

NZDJA NZ Dog Judges Association Inc

My Journey so Far to the Centre of the Ring by Teresa Lawrence

Journey is defined by some as travelling from one place to another – usually taking a long time to do so. I am not too sure what made me really want to start my journey from exhibitor to Dog Show Judge other than I have wanted to do this for a long time. Once I decided to actually start the process it does then seem to take a long time to get from the end of the lead to the centre of the ring. (In fact it takes less time to become a District Court Judge than to become a Dog Show Judge but I think now, my chances of becoming a Dog Show Judge are now slightly higher). I am not being critical of the process involved as there is such a lot to learn and hopefully the learning and stages we go through at the beginning will set us fledging's up to continue the good reputation NZ Judges hold overseas.



To be completely honest I think I still might think being a Dog Show Judge will mean flying to Dog Shows all over the world to nice locations and judging beautiful dogs (kinda like I thought being a Lawyer would mean driving a nice car and wearing a fitting suit in high heels – not so). In reality Dog Judging will probably mean long flights with multiple transfers to Judge in the freezing rain in uncomfortable shoes.

The two year aspiring panel and its requirements have us all chomping at the bit to get onto the Ribbon Parade Panel. When you get there, you cannot help it but the self-doubt does really set in and you suddenly panic that maybe you really know nothing. Face it, at an All Breeds Ribbon parade you have no idea what breeds are going to turn up. And we know nothing ever plays out like it does in your head, right? – like getting 10 of your own breed which you know you could attack with confidence.

We are told to use Ribbon Parades to perfect our ring procedure skills. We are being taught you do not fault Judge but you must find the dog that has the most attributes that best meets the standard. Years of listening to, and unfortunately being part of, the ring side critic's society does entrench in your thinking an approach that now we have to unlearn. We now focus on standards and the positive attributes of each dog in accordance with the standard. This positive approach I really like and is, I think, more constructive and mind expanding than sitting there looking for who is "East-West" or who throws their rear. The ring side critic is now no longer our mind-set!

For me this has been one of the best parts of learning to become a Judge – learning to focus on the attributes of the dog in front of you and apply the standard to that dog is a lot harder than picking out specific individual faults of a dog. Believe me...this is a work in progress.

To go over and have the task and responsibility of judging all these breeds and then judging Best in Show at this early level is a daunting task. You hopefully have an idea of the breeds in your Group but I can say a smartphone is your best friend to pull up breed standards at a touch of your screen during your tea break or lunch break. Driving home with your judging buddy from that weekend is also a great way to compare ideas and share knowledge. I believe we will always be learning and on a learning curve...at this stage it may be the Mt Everest curve, but we will always be on it.

In fact simply deciding what to wear on the day has been a difficult one. If you can, and it's a Double Ribbon Parade, try and make sure your judging buddy is a female. She will answer you honestly when you ask "is this OK". Personally, I am not mentally prepared for approaching 50 so any assistance on appropriate dress attire is sometimes needed. Having an exhibitor approach me and say you are pretty hot for a Judge is not what I need – especially when I was actually the steward for the day... and the exhibitor was wearing one of those non-removable ankle bracelets! True story.

One thing that has really impressed me is the breeders who are willing to chat with you and share their knowledge. For me, judging the dogs has then given me the confidence to approach breeders and talk about their breed and clarify things I am unsure about and ask questions. From my experience breeders have been objective with answering my questions and have wanted to provide information and share their knowledge.

While Timaru where I live is not a bad place to live, I am not sure it can really boast being the best of anything much in New Zealand (JMO!). However I think we can boast having one of the best Judges Groups in NZ (JMO).

From talking with other people at the same stage I am at, we all genuinely want to do the very best we can with the knowledge we have. We appreciate the work that goes into running a Ribbon Parade by Clubs and thank them for doing so as this means us being able to get appointments – which we eagerly await! We also hope that you will support us with your entries and know that we are thankful to you as exhibitors for taking the time to show your dogs to us.

Important Dates

Annual Conference: Sun 26th June 2016

Auckland Practical Exams: Sat 16th July 2016

Christchurch Practical Exams: Sat 30th July 2016