

# NZDJA NZ Dog Judges Association Inc

## The Wonderful Journey of Judging?

by Lavina Diamanti

Every year we receive applications for aspiring judges to start on their judging journey. This year was no different and we welcome those who have made the step onto the Aspiring List and also to those who have progressed from that list to the Ribbon Parade Panel. We look forward to following your progress. I thought it timely to update and reprint an article I wrote a few years ago on the journey of judging.

There are many reasons why someone wants to become a judge. Some feel it is a natural progression in a sport they love. Some start only wanting to be specialists in their own breed. Some have a thirst for knowledge and want to transfer this to the judging arena and others are encouraged by friends or mentors. Whatever your reason, you will need the support of your local judges' association branch. If you don't have an active branch close to you, don't despair: some branches now offer online meetings to support you completing your mandatory training items. Also, I have accumulated a lot of training information, and this is available on the NZDJA website ([nzdogjudge.com](http://nzdogjudge.com)) under the Resources/Member Resources tab.

The journey to All Breeds judge is not a fast one and under the current regulations will take you at least 15 years to achieve, provided you don't hit any stumbling blocks along the way. Unlike some countries where you can achieve All Breeds status in only a few years, NZDJA wants to preserve the quality of our judges. We are respected on the world show stage, and this was achieved through our training and examination processes. As they say, nothing worth having is easy, so be prepared to put in the hard yards to be a respected and knowledgeable judge.

Judging isn't for everyone. Some don't progress much past the first couple of panels, some are happy to sit on a panel without progression. This could be for a variety of reasons: sometimes life and family just get in the way and sometimes they realise they are just happy at the level they are at. Some find that after the first few appointments perception was very different to reality and they choose not to continue. So, what is it really like?

Firstly, you will realise that it is much harder than you ever thought. If you haven't sat exams since leaving school you will be reminded of the stress and nerves that students go through at exam time. You will realise that the only way to really progress is through hard work and that can often be while juggling work, family and other commitments as well as showing your own dogs. You will have successes and failures and hopefully you will pick yourself up and try again. You will, in time, understand that the failure was an important part of the learning and cherish it for the lessons it taught you.

You will analyse your decisions long after the judging has finished. You will second guess yourself or compare your decisions to others. You will wonder if you have put up the 'right' dogs. You will worry what others thought of your judging and your decisions. But you will learn that they are your decisions and yours alone. You will learn

that the only person who really thinks you have done a good job is the one who gets the top award so only the opinion of a respected peer is valid. You will realise that you can't please everyone so you don't try, but you learn that being fair, honest, knowledgeable and giving all exhibitors equal consideration earns respect.

You will realise that being in the centre of the judging ring is a very lonely place. You can't phone a friend or call time out. Your only life line is your breed standards. You will be judged for your decisions and will need strength to stand by them. You will learn to make sound decisions and make them quickly and confidently. You will learn that every appointment is an opportunity to further your knowledge and you will re-read breed standards when you get home while the image of a dog or breed is still in your head. You will understand the value of an honest mentor and you will discuss your appointments at length with them.

You will realise that it isn't good enough to just memorise a breed standard: you will need to really understand the breeds and that means understanding their history, form and function. You will also realise that the more you learn, the more there is to learn.

You will learn that progression up the judging ladder brings opportunities to travel throughout our beautiful country and, if you are lucky, overseas. You will also learn that travelling alone to places where you know no-one isn't nearly as exciting as you thought it would be. Standing in a show ring for hours in searing heat, freezing cold or pouring rain isn't much fun either. You will realise that 'fit for purpose' applies to your own health and fitness as well as the dogs! But you will do it and do it willingly because of the love you have developed for judging dogs.

You will realise that not every show dog is a good dog and you will learn what you can reward and what you can forgive. And you will learn that sometimes, you need to make some tough decisions. But you will learn that the tough decisions are the ones that help give direction to a breed. Sometimes you will have the opportunity to judge some truly magnificent dogs, and those are the ones that will be cemented to your memory. You will meet an amazing range of people who will share your love of dogs and judging, and you will have the opportunity to judge breeds we never see here in NZ. You will spend many hours talking to breeders and fellow judges. You will watch with pride the progress of young dogs you awarded as they blossom into budding champions and beyond.

Judging dogs is more than reading some standards and handing out ribbons. It is a journey that begins with a love of dogs of all shapes and sizes. It is a passion that drives you to learn as much as you can and to keep learning.

Congratulations to all our new aspiring judges and good luck to our new ribbon parade judges with their first appointments.

Happy judging. 🐾