

# Judge And Ye Shall Be Judged

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By Sierra Milton

What qualities should dog show judges possess to be considered top calibre? Before that question can be answered, other more fundamental definitions should be established – what are the actual responsibilities of a dog show judge? Or even more basic – what is a dog show?

Dog shows were originally established as a means of determining which (not whose, but **which**) dogs most embodied the standard of excellence determined for each breed and should be used for breeding in an attempt to reach the ideal type symbolized by that standard. Dog shows, much like horse and other livestock shows, were a proving ground and a means for exhibitors and breeders to determine how close they were to the standard and in what areas their stock needed to improve. These events also served as both educational forums and places where neophytes could go in search of mentors and knowledge about the sport and their breeds. The AKC states that 'Competition in conformation and performance events can best demonstrate the progress that has been made in breeding for type and quality, and/or for practical use, stamina and obedience.' However, a recent conversation with a KC representative indicated that the focus of the UK shows has changed from the original means of determining which dogs were achieving the ideal type and instead have now become 'entertainment and enjoyment' for the participants, enabling them to take pleasure in spending time competing with their dogs.

Unfortunately, that original purpose has somehow become lost to the vast majority of dog show exhibitors, and some registries, in today's show scene. Very few exhibitors spend the entire day at the show. Even fewer engage in actively seeking to learn more about their sport, the history of their breed, structure, movement, or in watching the maestro's art of presentation, grooming, or a hundred other aspects that go into making a well-rounded, knowledgeable enthusiast. Most exhibitors support the 'show and go' philosophy of modern events – show your dog, grab your ribbon, and make it home in time to spend the rest of your day in some other pursuit. Don't believe me? Walk around the next show you attend and listen to the conversations; pay particular attention to how many of the thousands attending the show are actually around the group and best in show rings at the end of the day and again listen to the conversations. The talk is not about why a dog moves a particular way or who the ancestors were in the pedigree that contributed to that great presence, but instead the conversation will centre around politics, past wins, which judges like the dog and who is going to win best in show based on who is handling what dog. Few exhibitors, even the most ardent, can actually give an accurate history of their breed or know which breeds of dogs were used to produce their breed. If I am wrong, please let me know – if I am right, donate a few dollars to Take the Lead or the Canine Health Foundation if you are an American or a few pounds to the Kennel Club Health Foundation Fund if you are in the UK!

Now that we have determined dog shows in their most original form should be a means of determining our progress in breeding against a standard for type and quality, we need to look at how judges relate to that purpose. Judges should, if we concur with the original purpose of dog shows, be an integral part in the future of the breeds. They are charged with determining which dogs are suitable from a type and

quality viewpoint of being bred, thereby greatly influencing the development and well-being of those breeds. If a judge overlooks bad or improper movement in a dog and awards a win, harm has been done to that breed. While fault judging should not be practiced, neither can major faults be overlooked in the excuse that the dog moved great last week - or even yesterday - or because its handler is a 'good guy' and presents the dog well. Judges are as integral to the future welfare of the breed as are the breeders. Breeders judge every single time they evaluate a litter of puppies they have produced or evaluate the dogs to be bred from; judges breed every single time they give the nod in the ring.

Judges must, as specified by the AKC:

- Demonstrate breed knowledge through continual study of the breed standards, knowing and demonstrating a thorough understanding of the breed and its purpose through the dogs that they place and advance in the show competition.
- Practice good ring procedure, control and adherence to the rules set forth.
- Show impartiality. As stated in the AKC Judges Guidelines, 'It is essential that fanciers have full faith in the impartiality of judges. There should be no doubt that your decisions are based solely on the merits of the dogs being judged.'
- 'Possess and project an unwavering air of **integrity** and **ethical** behaviour that protects the reputation of AKC dog shows as fair and well-judged.'
- Possess and use commonsense to avoid situations that might compromise or raise ethical questions.

The KC sets forth a Code of Best Practice for Judges, similar to the AKC. As well as 'a comprehensive knowledge of the breed to be judged and its Kennel Club Breed Standard,' the general requirements, in addition to those of integrity, age, health, and judging procedures, are:

- Absolute integrity in order to judge honestly and impartially, and to place dogs solely on their merit.
- A suitable temperament and sufficient stamina to cope with what can be a physically and mentally demanding task.
- To judge in a customary fashion acceptable to the exhibitor/competitor and the breed of dog.

The AKC must have thought the terms '**integrity**' and '**ethical**' to be of sufficient importance to boldface those words and the KC additionally attaches the adjective 'absolute' to further emphasize 'integrity'. But what is ethical and what is not ethical? And just what constitutes integrity? What types of professionalism should a judge display and does that professionalism end when he or she steps out of the ring? How should judges conduct themselves at or away from shows? Should there be a code of ethics that a judge must ascribe to and abide by before being allowed to judge? And what exactly is meant by "ethics" or a "code of ethics"?

The word *ethic* is used to describe the concept derived from the ancient Greek word *ethos*, meaning moral character. The social rules of a society were known as 'mores' from which the term 'morality' comes. *Ethos*, in ancient Greek, referred to one's inner character or choices, while *mores* referred to external pressures of society. Nowadays, the meanings of these terms are somewhat reversed; however, it should be considered significant that the origins of these two words reflect the tension between inner- and outer-driven analysis of what makes moral choices consistent. Ethics are regarded as those principles which govern an individual or profession – moral principles that are laws or rules of conduct governing or directing a person's actions. Quite simply, a code of ethics is a 'moral set of rules of conduct governing an individual or a profession.'

'Integrity' is defined by Merriam-Webster as implying 'trustworthiness and incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge.' The Encarta dictionary gives a further definition as 'the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards.' Not surprisingly, the synonyms for 'integrity' are honesty, honour, truthfulness, veracity, reliability and uprightness.

So, we should be able to define judges as 'persons of integrity, honour, veracity and good moral character who uphold the rules and principles of any kennel club which has entrusted them with the duty of determining the progress and future of a breed by selecting those dogs that most meet an exacting standard of perfection.' We, as exhibitors and breeders, should be able to rely upon these individuals to do their utmost in advancing breeds and sport.

### **But can we?**

I wish to make it perfectly clear that I believe the majority of people who aspire to be judges do so for the most altruistic and most honourable reasons. What is undeniable though is that some of these same people later lose their way in the highly competitive, emotionally charged arena of today's dog shows. Some, while able to recite the standards, are unable to effectively interpret them in the ring, particularly when faced with intimidating personalities. Others begin to believe themselves above reproach or accountability, hiding behind the 'god syndrome'. Others, courted by sycophants eager to curry favour, fall victim to their celebrity status and begin to crave more adulation and recognition. Still others, enjoying the centre ring limelight, either actively or indirectly begin to curry favours of their own with show chairmen and other judges in an effort to garner more assignments. And, a very few abuse their perceived power through a variety of personal gain misconducts, whether monetary, gifts, or sexual in nature. More common in the UK than in the US are those breeder-specialist judges who exchange wins among themselves or who give wins to dogs connected to their own kennels by either offspring or being progeny.

One of the most common complaints heard is that too many judges are 'face judges.' While some of this may be attributed to 'sore loser syndrome,' face judging does occur and is believed to transpire on a major scale. Most commonly 'face judging' refers to well-known professional handlers and breeders who are known to the judges through years and numbers of dogs shown or having been heavily advertised. If face judging were not considered to happen and exhibitors did not believe that judges seeing advertisements of dogs winning championship points, breeds, groups or best in shows would not give the exhibitor and their dog an edge in the ring, why would

such vast sums of money be spent on advertising? Why would professional handlers have entire sections advertising the dogs they show? And why would an advertising budget be an integral portion - and often part of the contractual obligations - of any heavily campaigned show dog? And, why would the vast majority of advertisements feature the handler prominently by both photo and name? And can we trust that these photographs have not been visually enhanced, giving the viewer false expectations?

Advertising in itself is not evil or lacking in merit. Done tastefully, and provided the dog is of high enough quality to warrant the advertising for any reason other than attempts to influence votes of judges, it plays an important part in the dog world. Dog publication editors do a good job of ensuring that tasteless ads do not appear in their magazines and papers. The advertisements make it possible, just as ads in any magazine or paper do, for the production of that publication. However, it is the owners and handlers that have to determine whether the ad is promoting the dog or attempting to influence or manipulate judges. Competent judges of integrity and honour will not be unduly influenced by this advertising spin and will not put up or beat those heavily advertised dogs by prejudging based on the promotions. I believe that advertising has a useful purpose, particularly in those countries where breeders may not actually see or know every dog being shown. Unlike the UK where the majority of same exhibitors are seen at every championship show, advertising makes it possible for a breeder on the East Coast of the US to be aware of and see a dog from the West Coast that may be of value to their breeding program. I am not naïve enough, though, to purport that advertising has not evolved to be part and parcel of win and campaign strategies for all the wrong reasons.

What causes judges to succumb to face judging? Those judges who are not thoroughly familiar with the breed, its purpose and standard will settle on the familiar face, sometimes mistakenly trusting that the professional or well-known face will be a safe placement. There are also those who enjoy seeing their faces in the various dog publications, believing that they are as vital a component as the dog, losing sight of the main premise of dog shows - it should be about the dog and not the handler, judge or show. Another group believes that the more they are seen in the advertisements, the more popular they will seem and the more judging assignments they will reap. Other judges may be lacking in self-confidence and believe that, particularly if time is pressing, that placing a well-known exhibitor at the front of the line is less likely to cause controversy. There are also those individuals who succumb to manipulation and the intimidating presence of some exhibitors, lacking the intestinal fortitude to put up lesser-known or unknown dogs.

One of AKC's most famous shows, Westminster Kennel Club, sequesters the Best in Show judge prior to entering the ring, thereby reducing any hint of impropriety since the judge has not mingled with the exhibitors or watched any of the previous judging at that show. Although Crufts does not sequester its Best in Show judge, many exhibitors believe that the judge cannot possibly consider the dogs in the Best in Show line-up with no prejudgement after having watched various breed and group judging over the four days. Certainly judges should strive to dispel any hint of perceived impropriety seen by the exhibitors, particularly in such a prestigious show as Crufts which is billed as the 'largest dog show in the world.' While this is not practical for most shows, there are those judges who maintain a highly professional manner by restricting conversations before and during judging. One of the downsides to this approach however, is that judges may develop paranoia about even basic

discourse and refuse to impart valuable knowledge to those exhibitors willing and desiring to be educated.

While judges are not required to justify their decisions, I am always sceptical of those judges who refuse to discuss decisions when approached in a non-confrontational manner. Judges should be willing to discuss with the exhibitor after the judging assignment is over; after all, the judge is supposed to be the ultimate evaluator of the breed. Passing on knowledge and information ultimately helps the exhibitor by not only giving insight into what characteristics of the breed the judge considers important, but also in what areas the individual's dog is strong and weak.

It is easy for judges or kennel clubs to deny that certain individuals or dogs have an advantage over other competitors and acclaim that the 'best dog won.' It should be stated that in many cases, this is absolutely true. Unfortunately though, lack of commonsense displayed by some judges give weight to the claims of partiality and unprofessionalism. It is possible through statistical analysis to uncover trends in face judging. Regrettably such analysis is time-consuming and would require that the AKC, KC and other kennel clubs both acknowledge and take a proactive stance to eradicate or lessen the tendency of face judging.

Judging the wrong end of the lead is not simply awarding wins to professional handlers or well-known exhibitors though. Over the years, judges have been charged with different types of face-judging follies:

- Exchanging wins with exhibitors who will be judging future shows at which the current judge will then be exhibiting. While it may be explainable, judges should endeavour to not show to those judges that exhibit to them. This also validates the AKC's, and those of other kennel clubs, rule barring judges from soliciting or promoting assignments.
- Granting wins to exhibitors who have sold or given them dogs, some foolish enough to do so without even a respectable interval of time elapsing. What price is that win really worth?
- Using the exhibitor's dog for stud, either before or shortly after, giving them the win. In some cases, rumours spread rapidly that the win was in exchange for a no-cost stud fee.
- Giving a win to a show committee member in exchange for an assignment at the show committee member's show.

One of the most visible displays of lack of commonsense here in the UK are those judges who travel to shows with an exhibitor who then goes on to show under them at that same show. How are other exhibitors supposed to react when the travel-mate gets the nod? While the dog may have been the best in the ring, any judge who imprudently fails to maintain a sense of judicial propriety needs to consider the cost to the sport of that shared transportation.

Distasteful as it may be, another daft impropriety involves the exchange of sex for wins. Those foolish enough to barter themselves for a slip of paper or ribbon may wish to consider the fate of an exhibitor who did just that and was given a reserve (fourth) placing here in the UK instead of the promised win. The exhibitor who

complained bitterly afterwards is rumoured to have been told that ‘...it hadn’t been worth more.’ Whether the dog or the act itself was of not sufficient quality, or whether the judge regained his integrity with morning tea remains to be revealed!

Each kennel club has its own set of rules pertaining to judges, some more lenient than others. Those who are or aspire to be judges should hold themselves to the highest standards of conduct, setting themselves above the masses as examples of behaviour. Dog show judges are similar in nature to justice court judges in that their behaviour and decisions affect the masses and reflect upon the sport. A recent appellate decision stated: “There are good reasons why our justice court judges must regard scrupulously the nature of their office. In the first place, most of our citizens have their primary, if not their only, direct contact with the law through the office of the justice court judge...The perception of justice of most of our citizens is forged out of their experiences with our justice court judges. If these judges do not behave with judicial temperament and perform their duties according to the law and by reference to the process of adjudication there seems little hope that our citizenry at large may understand and respect the legal process.” Mississippi Comm’n on Judicial Performance v Spencer, 725 So.2d 171, 179 (1998). It is easy to apply the manner in which legal justices are expected to conduct themselves to the honourable comportment of dog show judges.

Consider some of these applicable canons cited in the above-referenced decision:

- Canon 1 provides ‘An independent and honourable judiciary is indispensable to justice in our society.’ It further provides that a judge “should himself observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved.’
- Canon 2 provides that the judge ‘...should conduct himself at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.’
- Canon 4 states that a judge ‘shall conduct all of the judge’s extra-judicial activities so that they do not: (1) cast reasonable doubt on the judge’s capacity to act impartially as a judge; (2) demean the judicial office; or (3) interfere with the proper performance of judicial duties.’
- Canon 5 requires that a judge may engage in ‘vocational activities’ such as writing or lecturing only ‘if such vocational activities do not detract from the dignity of his office...’
- Canon 5 also goes on to state that:
  - A judge ‘may participate in civic and charitable activities that do not reflect adversely upon his impartiality...’
  - He should ‘refrain from financial and business dealings that tend to reflect adversely on his impartiality, interfere with the proper performance of his judicial duties, exploit his judicial position, or involve him in frequent transactions with lawyers or persons likely to come before the court on which he serves.’

- 'Neither a judge nor a member of his family residing in his household should accept a gift, bequest, favour, or loan from anyone' except in very specific circumstances and such gifts, bequests, favours and loans should be disclosed in writing to the governing body.

It is with relative ease that such principles can and should be adhered to by those people entrusted with the task of not only judging the dogs who form the basis for the future, but in doing so with integrity, impartiality and in such a manner that they, the registry body or the sport itself does not come to be viewed adversely by the public.

Here in England, the media are in the frenetic throes of deciding whether someone's personal lifestyle and choices reflects upon their ability and nature to conduct themselves in a professional manner in an unrelated sport. Does a person who fails to maintain their personal promises, vows and agreements influence our ability to rely upon them to make honourable and ethical decisions in the show ring? Can the public trust the integrity of someone who behaves less than prudently in all areas of his or her life? To realize how public opinion is affected by such revelations, one only needs to look at political public confidence polls after a politician has dallied with a staff member or has been involved in shady financial dealings or accepted gifts from lobbyists. The stretch from the effect on a politician's credibility to that of a dog show judge is easily comparable. In recent news, the Crufts Best in Show judge removed herself from judging because past breeding practices in the 1970's were viewed unfavourably by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards. Regardless of whether the accusations were right or wrong, I believe that she showed a tremendous respect for both the sport of dogs and the future of dogs by stepping down from such an esteemed assignment and withdrawing from all future assignments. She placed the sport above herself and conducted herself 'in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity...of the judiciary.'

In the US golf-outings and even politically motivated weekend outings have been promoted by some individuals, groups and shows at which judges, professional handlers and even some exhibitors participate. Such activities must be considered very carefully since public perception may be skewed and the integrity of the judging process suspect. A better use of 'off days' during a circuit would be educational seminars or outings designed for strictly judges or handlers, but not both together. Judges need to also consider their behaviour at show-giving club dinners, particularly since such affairs are always closed-society events and the average exhibitor not allowed to attend. It is not a matter of whether the individuals have the integrity to comport in a fair-handed, unbiased manner after socializing on a continued basis, but rather how the public and the exhibitors perceive such socialization. If it lends itself to even a modicum of adverse reflection, such activities should be actively discouraged, rather than encouraged. Those judges wishing to maintain the highest levels of exhibitor confidence should understand that once one becomes a judge, maintaining the respect of the average is paramount and, rightly or wrongly, those in positions of power must be held accountable to a higher standard of behaviour. Judges need to accept that their socialization and friendships change upon accepting the responsibility and lofty power of being a judge; their peer group has changed with that acceptance.

Consider these hypothetical scenarios (Characters, places and incidents are used fictitiously and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental):

- The show chair of a large show wins at numerous shows under several of the judges that were contracted for the two shows of last year.
- The offspring, partner, sibling, or unmarried mate of a judge seems to continually enter the same shows where the judge is adjudicating and wins at a higher ratio than at shows where the parent, sibling, partner or unmarried mate of the judge is not judging.
- The person seen furtively leaving the judge's room in the early hours of the morning wins the breed that day.
- A certain type of person, be it same sex or younger or short skirts or anatomical endowments, seems consistently to win under a certain judge.
- A judge is involved in a lawsuit alleging poor treatment of a dog in their care and yet is still determining the fitness of other dogs in the show ring.
- A judge has been convicted of a white-collar crime.
- The judge gets 'lost' during judging and must be guided to the ring and reminded of what he or she is doing throughout the judging because of advanced age.
- The line-up of placings is a conundrum to those standing both inside and outside the ring with no continuity as to type, movement, or condition.
- The exhibitor seated at a judge's table at the club dinner, monopolizes that judge and then goes on to win under the same judge the next day.
- The judge who has the responsibility of answering phone inquiries and sending out show schedules for a show that she is judging.

Should these people be judging? The worrisome fact is that because judging is subjective in nature, it is very difficult to prove that any impropriety is occurring. Few, if any, charges of misconduct will ever be brought forward. Exhibitors are afraid to do more than shadow whisper because they fear being known as troublesome or whistle-blowers. It is easy to whisper innuendoes and gossip; it takes effort and courage to step forward and demand that the judging be done solely on the dog. The majority of exhibitors will support these judges by entering under them, even while complaining about the very character flaws that make their judging less than judicious. If you believe a judge to not judge impartially and fairly, there is a simple solution – do not enter under that judge! It does not matter if the judge is at a show only ten miles from your house or if the judge is judging on the third day of a five-day circuit, or even if you think the entries will be low and you 'just might have a chance.' By supporting the judge and entering, you are inferring your blessing and directly condoning the manner in which the judge conducts themselves. Shows are not conducted to lose money for the club, and those judges who fail to draw entries will eventually not be retained. Furthermore, the exhibitors following the judge

around for major wins will cease doing so if the numbers are not there. Simply put, we, the exhibitors, hold the power to stop bad judging, just as we, the voters, have the ability to remove bad politicians. Vote with your feet!

What can be done to curtail bad judging? Other than boycotting and refusing to show to those judges who fail to comport themselves professionally, the various kennel clubs need to look at how judges must first qualify and then maintain that qualification to judge. The AKC has, perhaps, one of the most comprehensive requirements for granting the right to judge to individuals. It certainly is not as subjective as the system employed in the UK where individuals are moved up the judging ranks to the level of championship judge based on their toadyish ability rather than on what they know and how they have learned the evaluation trade. Those systems whereby judges are moved forward dependent solely upon their personalities and not abilities are likely to face greater infractions of the code of conduct for judges. Those highly placed individuals in clubs in the UK have a great deal of power in not only granting the ability to judge at a championship level, but also in promoting those judges to the championship clubs who request the list of approved judges maintained by the breed club. There is a great deal of truth in the saying that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

The Racking Horse Breeders' Association of America requires annual re-licensing of their judges. Each judge must attend an annual judge's clinic where the annual written examination is given a minimum of two out of every three years. Those judges not attending the annual Clinic have to produce written evidence of their inability to attend and that absence must be excused by the Judges' Committee prior to the judge being re-licensed. All negative reports are reviewed by the Judges' Committee prior to the annual re-licensing. Any judge failing the written test, which is revised annually, must wait a period of one year to be retested; if the written test is failed for a second time, the candidate is dropped from the judging program and must wait for a two-year period before reapplying. The Association believes that the term 'licensed judge' means more than a mere position and that it 'connotes competence, fair dealing and high integrity resulting from adherence to the Bylaws and Rules of the RHBAA and to idealistic and high moral conduct. No inducement of profit or personal gain can ever justify departure from this ideal...'

There are professions that require psychological examinations prior to employment. These exams show tendencies – whether inconsistencies or the ability to carry out the necessary responsibilities – and would be useful in not only showing those individuals who are unsuited temperamentally, regardless of knowledge, for the task of judging, but also those individuals who would benefit from additional ethics education. Many employers commonly use a variation of personality assessment tests as an aid in determining the suitability of an individual for a specific position. There are many types of pre-employment assessment tests ranging from honesty and integrity tests to full blown management evaluations measuring career competency. Clinically oriented psychological profile tests, such as the MMPI, while diagnostic in nature, also have a section on trait assessment. The Achiever test is said to provide good cognitive assessment (information regarding six mental aptitudes), management skills, leadership skills, communication skills (plus nine behavioural traits), as well as providing personal development suggestions. Rather than using these types of testing as a means of refusing judging candidates ranking low in certain areas, the tests could certainly be used to emphasize those areas that need attention and further development.

Other than psychological evaluation, annual licensing and testing, a merit system for acceptance into the judging peerage, review of any negative reports, and exhibitors refusing to show to specific judges believed to be partial, the kennel clubs need to take a strong stance in the fight to demand and maintain integrity and impartiality. Analysis needs to be done on judging trends. Mandatory and on-going attendance in ethics classes should be instituted. A judges committee needs to randomly, and unannounced, observe judging of peers. Care to maintain confidentiality of those individuals brave enough to report perceived misdoings must be paramount. No one will actively speak up and reveal bad judging if they fear being ostracized or penalized in future events.

Good judges do abound in our sport. The numbers who fail to meet the exalted expectations tarnish those who are determined to fulfil their duties with integrity, honour and dedication. If my words have incited your anger and derision, perhaps you need to do some further introspection. I believe that those judges who are impartial and highly professional share in the sadness that our sport, as well as the future of all dog breeds, is jeopardized by those who have lost their way.

Which end of the lead do **you** judge and who pulls **your** leash when it comes to handing out placings?

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