

NZDJA NZ Dog Judges Association Inc

The Winning Edge, from a Judges perspective

by Lavina Diamanti

We all want to win, right? Of course we do. We wouldn't be competing in any form of competition if we didn't like winning. So why not give yourself the best chance? Sometimes we wonder why a particular dog does a lot of winning and another, equally as good, doesn't. Sometimes it can be the little things that give the other dog and handler the edge. As judges, our job is to reward breed type, conformation and soundness first and foremost. But when it comes to the top awards, those dogs that also excel in condition, presentation, are "fit for purpose" and are well handled will have the winning edge. This is, after all, a dog show. As judges, we get to see the best and the worst. So here are some thoughts from a judges perspective.

Presentation

- Make sure your dog is clean. The coat will look better and the judge will appreciate it. If the judge is quick to get the wet wipes before judging the next dog, then chances are the dog is dirty and the judge knows it. Even short coated dogs need bathing. Professional groomers are usually happy to assist with advice on presentation and coat preparation.
- Most exhibitors use grooming product of some description and I won't comment on its use as this is covered by show regulations. But please, remove excess powder, chalk etc. No judge wants their hands covered in grooming product after judging a dog.
- If your dog has a long coat it should be free from knots and mats with the loose undercoat removed. I would rather judge a dog which is "out of coat" than one which is matted to the skin. Retention of undercoat can also lead to nasty skin conditions.
- Please clean your dog's teeth. The judge doesn't want to be knocked out by "dogs breath" and your dog will be healthier for it too.
- Trim the nails regularly. If the nails are too long the dog cannot move freely and its efforts to compensate will impede its movement.
- Condition and general health start at home. It is a delight to judge a dog that glows with health and has well-toned muscles. "Fit for purpose" is also an important consideration when awarding the ribbons and this includes overall health and condition.

Handling

- It is difficult to judge a dog that doesn't gait at a steady pace around the ring and won't stay still long enough to be assessed. 90% of the preparation of a winning dog is done away from the show ring. Learn as much as you can about handling your dog and your particular breed. Read books, go to training classes, watch the good training videos on YouTube. Get someone to video you in the ring and study this to see how you can improve your handling. Get a large mirror and practice stacking at home. All these things will help you maximise your time in the show ring.
- Find the best lead and collar combination for your dog. This can be trial and error. What works for one dog doesn't necessarily work for another. It is hard for the judge to assess a dog that is fighting against the lead.
- Socialise your dog. Dogs that don't like strangers touching them are also difficult to assess. The last thing a judge wants is to be bitten and an unhappy dog is a sure sign to a judge that caution is required.

The other bits....

We don't make decisions based on what colour suit you are wearing or how pretty the lead is, but there are some things you can do to enhance the final picture.

- Your clothes should be a backdrop to your dog and compliment it, not distract from it. Its hard to focus on the dog's movement when your eyes keep fixing on the sparkly shoes.
- Make sure your show clothes are comfortable and fit well. This stops the embarrassing moments and ensures the judges attention remains on your dog, not on your wardrobe malfunctions!
- Toilet your dog well before the show. Sure, even the best handlers get caught out sometimes, but put the time in early to minimise any chance of your dog needing to "go" in the ring.
- If you are relatively new to dog showing, I hope this insight will help you with your training and preparation. If you are a seasoned exhibitor, maybe this will shed some light on some decisions you have puzzled over. Either way, good luck and I hope you gain the winning edge.■

Important Dates

31 January	Closing date for applications for promotion
19 March	Theory Exam
13 & 14 July	Christchurch Practical Exams
20 & 21 July	Auckland Practical Exams