



JUDGE PREPAREDNESS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

What the Dog Show Community Is Saying

The question of judge preparedness is not a new one, but it continues to surface in conversations at ringside, in grooming areas, and across the broader dog show community. To better understand current perceptions, a recent survey asked exhibitors to share their thoughts on how prepared judges are when they begin evaluating a new breed.

The responses revealed a consistent theme: most participants view judge preparedness as moderate, but inconsistent.

Rather than indicating strong confidence or significant concern across the board, the majority of answers fell into the middle—described as “somewhat sufficient” or “minimally prepared.” This suggests that while many judges demonstrate a working knowledge of the breeds they evaluate, that level of understanding is not always consistent from one judge to the next.

EXPERIENCE BEYOND THE STANDARD

A key distinction emerged between knowing a breed standard and applying it effectively in the ring. Respondents repeatedly emphasized that true preparedness requires more than studying written material. It demands hands-on experience, mentorship, and the ability to recognize breed type, structure, and movement in live dogs.

Limited opportunities for breed-specific mentoring and a perceived acceleration in the approval process were identified as contributing factors. While education requirements exist, many feel they do not always translate into the depth of understanding needed for confident and consistent decision-making.

“We keep rewarding dogs that are not breed standard...”

IMPACT ON BREED QUALITY

The majority of respondents agreed that inconsistent preparedness can have a direct impact on breed quality over time. Concerns centered around the potential for incorrect structure or type being rewarded, which can lead to confusion among exhibitors and breeders about what is truly desirable.

When judging lacks consistency, it not only affects individual outcomes in the ring but may also influence long-term breeding decisions. In this way, the role of the judge extends beyond placement—it contributes to shaping the direction of the breed itself.

WORKLOAD AND FOCUS

Survey responses also touched on the scope of judging assignments. While opinions varied, there was acknowledgment that judges are sometimes tasked with evaluating a large number of breeds. Some respondents suggested that this breadth may make it more difficult to maintain the level of focus and familiarity required for each individual breed.

Although reducing assignments was not universally viewed as a solution, the idea of balancing breadth with depth was a recurring consideration.

“Knowing a standard on paper is one thing. Recognizing it in a live dog is another.”

PATHWAYS TO IMPROVEMENT

Despite differing perspectives on specific challenges, respondents showed strong alignment in their suggestions for improvement. The most commonly cited areas of focus included:

- Increased access to breed-specific mentoring
- Expanded hands-on workshops and evaluations
- A more deliberate and measured approval process

There was also interest in greater accountability within the system—ensuring that judges not only complete educational requirements but demonstrate a clear ability to apply their knowledge effectively.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

At its core, this conversation is not about criticism, but about preservation. Judges play a critical role in defining success in the ring, and those decisions influence breeding choices and, ultimately, the future of each breed.

The survey results reflect a community that is engaged, observant, and invested in maintaining breed integrity. While perfection is not the expectation, there is a clear desire for greater consistency, deeper understanding, and continued support for judges as they develop their expertise.

As the sport continues to evolve, so too does the opportunity to strengthen the systems that support it—ensuring that both judges and exhibitors can move forward with confidence in the process.