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Twenty-Five Years

Recently in the mail I received a certificate from AKC for having been an approved judge for 25 years. I thought perhaps some reflections on these years might prove interesting to readers of this column.

The first time I stood in the ring and judged the Chihuahua was in May of 1992 at the Michigan Chihuahua specialty. That was one of the more humbling experiences I have had as a judge. I had some "I will never" mindsets that just did not work from me as I stood in that ring. I resolved to do my own thing since I have to look at my reflection in the mirror after I judge. It is my bias that we who judge should attempt to please no one but ourselves.

When I first began to show dogs in 1968, the Chihuahuas I saw were for the most part smooth coats. An occasional long coat would be entered, but the long coats lacked good type at this time in my opinion. I was drawn to the long-coated variety and set out to find a bitch who had decent type and pedigree. Like most who set out on such a venture, I was destined to have more disappointments than successes. My first long-coat developed a reverse scissors bite and was decidedly long in body. She was spayed and placed as a pet.

I began to breed litters of puppies. Most of the litters were single male puppies. I think I recall having 17 male puppies before a bitch puppy appeared in a litter.

I began attending the national specialty of the breed in the late 1970s/early '80s. I met Mary Lyddon, mother of Terri, at one of these specialty shows. She offered to sell me a bitch puppy, but Terri had to finish it before I could take her home. I agreed to these terms; Terri finished the bitch, and she came to live with us. She contributed to my long list of male puppies and usually had only one puppy per litter. She was finally spayed and placed in a pet home.

When I reflect on my early days in the show ring, I recall most exhibitors were down on their knees posing their dogs. I really did not like this method, but I joined the ranks of others down on my knees. When I was training a puppy at home, I often baited my puppy like I had observed exhibitors in other breeds doing. I decided I was going to break away from the "down on your knees" method of showing a dog. I also felt a Chihuahua needed to be brave enough to walk into the show ring rather than to be carried into the ring.

As time passed my efforts were met with successes. My first homebred champion was Ch. Lyddon's Arctic Blast. He was born by C-section one dreadfully cold winter night. When I got into the car to begin my trip home, the weatherman on the radio said, "We have just been delivered an Arctic blast." The weatherman named my puppy. Blast was a wolf sable long-coat. He was the only puppy of that color I ever had.

By this time smooth coated Chihuahuas in the show ring still excelled over the long coated variety. However, the long coats seemed to be improving steadily. I remember a long coated bitch was awarded BIS at one of our nationals. Handlers of our breed were beginning to stand and bait their dogs in the show ring. This change came about gradually. Today it is seldom that we see even very young puppies being shown with handlers down on their knees.

Comparing 1992 to 2017 reveals marked changes in many aspects of the breed. Probably the most marked change is in the quality of the long-coated variety. The long-coat of today is very equal to the smooth-coat. Rear assemblies had improved to the point we see few of what I would call crippled dogs in the show ring. Presentation of our breed has improved both in showing methods and in grooming. The Chihuahua should always appear natural rather than sculptured in the show ring. We have come a very long way. Those that are still breeding litters of puppies need to keep on course of continued improvement in breed type and soundness.

—Richard Miller