

A Breeder's Perspective

Judie Evans

How do we as breeders define what makes a good Collie judge? What is it that we would like you to focus on when you are invited to judge our breed? Obviously we know that any good judge can be expected to appreciate showmanship, glamor, presentation, and grooming. We also know that basic structure and soundness are qualities that most understand. What separates those judges respected and sought after by longtime breeders from the judges that we unfortunately see passing off their generic opinions at many all-breed shows; shows where all too frequently Collies win that have no real merit and lack breed type? The answer is knowledge and understanding of those virtues that the Standard emphasizes, and the ability to recognize and reward that quality over those superficial characteristics that are far easier to attain. After breeding Collies for over 35 years, I know from experience that should you breed away from the correct expression or head type these virtues can be lost in a single generation and getting them back is a difficult task.

The overall picture of our breed is its most basic characteristic, since without it, none of the elements that make up the whole dog, however correct or beautiful they may be, are sufficient to make it a true Collie. I am an "outline person," and the picture of a Collie posing majestically showing me that picture of balance, elegance, and beauty still can take my breath away. We want the Collie to be proud and impressive; an elegant, arched neck, well laid back shoulder, level back, gently sloping croup... a picture of curves rather than angles. The coat is important, not just in quantity but in that it fits the dog and is of correct, harsh texture.

I also feel strongly about how the Collie should be shown in the ring. Contrary to what we sometimes observe in the show ring today, the Collie Standard

specifically states that the breed should not be shown excessively posed. Furthermore, he should not have to be strung up on a tight lead to manufacture the desired overall picture of elegant balance. He should not be expected to stare, mesmerized by a chunk of liver or be wired up like a terrier... this is not the Collie.

We also want you to understand Collie movement. Contrary to the belief that the Collie is just a "head breed," we do value correct movement. Despite what we see as desirable in some breed and most group rings, faster is not better. A Collie is meant to cover ground. His movement should be smooth, reaching, and effortless when viewed from the side. As his speed increases, he should single track: a desired characteristic of the Collie. The one who runs the fastest does not necessarily get the prize here, and although this may be the trend in the all-breed ring at the moment, it is not the movement of a herding dog.

These things being said, we can talk about what makes up a really exceptional Collie, the one who not only is worthy of winning dog shows but also has the virtues that are essential to the breed. The Collie Standard places great importance on head qualities and expression, and no one aspiring to judge this breed can do a competent job without a thorough study of the Standard.

Longtime Collie breeder Trudy Mangels of Brandwyne fame writes in her book *The Evolution of the Collie*, "The head is the feature which distinguishes the superior from the ordinary. In no other breed of dogs is the head as important in evaluating superiority as it is in the Collie."

So what is it that we want you to focus on here? We want a head inclined to lightness in relation to the body in our breed... more head is not better. The

Collie head should be a lean, well-blunted wedge. It should be smooth and well finished, with parallel planes of approximately equal length separated by a slight but perceptible stop. It is much easier to get these parallel planes on a shorter head. The virtues of smoothness and finish of foreface, flat frontal bone, and well-filled skull are more difficult to get on a longer head. Mother Nature is constantly working against us in these areas and longtime breeders appreciate how difficult it is to achieve that correct profile and the beautiful finish while maintaining a long, light head, and these are virtues to be recognized and rewarded.

The Collie's expression is a great priority and as the Standard states, "No Collie can be properly judged until its expression has been carefully evaluated." It is basic to judging our breed that you understand that the Collie eye is to be of medium size, dark, almond-shaped, and set obliquely into the head. The Collie's expression is created from the combination of the rounded muzzle, correctly placed stop, oblique eye set, and the carriage and set of the ear. The expression should be sweet, quizzical, and melting. These are not simple concepts to grasp, but without the correct head and the desired expression, we really do not have "the Collie." All the cuteness, showmanship, clever grooming, and cosmetics will not make it a good dog.

Perhaps one of the best descriptions I have read recently of the priorities of a breeder judge comes from George Horn, a longtime successful breeder, now a respected judge:

"The virtues I hold most sacred in judging are really fairly simple to explain. Overall picture, type, balance, or whatever you wish to call it comes first. No part can be more important

than the whole dog. After that would come the things that make a Collie unique from other dogs.

"Just about all of those things are part of the Collie head, such as eyes, ears, expression, muzzle, skull, etc. No, I did not say nothing else matters, just that it doesn't matter as much. I love any dog with good legs and feet that can move well down and back and from the side. Unfortunately, those things are not what makes a dog distinctly a Collie.

"Though there have been minor revisions to the Standard over the years, the basic intent has not been affected. The Collie is to be a lithe, active dog with balance and harmonious proportions. It should never show any problems associated with bad temperament or be lacking in alertness (showmanship) or responsiveness. The areas dealing with various aspects of the head make it clear how important these are to the people who framed the Standard. Such statements as 'prominent head faults are severely penalized' or 'eye faults are heavily penalized' and 'a Collie cannot be judged properly until its expression has been carefully evaluated' make it clear how important head characteristics are to the Standard."

