

NZDJA

The value of a Challenge Certificate

By Lavina Diamanti

There is often a lot of discussion around the issuing of challenges, Linda Strongman did a really good presentation titled “Chocolates or Challenges” at last year’s conference, which encouraged a lot of discussion. I wanted to delve a bit further - I am talking about whether judges should withhold them, or not, and in what circumstances. There are many different schools of thought and it often depends on what your breed is and where you live as to what may influence your opinion. Many of our judges have differing opinions as to whether or not they should withhold challenges. Some judges never withhold, and others withhold them with regularity and then there are all those in between. Some exhibitors are terribly offended if they are not awarded a challenge, others understand the reason and resolve to make improvements to their breeding programmes. So who is right and who is wrong? How much value should we be placing on the awarding of challenges? To get a better understanding of it lets break it down a bit further.



The image shows a sample of a Challenge Certificate form. It has a decorative border and the title "Challenge Certificate" in a stylized font. Below the title, it says "awarded to". The form contains several fields for information: Name of Dog, Breed, Dogs NZ Reg No., Catalogue No., Owned by, Name of Show, and Date of Show. There is a section for the judge's signature and the secretary's name, and a logo for Dogs New Zealand Breed.

highly valued as the recipient has most likely beaten many dogs on its way to its title. But, a breed which has very limited numbers, can often title in 8 shows with of course the last one being after the age of 12 months. But just because they are part of a minority breed does not mean at all that they are not superior examples, as many go on to group and in show wins.

When we sign a Challenge Certificate, we are signing to a declaration which states;- *I hereby certify that having judged the above named dog at the place and date detailed, I am of the opinion that it is worthy of the title of champion.* So what makes a dog worthy of the title champion? If we delve into a bit of history of the word and also look at the meaning as described in various dictionaries it gives us more clarity. The word “Champion” originated in the 1300’s in the days of Gladiators fighting and the consistent winners were referred to as champions (or champions as it was spelt then). Definitions in modern dictionaries include “a champion is a person who is the best in his field or who has defeated all rivals” and “One that is clearly superior or has the attributes of a winner”. So it would be fair to say that when we transfer this across to our own sport, then those dogs who bear the title champion are, at the very least, good examples of their breed in type and soundness and most probably capable of winning at a level higher than the breed. Would you agree?

As we all know, in New Zealand, a dog only needs 8 challenges to be able to be awarded the title champion. There is no requirement for any other dogs to be beaten, nor is there a requirement for any other awards to be earned along the way. We also know that a champion in a numerically strong breed is

So lets go back to our judges making that decision – to award or not award the challenge? For the judge who never withholds, their reasons may be varied. Some may feel that the exhibitor has paid the entry fee so should receive any award they are automatically entitled to. Some are of the opinion that we have a declining number of exhibitors, so they don’t want to risk having a new exhibitor not come back. There are probably many more reasons as to why judges won’t or don’t withhold challenge. Collectively, as judges, we can change the direction of a breed for better or worse, so should we be asking ourselves the question “Am I doing the right thing for the future of this breed by awarding this challenge certificate”? If the answer is clearly no, then you have a decision to make.

For the judges that withhold with regularity, they also have their reasons. Usually the exhibit(s) are unsound or lacking in breed type. It may be that they have a “serious fault” as per the breed standard which would give them cause to withhold challenge. Whatever their reason at the time, they clearly believe that the dog(s) in front of them should not carry the title of “champion” as to do so would be a disservice to the breed.

It is easy for us, as judges, to happily sign the challenge certificates at the start of a show and award best dog and bitch for each breed as we progress through our appointment. But what if, when awarding, we were follow the lead of some judges to say, “my best dog and challenge is...”? Would this subtle difference place more value on the award? Let us also not forget that our reserve dog and bitch must also, in our opinion, be worthy of the title Champion as they may be elevated if the challenge winner is disqualified. Food for thought? I hope so. Happy judging.

Important Dates

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| 23 June | AGM & Conference |
| 13 & 14 July | Christchurch Practical Exams |
| 20 & 21 July | Auckland Practical Exams |