeds or group. After that, for most people, any breeding and handling experience probably does not involve the same level of emersion, and consequently, not the same educational value. Therefore, other avenues must be pursued to acquire the breed knowledge necessary for judging competency. Institutes, seminars, workshops, judges study groups, ringside observation at specialty shows, spectating at large entries, having a mentor in the breed, judging the breed at matches, futurities, non-regular special attractions and foreign assignments, kennel visits and independent study are the ways in which today's judges learn about the breeds they hope to judge.

Just as there are standards for accredited programs which prepare practitioners for a profession or trade, so too, there should be written standards (1) for the above experiences if they are to be accepted as educationally valuable. For one to be considered educated in a particular breed, one should have had a number of these experiences, and some of the most valuable ones should be required. However, simply collecting the required number and types of experiences does not guarantee that the desired level of knowledge has been attained by the learner. Just as graduation from law school is not sufficient for one to practice law, an aspiring dog show judge must demonstrate an adequate mastery of the subject as a prerequisite to judging approval. While the law school graduate must pass the bar exam to practice, the dog judge must take written and oral exams. Having had the required educational experiences and passed all exams, the judge has met the cognitive requirements of preparation. The ability to implement this breed knowledge in the judging context must now be assessed. This will determine the number of new breeds to be granted on a provisional basis. That determination is based on past performance especially since ones last application.

## **Evaluation**

All judges have their judging performance evaluated by official evaluators representing the AKC. These evaluators should have a good understanding of the breed in question and have some training in how to evaluate judging competency. Then, based on the premise that a judge who is doing a good job in his or her most recently approved breeds can more likely handle a larger number of new breeds than a judge who is struggling, a simple scale of performance levels can be devised to indicate the number of new breeds to be awarded. Such a performance scale should express the approximate

performance level of each judge in recently approved breeds and the corresponding number of additional breeds to be expected or granted.

The contribution to a judge's average performance score from an individual evaluation report will be limited to the judge's observed performance in the breed on that day coupled with a discussion with the judge following the observation. Since the judge will be given a score on each evaluation, on the day of the observation, the average of the scores since one's last application will be known to both the judge and the AKC Judging Operations Department. This knowledge of where one stands in the view of the AKC will help the judge decide what is a reasonable number of breeds to expect on the next application once breed-specific preparation is completed. The following performance scale is offered solely as an example:

With 1 being the highest score and 5 being the lowest. (2) A scale to determine the number of new breeds an applicant might expect based on an average of three or more observations from three different evaluators could be something like this:

### Average Score Number of New Breeds

4 or Below	0 to 2 (3)
4 to 3	3 to 6
3 to 2.5	7 to 10
2.5 to 2	11 to 15
2 to 1.5	16 to 20
1.5 & Over	Group (4)

Under this system a committee is not required to arrive at the number of new breeds to be granted. An AKC employee with the appropriate title can look up the applicant's score to see where it fits in the range of new breeds to be granted. The applicant will always know his or her current score and will not waste money on application fees, as happens under the

current system, when the judge's expectations are out of line with the AKC view. Under this proposed system a judge may choose to wait until his or her average score is within a desired range before applying for additional breeds. In other words, improving one's performance and patience are rewarded by the system. Any quibbling will likely be over a breed or two within the appropriate range indicated by the judge's average score. Perhaps a committee will then be needed to settle such matters.

Once new breeds have been granted on a provisional basis, the judge must achieve an average score of 3 or above in provisional assignments to receive regular status. The evaluations that went into receiving regular status plus at least three more scores must be average to determine the number of breeds to be granted on the next application. The numbers of observations beyond this minimum and the number of breeds applied for are up to the candidate.

However, when a judge has repeatedly demonstrated over many years, the clear ability to translate breed knowledge into competent judging with a sizable number of new breeds, we may no longer need to spend as much time on judging observations of such a candidate. In such cases, the primary question becomes, "Has this experienced judge acquired the breed-specific knowledge in the breeds for which he or she is applying?" The candidate's ability to successfully apply breed knowledge having long since been demonstrated.

It is in the early years of a judge's career, when there is little question whether the breeder or handler has sufficient breed knowledge, that we need to focus on the candidate's ability to translate this knowledge into an acceptable judging performance. This is when it is important to help the newer judge find a successful pace for advancement.

## **The Evaluation Problem**

Formalizing the preparation component of this approach is the easy part. The difficulty lies in how to achieve a sound performance evaluation process that is both accepted as reasonable by most people in the sport as well as economically cost effective. The old Performance Evaluation Test (PET or Hands-On Test) was an attempt to deal with this aspect of the approval process, but it had some built in problems, which led to its demise. Not long ago there was an unwritten understanding that if your evaluations averaged "meets expectations" you could expect approval for eight new breeds. Add in some "strong" or "exceeds" and twelve or more breeds might be possible. What is being proposed here is not different in kind from this approach. It does, however, imply a refinement of the evaluative process. Under the previous system judging evaluation was left entirely to the Field Reps. Although the Reps were experienced dog people they were not specifically trained to evaluate judging performance. Often they were not even on the same page with one another regarding the process, which clearly demonstrated a failure to provide such training. At least a common understanding of what each score means in practice can and should be an outcome of such training.

The Field Rep's breed-specific knowledge is another matter. With regard to such knowledge, a Field Rep ought to be able to rely on the expertise of others to assist in a judging performance evaluation. (5) Breeders not in competition on the day, breeder-judges, experienced breed and group judges and emeritus judges willing to serve in an advisory capacity, may comprise a regional pool of experts from which the Field Rep may draw to assist in a judging evaluation. These breed experts should be able to assist the Rep in discerning the relative quality of the exhibits in a given class. Certainly the Achilles heel of the

earlier process was expressed in the often-heard criticism that, “Field Reps are not all-breed judges and are therefore not qualified to evaluate judging performance in every breed”. By officially including breed experts in the evaluation process, as happened in the PET, it can be expected that the outcomes will be more widely accepted as well-founded assessments of judging performance. (6) This inclusion of breed experts in the judging evaluation process can be accomplished in a financially efficient manner and yet bring soundness and legitimacy to the evaluations. Such an inclusion may help solve the evaluation problem which has plagued the judging approval process for so long.

evaluation. (e.g. Q: “I thought #11 was one of the best, why did you not place him higher?” A: “His eyes are too light and round, he is undershot and does not have the proper undercoat.” Such a response from the judge’s perspective completes the picture for the ringside evaluator and clearly has an impact on the evaluation.)

#### **End Notes**

- (1) Standards already exist for seminars and workshops. Reasonable standards for the other experiences should not be too difficult to develop.
- (2) We already had this scale using different terms: Exceeds Expectations = 1, Strong = 2, Meets Expectations = 3, Marginal = 4 and Does Not Meet Expectations = 5
- (3) The direction of the scores should matter e.g. 5, 4, 4, 3 = 2 breeds; 3, 4, 4, 5 = 0 breeds
- (4) Provided the last approval was for one half of a group or more breeds. This is where exceptional judges can prove they are ready for accelerated advancement.
- (5) This is already being done in a less formal way.
- (6) This is fundamentally different than a polling of exhibitors, handlers, superintendents or others in the dog show world, which can quickly become formalized scuttlebutt. Rather, a small (2-3) group of breed experts advise a Rep on a particular judging performance after a post performance Q&A with the judge. This is critically important to arriving at a fair