

ABdFC National Specialty 2007

Judges comments:

It all began in early October 2007 in the outskirts of a quaint town, known for its big Clock Tower Center. The Town was called Rockford Illinois. The day was unusually temperate for the time of year, normally one expected to feel the cool breeze of fall with the anticipation of Jack Frost to soon appear. "Not so" said Mother nature.....she said "today and tomorrow will be unnaturally hot" with a humidity reading that one could relate to by saying it felt like walking around with a hot wet blanket tightly wrapped around your body.

And so it began..... This event was a year long in the making and this was an event that many people came from afar to attend either to participate in or some to just merely witness. Early in the morning, in a metal framed building on the fairgrounds of this attractive farming community, the frenzy and anticipation of the next few days began. The property normally is inhabited for the exhibition of farm animals but for the next few days it was taken over by individuals who came by planes, trains and in large elaborate motor homes, vans or cars. These vehicles were all fully laden with paraphernalia that is a kin to the likes of equipment people in this community very rarely see. The attendees set up this equipment in the small metal building and then they began their work and their passion. They worked with and prepared the most stunningly beautiful dogs you have ever seen, they came in various sizes and colors. The buzz in the air was high and they all bantered amongst each other about what the "Judge" would do. The fur was flying in all directions! But why were they here in the suburb town of Rockford Illinois? These dogs were Bouvier des Flandres and the event was the 2007 American Bouvier des Flandres National Specialty Competition.

The owners, breeders and handlers were here to present the efforts of their work to one individual who they collectively elected. Some of the people had little experience, and some with a lifetime. Their work was the careful breeding, selection, raising and exhibiting of this magnificent dog. This work must be rewarding as each year they came for the same event. This work was pleasure but it had many hours of pain, sadness and heartbreak.. but it was rewarding as well, it included many hours of fun, happiness, competitive spirit and camaraderie. Each year they came to compare and review the fruits of their labor. So what did they do at this event, well there was this second, metal building and in this building was a barricaded area similar to a boxing ring yet somewhat larger. In the center of this ring, stood a single being," the Judge". Some of the people from the first building came over with their dogs all beautifully coiffure and they themselves dressed as if they were meeting the Queen of England herself. They proceeded into the ring all day and each time after brief hands on examination of their dogs, they were asked to run with their dogs in a circle around this person in the center, who just stood their watching them go around her. The handlers of these dogs would fly around this ring the first time as if they had just lifted the gate at the Kentucky Derby. Oddly enough the judge told them to go again, and again and again and again! Each time around the person leading and guiding the dog started to exhibit more beads of perspiration, the pace the Handlers ran at began to slow down. The handlers were panting but the dogs seemed to revel in this as each handler began to fall most dogs got better. One could conclude from this observation that

the movement of these dogs was an extremely important factor in how the Judge based her decisions. You could observe how movement changed each time dogs circled. As handlers tired, each dog was then left to its own attributes to continue the quest. In the end there was the most impressive lineup of dogs one could ask to have the honor of viewing, the handlers not so good looking any more but the dogs Magnificent.....interesting ritual don't you think?

How can a breeder describe the feeling of having the most difficult, tiring, mentally draining, yet the most exciting, rewarding, undeniably fun, honorable task of judging their own breed at an American National Specialty? You can't, but I can say I recommend it to each and every breeder. It is an experience that will stay with me forever. The most exciting part was physically seeing and touching these dogs that I have never seen before. I love going through the process of finding the Best Dogs on that day according to the breed standard and my vision of the Ideal Bouvier des Flandres.

A word or two about my overall findings.

In Judges School I learned that a critique should mention the virtues and the failings of the exhibits, with more emphasis on the major virtues, rather than the minor ones. Easily said but more difficult to do, I try not to fault judge but as a breeder and judge you are harder on your own breed because of the years of passion and work you have given in trying to better and preserve the breed you so love.

When judging the Bouvier, my priorities are as follows: As a class enters the ring, I watch to see if there is a "show dog" in the group. That just means that I like a dog that is "self-possessed." That "hey look at me dog", the one we all wish for. I like character in my bouviers; I am not fond of a bouvier you need to string up in a ring, in order to make a presentation. Standard states "He is agile, spirited and bold, yet his serene, well behaved disposition denotes his steady, resolute and fearless character. His gaze is alert and brilliant, depicting his intelligence, vigor and daring ". Not all "Bouviers are show dogs. They may prefer other working events more and excel very well at those. If they don't want to be there, take them home and love them. We have all experienced the absolutely gorgeous dog that "will not do it, no matter what". It's the nature of the breed they are stubborn. My "Queen Abbie" comes to mind. After that I look at my line and discern "Type", Type to me is "Does this dog Look like a Bouvier if I saw it on the street or in the field. "The Bouvier des Flandres is a powerfully built, compact, short-coupled, rough-coated dog of notably rugged appearance. He gives the impression of great strength without any sign of heaviness or clumsiness in his overall makeup.", In general my entries had good type, no question. I found very few dogs lacking breed type. Movement is extremely important to me. Coming, going and side gait go hand in hand with type. More on that later.

Do not confuse "Style" with breed type. I see two distinct styles in today's bouvier. I usually use the analogies as related to expensive vehicles. The "Hummer" and the "Jaguar". both are extremely expensive vehicles, both take you from place to place, both are reliable....in other words both can do the job. Both I breed and both I like.

The head must fit the body; big head is not necessarily a good head if it is out of balance to

the rest of the dog. Eye set, shape and Color, skull to muzzle planes and proportions, under eye fill, lower jaw depth and width, bite and I do check side bite as I believe this relates to strength and fill of the muzzle. I saw many even bites and a few under so we need to be cognizance of this. Dropped teeth did not concern me if the rest of the bite met in a scissor fit. There were some outstanding examples of the Classic bouvier Head in my entry. I found some round loose eyes; to me they lose that "Bold Expression". I also saw some lighter eyes, so we need to watch this. In general the eyes were dark and oval and very pleasing. Most skulls were good; there were some that were too rounded rather than flat. Some were lacking under eye fill but most had good parallel planes I did not see ear placement or pigment as a problem what so ever. Remember that the Eyebrows are erect hairs accentuating the shape of the eyes without ever veiling them. Bouviers do better if they can see!

Standard states that a bouvier "neck is strong and muscular, widening gradually into the shoulders. When viewed from the side, it is gracefully arched with proud carriage". A short, squatty neck is faulty." I saw too many squatty necks, this goes along with an incorrect front assembly. Some dogs I felt were too coarse over the shoulder.

Being a Herding dog, this is a movement breed; they must cover ground easily with little energy or wasted motion. Movement on most was good but I did notice a few too many dogs steep in the upper arm and lacking the desired "slightly greater than 90degree angle of the shoulder". This did affect the front movement. The front's pound or the dogs appear to move very quickly yet covering little ground. This in turn would create lack of balance for the rear assembly and I saw crossing over of fronts with rears, crabbing and some extreme over compensation by the rear and pushing fronts way to far off the ground.....wasted motion. Breeders, if we have an issue in our breed it is our bouvier front. Let's not lose this, ask the Golden retriever breeders, once lost it is very difficult to get it back. Again the Standard addresses that" The shoulders are relatively long, muscular but not loaded, with good layback. The shoulder blade and humerus are approximately the same length, forming an angle slightly greater than 90 degrees when standing. Steep shoulders are faulty."

Top lines and tail sets in general were good. I found most dogs had good spring of rib and good depth of chest. Some entries could use better fill between the front legs.

Rears were opposite from the fronts, some were over angulated and created a high kick up however having said that the rear assemblies in general were better than the fronts. If you noticed I checked feet and I'm happy to report I found very few poor feet and pasterns. I was also happy to find good size, with excellent bone and substance, on the majority of the entry. Some of the younger bitch classes were a little concerning as far as size and lack of bone. Hopefully growth and maturity will address this. Proper length of leg and overall height to length proportion in general was very good. We do not appear to have a problem with long and low.

We did a few years back; correction of this was excellent to see. Most of the entry present had the classic cobby square appearance, but I did see some longer loins. This was more apparent in the females.

Temperaments were outstanding. The dogs appeared to be agreeable and extremely comfortable with being handled by a stranger. A few younger dogs had minor issues but nothing that concerned me. I loved the spirit in some of the dogs and my placings indicated this.

Coat quality overall was very good. Just a note on grooming: I am first to admit I love the look of a well groomed bouvier. However, please ease up on the hair spray, Listerine, and coat chalk /color. Some dogs were over groomed, too scissor for my liking, I prefer a well worked hand stripped coat. Enough about that!

Conditions of the dogs were good to excellent. Some dogs were over weight and I strongly believe this also hampered their movement.

I found many of the dogs to be extremely worthy, which made for some very close decisions. Those that ended up in my last 20 dogs had both the general outline, balance and soundness that I was looking for, plus some hard sought type characteristics that contribute to making our breed unique. There were some wonderful younger dogs that I held in my final cuts and I believe that they will all have successful futures.

The presentation and handling of the dogs was excellent and I had a hard task, as in some classes like my open bitch class, many could and will change places many times.

I thank the Members of the American Bouvier des Flandres club who trusted my judgment and dedication to this breed enough to vote and allow me this honor. A huge "Thank you" to my Chief Ring Steward, Patti Klecan, she supervised the smooth operation of the ring. A good ring steward is so important for exhibitors and spectators alike and they are the strength and organization behind the Judge. Thank you to the Northern Illinois Bouvier des Flandres club for being the host club and organizing this National Specialty.

Finally my grateful thanks to the bouvier owners/exhibitors for their acceptance of my placings, your good humor and sportsmanship did not go unnoticed. I really did have lots of fun with you all, I shall treasure my memories. With your continued dedication and open minded breeding programs, the bouvier future is solid.

On a side note, the female handlers are in far better condition than the males.....sorry fellas!

Yvonne Savard