

ABdFC National Specialty Sweepstakes 2007

Judges comments:

The huge thank you to the show committee for the invitation - and to the exhibitors for the lovely entries in the puppy and veteran sweepstakes at the 2007 national specialty. Judging is an experience every serious breeder and exhibitor should have. It's a whole different deal to walk in that ring and have the decision making all yours. I felt I owed it to each entry and every exhibitor to know and apply the standard - and put aside any personal preferences. The Bouvier standard is a fairly complete one. Anyone serious about dog shows and breeding should memorize it - and read standards for other breeds to appreciate our standard - and to better understand what makes the Bouvier distinct from similarly built breeds. We should all be able to name the three things severely penalized under our breed standard - and have enough respect for the standard that dogs with those problems just have a happy life outside of a show ring.

The puppies were very well trained and behaved (for the most part) and all the temperaments sound. I was glad I didn't have to eliminate any from consideration because examination and movement was difficult or impossible - because puppies being puppies - that can happen. The veterans are a very special group. We should all take notice of those lines that hold together for the long haul.

My goal was to sort to the front the dogs with the breed type pieces of squareness, width and depth of body combined with bone, correct outline, good head, bite and coat (with allowances for puppy coats and the older veterans.) I was pleased to find the majority of the entries with short backs, good bone and rib spring. I also found a lot of good toplines and tailsets, and overall, correct head proportions and bites.

I was looking for good shoulders - and was disappointed to find in the minority the "slightly more than 90 degrees" shoulder called for by the standard. A good shoulder is something we should treasure and protect as breeders - because once we lose that proper front end angle - it's one of the most difficult pieces to bring back. We also need to pay attention to equal layback of the scapula and humerus. While some of the dogs with a steep scapula and well laid back humerus can compensate into decent movement, loss of balance in front end angles will bring trouble in later generations. I was pleased to find most of the entries had shoulder bones of equal length, with few short forearms.

There were many good rears in the sweepstakes entries. Our breed appears to be moving away from the over angulated rears that were easy to find ten years ago - with the wasted-motion high kick that went with them. Hock length is also better. I found very few long or poor hocks. Many solid rear assemblies.

I was glad to see a ring of good size so that everyone would have a chance to show their movement. I was hoping to find many with the balanced and free movement called for by the standard. Restricted motion was easier to find than free movement. Balanced and free movement is critical for our breed because it's what allows the breed to work a long day without

tiring. The dog with correct movement is easy to spot. They move with such ease and efficiency there's no question they can move like that all day. Legs and shoulders extend fully without lift. You can draw an equilateral triangle - across the ground through each extended leg with the upper point of the triangle directly above the center of the back. This is the movement we need to preserve for future generations. That thought was foremost in my mind as I made my selections. I was also looking for the firm and flat back in motion called for by the standard.

It was very interesting to see the Bouviers that I judged on Wednesday back in the ring in the days following - some with different handlers. A few dogs that showed me their best faded in the heat and humidity and many days of shows. Others didn't - and some got stronger as the week went on. Judging is truly "on the day." Several of my classes were hard decisions between the top two - and same dogs/different day - the outcome could easily switch.

I thoroughly enjoyed the assignment and getting my hands on some truly lovely Bouviers. Thanks to my ring steward Pat Dowling who had everything in order from the first minute to the last and to the show committee for all their hard work that brought a smooth running and very enjoyable show.

Cheryl Calm