

## Preparing for practical exams

by Lavina Diamanti

Congratulations to those who were successful with their theory exam passes. Now the hard work begins to nail those practical exams.

The theory exam is a test of your knowledge of the breed standards, the practical exam is a test on how you apply that knowledge. Study for the practical is quite different to study for the theory. In my experience the theory exam required finding ways to cement the breed information into my memory. I used many different methods but I found my time was my saviour, time studying to really understand the breed standards. The practical on the other hand, required practice verbalising decisions and drilling down on the form and function of the breeds along with the important historical points that help make each breed what it is.

Practical exam time can be incredibly nerve wracking. You are in the ring with 3 examiners who are watching your every move as you judge your allocated dogs. They will be assessing how you run your ring, how you communicate with the exhibitors and the steward plus the suitability of your attire. Once you have judged a few breeds they will start asking you questions. They want to know how well you know each breed standard and how you applied that to the dogs you judged. They will expect you to be able to justify your decisions based on that knowledge. They will also expect you to know the history of each breed and its relative form and function. They will also expect you to be able to critique the dogs. Some candidates find nerves their friend, a bit like a stage performer, others struggle with the pressure. Regardless of which category you fall into, preparation is the key to a successful exam.

The following are some tips to help you in your preparations to be successful on examination day:

- Don't leave your preparation until the last minute, if you haven't already started, do it today.
- Set the goal to achieve a good pass, the examiners are looking for better than average!
- Identify the breeds you will be most likely to get in your exam. Entries at shows in the area will give you an indication. Concentrate on these to begin with.
- Research each breed. Where did it originate? What was its purpose? What other breeds were used to develop this breed? Has it changed and if so why?
- Research other similar breeds e.g. the terriers from the Scottish Highlands or the various spaniels. What is similar about them and what makes them different? Why?
- Understand the form and function of each breed. Why does a

breed have the characteristics it does? What are the hallmarks of the breed? How do those characteristics tie into the job it was bred for?

- Make sure you know your anatomy and canine terminology.
- Now start practicing applying your knowledge. Go to Youtube and find videos of these breeds being judged. Judge them yourself based on what you see. Verbalise your decisions — and I mean really verbalise. Talk it through out loud, not just in your mind. Better still, have a mentor with you so they can question you on your decisions.
- Print off photos of dogs from the internet. Place them in order and again verbalise your decisions. Check your standards for specific terminology. You don't need to use the exact words, but you do need to understand their meaning.
- Practice critiquing dogs, nose to tail. Make sure you verbalise what you see and not just quote from the standard.

On exam day itself:

- Make sure you are well presented. Dress as if you are judging a championship show, smart but comfortable.
- Arrive in plenty of time. You don't want to be rushing.
- Your turn for the ring — judge with confidence. Try to ignore the examiners and just get on with judging the dogs.
- The examiners' role is to test your knowledge. Answer all questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, say you don't know. If you forgot to check something, don't pretend you did. The examiners will know that you didn't!
- Make sure your answers are meaningful. Remember: **What**, **How** and **Why**. **What** do you know about the breed; **How** does that knowledge apply to the dogs in front of you; and **Why** did you place them the way you did?
- Because you have done so much practice, your words will flow.

Good luck. 🐾

### Important Dates

|                 |                           |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 1 July 2023     | Judges' Seminar, Auckland |
| 2 July 2023     | NZDJA AGM, Auckland       |
| 15-16 July 2023 | North Island Practicals   |
| 29-30 July 2023 | South Island Practicals   |