

NZDJA

Breed Type: Let's all take responsibility

by Lavina Diamanti

Breed standards are often referred to as the 'blueprint' for a breed. Essentially, it is the picture in words for how a breed should look and also details its soundness and temperament of a breed.

A breed standard should be the pattern used by breeders in their attempts to produce typical specimens of the breed, and it is the tool of the judge in assessing dogs in the show ring. I recently read the correlation between the breed standard, the breeder and the judge described as follows: "The standards are the building plans, the breeders are the builders, and the judges are the building inspectors." This stuck with me as I felt it was a description that we could all relate to and it made sense of the relationship between breeders and judges. When we have a breakdown in this relationship and one or both parties is not understanding the breed standard (building plans) then the breed (building) will, over time, change from what was originally intended.

Breeders responsibilities

I believe that as breeders, we are all responsible to thoroughly understand our breed standard and to know what our breed was originally intended to look and perform like. We should have some knowledge of the history of our breed and understand its form and function. But, in addition to that, we also need to be able to assess anatomy and conformation, assess what is required for our own breed and also assess the correct gait for the breed. Sadly, I have heard of breeders who either don't know or don't want to know what their breed standard requires, nor do they have even a basic understanding of construction and anatomy. Their breeding programmes have been based on what they "like" and what wins in the show ring. Sadly, when that happens then they are often unaware of traits that are creeping into their breed because they are focused on producing something that looks like the big winners of the moment.

If you talk to enough breeders and exhibitors, and read enough articles published overseas, you will find a common theme with the subject of the changes in breed type in many of our breeds. Common comments are along the lines of "the breed has got too big, too heavy, too small" or "you never see a correct head anymore" "only the flashy dogs with lots of coat win any more" and so on. Some breeds are very lucky to be consistently producing sound, quality stock that is a good representative of the breed standard. But that isn't the case with many breeds and, if we are honest, they are changing because some exhibitors put winning above all else and some judges are consistently rewarding the generic show dog and ignoring or not understanding the correct breed type.

What are our responsibilities as judges?

If you apply the analogy of the building inspector, then our role is to pass or endorse those dogs that are 'built' to the blueprint and fail or reject those that do not. In theory, breeders (as with a builder) that fail, will analyse and fix the problem and come back for another inspection. But we know it isn't as easy as that, because as we know, dogs aren't like a building. Change isn't instantaneous: it takes generations. And in New Zealand we are not permitted to give an 'inspection report' unless it is a specialty show.

In addition to that, there is no perfect dog and, therefore, every dog we judge would technically fail on at least some point, even if very minor. So, going back to our role as a building inspector, if we were applying the same theory to a building and making some allowances here and there, then at the very least it should look as it was intended when the plans were drawn up, be fit for the purpose it was originally intended for, and have the strength and soundness originally intended.

If we cross this analogy over to our role as judges then I believe our duty is to ensure that the dogs we give awards to look as they were intended, are relatively close to the breed standard description, are fit for the purpose they were originally intended for and are sound in body and temperament. If we, as judges, consider ourselves as the inspector of the breeding programmes of purebred dogs then our breeds should continue to improve, and breed type will last the test of time. After all, isn't this what we should all be striving for? 🐾

If you are a breeder/exhibitor and would like to know more about anatomy and construction then like our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NZDJA) or check out our website (nzdogjudge.com) and keep an eye out for training seminars in your area. Details of Branches of the Judges Association and contact details are listed on the website.

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Important Dates

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| 20-21 February 2020 | Auckland Practical exams |
| 13-14 March 2021 | Christchurch Practical exams |
| 30 April 2021 | Closing date for applications for 2nd round of exams |