

# NZDJA

## A Dog show or a dog Show?

by Lavina Diamanti

There is a difference? In my opinion, yes there is: Are we judging for the best dog as per the breed standard or the dog and handler that puts on the best show? To be fair, we probably need a balance of both, but the difference can depend on the judge and what emphasis they place on presentation and handling.

If you have a copy of George Alston's book *The Winning Edge* then you will know that, as a professional handler in the USA, he states that he would rather have a good 'show dog' than a 'good dog' any day. Why? Because he knew he could win more with the dog that showed its heart out than the dog that had great breed type but would rather be at home on the couch. Not always do the two come in the same package, and when your living depends on it, the good show dog is going pay the bills.

As judges, our responsibility is to reward correct breed type. But does that always happen? It depends who you ask, but I have seen enough over my years in the ring to know that it doesn't. We all know of dogs that are the 'flat catchers' — they aren't the best specimens of the breed in the ring but because of their presentation, showmanship and handling skills, consistently feature in the ribbons. There is nothing we can do about that as exhibitors but as judges, we have the opportunity to have some control over this. It's not easy. Sometimes we are swayed by the extra things, but in doing so, we don't always get it right and don't always do what is best for the breed.

It is interesting watching the video coverage of Westminster and other shows in the USA which, in contrast to Crufts in the UK, seem like a competition of the best handler and which dog/handler combination 'shows' the best. And this is often backed by the announcers' commentary: "He stacked perfectly"; "Groomed to perfection"; "The handler got the best out of him". Even better when the judge says "he (the dog) was just asking for it — he didn't put a foot wrong"!

Watching some of these breeds and the influence of the US on the breeds isn't always a positive thing and, in some cases, the 'style' is referred to as 'American type' which is essentially saying that they almost look like a different breed. Now I know that the USA operates differently to us, and some of these things are inevitable, but obviously that influence has spread down under.

How can a dog 'ask for it'? And how does the 'perfect stack' tie into breed type? It's not a grooming contest, or a competition to see which dog doesn't move a foot or twitch an ear, so why should that be the reason a dog gets the award? Yes, sometimes when we have two equally worthy dogs these are the difference between best

and reserve, and it is a show for exhibitors and public, but let's not discard our breed standards in the process.

As judges, we have all had situations where we are faced with the over-handled, over-groomed, or over-stacked exhibits — not to mention the stare-down from the handler! — and we have succumbed to choosing the best 'show' dog and not necessarily the best dog. We wouldn't be human if we hadn't. But that isn't to say it is right, and sometimes on reflection, we realise we may have been duped! On the contrary, sometimes our decisions are questioned when we don't select the dog that 'showed perfectly'!

I recall a judging appointment a while ago. My Best of Group winner didn't go around the ring at 100 miles an hour with tremendous reach and drive, they weren't flashy with awesome markings, and they didn't have an over the top handler. But they were, in my opinion, the closest I could find to their respective breed standard and gave me the shivers when I judged them in their class. Yes, I could have chosen flashy but flashy doesn't encourage our breeders to follow correct breed type, nor does it encourage our exhibitors, who aren't breeders, to select the best specimens to show.

Sometimes our exhibitors need to see that they don't have to be the best handler or groomer to have the best dog in the show.

Happy judging. 🐾

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### Important Dates

31 August 2022 Effective date for Breed Standards for exams

31 December 2022 Cut off for completion of mandatory training