

PREFERRED BREED TYPE

WHY THE STAND-OUT BEST DOG CAN BE A LOSER

E. Katie Gammill © TheDogPlace January 2009
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“The best dog you’ll ever breed may be the hardest dog you ever finish!”

The Best of the Best or one that looks like the rest? Let’s be honest. Something called “preferred type” is flooding the rings today and in many breeds, it has little to do with the Breed Standard. When “current type” does not equal correctness, the best dog can lose because in many rings, the fatal flaw is being a stand-out.

A dog show friend, absent from the sport for several years, attended some local shows with me. Welcoming the opportunity to view dogs in general after her sabbatical, she became visually distressed. Her despair increased when a “less than average” class dog received BOB. The waning quality in her beautiful breed breaks her heart. She stated it would be wasted effort to show a dog correct to the standard today, as some judges feel compelled to award dogs conforming to the majority of the entries.



Observing other breeds, she remarks on the lack of neck, restricted front movement and the lack of rear follow through; we discuss “gay tails” and breed type variances. We watch faulty movement and see coats dragging the ground. Weak pasterns and sickle hocks complete the picture. She wonders what causes this to happen to functional dogs in such a short time. It seems the correct dogs have fallen victim to what one may refer to as the “Perfection of Mediocrity”.

Today, many breeders and owners turn to performance, choosing not to participate in a “crap shoot” where such variety in type confuses both judges and ringside. I make this statement at the expense of being tarred and feathered but increasingly, the best dog you’ll ever breed may be the hardest dog you will ever finish. It will be the “odd man out” and look different from the majority of dogs represented in the ring. Why? Some judges, insecure in a breed and therefore lacking courage, choose to walk “different” dogs rather than stick their neck out. Understandable, but should those lacking confidence be passing judgment on another’s dog?

My old mentor said, “The pendulum of type swings to and fro, but those remaining true to the standard triumph in the end.” Those dedicated breeders have the knowledge to restore a breed to its initial form once it hits bottom.

Should a judge reward a dog to suggest it could possibly assist in correcting breed faults? NO! It is a breeder’s responsibility to incorporate such animals into their programs, regardless of success in the show ring. Judges are to judge to the written standard to the best of their ability, fairly and efficiently.

They avoid awarding “drags of a breed” when possible but judges have little insight into the Pandora’s Box of breeding.

A respected dog person of long standing approached me with this statement while at a seminar. “A judge CAN NOT GO WRONG by putting up winners conforming to the majority of the type of dogs in the ring on a given day.” My response was “Surely not!” Well, I believe it now! After observing an all breed judge from ringside, I watched two outstanding individuals “walk” because they looked different from the rest of the short neck, sickle hock, smaller than average dogs lacking side gait that toddled around the ring like fuzzy little caricatures of the breed.

This strange “look alike” perspective takes over in many breed rings and not just among judges. Asking a breeder what their standard said about head planes, the response was: “What are parallel planes?” We discussed the occipital bone, short and medium muzzles, balanced heads, etc. Reading a standard and applying it can be two different things.

Judges should have the ability to articulate why one dog wins over another. So is that why they make terminology common among standards - to make it easier for judges? If anyone can describe a bulldog and an afghan using the same language, please step forward. Removing the “point system” from the old standards has had a negative affect. In a final decision between two comparable individuals, one has an idea where to hang their hat regarding prioritizing.

“Should we just BREED TO WIN or should we BREED TO THE STANDARD and expect judges to judge to the Standard?”

It is a “Judas Kiss” to any breed when a judge puts up a dog simply because it looks like the majority in the ring. It encourages people to breed to “winners” rather than to a breed standard. In judge’s education, they address soundness but type takes priority. Educators assume that new applicants understand structure

and corresponding movement. Type without soundness is as detrimental to a breed as soundness without type. A bad front and bad rear working in sequence produces “balance”. Do two wrongs make a right? The goal is “a balance between type and soundness”. A breed must be able to walk to the water bowl without falling over its own feet!

This brings us to the next question. Are not judges “protectors of the breed standards?” Judges education is NOT at fault. Perhaps the problem is what some judging applicants do NOT bring to the table! It is a privilege to pass judgment on a breed but one has the responsibility of understanding “Basic Dog 101”. The AKC’s required anatomy test neither assures someone’s knowledge nor is it any guarantee a judge has the ability to analyze structure and movement.

Some breeder judges today send dogs with a handler giving little thought as to their quality or future effect on a breed. Shouldn’t breeder judges be especially careful to send correct dogs for public observation? Breeders have a responsibility to put out “the best of the best” rather than a dog that wins simply because it “looks like the rest.” By so doing, they are sending false signals to both ringside and new judges.

When judges say, “This must be what the breeders want as the ring is flooded with this type” it is detrimental to any breed. It IS NOT about “what breeders want.” Breeders and judges have a responsibility to breed and judge to standard.

Should handlers show dogs for clients when they KNOW the dog or bitch is not a good representative of the breed? Breeders and exhibitors have a responsibility to promote only dogs that DO represent their breed standard and to sell as pets those who do not! A good handler should make every effort to finish a dog but they too are responsible and should be more selective regarding client dogs.

Handlers who read the standard and who have the courage to turn down an inferior dog are to be admired.

Advertisement does not always mean a dog represents "breed excellence". Handlers do not always present "good dogs". Advertising carries some influence and if a judge selects winners on advertising alone, they do a disservice to the breed and it reflects on their ability as a judge.

"Priority judging" can be detrimental to breeds as Judges become caught up in selecting for individual virtues be it eye, ear set, feet, or coat color. That is why some specialty judges "put up pieces" rather than the whole package. Virtues are important, but a dog should "fill the eye". A single virtue cannot take precedence over a plethora of faults! Priority judging explains why many judges take so long to judge a class.

Dismayed exhibitors approach me with serious concerns regarding the direction of our sport. Time and effort is required to understand what makes a breed "breed specific", and what constitutes "breed excellence". There is no short cut. Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. However, it should be a knowledgeable opinion. Personal preference only enters in when two dogs are equal according to the breed standard.

Another issue is "spot entering". Granted, today people enter under specific judges where they feel there is a chance of winning. However, why on a four-day weekend, do we see one point on Thursday, a major on Friday, one point on Saturday, and a major on Sunday? Should not one support the person who supports them by entering all four days? If there is a major, don't break it by not attending. Don't bump up a bitch or dog to BOB without first asking the other exhibitors their preference. Many people drive

miles only to find someone failed to show up ringside or" bumped up" a new champion and broke the major. This co-operation is something we used to be able to count on. Today it is "iffy" at best. This is "sportsmanship"!

Watch dogs go around the ring. Some are structurally inefficient. Some shoulders do not open up, the dog reaches from the elbow. Ask yourself why one dog out-moves another. Go analyze short coated dogs. Take this knowledge to your own breed ring and "look beneath the coat". Understand top lines, body shape, breed specific movement and toy/moderate/ giant. Do some study and then some soul searching. Ringside observers and breed enthusiasts look on in dismay today, wondering where the functional dogs of the past have gone. Sadly, some faults are so prevalent today they are viewed as "virtues".

"Winning because of an exceptional breeding program takes the breed and breeders toward breed excellence. That should be the goal yesterday, and today."

Requested to address this issue, I decided to take time to sit back and see the "big picture." The "big picture" is upon us, folks, and it is not pretty! My reason to become a judge was the challenge to select the best of the best according to a written standard. I love dogs! I love SOUND dogs with BREED TYPE! Both virtues, believe it or not, can be present in the same animal! Through combined efforts and a willingness to call "a spade a spade", our breeds WILL survive. Breeding for the sake of winning is a downhill slide. This alone assures the future of our breeds. Turning things around will take dedicated breeders and judges, critical handler selection, and educated exhibitors. Our sport deserves nothing less than the best of our intentions.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Why do breeder judges “put dogs with handlers when they know the animal does not represent breed excellence?
2. Why do handlers accept such dogs knowing once they finish, they will be “petted out”?
3. Are you kennel blind and do you breed to standard?
4. Should breeders and newcomers read the standard prior to stud and bitch selection?
5. When will more mentors open up to newcomers?
6. And lastly, are “gas money” and “filler” dogs destroying our sport?

Putting a breed back on track requires ETHICAL HANDLERS, DEDICATED BREEDERS, AN UNDERSTANDING OF BREED STANDARDS and KNOWLEDGEABLE JUDGES WITH THE COURAGE TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE SELECTIONS. Being a judge is not for the faint of heart. Sending the best dog to the next level and being a part of its journey to the pinnacle of success is a thrill of a lifetime.

There is but ONE standard. “Preferred breed type” is like a flavor of the month, very fleeting! BREEDERS, JUDGES AND EXHIBITORS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THEIR BREED STANDARDS. CURRENT FADS AND PERSONAL OPINIONS ARE FLEETING AND DESTRUCTIVE.

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