

NZDJA



Handling the pressure

by Lavina Diamanti

Not everyone who signs up to judges training continues the road to All Breeds status. Not everyone wants to be All Breeds, they may just want to judge their own breed or group. But everyone who signs up for training signs up to be put very firmly outside their comfort zone.

For some, standing in a ring judging dogs is an extension of previous experiences such as theatre or stage performances or presenting to large groups at work. Once they get past the training of actually being a judge, they are comfortable in the ring and are confident and self-assured. For others, the very idea of being in the middle of the ring is a massive hurdle to overcome before they can begin to build confidence as a judge.

Whatever your own level of comfort is when judging at a show, one thing we can be sure of, is we will feel the pressure. And it is then that our brain goes into overload. How much we will feel the pressure will depend on our personality, our life experience and our natural resilience. For many, not only do we think everyone is watching and everyone is talking about us but it is a human instinct that we want to be liked and we want to do the "right" thing and that interprets to putting up the "right" dogs. Add to that the intimidating behaviour of a few exhibitors – you know it, the stare down, the look of disbelief if you don't put them up, the grandstanding behaviour: and the pressure starts to mount. By now you are questioning whether the dog in front of you is a top winning dog and will you look silly if you don't "find" it. Then comes the behaviour of the audience designed to seduce you into thinking a particular dog is the one you should be awarding – the loud cheering and whoop whooping – by now the pressure is really on. Time comes for you to make your top awards and you are greeted by either deathly silence or over the top cheering. Now you are really wondering if you did the "right" thing. Any of this sound familiar? Next comes the pressure from social media and the live streaming at shows, the Dogzonline points systems and the advertising of all the winning a dog has done. Add to that the use of words such as "esteemed" or "respected" judge in the advertising text and the pressure continues to mount. The main thing to understand is that all of this behaviour is designed to psyche you into putting up certain dogs. Whether a judge responds to the pressure or not is never known, only the judge themselves knows in their heart what made them decide their placings on the day. For after all, the decision is theirs and theirs alone which is one of the wonderful things about this sport we indulge in.

At the beginning we spend time teaching our judges ringcraft and anatomy and then we concentrate on their breed knowledge and passing theory and practical exams. But when do we teach them how to handle the pressure they will face as a judge? When do

we teach them how to handle the appalling behaviour of some exhibitors designed to influence the judges decisions? How can we teach them that all this is nothing but background noise and our challenge, as judges, is to ignore the pressure, stand firm and just judge the dogs? Can this be taught or is it something we can only learn from experience? If we are lucky, we will have a mentor who will guide us with learning to cope with the pressure we face in the judging ring. But not everyone has someone to guide them, and it is possibly one of the main reasons why some aspiring judges don't continue with their training.

Many well known and experienced judges have recorded their advice on handling the pressure but one of my favourites can be found in the book of the famous English All Breeds judge, Tom Horner 'Take them Round Please'. He wrote "When judging dogs you must not be swayed by any consideration, except by the relative merit of the dogs in front of you. You have but one duty: to judge the dogs. Forget the handlers, and forget what the dogs have won previously. Place the dogs as you think they should stand, never mind if the winner belongs to your best friend or your worst enemy. Disregard the fact that you won under one of the exhibitors last week, and that another is judging at the next show. Be completely selfish – please yourself and simply judge the dogs and safeguard your reputation. That is the only way to gain respect from your peers".

Wise words that many of us have heard before but we can all be reminded of. Whether you are an aspiring or an experienced judge, coping with pressure in the judging ring is a conversation we shouldn't be afraid to have.

If you would like to start on your journey to become a judge, we would love to hear from you.

Visit www.nzdogjudge.com for branch contact details. 🐾

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Important Dates

20 June 2021	Annual General Meeting
29 June 2021	Theory exams
14-15 August 2021	South Island Practicals
28-29 August 2021	North Island Practicals