

Norwegian Elkhound Club of Great Britain Championship Show

23.4.2016

Firstly, I'd like to explain something about my approach to judging our lovely breed. When I undertook the Club's year-long Judges' Training course 16 years ago, my cohort pledged to "judge the dog, the whole dog and nothing but the dog". Strange as it might seem, and much as I might have been amused by the experience at the time, it obviously had an effect on me, as it is a promise that I have chosen to abide by during the whole of my career as a judge. Not for me the superficial lustre of clever handling, political affiliation, nor indeed any consideration of 'the other end of the lead', but rather a deep understanding and appreciation of the finer points of the standard and the purpose of the breed, coupled with a determination to judge without fear or favour. I think that, on the whole, I have a reputation for fairness and impartiality amongst my fellow exhibitors, particularly those that share the same strong moral compass. These comments do have relevance to some events that rather disappointed me on the day of the show.

And so to one of the high points in the career of any judge of the Norwegian elkhound in this country – the privilege of judging the Club Championship Show, having been selected for the honour by one's peers. The size of entry was comparable with that for Crufts this year, but much reduced on the numbers that could be expected when I first started attending shows, in the late 1970s. Several dogs were absent either because I bred them or had close (human) familial connections to them. Overall, the greatest depth of quality is in the bitches, where I found several top flight representatives of the breed. Whilst it is true that most of the best kennels from times gone by were founded on strong female lines, you do still need top quality stud dogs to take your good bitches to and there weren't many of those, although the single Stud Dog class entry was exceptional and proved the merit of at least one of our older males.

This year has been bad for constant moulting and many of the dogs were either out of coat or blowing coat. This might account for the number of exhibits that did not exhibit the clear undercoat required by the standard, but rather were beige in colour. Some dogs also lacked distinct harness markings and the black tips in the over coat that are also referred to in the standard, and which keep the undercoat lying flat. The fashion these days may be for pale and fluffy, but if you pay any attention to the standard at all, you will know that type of coat is not correct.

There were some other trends for breeders to be aware of. Length of leg seems to be a particular issue. The distance from the ground to the brisket should be at least half the height at the withers and preferably a little more in a young dog, whose chest will drop as it reaches maturity. The great Norwegian breeder/judge, Olav Campbell (who was sometimes called The Father of the Norwegian Elkhound) criticised the British-bred stock of the 1970s for their lack of length of leg and overall heaviness, and I think that he might well be of the same opinion today. I was struck by the lack of drive that was generally evident and I felt pure joy where I actually found it. Additionally, several of the dogs were crossing over at the rear when seen from behind, which should not be confused with singletracking. My last appointment was at the National Specialty in 2014 and lack of drive seems to be something that American breeders don't struggle with to the same degree. All of these characteristics would affect a dog's ability to hunt in the uneven terrain of rural Norway, with its rocks, streams, slopes, deep undergrowth and, in the forests, fallen logs.

On a more positive note, we are seeing a return to a more compact outline and there has been a great improvement in tail carriage and curl. But there is still a huge variance of type generally and we seem to have completely lost the skill of being able to identify the faults in our own lines and use judicious breeding combinations to make improvements.

I must comment that the owner of Best in Show rolled out one good quality bitch after another – where has she been hiding them?

Puppy Dog (1,0) 1. Middleton's Kestos Vorik at Graythor. Well-grown youngster for 10 months, presenting lovely proportions, good bone, a pleasing head and dark eyes. Well-laid shoulders giving a good front action, topline just falling away a little at the croup, so not quite so precise behind. Beautifully presented, correct coat and a good clear colour. A promising puppy. BPIS.

Junior Dog (2,1) 1. Medhurst's Ellahyde Fine N'Dandi. Completely out of coat and hence looked a little light in substance today, but a striking young male. What coat he had was a beautiful clear colour with the correct contrasting darker outer coat. Very compact in outline with the shortest loin I found all day, excellent length of leg and a well-curved and high-set tail. Attractive head with dark eyes, ears and mask. Balanced movement in profile, but a little unsettled going round the ring. He needs time to mature, but keep going, he's worth it.

Yearling Dog (2,1) 1. Crossley's Crossridge Came Alone. A really nice dog and something of a revelation to go over. On standard for size, compact outline, with a short loin, a level topline and a well-set and curled tail, adequate bone. I would prefer a shade more length of leg to complete the picture. Moulting, but a good colour. Good wedge-shaped head with neat, dark ears and a medium eye. Excellent layback of shoulder, giving sufficient forechest and a pleasing length and arch of neck. Excellent rear angulation with plenty of dog behind the tail. Although a little soft in condition compared with some, he moved very freely and with drive in this class, closely controlled by his more than competent handler. Just beginning to disintegrate in the challenge, he did enough to secure the RCC.

Novice Dog (1,0) 1. Ellahyde Fine N'Dandi

Post Graduate Dog (2,1) 1. Crossridge Came Alone

Limit Dog (2,0) 1. Eaves-Paull's Barbelka Uwaga. Smart dog with a compact outline, a level topline and a well-curved, high-set tail. Pleasing head, with dark eyes and neat, dark ears. Good rear angulation, but would prefer a little more return of upper arm and a touch more length of leg for balance. Correct coat of good colour and texture. In hard condition, he was somewhat unsettled on the move, but his attentive handler kept him in check. 2. Wadsworth's Aftonlee Arran Winds. Not quite the proportions of 1, nor the precision at the rear on the move, but better in forehand construction and length of neck. Strong bone, masculine head, dark ears, would prefer slightly less depth of stop. Beautiful coat and colour.

Open Dog (7,1) 1. Simms' Ch Bowerhinton Broder at Elverdal. A beautifully balanced dog, demonstrating good breed type and proportions. Square outline with good length of leg, lovely bone, a level topline, tail set high and well-curved. A well-shaped and carried head with dark ears, dark mask and a medium-coloured eye. I would prefer just a little more angulation both fore and aft, but his movement was balanced in profile and he moved very cleanly both coming towards me

and going away. Carrying a harsh coat and presented to perfection, he literally shone and had 'look at me' in spades. CC, BOS & RBIS. 2. Moughton & Wolstenholme's Ch Bowerhinton Bellino at Dekris. An old favourite and presented, as always, in tip-top condition. Beautiful head conveying the nobility of the elkhound male, strong bone, powerful body with good depth of chest, excellent forehand construction. He moved with drive from well-muscled hindquarters. Well-curved and carried tail, lovely clear, harsh jacket. Close-up to the main winners, but just preferred his litter brother's topline and more compact profile on the day. 3. Gray's Strom Footloose for Grasilva (Imp USA). Not quite the compact outline of 1, nor the shoulder placement of 2, but a very smart dog with good length of leg, strong bone and good depth of chest. Pleasing head with an open expression, very alert. Level topline, well-set tail, in hard condition, moved with drive.

Michelle Lucas Special Beginners Dog (1,0) 1. Ellahyde Fine N'Dandi

Special Veteran Dog (7-10 Years)(2,1) 1. Haugstad's Ch Kestos Night Cap at Skogly. A compact dog, but might prefer a little more length of leg for balance. Nice wedge-shaped head, neat ears, excellent bone. Tail well-curved, but would prefer a little less slope through the croup. Moved out quite well.

Special Veteran Dog (10+ Years)(2,0) 1. Middleton's Ch/Ir Ch Kestos Ispy at Graythor JW ShCM. Another old favourite, and at just a few days short of his 13th year, this old gentleman is in wonderful condition. He has a beautiful head which is still carried proudly, good shoulder placement, excellent length of leg and a compact outline. Still very strong in the forehand, only the curl of his tail, which has relaxed slightly, gives any indication of his age. The ultimate showman, always switched on, he moved well and I was pleased to award him BVD. 2. Gilbert's Barlestone Ingolf. Not quite the proportions of 1, but a neat head, strong bone, a good clear colour and a well-set tail. Stronger in the forehand than the rear these days, he was very calm and collected on the move.

Puppy Bitch (2,0) 1. Barganska's Barbelka Zagadka. 11 months old. Rather a pretty young bitch, with a pleasing head, dark eyes, ears and mask. Good length of leg and overall proportions, good bone and feet. Correct coat, with a good clear undercoat and contrasting darker outer coat. Quite good rear angulation and tail set, but still needs to develop across the chest. RBPIS. 2. Crossley's Crossridge Classi Lassi. At 10 months, rather more immature than 1 in terms of development, and I felt that she was a little overawed by the occasion. Good forehand construction, moving a little close behind at the moment. Compact outline and her coat was a lovely clear colour. A sweet, feminine puppy who needs time to develop and learn her craft.

Junior Bitch (3,1) 1. Maun's Bowerhinton Breath Of Life. A little less compact than 2, but I preferred her angulation. A well-balanced head, although ears a little tall, good reach of neck, good, straight front coming towards me, less precise going away. Level topline, powerful body for her age, strong bone, well-shaped feet, tail carried high over the back, good clear undercoat, although darker markings a little indistinct. 2. Barbelka Zagadka

Yearling Bitch (3,0) 1. Bowerhinton Breath Of Life. 2. Wrigley's Kestos Mystical. Had also left her clothes behind, but she was a lovely clear grey. Compact outline and good length of leg, not quite the bone of 1 and perhaps slightly upright in pastern in comparison. Feminine head with a sweet

expression, well-set and curled tail. Her ribs yet to spring, she has some maturing to do, but her overall body shape is good and she should do well with maturity. 3. Kemple's Halejeger Sijsje-Wiesje. Rather different in type to 1 and 2 and not quite in show condition. I liked her bone, her attractive head and her harness markings were well-defined. At her first show, she was a little unsettled.

Novice Bitch (2,0) 1. Barbelka Zagadka. 2. Kestos Mystical.

Post Graduate Bitch (5, 0) 1. Ramm's Vinelka Child Of The Moon. A very compact, feminine bitch, with an attractive head, neat ears, dark eyes and an open, friendly expression. Tightly curled tail set high over her back, correct coat. Very good angulation front and rear, lovely legs and well-shaped feet, she looked very good on the move. On the day, just felt that she was carrying a shade too much weight which altered my perception of her length of leg in the challenge. 2. Bowerhinton Breath Of Life. 3. Mortimer's Laakso Alyssa. A well-constructed bitch, rather short on coat today. Not quite as compact as 1 and 2, she is, however, well-angulated and moved steadily on good, straight limbs. She has a frank and open expression and a kindly eye, a tallish ear and a well-set and carried tail.

Limit Bitch (10,1) Certainly the strongest class of the day overall, but there was a huge variance in type. 1. Clark's Florence Florentina Rollssupreme. A very smart, showy little bitch that really drew my eye. Beautifully presented, she had a super outline, a sweet feminine head, well-laid shoulders with a good return of upper arm and reach of neck, good bone and well-shaped feet, sufficient rear angulation. Correct close coat, which was a lovely colour, level topline, tail set high and tightly curled. In the challenge, not quite the freedom of movement at the rear of my main winners, but she was close-up to them. 2. Allchin's Laakso Kia's Cracker of Carolon. Not quite as neat in outline as the winner, nor as tidy on the move, but she has a good head with dark eyes and ears, a well-set and carried tail, lovely bone, well-laid shoulders and a powerful body, with good breadth and depth in the chest and an excellent length of rib. She has a level topline and very little tuck-up. 3. Middleton's Gokstadhaugen's Ea-Lykke at Graythor (Imp Nor). Not quite the proportions of 1 and 2, but a feminine bitch of good type with a very attractive head, neat dark ears, dark eyes conveying a sunny disposition, excellent bone, topline a little uneven. Her good angulation gave her the best movement in this class.

Open Bitch (4,0) Another strong class. 1. Clark's Ch Aftonlee Ayrlic Winds. This is exactly the type of bitch that we should be breeding from. She is so correct on the move, it takes the breath away. She is light on her feet, like the winds that her name recall; singletracking effortlessly, moving with reach and drive and perfect foot-timing. She is beautifully put together, with a front to die for and her rear angulation is exactly as required by the standard, neither too much nor too little. Her body is powerful, yet she is still feminine. She has an exquisite head and a gorgeous coat and colour. Her clever handler was attentive to the judge and kept her standing to attention at the right times. No hesitation in awarding her CC & BIS. 2. Middleton's Ch Graythor Norwegian Lights. Another top quality bitch, just a little out of coat on the day. A strong but feminine head, dark eyes, good bone, pleasing proportions with good length of leg, a good straight front and well-laid shoulders giving clean lines as she came towards me and a pleasing reach of neck, good hindquarters, solid bone and a well-set tail. Very attentive to her handler. In full coat, she would certainly have been up there with my main winners. 3. Middleton's Ch Bowerhinton Be Madam's Spy at Graythor ShCM. A very

lovely head with a sparkle of delightful naughtiness in the eyes. Compact, but not quite the length of leg of her daughter. Lovely bone and good straight limbs. A little uncooperative on the day.

Michelle Lucas Special Beginners Bitch (5,0) 1. Vinelka Child Of The Moon. 2. Hodkinson's Powdermill Lest We Forget at Thordell. A little out of coat, but she still had solid bone, well-sprung ribs and a sturdy, workmanlike frame. Her tail was well-set and tightly curled. A lovely, feminine head with dark eyes and ears, and an expression that is heart-wrenchingly familiar to me. Short-coupled, but would prefer a little more length of leg for balance. Moved very well in front, but still needs to strengthen a little more at the rear. I believe it will come with time and conditioning. 3. Kestos Mystical.

Special Newcomers Bitch (1,0) 1. Threadgold's Bowerhinton Bywnans. A somewhat masculine bitch, with a strong head and bone. Good front assembly. She was well-presented, with a very attractive coat and colour. A little less compact than some and her tail was carried to one side.

Special Veteran Bitch (7-10 Years)(1,1) 1. Barganska's Ch Barbelka Nowinka JW. A very typical bitch, with a pleasing outline and a youthful outlook that belies her years. A well-shaped head with a sweet expression coupled with an occasional flash of something naughty, dark eyes and neat dark ears. Short-coupled and compact, with good bone and correct feet, tail high-set and well-curved, coat clear and of the correct texture, well-marked and pigmented. For perfection, would prefer slightly more return of upper arm, but she moved very well in profile on her trip around the ring here and the image stayed imprinted on my mind in the challenge. Very smart and showy, she was presented in hard condition and strode out powerfully, facilitated by her well-muscled hindquarters. Pleased to award her a well-deserved RCC, BVB & BVIS

Special Veteran Bitch(10+ Years)(7,0) 1. Clark's Carolon Quite The Lady. I discovered later that this bitch, at just short of 13 years of age, had not been shown for more than a decade, which makes her my find of the day. A powerful bitch, yet still feminine, with good, straight limbs, a well-proportioned head and excellent bone. She had substance without carrying any excess weight and her good musculature and angulation give her the ability to float around the ring without effort. Her close jacket was a beautiful colour and her tail was well-carried. Loving her day out and giving a good performance, she was another in strong contention for top honours. 2. Brewin's Graythor Norwegian Star at Liondyke. A very typical bitch, not quite the length of leg of the winner, but very short-coupled. Neat head with a sweet expression, dark ears, a good tail. A very showy and smart little bitch. 3. Barganska's Ch Barbelka Iskra JW. Another consummate showgirl from years gone by, giving a good performance. She moved very well, but I just preferred the winner's topline and colour. Not quite as compact as 2. A very attractive head with an open expression.

Brace (4,1) 1. Mortimer's Brace. The owner could give a master class in handling a brace. Both dogs were moving perfectly in unison and complemented each other well in terms of construction. 2. Barganska's Brace. 3. Haugstad's Brace.

Stud Dog (1,0) 1. Ch/Ir Ch Kestos Ispy At Graythor JW ShCM. The quality of this group was excellent, and speaks for this dog's prowess as a sire. He has set his stamp quite strongly on his offspring. A group to be very proud of.