

IN YOUR HANDS by Paul Battigan

The Rough Collie – The standard – (Theirs and Ours)

An interpretation in four parts



The following is not intended to present an explanation of the standard in the traditional format. That has been expertly catered for by others in this series. What follows then is alternative style interpretation, one which at points will quite deliberately strive to “push a few buttons”, encourage the reader not to rely on being informed of something, not to agree with the presenter, but rather to think for themselves and cultivate or challenge their own point of view. The writer’s point of view here has no greater validity than the readers. A selection of photographs will accompany with permission and all with a focus on positive attributes.

PART 1

THE DOG - One cannot fail to recognise the common traits and characteristics inherited from the common ancestor and yet one cannot fail to appreciate the diversity we encounter in the species nor its genetic malleability, the human management of which gave rise to as many as 360 breeds of specific form and function, man’s best friend providing not only companionship but partnership in many and varied aspects of life.

The protection and preservation of these breeds lies within our remit now and as we follow in our own ancestor’s footsteps everything from the Chihuahuas to the Great Dane and all in between walk alongside us in all their own breed specific glory.



THE ROUGH COLLIE



- Something specific to a certain breed must have first caught our attention or imagination; in the case of our Rough Collie, whether we had a knowledge of all its components and complexities; that Breed Specific silhouette, that Breed Defining headpiece made an impact. We all began with that first impression and although the devil is in the detail, we

return to that essence of breed type again and again. With every judging appointment we begin with that overview and end the process with it also.



The detail however and the interpretation of it can on occasion elicit some debate. Why should that be? How often do we hear reference to the terms “classic” v “modern”? how often do we debate the term “fashion” in respect to where the breed is positioned at a given point in time? More to the point have we truly always addressed the question of the evolution of the breed in order to understand what is at the heart of the debate or do we simply repeat the debate out of habit?

In her work, which was no doubt also a labour of love, “The Collie”, published by Popular, the esteemed late Margaret Osbourne lays out a table of some dominant and recessive traits of the Rough Collie. As far back as 1957 Ms. Osbourne clearly informs the reader of a simple fact – that the Rough Collie may present as a breed where “two definite extremes of type are discernible” now that is “discernible” – not desirable, it is in other words a statement which wins my respect for its realism. Ms. Osbourne elaborates.” the tall, flat sided type, with a very long, lean head and a long body v the short, chunky type, not long in head and with a broad back and short body” Sound familiar? Is it the case then that this shorter headed, broader backed dog has legitimacy? – no absolutely not; again then – “discernible” but not desirable is key.

MODERATE - If we think of a balance beam, a see saw, with the square, “cobby” Collie at one end and the longest most lean at the opposite end, in other words two extremities – where does the “correct” Rough Collie lie? The answer is surely literally at the point of balance, the centre point where the subtle yet complex balance of qualities of strength and fitness, elegance and endurance, beauty and intelligence conspire to create this harmonious animal. The key to the importance of recognising that middle ground is to be found throughout the wording of the breed standard. Take note for example of the following requirements; size “Males - 22-24 inches at the shoulder”, Females 20-22 inches”, (and no longer in the current standard but a weight parameter again which was neither light nor heavy.) Take the length to height ratios, “slightly long compared with height”, the balance of head – “must be considered in proportion to the size of the dog”, never “deep through”, the size of the eye – “medium”, the bone – literally “moderate”, neck – “of fair length”, again neither short nor exaggerated, the coat is fitting the outline of body, even the temperament – everything is pointing you towards a single word even if it does not repeat – and that word is “moderate”.



THE BALANCE BEAM- The navigation of that imaginary balance beam is the challenge for the breeder. Each time the breeder plans a mating, they roll a genetic dice the sides of which bear the weight of Ms. Osbourne's dominant and recessive trait list and which carry the history of the breed and its evolution within its core. One roll of the dice in one direction, however marginal, will see the breeder traverse the balance beam gingerly or profoundly, losing ground in one area, gaining in another, experiencing the frustration sometimes of within the same litter finding greatly desired attributes being present in one puppy whilst a sibling may excel in another breed point. Perfection – the perfectly moderate and perfectly balanced animal in all aspects is the goal, the goalposts however are the property of “Mother Nature” and she is not always “playing ball”. The vast majority of high-quality Rough Collies lie within a margin, which can again be debated by the reader, but perhaps one which is a modest 5-10 % left or right of that fulcrum point. They possess differences however subtle and are in the absence of total perfection, being realistic, subject to the application of “weight” of preference by the individual who views them through their own eyes, who's experience in reality leads them to apply weight of judgement but without over emphasis to certain points as they tip toe along that beam of balance or when judging as they work their way through a class. A breeding choice, a shift left or right of centre, a heavy tilt on that dice and quality, type will alter and will alter remember in line with what we do know is a species which exhibits a considerable amount of malleability. On occasion it may be critiqued in some quarters, that this shift is the following of, is the result of a certain trend, of fashion, is the product of a certain time, even often unproductively stating that where faults arise it is the fault of a certain dog alone. But is this where in terms of our phraseology, we might challenge ourselves?

Fashion, by definition - “*a popular style, at a particular time or place*” and that's the thing, not necessarily at this current time, not necessarily at this place. Fashion is not a child of the 60's ,70 's or 80's. It is perpetual change or even cyclical but nevertheless always in motion. Some new wave of Rough Collie breeder did not adopt ownership of it at a given point in time. The history of the breed, its evolution, its genetic makeup, moreover the human management of the same, some level of appreciation of that is surely essential. What after all is the saying? “We cannot know where we are going if we don't know where we have come from.”

So careful consideration of this word “fashion” is sometimes called for. The world was not created in 6 days with the 7th day given over to the creation of the dog breeds, the notion that this elegant show ready specimen of a Rough Collie stepped out of the highlands of Scotland and straight into the show ring unaltered, might we consider this notion with caution. The dog breeds left to their own devices from the Chihuahua to the Collie to the Irish Wolfhound – would, unaltered by fashion, by human intervention - however driven by function – have remained many, many 100's of years ago as, well - The Wolf! It is common- place and convenient to sometime

eulogise the images and inhabitants of a by gone era. It is absolutely worth remembering to respect always all that went before, paying appropriate homage whilst simultaneously getting to grips with the ways of and reasons of our breeder forefathers in defining the attributes which differentiated their stock from others, be that stock in nature - companion, herder, retriever, protector etc. Now, the stock to which we can with reasonable accuracy trace the lineage of our present-day collies; let us consider the images of that time which are available to us.

Yes, those early traceable specimens possessed a distinguishable tapering of the muzzle, yes, they exhibit the semi erect ear carriage, they fall within the familiar size range, a comparable height to length ratio, they show hallmark markings, numerous trademark attributes but do they measure in totality against what some may label “classic”?

Does the history of this breed span a far greater period than the stock to which via stud book records we can accurately trace, and does it embody a far wider circle of representatives? well yes of course but for the purpose of examining the breed as a show dog, we examine the traceable lineage of that show dog and even if it includes examples which seem to conflict with some assumptions. Our assumption may lean towards an animal of more refinement; specimens which were representative of that refinement must have been present – but not exclusively so for the images of the time also suggest the presence of examples which appear deeper in stop, shorter in head etc.

Spanning the years 1880 to 1900, is it not worth noting the change, noting the speed of change; to take note of the pedigrees of the specimens which followed, the line and indeed inbreeding which took place as a collective effort to fix now familiar characteristics. So, what else was happening within this timeline, what might have influenced this change - 3 words – The Dog Show! The year 1859 did see an event (pre-Kennel Club) run for Pointers and Setters, and by the following year an event for Sporting and Non-Sporting Dogs. 1867 then saw the first scheduling of classes for “Collies/Colleys/Scotch Sheepdogs). Founder of the Kennel Club in the year 1873 and coincidentally owner also of “Trefoil” (born in the very same year on the Shirley Estate at Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, Ireland; the male to which via that tail male lineage we trace all of our Rough Collies back to; was one Mr. S.E Shirley and in an era of rapid change across all walks of life Mr. Shirley and his peers presided over an aspirational and newly fashionable pastime which hitherto did not exist with any regulation. Enter the show ring, amongst many many other breeds, the Rough Collie and the type which differentiated it from the many others. By 1891 as many as forty show licences were granted by the KC. Enter transport links, accessibility for the middle classes, disposable income in the post war years and note the rise of the sport and the refining and defining of many breeds as show dogs through these years. And that is the process which took place, the standard was for our breed not written in stone and somehow discovered in a romanticised Scottish Glen. How often do we hear it stated “there is only one standard” – absolutely true, but to tell a story

and to offer an interpretation of how the story unfolded and to get under the skin of the one true standard, is it not worth considering a reality, one which refers to the original breed standard that being in 1881, but also the Scottish Collie Clubs standard of 1885, the English clubs revised standard of 1898, the revised Rough and Smooth Collie standard of 1910, the Kennel club breed standard of 1950 (and bear in mind although only 1950 – this is the first year of the “Kennel Club breed standard”!), then the revised Kennel Club standard of 1969, then the revision of 1988 with a further amendment in 2012. The original standard did suggest that the skull be “rather broad”; the back “short”, colour “immaterial”, much amendment to the wording was clearly required and that process took place so very quickly.

With regards to the expression just for example we moved in description from “cunning, foxy” in 1885, to “expression full of intelligence” in 1898. The words “sweet and dreamy” appear by 1910, with “dreamy” dropped by 1950.

There are many examples. The standard as produced by the FCI adopts the detail of the country of origin albeit in a slightly different format or under alternative headings.

So this working dog then defined and refined, this Rough Collie a more “stylish” perhaps? example emerged in tandem with the sport of dog showing as it gathered pace, as it garnered favour, as various breeds became fashionable, some for example for reasons of endorsement and popularity amongst not the average stockman but amongst royalty even. This progression then stalled or interrupted by the war years and then that steady post war growth of what was an almost new aspirational era in society until finally the numerical, registration, exhibition hay day of this breed approached.

Consider even and never dismiss that the “Golden Era of Hollywood” produced a canine star incomparable in iconic status to others of the species which fuelled the rise in popularity of this fashionable dog. Note how even the colour of that certain dog influenced what was most fashionable from the palette of recognised colours of Sable, Tri Colour and Blue Merle which were available. Alteration of a breed on a whim, at the behest of fashion is not condoned, ever; but the attributing of the word fashion to solely the modern day breeder in solely a derogatory way, if in the absence of encouragement... to “press another button”, to challenge our thinking, is that itself really to be condoned? Long-term, what does that achieve?

What is the point to all this reflection upon history you may well ask? Where lies the direction and education of the specifics of the breed standard? Well, is it possible, that if we make a choice to understand the evolution of the breed, that we begin then to demystify the complexities of it? If we permit the images of early traceable exhibits, see the malleable nature of them, compare them with the more refined show dogs which graced the rings only relatively shortly thereafter and if we in tandem consider the dominant and recessive traits, the extremities of which even Ms. Osbourne referred to realistically as far back as the 1950’s.. now we have

perhaps some understanding of the fact that the propensity for these variances to exist, did in fact - always exist – it is not new, is not a child of the 60's, 70's, 80's – it actually always existed. Now we at least have the potential to relieve ourselves of the endless burden of a “modern v classic” debate which does not further the conversation and we stem the flow of blame for what we see as era specific faults. We see instead the potential for collective thinking, encouragement and mutual support. How often, ringside, have we engaged and been party to discussion on the shortcomings of “that dog”, “this line”, “that breeder”, as if somehow just because it is convenient, it were actually possible to neatly package all rights and wrongs into distinct boxes and avoid entirely “that dog”, “this line”; when the truth is in fact that given the gene pool shared amongst the European based Rough Collie, we are never more than one mating or two away ourselves from the very health issue we might malign a peer for, one mating, one roll of the genetic dice away from the very same breed fault we have identified in a competitor's stock. Will the knowledge of the pedigree relieve you of the burden of such pitfalls of perception?

Yes, we have faults, yes, they need addressing, yes at times we have a heightened awareness of frequently occurring issues at points in time. It would be wrong and irresponsible to deny that or to deny discussion of those issues. However, do we also need to find a way to move the discussion forward and ensure that the debate is always constructive, always supportive?

Part 2

THE HEAD – Consider in your mind images of a selection of breeds & an exercise to identify those breeds in the absence of the head being visible in the image. In each case, will you instantly identify the breed correctly? In other words, is there an element which is relied upon to consistently suggest which breed is represented? We have chosen to keep and to further not a generic animal but an animal which is partly defined by a breed specific head. It therefore cannot be regarded with anything other than the standard stated “great importance”. This does not imply of course that it can be consider in isolation.



For the writer there is a significant difference between a dog which appears to “look at you” and a dog which appears somehow or other to “look- into you”. To use the cliché – “the eyes are the windows to the soul”. The faithful, mild and loyal demeanor of our breed is somehow reflected through the expression, this expression is then and rightly so greatly desired.

The complexity here lies in the fact that the eye alone will not be evaluated in isolation. True expression is total expression, to exist in totality the colour, shape, size, placement, even surrounding pigment of the eye must conspire not only with

each other but with the cavity which receives that eye. Crucial then is the centre point of the correctly balanced head – the stop, relevant then are all the points of balance and angles which the standard describes, the size, placement and carriage of the ears also important elements.

The achievement of that angle if you like, that wedge shape, for this writer – in its isolation will still perhaps not elevate the quality in totality; for the angle is akin to a mathematical base, a framework but to complete that look of quality and elevate, there is a requirement for a level of moulding to present in the foreface, a cleanness to maintain in the cheek, a supporting underjaw which accommodates correct dentition with a tight and not short lip line. A smoothness must be present as the hand wants not to dissect a headpiece as if it could be compartmentalised but rather flows over the whole from the tip of the nose right back to that nicely filled flat skull, not flared or deep skull.



We often speak of the head “pattern”. The word pattern does not in itself appear in the written standard and yet it is one handed down the generations with quite some legitimacy. Consider if you will, a tailor’s pattern, consider an architect drawing, consider the smallest change in their dimensions and how that translates into the finished cloth or structure, whichever the case may be. What if the headpiece of the dog could be deconstructed graphically, reverse engineered so that we were enabled to view a pattern? Now take that pattern and if just for one example the “stop “ on the Rough Collie “breaks low”, rather than being centrally placed, is too deep, or is lacking

altogether within that pattern, when we reconstruct the image, when the pattern is something physical again, imagine how that change in dimension might dictate an altered receptacle for the eye. (Note the well-placed stop and oblique eye which all the examples show here)



The numerous working parts, they will not necessarily align in 100% predictable and completely consistent fashion from dog to dog even with line breeding, is it any wonder then we have subtle variances from dog to dog? Is it any wonder expression is a greatly prized asset?



Again imagine producing a selection of Rough Collie head study images, firstly as the original image appeared, secondly in 3D - the image in other words as a graphic artist using modern technology might map out the dimension or engineering of the finished product, then have it “unravelling” into quite literally – that pattern again. Imagine if we alter even just ever so slightly the eye placement or dimension on the flat pattern. We now “reconstruct”, reproduce the image and compare it against the original. Such subtle difference has the power to make all the difference. It is not the reading or memorising then of the head standard of the breed, as if every dog will present fitting that template to equal perfection, in total uniformity ; it is the understanding of what you are seeing and how and why a pattern may differ ever so slightly and still regardless produce a different “look”. It’s “listening” to what your eye and hand is telling you and developing an understanding of your own response to it.

MOVEMENT



In evaluating the structure of the Rough Collie, for the purpose of this interpretation, we are going to review at the end of this section, the dog in motion. First however, consider the working dog in the field. The job description for the herding dog does not describe an animal which is using its structure to move in one consistent manner. Rather, the dog will be required to constantly vary its pace and speed. It will alternate between maximising its physical presence and progressing also at times in a somewhat stealth like manner, head carried relatively low. It will drive off its hocks to progress (not swing from its hip) but it will need the ability to turn quickly and change direction and if those strong well let down hocks are the powerhouse of the rear assembly, then those flexible pasterns in front, good feet, the moderate bone, they are also essential. Keeping balance, as the animal navigates the landscape and drives its charges will be a requirement of the job spec. and that rudder like well set on and carried tail will play its part also.

(Here two modern time Rough Collies, a mother & daughter, also both Champions of the showing are enjoying their work)



If stamina is required, then the presence of heart and lung room is essential, and thus a depth and spring of rib, the length of which (& length of loin) will determine the outline also; but keep hold of that word “moderate”. Consider in a completely alternative sphere, the physicality of the human long-distance runner, he or she does not require the physique of a heavyweight boxer in order to accomplish their goal, nor do they

bear the burden of assuming the need to sprint throughout the endeavour. In the Collie a level of fitness, of muscle tone will be essential, a level of economy will assist – in other words the ability to extend those front legs, maintain enough firmness through that top line, be neither in nor out at elbow, possess that slight rise over the croup – all of these elements will contribute to the efficiency of the gait without waste of energy.

Angulation is frequently discussed in terms of how the rear angle, how the turn of stifle and the well let down hock appear and allow, in reality; the dog to drive forward, but front angulation is of equal importance.

The weight bearing, correctly angulated forehand is not alone producing a “cosmetic” element, adding a noble look for the mere sake of it. A somewhat “noble” outlook may be achieved from a length of neck which is for example technically a “Ewe” neck, but that is not the reach of neck which flows, crest like from a shoulder which is well laid back, a shoulder the angle of which is complementary to the correct upper arm. Note the correct reach and drive on the example here.

To finish, note the double, weather resistant coat which adorns that working framework as the animal goes through its working day, experiencing a range of conditions. Consideration of all these elements is given and thus we are respecting the function of the breed and its support of its master.



The showing offers the moving dog, on occasion the space and surface to demonstrate its ability to good effect, it does also on occasion inhibit that process depending on the prevailing conditions and parameters. The mix of gaiting potential, the variety of pace possible, the combination of strength, endurance and

subtle, quite persuasion that the working dog might employ— these elements are not exhibited within the showing but what we are looking for, within the confines of that arena, is at least the suggestion of each of those assets, the sense of potential conveyed, the clues as to the capability and historical function. The physical condition of the animal at that point in time will be relevant, its temperament will be relevant as the dog's attitude to its surroundings will dictate how the animal holds itself and thereafter gaits.

There follows some video of a Rough Collie on the move as it might circle a ring and with our thanks to the owners of all images shared here. Click to play.

<https://youtu.be/4NMBgZ7jXgE>



PART 3 - Judging - In Practice





We have studied the written word, attended the seminars and hands on evaluations, read various interpretations of which this is only one, and a modest one at that, absorbed as much information as possible – but now what...?? Where does that take us?

The Conviction

Leaving the world of Dogs behind for a moment, science will inform us that when we look upon an image of what we perceive to be a beautiful person, whether or not we are conscious of it, whether or not we analysis or

articulate it, we may succumb to subconscious appreciation of facial symmetry. A somewhat natural appreciation of symmetry is within our own coding, we don't memorise the components of the reaction in order to **feel** the reaction. In the world of dogs, yes, we educated and familiarised ourselves with the written word, we memorised it consciously or absorbed it naturally over time. We learned from our seniors, our peers and our own experiences as we went along, but we retain surely not only an ability to judge with our heads, we subconsciously engage our hearts also and we “*feel*”, we react. Regardless of the commonality of the trigger which evokes our feeling or response, the weight of response, the totality of the reaction – this is our own. In other words, we do of course respect and adhere to that which we have learned but we also feel with our own heart, react with our own gut and see through our own eyes. Is this the reason we do not see 100% uniform show results?

The standard is the standard, regardless of its various historical incarnations, the currently recognised standard we do judge to – but we do so from a particular perspective - i.e. - the centre of the ring, with the benefit of our own eyes, our own hands, we judge at a particular point in time under the conditions of that moment, in a setting particular to that moment. We judge the entry as it presents itself to us in that moment, each dog against the standard but each dog against the other present. We furthermore do this within a very limited timeframe, reviewing, thinking, feeling and deciding all within minutes – considering that then, we are obliged to hold the courage of our own convictions in making our decisions, our own, not those of a mentor, a peer, not the ringside who at that moment inhabit an alternative perspective with the luxury of not nailing their colours to any mast. It is a privilege to be in such a position but one of responsibility and all the education in the world will not alone suffice or act as a substitute for the recognition of the need to and ability to decide and please oneself and not an audience.

The dog game is quite unlike any other, we indulge in the exhibition of our stock but that accounts for only a small percentage of the commitment we make. It is more than a hobby or sport; it is a lifestyle choice. The show may only be a Saturday's

work, the investment of time, energy and finance is a seven day a week affair. So heavily invested are we, such influence does it bear on our lives, it represents a passion then which is the best of the game, but can that very passion can also be something of a double-edged sword? Can investment and passion occasionally be to the detriment of perspective? Though it may be labelled man's best friend, the dog does not for example require humanising, it is enough, as a multi-faceted species aside from us – it is enough, just as it is. Surely one favour we can do the dog and ourselves is to remember to maintain perspective, consider then and respect the dog for all that it is and recognise all it is not and does not need to be. It is not an extension of oneself nor is it our child. The dog furthermore is without ego, the ego is ours alone and it matters not to the dog what its takings from a show may be, it is not there competing of its own volition. If the dog losses it will not hang its head in shame on return to its kennel mates, we are not then required to be upset by loss on its behalf, or as if it were our child regardless of the extent of the investment. What the dog needs at the end of a show day is the same as it needs every other day – for you to be its pack leader, to provide food, shelter and companionship. Yes, it is a statement of the obvious but occasionally so invested in our own dog world bubble are we, can our perspective become clouded? Does this have the potential to be our greatest downfall? Is that loss of perspective frequently at the root of the issues we experience? One favour then we can do ourselves is, regardless of how loved and much a part of the family it may be, for those few minutes that the dog is appearing in competition – regard it as “stock”. That does not devalue the dog in any way, on the contrary it respects the animal as a separate entity. When we choose to consider as exhibitors our show dog as “stock” in competition; win, lose or draw it will influence our reaction, more to the point when we come to the ring as a judge ourselves, that now habitual attitude will extend itself and the judge will have a greater ability to consider the entry before them as stock, regardless of the relationship one may have to its owner, breeder, fellow exhibitor, the greater now the ability to judge without fear or favour.

The repetition verbatim of a breed standard in the absence of feeling, in the absence of the mention of and encouragement to maintain also our own personal standard of behaviour and keeping of our own compass, will that yield positive long-term results? It would not seem so. Start as you mean to go on, but in dogs; go on as you meant to start..., in other words every now and then, is it worth stepping back into “civilian” shoes and reviewing the dog world at a healthy distance?

If we question not each other, but one's self, are our principles and actions the same now as when we began and if not - why not? If we proclaim to have a genuine affection for a breed, then should we seek to affect that breed in a genuine way? Win or lose - maintain perspective and then in turn maintain the standard of the breed. Can we have one without the other?

To reach that centre of the ring and enjoy contributing to the whole process by judging, there must also be a clear pathway to the judging appointment, a structure

which will with transparency and complete fairness be available to all who wish to follow that path. In Ireland for 2019 so called specialist judges, individuals who own themselves this breed accounted for a mere 5 appointments out of the 36 sets of Green Stars on offer, (2 of those 5 being at the two IKC licenced Breed Club events, i.e. the AICSS & RCCI). That figure is quite typical of the average over the course of the past number of years. Also do we know individuals, specialists, who had chosen to take a back seat in terms of breeding and showing over the years who have fallen through the cracks and their knowledge and experience not harnessed by keeping them in the loop in regard to their potential and qualifications to continue to judge or do we know individuals who have never had the invitation to judge their own breed in their own country?

If someone chooses to judge and has the desire to “progress” by adding their availability to assess other breeds, then by all means they should do so, in fact if they are passionate about it and their eye for a dog and their honesty and integrity determines it, then they should be actively encouraged to progress. The Dog World needs such people. BUT the assumption that one ought to progress through the breeds of one’s own group and then beyond – (to deliberately for debate push another button), that I might question. It is perfectly acceptable to say “no” and if one’s interest in the next breed and the next is not full and genuine – is it preferable to say, “no thank you” and decline an invitation? Did the judge you entered once under who appeared disinterested in your breed really start out that way, or did they get swept along in a tide of progression or lose themselves or perspective in order to arrive at that point? Just something to think about ...

There are also many hugely successful breeders who do not judge at all. Their contribution is regardless beyond question.

The appointment of a judge because it makes commercial sense alone, because an individual ticks several financial boxes, that to the consistent cost in opportunity or exclusion to the specialist, is that questionable? (and that, yes, that is a point of view which may meet with disagreement.) The “All Rounders” option is invaluable, one should never seek to diminish it in any way whatsoever – but yet again let us return to our “balance beam” and let us navigate our way to an appropriate mix of judging panels and if not – why not?

In keeping that even keel there may be other positive, habit forming rituals worth practicing under our exhibitor’s hat first which will lead to good practice when eventually judging. When in competition, even when focussed on one’s own dog, there may be moments when during the class the occasion presents itself to “check out” the competition. If we engage in that from the viewpoint solely of the competitor, the temptation may arise to identify solely the weaknesses in one’s classmates, to focus on the negative. Should we be wary of that? Rather than only finding fault, with regularity seek also to acknowledge the strengths of your competition and

ensure that your opinion is a balanced and fair appraisal as the habit of same ought to lend itself to a positive frame of mind when your own judging appointment arrives.

If the rival dog in exhibition finds no favour with you at all in any aspect do also be clear and honest with yourself that you have considered in this only the merits or lack of within the dog and that your opinion of the dog has not been influenced by your relationship, or lack of relationship with that dog's owner. The novice can on occasion be impressed by the appearance of sportsmanship and support by a sudden burst of ringside applause which greets the awarding of a "ticket" to a certain dog, only to become shortly thereafter rather disillusioned to learn that the applause was in fact not for the winning dog, but a response to a certain dog which has been beaten! If one aspires to judge, can we avoid then whilst exhibiting oneself, the pitfall of engagement in the disingenuous? In other words, can we really be one kind of exhibitor and then suddenly be a different kind of judge?

The practice of spectator "ringside judging" and commentary is a complete inevitability, and it is not in fact unhealthy. To imagine that one's dog will not fall under the gaze of the spectator and be subject to their individual or collective assessment is naïve. We can however temper our commentary, seek out the positive and retain just some of our opinions at least for occasions when they are actually sought? We can silently critique, the practice of same, preparing us for the eventual requirement to critique ones actual rather than virtual winners. It is furthermore inevitable that an element of result prediction will surface either preshow or ringside, as speculation upon the likelihood of a judge elect finding favour or otherwise with dog x, y or exhibitor z occurs. Inevitable though it may we can in fact temper our commentary or engagement in that activity as it can lead to several unfortunate pitfalls and assumptions which may be entirely unfair to the judge or his/her entry. At its most extreme it can even influence the actual entry which presents on the day. If the good habit exists when exhibiting, then the habit will persist also when judging to keep an open mind and to judge as one finds on the day in question.

No dog ever entered the ring with the grade of "Excellent". Therefore, no dog has ever been "Downgraded". It is an unfortunate expression. Every show day is a new day, every playing field is a level one. Fair minded judging, not to be confused with judging with an eye on the popularity vote or the prospect of securing the next appointment, simply honest judging – it does not begin then when one begins to take centre ring position, it does not begin when memorising a standard, it does not begin with the passing of an exam; it surely begins with good practice, positive habit forming practice as an exhibitor and this is the reason I have included the subject here.

On the subject of critiques, and the production of same as a requirement, it should be noted that the expectancy differs from country to country, from a total absence, to perhaps critiquing the first two in each class and submitting same to the dog press

thereafter for publication and then up to and including the provision of an immediate critique of every dog. The ability to judge does not necessarily determine a proficiency in description, nor vice versa. If we should in Ireland follow the route of many other FCI countries in critiquing every entrant, as part of the debate on same it is worth considering the real value, for if a brief, time limited description checks a requirement box, and if that description is an evaluation against the standard as one progresses through a class as a judge, to what extent is it an explanation to an exhibitor of the judges evaluation of their dog relative to their competitors? The “staffing” of rings would also need to be addressed, if it can on occasion be challenging to secure the services of ring stewards for almost 40 Championship shows per annum alone, would the requirement to also provide scribes at each prove a challenge too far, would a payment incentive be required to staff such a ring and if so who might fund that? In other words, there is a need to balance “real” value v “perceived value”. Should we be careful what we wish for or at least debate all views?

Part 4

THE AMERICAN STANDARD

The first recorded UK export of the breed to the USA was in 1879 and thereafter a steady stream of UK bred stock found its way there to provide the foundations of that country’s early kennels. By 1886 there was already a breed club established in America. The wordsmith author of the American standard has offered us something to be appreciated for depth of description, a written standard which is in some contrast to the more pared back and deliberately more uniform description of the country of origin or Kennel Club (UK) version. It deploys words such as harmonious, proud, responsive, impressive. It retains the much to be admired “carrying no useless timber” phrase and describes as I would also choose to include, the word “receptacle” in relation to how the foreface is chiselled to hold the eye. It clearly states, “a heavy headed dog lacks the bright, alert, full of sense look that contributes so greatly to expression”. It contains all the familiar elements of the UK KC standard; it is attempting after all to describe the very same animal. The description of the stop is somewhat different, (UK “slight but perceptible” v USA “very slight but perceptible) but the American standard noting also “a very slight prominence of the eyebrows”. and then again “the arched eyebrows”. This is not a word contained in the UK standard. The American standard discourages against a “prominent haw”, again absent from ours. The paragraph on the ears carries a much fuller description. The body and leg paragraphs are fleshed out also. It is the American standard which on gait, offers the phrase “single track” that being observed as the speed of the animal in motion increases, “bringing the front inward in a straight line from the shoulder toward the centre line of the body”. Key here however must surely also be the remark - “as the speed increases” for the animal at a slower pace, and that pace being often dictated by the scale of a show ring, may still if appearing to move too closely behind, be in fact actually moving too closely behind, not necessarily single

tracking. The most significant difference lies within two areas. In the UK the size of the Collies was defined for the first time in 1881 however the American KC increased the range in females from 20-22" to 22-24" and in males from 22-24" to 24-26". Now on the face of it that may not appear hugely significant but do remember that the standard, either one, does not encourage the breeder towards either the minimum or the maximum range. Therefore, consider then the outlook of a UK 20" inch bitch against the USA 26" male, now the difference is more noticeable is it not. A 5ft 4" gentleman would appear in stature quite different to a 6ft tall gentleman would he not? Remember however that malleable nature of the animal in question, the traversing of a height relevant balance beam is not in itself something extreme in nature. There is no reason on that basis to assume that quality representatives of both UK/European and American lineage have not or cannot be successfully merged. On the question of colour; the three recognised colours of Sable & White, Tricolour and Blue Merle were clearly defined for the first time in the written UK standard in the year 1969 but of course the 3 colours were adhered to for some considerable time before that. The American standard however has since allowed also for the option of the white, either all white or having a predominately white body but with the sable, tri or blue marked head. * (see note) The adage "when in Rome" applies here, the rule of the day in the country of judgment applies. If one is judging on soil which approved the American standard one considers accordingly the question of allowable colour; but if one judges on "home turf" under the standard of the country of origin and in all countries under the FCI, then one is obliged to respect that which it approves.



There is of course a precedent in cross Atlantic "splitting", and one example is the case of the Cocker Spaniel - Not until 1970 did the KC in London officially recognise the American Cocker although the divergence and separation had in fact been official in the States since decades before. Similarly, although the first Akita only arrived in the USA in 1937, with registrations there

commencing in 1972, we nevertheless have now the American Akita or Akita v Japanese Akita Inu. From time to time the debate re ignites, should the "Collie" and the "American Collie" be acknowledged as two distinct breeds? Social media has in recent years fuelled that discussion. As in all matter's social media related, the medium itself, it is not responsible for discussion which can err on the negative or divisive. It is merely a mirror, it reflects – albeit rapidly and with permanency the thoughts and options which abound. Not that the option exists, currently at least; but were it possible to conduct a poll, *split or remain* – on what side of the fence would the reader fall? As things currently stand each breeder retains the right to choose his/her opinion and depending on the jurisdiction, thereafter, exercise that opinion as

they see fit. So currently if a breeder wishes to avoid “American lineage” they can do so, and vice versa, the choice is theirs. If as a European the opportunity has not presented to one, to study in the flesh, at least a very broad selection if not majority of American standard representatives, or vice versa; _then when it comes to a Brexit type opinion poll, can we truly exclude all representatives based upon our “sampling”? If we have not observed yet, a representative which appeals, does that confirm that none exists? If we ourselves do not have a vision of how to successfully combine the two, do we deny another the opportunity to at least attempt to do so? If we do not possess a crystal ball and cannot with confidence predict that either gene pool might for any health reason for example, benefit in the future from cross co-operation, can we afford to firmly close that door ?. Before jumping to any conclusion these are just some of the questions we need to ask of ourselves. Remember also once that door has closed there would be no going back. Right now, the right to choose exists.



(Note) Although “Sable Merle” does not exist within the wording of the paragraph on colour in the approved USA standard, there is nevertheless a “Directive” which states there that “Quality rather than colour or pattern, is of foremost importance in judging the Collie. The standards emphasis on overall balance, head properties and expression are clear and should always take precedence over colour. Ideally, the sable merle should have dark

eyes, matched in colour. If the eyes are not dark and matched in colour, the sable merle should be penalised (not excused or disqualified) to the degree that the expression is affected”.

To put it another way, the words “Sable Merle” do not appear as a separate colour in the standard as the animal is actually considered to be sable (is phenotypically sable) but carrying the merle pattern and expressing it to varying degrees, sometimes recognisably so, sometime less so.

Whites as recognised by the AKC are not to be confused with “defective whites”, the offspring of two blue merles (double dominant dilution gene)

(Note also ... UK / FCI standard – “All white or predominantly white is highly undesirable”)

In all cases, in all regards & irrespective of geography, for all its joys and challenges, for all the debates, for all the questions we might ponder upon

The Standard – both The Rough Collies itself, and the standard of its custodians, - is ...

IN YOUR HANDS.

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