

The value of a critique

by Lavina Diamanti

Showing dogs in this part of the world is an unusual sport when you think about it. We spend a lot of money to run around a ring for less than two minutes to receive an opinion from a judge and, if we are lucky, we also receive a ribbon.

But, we have no idea why we were placed where we were, and unless it is a specialty show or one of the FCI shows, the judge isn't allowed to tell us! I might be wrong, but I can't think of any other sport where you win or lose but have no idea why.

This is contrary to other countries. In the United Kingdom critiques are done on all shows and these are published on the Kennel Club website and in a weekly magazine. Countries that operate under the FCI system require all dogs to be critiqued and graded. We in New Zealand recently experienced our first FCI shows, and the critiques were sought after and read with interest, as were the gradings.

So, what if it was mandatory for our judges to critique at every All Breeds Championship show here in New Zealand? What would that do to our sport? Would it make it better or just more expensive and a whole lot slower? What if it wasn't each dog, but just the best and reserve of breed winners?

The main reason why critiquing is not done at our normal All Breeds shows is because our regulations do not allow it. But if they did, then there would be other considerations such as the extra time it takes for the judge to complete the critique and maybe that would require more judges to judge the same number of dogs. This would then convert to added cost for entries to cover the additional expenses, plus more administration.

But would it be worth it? As an exhibitor, how much value would you place on a critique from a show? Would you pay a higher entry fee to receive a critique at every show? All the FCI shows held recently were well supported so that indicates that yes, the majority would.

Not only does critiquing provide obvious benefits to our exhibitors but there are also benefits for our judges. It gives them the opportunity to explain their placings. It teaches them to be more objective and clinical in their approach to judging and less subjective. It hones their skills and knowledge of the breed standards and in Ray Greers' words on the subject: "There is simply nowhere to hide." After all, you can't write a good critique if you don't understand the breed standard. It also improves confidence for our less experienced judges, and it will undoubtedly make them better judges.

In my experience, a well-written critique is a pleasure to read. A good critique should also paint a picture for the reader. It should align with the relevant breed standard and highlight the virtues of each dog.

Sometimes critiques will also comment on the reason for the placings and/or a comment on the overall view of the entry in the breed. A critique, however, that doesn't say anything much at all, doesn't relate to the dog in any way, or is full of flowery adjectives such as 'nice' or 'lovely' is lacking in value. Nor should it be scathing or harshly critical, but it can use kind words to indicate any major fault areas. Otherwise it is worthless.

Not everyone is gifted with the ability to write well, but it is part of our examination requirements both here and in Australia, so there is an expectation that all our judges should be able to write a critique that is half decent, and the rest will come with practice and experience.

How much value would you place on a critique?

Happy judging. 🐾

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Important Dates

31 December 2022 Cut off for completion of mandatory training