



TIPS FOR THE NEWCOMER

Based on an article by Carole Tipler, this is an excellent guide for newcomers and offers answers to some of the frequently asked question that are asked of the NZ Dog Judges Association.

Introduction

Congratulations! You have just received your first invitation to officiate at a dog show as its Judge. Because you have been around the dog scene for a few years now, have bred dogs of your choice, have officiated at shows in varying capacities and stewarded on occasions, the receipt of your invitation should not install feelings of panic. But, be prepared, it may. After all, it is vastly different being an exhibitor or show official to being a Judge!

But, don't panic. It's a privilege to be invited to judge at any dog show and it can also be great fun. Remember you have studied hard, tried to absorb everything there is to know about your chosen breed(s), done practical tests and now is the beginning of a lifetime of learning which is serious, but which is enormously enjoyable. What follows are some tips for the newcomers and can be refreshers for the more experienced, on what is required of a show dog judge....

The Contract

You will have received a contract from the club secretary either by email or by post. They may have contacted you by phone or email prior, but this is your invitation to judge. Until you have signed and returned the contract to the club secretary, and you and the club have agreed on the terms of the contract, it is only a discussion. The contract will detail the show information, including the venue and what breeds or groups you are being requested to judge. It will also list any conditions the Club may stipulate such as accommodation, travel arrangements etc. By signing the contract, you accept these conditions so please read the contract fully and make sure you understand what is being offered. This is also your opportunity to list what you require of the Club, i.e. accommodation and travel requirements, any other expenses etc. You must return The Club copy (if posted) or a copy by email within 14 days. If the Club accepts any additional conditions you have added or you accept the contract with no additional conditions then the contract is binding. The club may reject your requirements and therefore the contract is at an end. It is usual for Club Secretaries to discuss your potential appointment with you prior to sending you a contract at which time these matters are usually resolved.

Usually, an appointment is made long in advance of the fixture date so once you have signed the contract and sent back the Club copy, be sure to mark your diary to ensure you don't double book yourself as only illness or some other unforeseen circumstances would allow you to break the contract without being released by the club. Now you can look forward to the show with excitement.

Preparation

Every dog has a standard against which he/she must be judged. If you are judging a ribbon parade you won't know in advance what dogs will be entered but if you are judging an open show you will be sent a list of breeds by the show secretary the week prior to the show. It is important to spend your time learning everything you can about the breed(s) you are to judge. After all, it is YOUR opinion the exhibitors are wanting when they pay their entry fee, NOT the opinion of judges you may have watched in the past. ALWAYS do your own thing - you will be respected for that. It is recommended that you not only study the standards but you should try and learn more about the breed(s) you are to judge – what is their purpose in life (their function), how they were evolved, what should they look like, move like, behave like, etc. Even after you have gained experience in your judging you can never stop learning about the different breeds, each unique, each with their own characteristics and type.

Preparation should also include ensuring your travel arrangements are in order so that you will arrive at the venue with plenty of time to spare. If you are travelling by plane, make sure you know who is picking you up at the airport and from which area. In the days prior to your appointment spend some time planning what you will wear taking into account all weather possibilities. It is advisable to have a small bag for wet weather gear including appropriate footwear. Many judges have gone to shows unprepared for unexpected conditions which wasn't forecast in the weather report. You are expected to dress smartly but in comfortable clothing. After all you are on show yourself but are required to work hard so it is important to be comfortable and at ease. Another great tip – if you are travelling by plane the day before, wear something you would be happy to judge in. Luggage does go missing and you don't want to have to end up judging in your casual travel gear.

Remember in summer it can also get very hot and a hat is an important item to pack. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take a spare set with you.

It is normal that the Club will arrange the accommodation for you and if there is more than one judge officiating, they will normally arrange for all the Judges to stay together at the same venue. Remember to indicate on your contract that accommodation will be required if you are required to stay overnight. You can stay with friends or family provided they are not exhibiting at the same show.

Summary checklist:

1. Read the contract carefully
2. List any requirements you may require of the Club
3. Sign the contract and return the Club copy to the Secretary
4. Ensure travel arrangements are put in place
5. Ensure any accommodation required is booked or arranged
6. If you need to be met, ensure this is also arranged
7. Plan your clothing for all weather conditions including having with you appropriate wet weather gear
8. Thoroughly study the breeds to be judged
9. Be determined to do the very best you can as well as enjoy yourself
10. Remember; do not travel to the show with an exhibitor.

The Big Day arrives

It's here at last! This is YOUR chance to do the best you can for the dogs you are about to judge. You will be giving their owners/handlers your honest opinion of their construction,

movement and overall quality within the pointers called for by the various breed standards. Be confident. The exhibitors have entered their dog because they genuinely want your opinion. Be prepared to enjoy your day.

Step 1

Arrive at the show in plenty of time to meet the officials and in the case of a Championship Show, to sign challenges if required by the Show Secretary. By arriving in reasonable time, this will also give you the opportunity to relax.

Step 2

Meet your Steward and tell him/her how you would like the ring to work. Look at the position of the sun (or driving rain). You do not want to have to work with the sun in your eyes (or rain as the case may be). You also do not want to stand your dogs staring into the sun. Look at where you plan the dogs to run into the ring, whether you want them to stack immediately on entry or whether you prefer they should run around the ring first. Consider whether you will require your exhibitors to do a circle, a triangle, an up and down or a combination of any of the three. If any exhibits need to be tabled, consider where the table should be placed and ensure that it is sturdy and doesn't wobble. Be clear in your instructions but be prepared to have to repeat them for the inattentive or inexperienced exhibitor. In planning your ring, remember to make it as efficient as you can so that you can work smoothly within its confines and that your plan involves equal treatment of all breeds you are to judge whether they are large or small. You will also need to judge to time and the club officials or show manager will discuss this with you prior to commencing. It is recommended you get used to planning a ring/judging procedure that will involve the minimum of walking thus keeping the running of your ring as efficient as possible and not tiring yourself unnecessarily.

Step 3

Walk into the ring and be prepared to enjoy your long-awaited-for judging appointment. Be courteous to each exhibitor, smile a lot and have fun.

Summary check list:

1. Arrive at the show in plenty of time
2. Plan your ring with your steward
3. Be confident
4. Be gentle & patient, especially with puppies
5. Be consistent with every exhibit
6. Plan your approach to each dog
7. Judge each dog in the most economical manner
8. Move each dog and place each class
9. Be decisive
10. Be courteous to the handler/exhibitor

Critiques

If you are judging a specialty you may be asked to write critiques on each exhibit. You may do this by:

1. Writing notes at the time
2. Dictating into a Dictaphone or
3. In the case of some European countries, dictating to a scribe who will write down what you say for you.

A critique is YOUR opinion of that dog in writing. A critique can be a justification of your placing's so is a positive aspect of judging rather than an unwelcome chore. It is wise to seek the advice of those experienced in giving verbal or written critiques so as to develop a method that you are comfortable with. Also, refer to other articles on the NZDJA website on critiquing for more information.

Conclusion

So, now your big day has come to its conclusion. It is hoped that you enjoyed yourself and that the exhibitors were happy with your handling of their dogs. Remember, you cannot please everyone so the most important person to please is yourself. You may be approached after the show and asked why you did something (or didn't do something) with a particular exhibit. By all means explain aspects of your judging but be careful about discussing breeds you may not be entirely familiar with. Appropriate handling of exhibitors after a show comes with practice so take care not to run before you can walk and end up saying something inappropriate which may reduce your credibility.