

Sweepstakes Judge Critique

Lynn Kiaer, Cu Liath Deerhounds

General

First, I want to thank the committee for inviting me, and the exhibitors for allowing me to enjoy and judge your youngsters. I had a wonderful time, thanks to show chair Karen Eberl and her crew, the magnificent ring stewards, the friendly exhibitors and, most of all, your lovely young Wolfhounds.

In general, I was looking, in no particular order, for bone, substance, and movement. Bone is self-explanatory. Substance implies such things as depth and breadth of chest, and good muscle tone. In terms of movement, I was looking for athleticism, efficiency, and engagement of the hind quarters. I believe that a Wolfhound should be light on his feet, showing evidence of his ability to respond to the movement of his prey. Although many refer to the hind quarters as the engine, providing propulsion, and emphasize the need for great breath, my experience has been that the dog's front is much more important to his ability to run. The hind quarters, on the other hand, are important for stamina, both in the field and, more important, as the dog matures into old age. Consequently, I was looking not for great breadth in the rear (not that I don't like it!), but, in side gait, for the hind feet to land at or beyond the point where the front feet were.

The up and back was an opportunity for a dog to impress me with his soundness, but I did not penalize dogs for sidewinding, moving too close, or other movement faults that are apparent on the up and back. In large breed puppies, most are due to the dog attempting to avoid his own feet, which are in a different place than they were last week, or even last night!

Overall I was very pleased with the quality of the entry. Shoulders were straighter than I would like on many exhibits, resulting in an apparently shorter neck and front movement that sometimes defied classification as 'easy.' Some of the dogs may settle into their fronts a bit as they mature, but this is a difficult fault to correct, often requiring many generations of careful breeding – not to mention some luck – to eliminate. One thing that is easy to fix, however, is weight. Most of the dogs, but only some of the bitches, were carrying a lot of weight. While there was good muscling evident, there is no muscle over the ribs, and I could not find the ribs on many of the exhibits. It may be expected to show specials carrying a maximal amount of weight, but I believe we owe it to our large breed puppies to allow them to grow up without excess fat. It is easier on their joints, and studies show that leaner dogs live longer.

I want to especially compliment the Irish Wolfhound community on the temperament of your dogs. Not a single dog shied away from me when I approached the head, or even looked at me suspiciously. There were a few who lacked confidence as I moved around to the rear, but that will resolve with time and showing. I do encourage you, if your dog is inclined to move away from the judge at that point, to stay at your dog's side rather than move toward your dog's head. I think that having two people moving is

scarier than having only one move. When showing, I often keep a hand on the flank, and sometimes just leave a strong finger there, establishing my presence without encouraging leaning.

6-9 Month Puppy Dogs. This was a tough class, with the honors all going to the pups from a single litter. My first place puppy was not the best-behaved, but when he settled down to move, he was lovely. He had a lovely, sturdy outline as well. His brother, in second place, was also very handsome, and better-behaved than the winner, but did not have the same extension on the move. The next brother, in third place, was not quite as substantial as the first two, but also very nice on the move. Brother number four was not the mover that the others were, due perhaps to his more upright front assembly, but very handsome in outline.

9-12 Month Puppy Dogs. The class winner (who went on to Best of Opposite Sex in Sweeps) was handsome and strong, with good bone and very nice, sound movement. He was not the most cooperative on initial examination, but he relaxed and let me touch him all over after gaiting. A most promising youngster! In second place was a much rangier young dog with an unfortunate tendency to knuckle over.

12-15 Month Dogs. The winner of this class of one was a very nice young black-masked wheaten with a fabulous front assembly. A bit rangy at the moment – it's a tough age! – but a very nice young dog.

15-18 Month Dogs. This was a strong class. I liked my winner for his balance and easy movement, aided by his very nice front. His lovely expression was yet another plus, along with his excellent condition. The second place dog also had good structure, but was carrying a bit more weight than the class winner, which hampered his movement. In third place was a youngster who was not as mature-looking as the ones in front of him, who moved somewhat less efficiently. The fourth-place dog was another who was carrying a few more pounds, robbing his gait of its ease and lightness.

6-9 Month Puppy Bitches. Wow! This was a large and strong class, and I would have liked more ribbons! The class winner showed off her excellent construction by floating around the ring. A lovely girl. In second place was a very elegant bitch, not quite as substantial as the winner, but equally pretty on the move. Third place went to a lovely red bitch; she lacked a bit of confidence compared to the first two, but still very promising. The fourth-place bitch was not quite as tall as the competition, but a lovely mover, and she was my pick for best head!

9-12 Month Puppy Bitches. The winner of this class was a lovely, nicely-balanced black-masked red, with excellent movement; she gave my Best in Sweeps bitch a run for her money. In second place was a very pretty youngster who lacked the maturity and self-confidence of the winner.

12-15 Month Bitches. First place went to a very moderate and athletic young bitch with a wonderful expression. I might like to see a bit more rear angulation, but she used herself well. The second-place bitch had a more upright front assembly together with a more angulated rear, making it harder for her to stay balanced on the move.

15-18 Month Bitches. Yet another very strong class. The first-place bitch – who went on to Best In Sweepstakes – took my breath away. She was lovely standing still and on the move she could not put a foot down wrong. In second place was her litter sister, balanced and honest, but lacking her sister's sparkle. Third place went to a substantial young bitch who was better on the move than standing still. I rather liked the fourth-place bitch (another littermate to the first two) but she did herself no favors in the ring.

Again, thank you for the warm welcome and excellent entry!