

Show Me!

Ideas for Your Journey Inside, Outside and Around the Conformation Ring



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What Does the Title “Champion” Mean?

All through my involvement in the sport of showing dogs in the breed ring, I had somehow believed that the purpose of a championship was to determine if your dog was put together in a fashion that could possibly (hopefully) help to improve the breed if the dog was bred. I felt that the breed ring not only showed what this particular dog was built like and how it moved, but also (and in my opinion, more importantly) helped us see what the parents of this dog produced. Of course, there is much more to breeding than the form of the dog, such as temperament, function and clearances, among many other issues, but I have always assumed that the title of champion from the conformation ring was supposed to deem this dog structurally of breeding quality.

It was always a curiosity to me that the majority of other breeds had such a different situation. It seemed that even the one-point shows in Golden Retrievers were majors for most other breeds. I saw my friends in other breeds finishing dogs in a handful of shows. I know a woman with great Cardigan Welsh Corgis who finished her last dog in 12 shows. She said of the 15 shows she entered, 10 were majors, and her dog finished with five majors. This is unheard of in Golden Retrievers in the United States!

Then I read about a woman who had written a paper about breeding, and she said you should absolutely never breed a non-champion dog. I figured in Golden Retrievers, fewer than half of the 232 that finished last year were probably bitches (since they typically have a higher point schedule), so I wondered where all the show dogs were supposed to come from if only champions were to be bred. And an even bigger question: Where would all the pets come from that we all preach should come from reputable breeders? It was obvious that these 100 dogs could not possibly be the only Golden Retrievers being bred, yet how do we know the others are truly worthy of being bred? Yes, I know all about puppy mills and backyard breeders. We warn people to not buy from them. We do our best to instruct them to buy only quality dogs with clearances. But if only 100 dogs a year are deemed “breeding quality,” how can we preach that only those few should be bred? This doesn’t even account for those that

earned their title but didn’t clear! This led me to wonder, just what does this title mean, anyway?

When I started to research this to find out the actual definition of what a conformation championship is supposed to be, I was completely surprised to learn that according to the AKC, there really is no definition of a champion other than that the dog has the specified number of points under the specified minimum number of different judges, with two major wins. Looking further, the closest I could come to the meaning (not the requirements) was the following:

“Competition in conformation and performance events can best demonstrate the progress that has been made in breeding for type and quality, and/or for practical use, stamina and obedience.”

So if the purpose of obtaining a championship is to identify the best 200 or so dogs in each breed each year, then the current scheme is probably fine. But this does not really agree with the above description, and certainly not with what I had been assuming all these years! I thought that determining the top dogs of each breed was the purpose of the Best of Breed competition, as well as the group and Best in Show competitions! If the purpose is to “help” identify breeding stock as it is determined from the conformation aspect, then apparently something has changed from what was the original purpose of the title. Surely more Golden Retrievers than the ones that finish are of breeding quality, don’t you think?

HOW DOES THIS WORK?

As you probably already know, every April the new point schedule is published in the *Events* portion of the *AKC Gazette* (which lists upcoming shows, judges, etc.). The new point schedule is then put into effect in mid-May and holds at those numbers for the next year.

According to information I received from James Crowley, AKC secretary, the idea of a point schedule first surfaced in 1900. Prior to that, championships were based on a

specified number of Open firsts, regardless of the number of dogs in competition. The early schedules simply set a number of total dogs in competition for the show to warrant one through five points, with no breed breakdown. The point schedule as it exists today evolved over several decades. The basic formula with percentages was applied in the 1920s, but with one schedule and the same numbers applied to dogs and bitches. In the 1930s the country was divided into the four divisions, but still with the same competition requirements for dogs and bitches. It wasn't until the 1950s that there was a separate schedule for dogs and bitches.

The schedule has been restructured many times over the years to arrive at the current format. There is a set formula for the awarding of points in each sex in each division (see below). The last major change in the schedule was in 1989 when the continental U.S. was divided into nine divisions, whereas it previously only had four. The divisions were set so that there was a minimum of 100 all-breed shows in every division.

The number of points required for each point level is recalculated each year based on the entry numbers for each sex in each of the 12 districts. Because of the special needs of the last three districts (10–12), the formula is different to allow for more majors (up to 50 percent of shows). Since the majority of us are in districts 1–9, and I believe these are the areas most affected by the current point system, I will focus my discussion primarily on the problems I perceive in these areas.

CURRENT POINT SYSTEM

First, let's look at the current formula. Here is the formula as quoted to me directly from AKC via e-mail taken from their Web site:

"The schedule is based upon a set of percentages using the previous three years actual dogs in competition. It is calculated so that a certain percentage of the shows where there was an actual competition for a particular sex of a particular breed or variety, will carry a certain number of championship points. The percentages are as follows:

Divisions 1–9:

1 Point – 95% of the shows where there was competition for a sex of a breed, will carry at least one championship point.

2 Points – The two point break is set mid-way between the one and three point breaks.

3 Points – The three point break is set so that as close as possible to 18%, never to exceed 20% of the shows in each division, will carry major points (3, 4 or 5 points).

4 Points – The four point break is set at one third of the difference between the three and five point breaks.

5 Points – At least 1%, but less than 2% of the shows offering competition for a particular sex of a particular breed, will carry five championship points.

Divisions 10–12:

1 Point – All breeds and varieties should be set at 2 dogs and 2 bitches (In the other divisions, 95% of the shows would be awarded at least one point).

2 Points – Mid-way between the one and three point breaks (The same as for the other divisions).

3 Points – As close as possible to but not exceeding 50% of the shows in each division, should carry major points (this is

as opposed to 18%, never to exceed 20% in the other nine divisions).

4 Points – The four point break should be set at one third of the difference between the five and four point break, just as is done for the other divisions.

5 Points – As close as possible to but not exceeding 10% of the shows in a division should be awarded 5 points."

Independent National Specialties are not counted in this calculation.

HOW DOES THIS FORMULA AFFECT US?

The AKC does not place a specific limit on the number of dogs that can attain a championship in any given year. They do, however, limit the number of shows that can be majors. That limit on majors effectively limits the maximum number of dogs that can attain championships in the more popular breeds.

The AKC sets the point schedules so that only 18 percent (not to exceed 20 percent) of the shows in each district are majors. According to the AKC's statistics, there were 1,365 all-breed shows in the year 1999, and 1,997 specialty shows. The exact numbers are going to vary by breed, but let's say there is an average of 1,400 shows per breed (or variety) in which points can be earned. If we multiply 1,400 by 18 percent, we get 252 shows that can be majors. Each show can produce two majors per breed (male and female), but each dog is required to have two majors to finish. So in any given year, approximately 250 dogs of each breed can complete a championship. The actual figures are going to vary, of course, depending on the amount of competition, the fact that points are carried over from previous years, and that some dogs will win major points but for one reason or another never complete their title.

After studying this formula and how it affected the shows and titles awarded, I assumed it was established to theoretically allow an equal number of champions finishing for each breed. Yet this reasoning didn't seem to make sense. I don't think it was ever intentional that this formula would place an upper limit on the number of championships for any breed per year, and probably did not do this years ago. So after the explanation on the origins of the point system, I decided to again e-mail the AKC and ask the following:

"It appears they are aiming to allow every breed to have an equal number of championships earned and to allow an equal number of championships for each breed in each district, theoretically. Was it ever a goal to limit the possible number of championships awarded to each breed? IOW, was the system set up to limit the total number of dogs to become champions each year in any given breed regardless of the number of entries? Or were the entry numbers at the time much lower than they are now so this was not a consideration?"

James Crowley, AKC Secretary, told me, "The idea is not to have the same number of champions in every breed, which would be unfair because of the great disparity in the number of dogs competing in different breeds. Rather it is to try to provide the same percentage of shows with competition for a breed with major points. For example if there is competition for Dobermans at 100 shows in a division there

should be about 18 majors. By the same token if there is only competition at 50 shows in the same division for English Toy Spaniels, there should be about 9 majors. These calculations do not count majors created by Best of Winners or when a class dog goes BOB or BOS. These are like bonus majors.

“It is important to remember that the formula is as close as possible to 18% never to exceed 20%. Thus if there were 100 shows in the division with competition for a breed and 21 of them had exactly 15 dogs in competition, while exactly 13 shows had 14 dogs in competition, the 3 point break would be set at 14. Thus there would be 13% majors projected because the alternative of 21% was not acceptable.”

What interesting information! Just goes to show that sometimes what we think is the reason for something is not always how it was intended, even if that is the end result!

If you look at the number of championships awarded for the year, excluding the breeds that have more than one variety earning points, such as American Cockers, no breed has averaged over 259 champions in the last four years (the years we had available to look at). Golden championship numbers averaged 253 over the last four years, with 232 awarded last year.

I've included a chart below from a Web site established to bring the above facts together in a comparative and informative way. For those interested with access to the Internet, the Web site is: <http://members.tripod.com/~newpoints/>.

From this chart, it is apparent that the current point system does, in fact, keep the percentage of championship titles earned by any one breed to right around 1 percent of the total championships awarded. Granted, in the breeds with less than 250 dogs registered for the year (34 of the breeds recognized by AKC), the number of championships earned could not possibly get up to 250. Therefore, the 1 percent upper limit could never be met and that is why it is not equal for all breeds. Still, the point schedule, whether intentional or not, is set up to accomplish this equal number of champions amongst the breeds.

If you look at the chart, set up with the highest entry number breeds listed in descending order, you can see that Golden accounted for over 3 percent of the total number of entries for all breeds. Yet less than half of one percent of those entries account for the total number of championship titles awarded. If you study these figures, you will see that all of the breeds with an entry over 20,000 (excluding the breeds with multiple varieties that earn points in each variety) do not even have 1 percent of their entries finishing their championship. This percentage is listed under the column entitled “By Breed as % of all entries” on the Web site mentioned above.

If you go on down the line of breeds with total entry numbers below 19,000 per year, all of them have over 1 percent of the entries awarded championships, with the exception of the Finnish Spitz. But with a total registration of only 58 in 1999, the figure may be somewhat skewed, as in previous years the number of championships earned in this breed was much higher.

Why is it that the high-entry breeds have so many fewer champions per number of entries? The answer is simple! The point system will not allow it! And as our total entries increase, due to more people entering the sport and the ever

increasing competition requiring more entries to finish most of our dogs, the percentage of champions as a percentage of the entry number will continue to decrease!

Hence a backlog of soon-to-be-titled dogs. It is like giving a hypothetical ticket to the deserving dogs and telling them to go get in line so they can go through the door with their breed name on it and get the title they deserve. Which doors will have the longest lines that take the most amount of time? Which breeds will continue to have more dogs with that hypothetical ticket not getting through the door that year if only so many can enter? All the while, the really “special” ones (sometimes special because they are with the right handlers!) will get preferential treatment. Maybe they are truly better, or maybe their handler has the right connections. Maybe they are selectively shown to the “right” judges regardless of cost and location. Maybe they live in an area that has less competition or maybe they are out every weekend, which is not possible for all the dogs holding entry tickets. At any rate, these “celebrity” ones, the flashy ones that *wow* everyone, will don their movie star shades and move to the front of the line. Others will do so because they have “connections.” Yes, many of these dogs are truly better, or maybe just more showy and pretty, but the line moves ever more slowly until the year draws to an end and then the reality hits. Sorry, we're full. Come back next year. And the door slams shut...Okay, so it isn't exactly like that, but you get the idea.

HAS THE POINT SYSTEM HELPED THE BREED?

I think so in most ways! I think in the past, the competition in the popular breeds helped eliminate the title going to undeserving dogs (not taking into consideration politics for this discussion, of course). But now I feel that the entry numbers have outgrown the current formula and it is now actually hurting the breed in many ways. Just as in any part of life, things change and we must find ways to deal with them and better them as needed. This point system seems too “horse and buggy” in this jet airplane society!

I have a friend in a giant breed with a point system requiring six dogs and nine bitches for a 3-point major. She has excellent dogs in comparison to much of what I see at the shows in her breed, and she is often quite upset when she doesn't win over an apparently poorer specimen of the breed. More than once, I have told people it would be beneficial to sit ringside watching these giant dogs move to study movement because they have such a wide assortment of examples of movement, and many are horrendous! This friend, who is obsessed with movement, feels that the Golden ring is the most competitive and highest quality of any breed in competition. She feels there are many deserving dogs out there.

So I think the high numbers have driven the competition to a level that we have established good quality dogs, for the most part, and the stiff competition prevents many poorer specimens from finishing. But I also think many high quality dogs are being eliminated too! Of course, we all know about dogs who are *not* very high quality, but can finish when the price is right! Politics and popularity can go far, unfortunately, and we all know many undeserving dogs sporting a CH before their name. Yet, in my mind, allowing more dogs to finish would not harm the breed if the numbers for majors were still high enough to keep the competition strong.

Entry Data - Sorted by Breed as a percentage of the total entries

Breed	1999 Champions	1999 Entries	Breed as percentage of Total Entries	Championships awarded as % of entries	Number of Champions as % of all Ch titles awarded	Breed	1999 Champions	1999 Entries	Breed as percentage of Total Entries	Championships awarded as % of entries	Number of Champions as % of all Ch titles awarded
Golden Retriever	232	47114	3.08	0.49	1.14	West Highland White Terrier	149	7608	0.50	1.96	0.73
Labrador Retriever	186	41240	2.69	0.45	0.91	Belgian Tervuren	138	7425	0.48	1.86	0.68
Doberman Pinscher	221	40060	2.62	0.55	1.08	Flat-Coated Retriever	139	7342	0.48	1.89	0.68
Boxer	258	39099	2.55	0.66	1.27	Border Terrier	122	7237	0.47	1.69	0.60
Dachshund (3 varieties)	562	38884	2.54	1.45	2.76	Chesapeake Bay Ret.	128	6838	0.45	1.87	0.63
Poodle (3 Varieties)	690	37043	2.42	1.86	3.39	Airedale Terrier	124	6709	0.44	1.85	0.61
Cocker Spaniel (3 Var.)	596	35686	2.33	1.67	2.93	Maltese	188	6496	0.42	2.89	0.92
Rottweiler	178	34373	2.24	0.52	0.87	Australian Cattle Dog	122	6164	0.40	1.98	0.60
Shetland Sheepdog	246	31625	2.06	0.78	1.21	Old English Sheepdog	116	6101	0.40	1.90	0.57
Great Dane	219	30798	2.01	0.71	1.08	Silky Terrier	131	5646	0.37	2.32	0.64
Bulldog	231	30683	2.00	0.75	1.13	Tibetan Spaniel	117	5431	0.35	2.15	0.57
Collie (2 Varieties)	379	30668	2.00	1.24	1.86	Japanese Chin	124	5404	0.35	2.29	0.61
German Shepherd	229	30632	2.00	0.75	1.12	Belgian Sheepdog	109	5308	0.35	2.05	0.54
Siberian Husky	222	25276	1.65	0.88	1.09	Norwegian Elkhound	97	5294	0.35	1.83	0.48
Whippet	210	24518	1.60	0.86	1.03	Tibetan Terrier	111	5263	0.34	2.11	0.54
Chihuahua (2 Varieties)	381	23740	1.55	1.60	1.87	Bloodhound	95	4902	0.32	1.94	0.47
Australian Shepherd	259	23142	1.51	1.12	1.27	Border Collie	111	4834	0.32	2.30	0.54
Pembroke Welsh Corgi	187	21972	1.43	0.85	0.92	Petit Basset					
Irish Setter	199	20575	1.34	0.97	0.98	Griffon Vendeen	91	4678	0.31	1.95	0.45
Ger. Shorthaired Pointer	219	19510	1.27	1.12	1.08	Kerry Blue Terrier	91	4662	0.30	1.95	0.45
Dalmatian	185	19317	1.26	0.96	0.91	Giant Schnauzer	83	4632	0.30	1.79	0.41
Weimaraner	213	18237	1.19	1.17	1.05	Norwich Terrier	90	4623	0.30	1.95	0.44
Rhodesian Ridgeback	247	17768	1.16	1.39	1.21	Manchester Ter. (2 Var.)	70	4497	0.29	1.56	0.34
Pug	239	17664	1.15	1.35	1.17	Standard Schnauzer	85	4390	0.29	1.94	0.42
Afghan Hound	195	17586	1.15	1.11	0.96	Wire Fox Terrier	89	4287	0.28	2.08	0.44
Akita	181	17070	1.11	1.06	0.89	Brussels Griffon	74	4170	0.27	1.77	0.36
Samoyed	191	16770	1.09	1.14	0.94	Greyhound	73	4152	0.27	1.76	0.36
Miniature Pinscher	194	16732	1.09	1.16	0.95	Gr. Swiss Mountain Dog	84	4119	0.27	2.04	0.41
Papillon	229	16473	1.08	1.39	1.12	Bull Terrier (2 Var.)	71	3850	0.25	1.84	0.35
Chinese Shar Pei	167	16458	1.07	1.01	0.82	Briard	81	3737	0.24	2.17	0.40
English Springer Spaniel	169	16402	1.07	1.03	0.83	Am. Eskimo Dog	75	3669	0.24	2.04	0.37
Pomeranian	214	16215	1.06	1.32	1.05	Staffordshire Bull Terrier	61	3606	0.24	1.69	0.30
Mastiff	177	15345	1.00	1.15	0.87	Clumber Spaniel	79	3319	0.22	2.38	0.39
Borzoi	189	15217	0.99	1.24	0.93	Havanese	71	3180	0.21	2.23	0.35
Alaskan Malamute	161	14351	0.94	1.12	0.79	Ger. Wirehaired Pointer	57	3152	0.21	1.81	0.28
Yorkshire Terrier	219	14071	0.92	1.56	1.08	Australian Terrier	71	2998	0.20	2.37	0.35
Basenji	182	14030	0.92	1.30	0.89	Scottish Deerhound	55	2988	0.20	1.84	0.27
Beagle (2 Varieties)	243	13610	0.89	1.79	1.19	Curly-Coated Retriever	51	2928	0.19	1.74	0.25
Miniature Schnauzer	179	13444	0.88	1.33	0.88	Welsh Springer Spaniel	48	2865	0.19	1.68	0.24
Basset Hound	175	13234	0.86	1.32	0.86	Welsh Terrier	70	2783	0.18	2.52	0.34
Chinese Crested	223	13016	0.85	1.71	1.09	Norfolk Terrier	60	2680	0.17	2.24	0.29
English Cocker Span.	199	12999	0.85	1.53	0.98	Pharaoh Hound	36	2540	0.17	1.42	0.18
Vizsla	196	12287	0.80	1.60	0.96	Belgian Malinois	58	2496	0.16	2.32	0.28
Boston Terrier	147	12173	0.79	1.21	0.72	Bedlington Terrier	53	2312	0.15	2.29	0.26
Bullmastiff	164	12126	0.79	1.35	0.81	Eng.Toy Spaniel (2 Var.)	42	2133	0.14	1.97	0.21
English Setter	167	12069	0.79	1.38	0.82	Puli	32	2025	0.13	1.58	0.16
French Bulldog	206	11895	0.78	1.73	1.01	Skye Terrier	47	1977	0.13	2.38	0.23
Italian Greyhound	187	11783	0.77	1.59	0.92	Black/Tan Coonhound	29	1922	0.13	1.51	0.14
Bernese Mountain Dog	181	11663	0.76	1.55	0.89	Affenpinscher	38	1910	0.12	1.99	0.19
Shih Tzu	227	11419	0.75	1.99	1.11	Irish Terrier	34	1901	0.12	1.79	0.17
Am. Staffordshire Terrier	198	11288	0.74	1.75	0.97	Irish Water Spaniel	39	1839	0.12	2.12	0.19
Brittany	170	11228	0.73	1.51	0.83	Lowchen	35	1837	0.12	1.91	0.17
Newfoundland	170	11208	0.73	1.52	0.83	Kuvasz	30	1810	0.12	1.66	0.15
Pekingese	165	10679	0.70	1.55	0.81	Field Spaniel	32	1772	0.12	1.81	0.16
Cav. KingChas. Span.	204	10458	0.68	1.95	1.00	Miniature Bull Terrier	31	1719	0.11	1.80	0.15
Sm. Fox Terrier	178	10429	0.68	1.71	0.87	Lakeland Terrier	31	1688	0.11	1.84	0.15
Cardigan Welsh Corgi	180	9596	0.63	1.88	0.88	American Foxhound	32	1586	0.10	2.02	0.16
Lhasa Apso	192	9586	0.63	2.00	0.94	Ibizan Hound	25	1577	0.10	1.59	0.12
Saint Bernard	132	9288	0.61	1.42	0.65	Wirehaired Pointing Griffon	22	1373	0.09	1.60	0.11
Portuguese Water Dog	134	8980	0.59	1.49	0.66	Dandie Dinmont Terrier	19	1150	0.08	1.65	0.09
Saluki	136	8954	0.58	1.52	0.67	HARRIER	13	1138	0.07	1.14	0.06
Shiba Inu	181	8853	0.58	2.04	0.89	Sealyham Terrier	19	1058	0.07	1.80	0.09
Schipperke	162	8761	0.57	1.85	0.80	Sussex Spaniel	25	1049	0.07	2.38	0.12
Irish Wolfhound	132	8673	0.57	1.52	0.65	English Foxhound	16	1016	0.07	1.57	0.08
Bearded Collie	164	8564	0.56	1.91	0.81	Finnish Spitz	8	946	0.06	0.85	0.04
Bovier Des Flandres	136	8517	0.56	1.60	0.67	Komondor	12	862	0.06	1.39	0.06
Pointer	163	8445	0.55	1.93	0.80	Otterhound	9	857	0.06	1.05	0.04
Scottish Terrier	166	8423	0.55	1.97	0.81	Canaan Dog	15	801	0.05	1.87	0.07
Keeshond	130	8423	0.55	1.54	0.64	Anatolian Shepherd Dog	15	666	0.04	2.25	0.07
Bichon Frise	190	8422	0.55	2.26	0.93	American Water Spaniel	10	566	0.04	1.77	0.05
Great Pyrenees	147	8328	0.54	1.77	0.72	Plott Hound					
Soft Cld. Wheaton Terrier	172	8225	0.54	2.09	0.84	Polish Lowland Sheepdog					
Chow Chow	126	8129	0.53	1.55	0.62	Jack Russell Terrier					
Gordon Setter	124	8010	0.52	1.55	0.61		20370	1531808	0.00		0.00
Cairn Terrier	160	7786	0.51	2.05	0.79						

ARE GOLDENS REALLY BETTER THAN THEY WERE?

Has our quality truly improved because of this? Some argue that the Golden has been changed by the breed ring, and that is definitely true. When competition gets so intense in any venue, it appears that the extremes take over. The flashy, showy dog gets noticed in the ring while possibly a more honest, deserving, working-type dog may simply blend into the ever madding crowd of dogs clogging the rings. Or is it the handlers who are mad?

When competition gets so strong, people will be afraid to breed to anything that isn't winning like crazy. Currently, it is so difficult to finish most of the dogs in our breed and requires so much time and money (as well as political pull, unfortunately, at times), that people look for every "edge" they can get. This includes breeding only to those top producers and sometimes even breeding to dogs that may be strongly suspected of being carriers of genetic problems as well. This also limits the gene, and prevents people from considering dogs who are not proven producers of champion get. Consequently, this not only narrows the gene pool, it also widens the gap between the performance and conformation lines. It encourages people to resort to riskier breedings (both genetically and temperament-wise) and even encourages corrective surgeries for things like high tails and malocclusions (which dogs are then bred and the problems produced again!) Sure, this is an ethics issue, but desperation can tend to lead people to rationalize issues as well. The lure of winning can be a strong motivator, as can the agony of repeated defeat.

SHOULD WE HAVE THE SAME PERCENTAGE OF CHAMPIONSHIPS AS THE PERCENTAGE OF ENTRIES?

In my opinion, absolutely not! I credit the stiff competition in Goldens with the improvements in the breed over the years. Although Goldens account for 3 percent of the total entries each year, I feel that a percentage of 3 would be too high and would cheapen the title. As you can see, there are breeds with almost exactly the opposite statistics of Goldens in entry numbers and championships awarded. I cannot make a statement about what this has done for these breeds, and frankly, I don't think it would be appropriate to do anyway. I do believe that less popular breeds should have a higher percentage of entries finish for many reasons quite different from what pertains to the popular breeds.

What I *do* suggest would be that a minimum of 1 percent of entries for each breed of dogs finish their championship, and I am willing to bet that it was at least that in the not-too-distant past for Goldens. A numerical limit on the number of championship titles available has only been reached when entry numbers jumped over 19,000–20,000 dogs total. In the past, I know the numbers had to have been much lower, yet the breed thrived and grew. With only 15 of the 146 breeds below 1 percent of entries finishing, I do not feel this would cheapen the title, and it would serve to stop the continuing decline of championships earned as entries grow.

HOW DID YOU DO TODAY?

While getting a picture taken after winning Winners Bitch last weekend (June 2000), the owner was asked by the

judge how many points this win was for her bitch. The owner said, "Well, it would have been two, but there were three or four absentees so it is just one point."

And this was the judge's reply: "Well that is absurd! To think you have beaten 17 or so bitches and you get one point! This point scale is outdated and needs to be looked at." The owner told her she appreciated her position and agreed wholeheartedly.

Another interesting fact: If she had won with an entry of 30 bitches, it would have bumped her up to two points! Yes, nothing short of 31 bitches in this area will earn you that elusive major, and you can just about bet that a good portion of those bitches are entered from far and wide to get that last major to finish as well.

I remember one show I attended two years ago that was very close to a major. As I was leaving the Bred-By-Exhibitor bitch class, I counted five professional handlers standing ringside with groomed bitches that needed only majors ready to go in the Open Bitch class. Unfortunately, there were two exhibitors that chose to skip that day, which broke the major, even though they were there the day before *and* the day after. And guess who won that broken major with her Bred-By bitch?

I shudder to think of the number of shows people pay professional handlers to enter with their dogs that are chasing that last major! They pay the pros for hauling them to the show, caring for them, grooming them, and taking them to the ring, only to walk away without stepping foot in the ring as the count reveals the sad facts! And we call it handling, yet handlers often never get the chance to do the very thing they are hired to perform!

Of course, if the major does hold, this only serves to drive the point schedule higher in coming years. Higher entries serve to drive the point system higher as the backlog of deserving dogs show weekend after weekend, having a bucket load of major reserves but still steadfastly chasing that last major to finally finish. Here in District 2, the number of bitches required has increased by three bitches for the last several years. Is there any end in sight? Does this alarm anyone?

MORE FROM HERE AND LESS FROM THERE?

The way the system is set up, each district has its own specific point schedule dependent on the number of dogs shown in that area in the calculated three previous years. For the year 2000, the point schedule for winning a 3-point major is as follows:

District	Dogs	Bitches
1	22	27
2	23	31
3	21	26
4	18	21
5	23	28
6	20	23
7	20	23
8	22	23
9	25	30

I feel it would stand to reason that if a higher percentage of dogs is living in, and/or being shown in, certain areas, it

would mean that they should also have more dogs finishing. But the point system is devised to prevent that. The current system is based in a way to make an equal number of points available in each district, so the championships awarded will statistically be that way as well. This does not guarantee comparative quality in any way, shape or form across the districts! It is common knowledge that some areas are less competitive than others, both in points and/or quality of competition. Those that have the time and money to travel or hire a handler in those areas can often finish a dog while a better dog staying close to home will never acquire the title.

WHAT WOULD THE BENEFITS BE?

1. THE GENE POOL

Here is an interesting example of how the current point system could be limiting our gene pool. In addition to Golden Retrievers, a competitor also had a Welsh Springer Spaniel. The Welsh have a fairly wide variety of types; some are kind of low-set and Clumber Spaniel-like, others taller and more leggy and more Brittany-like. If you study Welshie pedigrees, you'll find that despite their smaller numbers and smaller gene pool, the dogs that are shown are generally less interrelated than are the show Golden Retrievers. This competitor informed me that last year she went through the latest Golden Retriever Yearbook and found that within seven to nine generations, about 90 percent of the Golden Retrievers that earned championships all went back to Ch. Sunset's Happy Duke to one degree or another, and 50 percent of them were descended from Ch. Amberac's Asterling Aruba. No one can deny that these were great producing dogs and contributed a great deal to the breed, but this is how genetic bottlenecks occur. Everyone wants to breed to what wins! Do you blame them? I sure don't. When you can spend up to \$1,000 a point to finish a dog, and several years of your time, anything you can do to finish faster can be worth it.

2. THE COMPETITION/CONFORMATION LINK

I personally feel that a somewhat easier time in the breed ring (not easy, just more like it used to be!) would allow people to broaden their focus to other areas of competition. Maybe if less time, energy, money and breeding decisions were focused on obtaining a conformation championship, breeders and competitors would be able to incorporate the competition aspect of our breed more often. More time that has been spent chasing the conformation title could be channeled into competition events. Breeders would then see titles that would help them breed for ability as well. Like it or not, titles are useful to help us make choices in our breeding decisions. Wouldn't it be grand if titles proved actual ability and merit and therefore helped us breed accordingly? Isn't that the way it should be?

Recently I saw a quad champion Weimaraner listed on the Internet! Amazing and quite impressive! A sporting breed judge told me that he often sees more titles on the less popular sporting breeds, but sees fewer and fewer in our breed. Does anyone remember the last dual champion Golden? It seems they get fewer and farther between, unfortunately.

3. BREEDING DECISIONS

Some people insist that breeders are irresponsible if they breed untitled dogs, no matter what. Often these people are either from a less competitive breed or send all their dogs out with handlers, who often have political pull, to be finished. With the average person who enjoys showing, it sometimes gets to the point that they can't pour that much time and money into finishing the dog. Yes, I know some of the dogs people insist are worthy really aren't. And yes, I know this should not be about money. But the fact remains that there are people with worthy dogs that cannot continue to spend that much time and money to finish them. If the dog is always in the ribbons in big classes, taking Specialty reserves, and still spending years running weekend after weekend to the rings, something appears to be wrong. Then, too, you need to consider the biological clock thing, and many times it is wise to put a bitch's show career on hold until a litter is whelped while it is healthiest for her.

Does the lack of a title make this dog a bad breeding prospect? Maybe yes, maybe no. One thing for sure, though, is that the title as it is currently set up is not a good way to judge that aspect. As proof, check out the parentage of some of our top-winning and top-producing dogs! The winner of the stud dog class at last year's National Specialty came from two untitled parents! In my opinion, he was very deserving and apparently his breeder had enough knowledge to see the merit in the parents (or else she was darn lucky, but I tend to lean toward the first scenario!)

It would seem that the title should be designed to help us decide breeding quality from a conformation aspect. It is hard for the interested puppy buyer to understand how the untitled dog (out of this great pedigree with X generations of clearances) is a terrific quality dog if it isn't finished. Maybe the dog has a gorgeous picture in the puppy packet but moves horribly and is not championship quality at all. But then again, the opposite could be quite true and the person has given up after so many "almosts" in the ring.

Then we have to consider the pet buying population and how we preach to them to buy from reputable breeders. But how can we explain to them that *this* untitled dog is high quality while the untitled dog from a puppy mill isn't? It would be wonderful to be able to tell people looking for a puppy to require 1) clearances, 2) a contract requiring the breeder take a puppy back for life and guaranteeing certain aspects, and 3) titles, and to walk away if any of the three is missing. Unfortunately, knowing the reality of showing in a popular breed such as ours, we can't do that right now.

INTERESTING STATISTICS

In closing, I'd like to give you a few facts to ponder.

Golden Retrievers accounted for 3.08 percent of the total entries for 1999, with a total of 47,114 entries. There were 232 championships awarded, averaging .49 percent of the entries finishing in this breed for the year. Their number of championships awarded accounted for 1.14 percent of all championships awarded for all breeds.

Labrador Retrievers accounted for 2.69 percent of the total entries for 1999, with a total of 41,240 entries. There were 186 championships awarded, averaging .45 percent of the entries finishing in this breed for the year. Their number of championships awarded accounted for .91 percent of all championships awarded for all breeds.

Maltese accounted for .42 percent of the total entries for 1999, with a total of 6,496 entries. There were 188 championships awarded, averaging 2.89 percent of the entries finishing in this breed for the year. Their number of championships awarded accounted for .92 percent of all championships awarded for all breeds.

Shih Tzus accounted for .75 percent of the total entries for 1999, with a total of 11,419 entries. There were 227 championships awarded, averaging 1.99 percent of the entries in this breed for the year. Their number of championships awarded accounted for 1.11 percent of all championships awarded for all breeds.

Golden Retrievers had more than four times as many entries as Shih Tzus, yet only completed five more championships (232 vs. 227).

Labrador Retrievers had more than six times as many entries as Maltese, yet completed two fewer championships (186 vs. 188).

The top five individual breeds in terms of entries (Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, Doberman Pinschers, Boxers and Rottweilers) had an average entry of 40,377 dogs and completed an average of 215 championships. These five breeds (Rhodesian Ridgebacks, Pugs, Papillons, Chinese Cresteds, Shih Tzus) with an average entry of

15,268 (less than half that of the top five) completed an average of 233 championships.

All of the breeds mentioned in the above statistics were very close to having 1 percent of the total percentage of championships awarded, which had no correlation to the numerical total of entries for the breed.

Hopefully, some of the above information will help the AKC, and the dog showing population in general, rethink the current point system and how it penalizes high-entry breeds. While most of us agree we do not want a championship title to be easy to obtain in the popular breeds (which would cheapen the title), many of us feel there should be a certain percentage of the entries that finish. Since only 15 breeds have less than 1 percent of their entries finishing, as mentioned above, it would seem reasonable to me to allow a minimum 1 percent to obtain their championship. Yet for Labs and Goldens, we are below half of 1 percent and it appears the percentages will only get lower as entries continue to rise.

As always, any correspondence is welcome and appreciated. If anyone has questions, comments, or suggestions concerning this column or any future subjects, please feel free to contact me at (740) 985-3975 between 8:00 and 4:00 EST, or e-mail me at shilogr@yahoo.com. ❖

