

NZDJA



Judging and our Juniors

By Lavina Diamanti

JDH, Junior Showmanship, Junior Dog Showing, NZYKC... confused? I'm not surprised. Let me try and explain.

Junior Showmanship is the art of young handlers showing dogs in a competition where they are assessed solely on their ability as a handler, and the quality of the exhibit they are showing is not taken into consideration. Junior showmanship judges are qualified to judge handling classes for our youngsters. They must undergo an open book exam and must be a member of the NZ Dog Judges Assn. As members of NZDJA they must also abide by our code of ethics. The qualification is included along side all the other judges qualifications on both the NZDJA and Dogs NZ websites. Currently we have 40 qualified Junior Showmanship judges in New Zealand. Australia and a number of other countries, including USA, operate a similar qualification system for their Junior Showmanship judges and also require them to hold a recognised qualification.

Junior Dog Handler (JDH) competition is the event which culminates in our winner representing New Zealand at the International final which is held at Crufts Dog Show in Birmingham, UK each year. Typically, there are approximately 10 heats throughout the year and the final is usually held at the National Dog Show. All judges who officiate this competition, whether they are from NZ or overseas, must be qualified in their own country to judge Junior Showmanship.

Junior Dog Showing (JDS) This is the competition that was formally known as NZYKC (or YKC). There are four age groups for JDS and there are a number of heats held throughout the country with many All Breeds clubs supporting this competition. The judges do not need to be qualified to judge Junior Showmanship although this is preferred and may change in the future as more judges become qualified.

What makes a good Junior Showmanship judge? Firstly, it helps if you like children and teenagers. If you don't have an interest in juniors then it probably isn't for you. Patience when judging the little ones is a must. The request for a small circle around the ring to a child is usually interpreted as walk as close to the ring rope as possible! They learn really young to maximise their time in the ring!! Like all judging you need to be able to separate the performance of the handler in front of you from any knowledge you may have of that handler, their family or dogs they may have successfully campaigned. That is a tough one and probably the one thing that inexperienced judges struggle with the most. The other challenge is that above all, this is still a competition and the reward must be given to the children and teenagers that handle



well. Sometimes we would love to give all the little handlers first equal, or are tempted to reward the cutest or the one that tried the hardest but if we do this, are we making the best decision?

Like all judging, it is subjective, and each judge will have their own preferences. A perfect triangle will earn a first place for one judge whereas another may place more emphasis on the interaction between the dog and handler. A good judge will make the children and teenagers feel at ease in the ring and will communicate with them at the appropriate age level. Many of our Junior Showmanship judges were previously Junior Handlers in years past and they are experienced from the other side of the competition.

When we are judging the older age groups and especially the Junior Handler competition heats or final, it can be very competitive. The reward is, after all, the opportunity to represent your country at Crufts, the most prestigious of Dog Shows. The judging process at this level is not only about straight lines and triangles it is also about the handler who can get the most out of their dog they are handling, which with the swap dog, they have only 2 minutes to familiarise themselves with. Some of our talented juniors can take any dog in the ring and make it look great, such is the depth of talent we have.

NZ qualified Junior Showmanship judges have officiated at a number of competitions overseas as well, including judging the Australian National Final. If you would like to know more about becoming a qualified Junior Showmanship judge, then email me at lavina.diamanti@gmail.com for more information or you can download an application form from our website. ■

Important Dates

31 January Closing date for applications for promotion
19 March Theory Exam