

DOG Shows vs. Dog SHOWS

Most of us have read about the beginnings of, and purpose of dog shows. They started as a way for breeders to evaluate their breeding stock; an evaluation of dogs that they bred for a purpose – whether a hunting dog or a lap dog – by a person whose opinion was highly valued in that breed. The AKC still defines this as the purpose: *“Dog shows... concentrate on the distinctive features of purebred dogs and help to preserve these characteristics by providing a forum at which to evaluate breeding stock. Exhibits are judged against individual breed standards, which... describe the ideal size, color, and temperament of each breed, as well as correct proportion, structure, and movement.”*

That does not seem to be what is occurring today. Somehow we have lost our way. A breeder / judge said to me awhile back while discussing the topic, “...but, it is a dog show.” While I love to judge a well presented dog in outstanding condition, (and also find great pleasure in winning when I exhibit), I have to ask myself the question, “When did we move the focus in ‘dog show’ from dog show to dog show?”

It is easy to place the blame on the AKC, on professional handlers, or anyone else that comes to mind, but in the end it really comes back to the breeders. If the purpose should be to have a place where we can evaluate our breeding stock, and that is not our main goal, we have missed the mark.

The questions this may raise are: 1. Do we want our breeding stock evaluated, or do we just want to win? 2. Are we breeding for a purpose, or do we just want to win? 3. Do we seek out judges whose opinion we value, or just those who, for better or worse, we think we will win under? If the answer to these questions is the second half, rather than the first, it may be time to reevaluate what we are doing as breeders.

On a recent trip to Europe to judge I was once again rewarded, as I had been in past trips, with the experience of having the honor of people bringing me their dogs, because they truly wanted to have their dogs evaluated, and know what I thought. These breeders may not have been dressed to the nines, or spent hours grooming, but in my book they were there for the right reason – to evaluate their breeding stock.

I have also had the honor of exhibiting under people whose opinion I value so highly, that whether I win or lose, I want to know what they think.

Keeping our eyes on the original purpose is not a step backwards into the past, but a way to keep our breed the best it can be into the future. May all of us have the courage to take an honest look at our dogs, and to keep the primary goal in mind of why we are stepping into the ring.

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Joni Johnson; PO Box 36937, Rock Hill, SC 29732