

Bearded Collies

Experts Are Taught, Not Born

The role of the judge is explained in this excerpt from the AKC's *Beginner's Guide to Dog Shows*: "Judges examine the dogs, then give awards according to how closely each dog compares to the judge's mental image of the 'perfect' dog described in the breed's official standard. The standard describes the characteristics that allow the breed to perform the function for which it was bred. These standards include specifications for structure, temperament, and movement ... The judges are experts on the breeds they are judging."

With this in mind, let's consider whether judges should attend performance events for new breeds that they are applying to judge. Reading the above statement, which is in its clearest form for beginners to understand, the judge is an expert who follows a written standard (developed by the breed's national club) to determine which dogs most closely possess characteristics that enable them to perform the function they were bred to do. Form follows function. If you haven't witnessed the function for that breed, can you truly understand proper form?

The written standard therefore should reflect all the characteristics necessary for a Beardie to work with man, herding for hours in potentially rugged terrain and in bad weather. If the standard does that, then there is no need for judges to attend a herding event prior to applying for the breed. However, we're asking a great deal from a formatted, length-limited piece of written work.

Should judges interested in applying for our breed be required to observe the breed working? If so, each could learn the variety of styles in which Beardies herd and the necessary "structure, temperament, and movement" for the breed to handle his work. Certainly you can't judge herding qualities such as biddability or balance of flock in the show ring, but the experience could complement the standard and even better explain the importance of efficiency in movement, flexibility, coat texture, temperament, and so on necessary for this breed.

By watching the dogs work, a mentor could help a judge gain a deeper understanding of the breed and discuss the connection between what the judge sees in the herding arena and what she should look for in the conformation ring, therefore making her more of a breed expert.

Currently the AKC encourages judges to attend performance events by offering attendance as one of its “10 enriching components” options when applying for additional breeds. If a judge does attend an AKC-sanctioned performance event, they can use that experience toward qualifying for the additional breed.

The true question then is to what depth of expertise do we need judges in the conformation ring to be? If they have judged other herding breeds and attended other performance events, why would they need to attend one for Beardies? Some would answer that they don’t need to; others will say that witnessing a specific breed doing his work is a fundamental part of what makes a conformation judge an expert.

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