

# NZDJA

## So you want to be a judge?

by Lavina Diamanti

In the past year we have received a large number of applications from aspiring judges ready to start 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. Others are encouraged by friends or mentors.

Whatever your reason, the best place to start is with your local New Zealand Dog Judges Association branch. Members 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 will take many years to achieve. We currently have regulations in place to speed up the process to counter the shortage of judges in New Zealand due to COVID-19 but expect that this is a temporary measure only. The quality of our judges and the respect they enjoy on the global dog show scene continues to be a focus for the NZDJA Board and this comes with study and experience.

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 daunting and the reality of being a judge very different to their initial expectations. So what can you expect?

Firstly you will realise that it is much harder than you ever thought. The first steps are relatively straightforward with open book learning modules together with regular training and being observed while judging at Ribbon Parade or Open Show level. Once you are ready to progress to Championship Show status, you will realise this is when the hard study really begins. 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 but expect that you may also have failures. Hopefully you will pick yourself up and try again. Few judges progress through to All Breeds without at least one failure at either the theory or practical examinations. You will, in time, understand that the failure was an important part of the learning process 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

lifeline is your breed standards. There is now the added pressure of live streaming. You will be judged for your decisions and will need strength of character to stand by those decisions. 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 up 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 many people's idea of 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 of 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 NZ. 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 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](http://www.nzdogjudge.com). 🐾

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