

Judging in the COVID world

by Lavina Diamanti

As I write this, much of the rest of the world has come to terms with living with COVID-19 and is getting back to some form of normal. Crufts is going ahead and being televised, and few masks are to be seen. Although our international borders are finally open, and the rampant Omicron variant seems to be hitting its peak, we are still under the Red traffic light setting of the COVID-19 Protection Framework, with the 100 person limit at events.

COVID-19 has changed so much in our lives, and we have had to make many concessions as we got used to living life in a pandemic. Many of us have in our back yard the now termed 'COVID' puppies. Many of them aren't puppies any more and in some cases they are nearing adult maturity. But their lack of experience at dog shows is still evident and many are not well-socialised and some are even less well-behaved. Yes, there is opportunity to socialise at home but there really is nothing quite as good as the experience they get as young puppies at a dog show. As judges we need to be patient with them and maybe just a little more tolerant of behaviour that otherwise we would be less forgiving of.

Mask-wearing as a judge and exhibitor has become the norm. I must admit, though, that wearing a mask while judging in 30 degree heat isn't easy and constantly having to de-fog your glasses all the time is challenging too. I also tend to leave half my makeup on the inside of the mask so constant changes of masks are required along with the obligatory check that I haven't spread my lipstick all over my face! Mouthing your own dog was previously something that was done in the USA and by our junior handlers. Now we have all been required to do it at some stage. Some judges still prefer to mouth the dogs themselves, but for some it has become the judge's preference. We need to be aware that not every exhibitor is good at this, and it can add time to the examination. The choice is yours, but if you are going to get the exhibitor to mouth the dog themselves, then consider doing this at the end of the physical examination. This way, the dog hasn't been put off balance by the handler showing you the bite. Also, there will be the exhibitors who will be adept at only showing you what they want you to see, so make sure you are satisfied that you haven't been duped.

Keeping your distance is no longer considered rude: it is now considered acceptable since social distancing became the norm. The obligatory wrist band to prove you have been vaccinated and the absence of those from the show scene who, for whatever reason, have been unable to comply. Elbow bumps would have once been considered a really weird thing to do, now we all get it! Some clubs have even been successful at running larger shows with separate

colour-coded areas and a BIS ring in the middle.

Getting used to being judged by only New Zealand judges received a lot of feedback in the early times, and not all of it was positive. But funny how we get used to things. Clubs are still getting excellent entries for their shows which means either we just want to go to a dog show and don't care who is judging, or our exhibitors have learned that our New Zealand judges really are worth the entry fee and travel. Either way, and it doesn't really matter, our New Zealand judges have been blessed with opportunities such as they have never seen before. This experience has been invaluable and hopefully they will be much better judges because of it.

As I have previously alluded to, dog shows in the pandemic era also saw our new and less-experienced judges be granted a quantity and calibre of appointments that previously they would not generally have been offered.

Dogs New Zealand has recognised that our NZ judges need support and have approved suggestions by the NZDJA Board as follows:

- That All Breed clubs be encouraged to hold at least one Ribbon Parade per year to support our Ribbon Parade judges.
- Support our Open Show judges by continuing with the requirement that All Breed clubs be required to hold at least one Open Show each year.
- Support our NZ judges by implementing a requirement that a club's judging panel must include at least 40% of NZ judges. This will enable those newly-qualified group judges to get the experience they need so they can progress.
- Amend show regulation 4.7 to limit the number of dogs a judge can judge at an open show in one day to 150 (from 250). This will ensure that some of our less-experienced judges are not overwhelmed with a large Open Show entry.

We are grateful that Dogs NZ have listened to our plea for support for our New Zealand judges, and our continued desire to produce judges that are of a world class standard. I love this quote from Benjamin Franklin: "Out of adversity comes opportunity", and I think that perfectly sums up the last two years for our judges.

Happy judging. 🐾

Important Dates

21 May 2022	NZDJA Seminar, Christchurch
22 May 2022	AGM, Christchurch
9-10 July	South Island Practicals
16-17th July	North Island Practicals