

NZDJA

So you want to be a Judge?

by Lavina Diamanti

Every year we receive applications for aspiring judges to start on their judging journey. There are many reasons why someone wants to become a judge. Some feel it is a natural progression in a sport they love. Some start only wanting to be specialists in their own breed. Some have a thirst for knowledge and want to transfer this to the judging arena and others are encouraged by friends or mentors. Whatever your reason, the best place to start is with your local Judges Assn branch. They are there to guide and help you. If you don't have an active branch close to you, don't despair, we are lucky now that there is so much information available on the internet and a member of the board is only a phone call away. With technology we have a whole library of information at our fingertips but your very first point of reference should be the NZDJA website and a copy of the Judges regulations.

The journey to All Breeds judge is not a fast one and under the current regulations will take you close to 20 years to achieve, and that is provided you don't hit any stumbling blocks along the way. We don't have a fast track process in New Zealand, and the quality of our judges and the respect they enjoy on the world show scene reflects this.

Sadly, some of our judges don't progress much past the first couple of steps. This could be for a variety of reasons, but we know that some find the process and reality very different to their initial expectations. So what can you expect?

Firstly you will realise that it is much harder than you ever thought. If you haven't sat exams since leaving school you will be reminded of the stress and nerves that students go through at exam time. You will realise that the only way to really progress is through hard work and that can often be while juggling work, family and other commitments as well as showing your own dogs. You will have successes and failures and hopefully you will pick yourself up and try again. You will, in time, understand that the failure was an important part of the learning and cherish it for the lessons it taught you.

You will also realise that being in the centre of the judging ring is a very lonely place. You can't phone a friend or call time out. Your only life line is your breed standards. You will be judged for your decisions and will need strength to stand by them. You will doubt yourself and second guess some placings long after you have gone home but you will learn to make sound decisions and make them quickly.

Expect that you will look at your own dogs with a different perspective. You will become a better breeder and a better handler

because you will understand what judges are looking for. You will probably also view the whole judging process differently. You will also realise that being a judge doesn't put you in the ribbons, but your new, better understanding of your breed most probably will. You will enjoy reading about the history of breeds and their development and you will never stop learning.

You will learn that progression through the judging ladder brings with it opportunities to travel throughout our beautiful country and if you are lucky, overseas as well. You will also learn that travelling alone to places where you know no-one isn't nearly as glamorous as you thought it would be nor is hanging around airports in foreign countries where no-one speaks much English. Standing in a show ring for hours in searing heat, freezing cold or pouring rain isn't much fun either. You will realise that "fit for purpose" applies to your own health and fitness as well as the dogs! But you will do it and do it willingly because of the love you have developed for judging dogs.

And then there are the really good bits. You will have the opportunity to judge some truly magnificent dogs, some which will give you the shivers or such a buzz you will just stand back in awe and excitement, loving the opportunity you have been given. You will meet an amazing range of people who will share your love of dogs and judging and you will be able to judge breeds we never see here in New Zealand. You will have the opportunity to share ideas and maybe you will even mentor some aspiring judges starting on their journey. You will watch with pride the progress of young dogs you awarded as they blossom into budding champions and beyond.

Judging dogs is more than reading some standards and handing out ribbons. It is a journey that begins with a love of dogs of all shapes and sizes. It is a passion that drives you to learn as much as you can and to keep learning. If you would like to start on your journey to become a judge, we would love to hear from you. Branch contact details are on our website www.nzdogjudge.com

Important Dates

21 & 22 July Practical Examinations – Auckland
28 July Practical Examinations – Christchurch