

TERRIERS SHALL BE TERRIERS AND NEVER BE CONSIDERED JUST “DOGS”!

by Geir Flyckt-Pedersen

When Masa Široka asked me to write something for this magazine I wondered what the hell I was going to “talk” about, but being a passionate lover of all our terrier breeds it may be suitable to address issues that seem to happen all over the world these days. We do see terriers doing “big” winning who are actually beautiful generic dogs, but not close to what an expert would call really typical.

Recently I judged, by a strange coincidence - Scottish Terriers at a major show in the US and as we see far too often over here, dogs are being shown at a speed which in no way shows the typical rhythm of movement desired for the breed. And when asked to slow down some of the exhibitors seemed rather shocked and surprised. But the fact that a Scottie can run round the ring at a speed of 25 kilometres per hour probably indicates that this is a well constructed animal, but in no way of the correct build for the breed. One of my most important lessons from my original mentors was: On the move, give your dog time to place the feet properly on the ground to give the judge the opportunity to confirm that the dog has a typical pattern of movement. And if you know anything about Scottish Terriers you will know that they are not supposed to fly! And also, if built the right way - actually unable to do so.

This problems is of course affecting all terrier breeds, be it long-legged or short-legged. The fact that a majority of terrier entries around the entire world today are judged by all-rounders instead of specialists makes it a necessity to take any opportunity you as a terrier breeder and exhibitor get to educate these non-specialists.

The world has changed during the nearly 60 years I have been involved in this sport. When I as a teenager spent as much time as possible visiting breeders, kennels and shows in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, most breeds had a couple of breeders who to a large degree ruled their breed. Most had big kennels, with a large number of dogs and they were able to build up and maintain a consistent type and supply the “outside world” with quality stud dogs. And in my own breed as in most of the more traditional terrier breeds, they

were all located in the UK. The breeders did not all love each other. Some of them would never deviate from their own bloodlines or from their own ideal but whenever they were judging you knew exactly what they were going to look for and in maybe too many cases: We knew in advance who was going to win. But still, maybe out of respect nearly everybody were showing... Even in the UK the number of seriously influential breeders has been shrinking year by year and today many British breeds have been improved by reimporting dogs whose forefathers left the country several generations ago. Still the Brits have to a large degree maintained their own identity - and as in the past - often reward breed type over movement and showmanship. And I think we should be grateful for just that. Even if it can be difficult to understand for the people ringside...

So what can you as a judge do to make sure that terriers remain terriers? I think this question is more difficult to answer in Europe where you these days have included a number of breeds previously in the Toy Group, but if we concentrate on what we call the Traditional Long-legged Terrier breeds, like Wire Fox-, Smooth Fox-, Lakeland-, Welsh-, Airedale-, Irish Terrier: If you consider yourself capable to judge these breeds you should be able to identify each one by just a “cut out” of their eyes and expression. In addition to silhouette of the entire dog where you should be able to spot the correct overall balance for each one of them. And of course know some of the breed specific terms like for Irish Terriers. What does a graceful, racy outline really mean. Does the word cloddy mean the same in relation to a Fox Terrier as to a Welsh Terrier???

Then the short legged bunch. The difference in balance and outline between a Scottie, Westie and Cairn and again be able to identify them by expression only.

Over the years many of the long-legged breeds have been interbred for generations in order to achieve the desired type and breed specific details. But that means that selection of the dogs chosen for future breeding was extremely tough.

The same was the case with the short legged group, so you really have to understand the difference

in their souls, which you should be able to judge by their expression. And of course eye colour is a hugely important feature in all these terrier breeds. Light eyes are an abomination. Easy to introduce and extremely difficult to eliminate!

But we must not forget all those breeds most of the judges with background mainly from the "traditional" breeds find it a challenge to judge. Even if some of these breeds like Dandies, Bedlingtons, Bull- and Staffordshire Bull Terriers are in many ways just as "traditional" as the aforementioned breeds, they require a specialised insight and understanding of which features makes an individual high quality and special.

We often use the term Terrier Specialist. But I think there is a huge difference in how a person with

"long-legged" background sees and approaches short legged breeds and vice versa. Which is why we all must try to learn from each other and we all know that judging dogs is not and hopefully never will be An Exact Science. The wonderful thing is of course that we see and interpret breeds and standards differently. Wonderful only if our decisions are based on real insight and knowledge and that we are not left to play the Guessing Game which I think we see too often these days. Generations of breeders are behind dogs presented in the ring today and show them respect by preparing yourself properly before judging any breed. But just accept: However hard you try, you will always make some mistakes. Or at least make decisions other would have done differently.



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