

# NZDJA

## A Matter of Type

by Lavina Diamanti

I was reading an article about the 'flatcatcher' in the show ring – you know the one – all flash and expertly handled, which often does a huge amount of winning, but due to its departure from breed type is not a great representative of its breed. This got me thinking about our responsibility as judges, the decisions we make and the influence it has on a breed. We have all seen changes in breeds, a prime example is the German Shepherd Dog. A must read is Louis Donald's article on the changes to that breed and how this came about. It is significant in its demonstration of how judges' decisions can change a breed so dramatically (a copy of this article is on the NZDJA website).

So, what is breed type exactly? In a nutshell it is the signature of the breed. It is what defines that breed from any another. To get a clear understanding of type in a breed, a good place to start is to drill down on the purpose of the breed, its history and development. Understand the form and function, and breed type will make sense. The moderate angulation of the Dalmatian for endurance, the importance of the tail and coat on the Siberian Husky for survival in the arctic cold, the sturdiness of the Cocker Spaniel for pushing through the undergrowth. Every breed has its hallmarks of breed type. So are we, as judges, doing these breeds a favour if they can no longer do what they were bred for due to their departure from breed type? In a word – No.

The other argument that comes up with this discussion is Type versus Soundness. I will never forget a discussion with a judge some years ago who declared they were a "movement" judge. Really? So breed type doesn't matter? I think what this judge was really trying to say was they wouldn't sacrifice soundness for type, at least I hope that was what they meant! And there is some merit in this as a correctly made dog of any breed should move well for that breed. But as we know, you can also get a sound mongrel! But soundness isn't just about movement, it is breed

specific. Soundness in a Bulldog is different from soundness in a Border Collie. A retriever with pinched nostrils is as unsound for its job as a lame dog would be. Let us also not forget soundness of temperament, so important in any breed but very specific in some – think the merry Cocker Spaniel. Soundness therefore, is totally breed-specific and relative to the individual breed type.

As judges we have a duty to the future of all breeds to recognise and reward correct breed type along with form and function. We must endeavour to not be fooled by the expertly presented and handled 'flatcatcher' no matter how much winning it has already done. We are custodians of the breeds. Our duty to the breeds are to ensure we reward correct breed type.

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