

THE CLAYTONS ROYAL Sydney 2007

When we first published the press release in August last year from the RAS of NSW informing everyone of the dramatic changes to the procedures for this prestigious event, we approached it with an open mind and called it an “exciting new concept for judging on the path to best of breed”. We pointed out that a champion class for each sex would have been preferable to the single class proposed, which was of course along the lines of the American system of “Specials” and to everyone’s relief this change was in fact effected prior to the close of entries.

Nevertheless there was much discussion in the ensuing months as to how this new system would work - or IF it would work. Strangely there was almost no buzz of anticipation right from the start of the show. There was absolutely no atmosphere. The dog people were flat and bored and disinterested, but I do not believe they set out to attend the show with that attitude, it just seemed to be the pervading feeling once judging started.

However, what no one could envisage was the disastrous result of separating exhibits at Sydney Royal into Champions and Non Champions, and the undoubted fact that the prestige of a Sydney Royal Challenge was to be totally destroyed. The reality struck home from day one as long term successful breeders and exhibitors watched in stunned horror AS PRECIOUS ROYAL CHALLENGES WENT TO DOGS WHICH IN MANY CASES DO NOT WIN THEIR CLASS AT REGULAR SHOWS. This is not to say that many worthy dogs did not well deserve their Challenge wins, they did, and they may well have taken the Challenge anyway, even if Sydney Royal 2007 had been judged in the usual manner, with ALL the top dogs in DIRECT competition, and the supreme award in each sex culminating in the Challenge. Sadly in many cases though this would NOT have been the case and the Challenge would have been won by a more worthy recipient.

Then to compound the comedy of errors, for some unfathomable reason, first dog in the ring for Best of Breed judging was the Challenge winner, then the Veteran Dog if there was one, then the Challenge Bitch, followed by Champion Bitch and Veteran Bitch. In many cases this resulted in a shambles, the often very young and inexperienced Challenge winning males holding up the traditional picture of the best of the best of the breed in that judge’s opinion, one dog and one bitch, sweeping into the ring to contest the top award. Some of the youngsters were not even sufficiently lead trained and onlookers were embarrassed. Again from day one we understand people complained to the stewards, but nothing was changed - because, we heard, it would then be unfair to those breeds which were already judged according to the shambles!

The Open classes were of course decimated, and quick thinking people had elevated dogs to compete in Open which were far from ready. The crazy thing is that at Sydney Royal dogs in Open for many many years had to be champions anyway, so what on earth was the purpose of creating a Champions Only class? In contrast to the many Challenge winners who were either not ready to win one at a Royal or - sorry, we do not wish to be hurtful but the

truth must be told - simply not of the quality to win won under the old criteria, many of the Best of Breed winners we are sure, would love to have added the words “SYDNEY ROYAL CHALLENGE WINNER” to their brag bags when recording their dog’s successful career. Now that the prestige of this phrase is no more, I guess it won’t matter in the future anyway but the sobering reality of this hit many of the old campaigners and further added to the general air of doom and gloom or disinterest.

Also young Champions were greatly disadvantaged by having to directly compete in the Specials class with the many mature and fully fledged adults. Yes, I know, I know, the pundits will say “well if they weren’t competitive there, they would not have been competitive anyway when the ribbons were handed out” However this is not true, and real dog people know that is the case. When an outstanding young dog is “down the line” and really takes the eye of the judge, then most judges will go for it anyway, because they realise it is young but highly promising. For whatever reason, when these young Champions competed in the Specials Class at Sydney Royal, their immaturity was highlighted and they seldom came through the ranks, even though many of them beat Champions regularly at other shows. Mind you it is all so mechanical these days at the Royal, very much the “wham bam, thank you ma’am” type judging I abhor, and this was certainly even more evident this year, with no time to work two dogs out against each other, just round the ring and point to one.

Much discussion took place about dogs who had claimed their titles having to move up to Champion, even after the final points were won long after the closing date, and many wondered how this could be technically achieved so easily when in the old days a dog who did NOT compete its title in time for closing date but was over three years of age so HAD to compete in Open, simply could not compete at that year’s Sydney Royal, even if he finished on the weekend after the Royal had closed. One famous BIS winner was lucky, for several years many of us had been advocating that the Royal closed on a Monday instead of the usual Friday, we were listened to, and that year the date took in a long weekend, giving more dogs the chance to compete in Open if they won points over the weekend and the owners were able to rush in to the office on Monday morning to claim their Championship, which this one did, and on into the record book. Once the rules for this year were published, many astute exhibitors did NOT claim their dogs’ titles, preferring to ensure they did NOT have to compete in the Specials class - totally legit as no regulation says you HAVE to claim a dog’s title within a given time frame - or ever - but hardly conducive to harmony in our competitive world.

And now we come to points earned for titles. For those dogs “from the classes” to use the American phrase, who went on to take Best of Breed, so far as we can tell, there were only the number of points earned in the entry excluding the champions, very disappointing if you would at a regular show earn up to 25 points for the number of dogs defeated, and on this occasion went home with a Challenge for - maybe - eight or ten points. We presume they got 25 points if they won the

Group but must admit we forgot to check that out. On the other hand, there were no points available from a Best of Breed towards a Grand Championship, so again, if you were campaigning a dog with the intent of gaining a Grand Championship, bad luck so far as your win at Sydney Royal was concerned. It is extremely interesting to note that of the four top winners only one is listed as having attained its grand Championship at time of closing of entries, although we understand at least one had done so before judging day. However dogs winning the new Champion classes and/or Best of Breed at the most prestigious show in NSW should surely be able to add those points to their tally in their quest for a Grand Championship? Worst scenario must have been a dog on 975 points who “won” 25 points at Sydney Royal this year and went home with nothing. Or a rare breed where points towards a Grand are hard to come by, and an exciting win at Sydney resulted in no “gain”. Question - again we forgot to check - did a Grand Champion who won a Group get “claimable” 25 points? Presumably so, but if that is the case, a bit tough on those Grand Champions who can not claim their 25 points at breed level.

So are you now sufficiently confused? If so, you are not alone, there are many more of us still trying to comprehend exactly what the procedures were.

Now we come to General Specials day, held on the ridiculous mid week no public holiday final day of the show - a Wednesday! This incredible decision was part of the change of timing for the entire Royal, to start late and finish well after Easter. In everyone’s opinion, it was a bad call, again adding greatly to the total lack of atmosphere that prevailed from Day One. Dog people are very much creatures of habit, for countless years Sydney Royal and Easter in Sydneytown have been synonymous with excitement, with interstate visitors coming for Specialties and staying for the Royal or vice versa, interest in how the Challenge winners from one event fared at the other and so on. Not this year. People who would never miss General Specials Day on Easter Monday stayed away in droves from the Wednesday, many of course had to work and could not ask for a day off if they did not have a dog competing, and interstate people had returned home. Sadly the public did not want to watch the dog judging either, perhaps the children on “Childrens Day” had other plans for their parents. Mind you, the day seemed particularly quiet anyway, far fewer people there than we are used to, not many families trudging through the dog pavilion, and rows and rows of empty seats in the public gallery.

The fact that the day was so long drawn out might also have contributed to lack of spectator interest. Not that we want to see the actual dog judging speeded up any more than it already is, believe it or not we go there to SEE dogs, to watch the winners, look up our catalogues, play ringside judges, and cheer on our friends in their moment of glory in the ring. It is rumoured that “pre judging” is under consideration for next year, to speed up the time judges are in the main ring. Heaven forbid, it will mean we have even less chance to enjoy Specials judging. Pre judging works in FCI countries where they have the room to conduct the procedure and if people want to watch the pre judging of a particular Group they can do so, then it’s into

the main ring for the dogs, a quick go through the motions and pull eight dogs, and very quickly place them, the judges having already made up their minds to perhaps the last two and how they perform at the last minute. There is no room at Sydney Royal in the dog area for such a procedure - far better to conduct two lots of Groups at the one time as used to work very well at the old showground, interest was high, there was something to watch wherever you looked, and of course it was standing room only unless you got there very early and saved your seat. There is no reason why two rings could not operate at Homebush Bay on General Specials day as they do on the other days, sometimes three, it simply requires some serious consideration to seating.

And PLEASE guys, the old “trick” of “We know who won but we’re not going to tell you just now” has been done to death, it is boring in the extreme and very time consuming for no reward. It is plain basic showmanship, while the dogs are in the ring, have just “performed” and the interest is high to then announce “and the winner is....”. This applies to both the puppies and the adults and now for the Breeders’ Group, which incidentally was the ONLY worthwhile innovation and added a grand new dimension to what should be, after all, a parade of top livestock. Taking the dogs out of the ring, holding another event, bringing the dogs back in is as stated, just plain BORING - and the public endorsed that as the few who were there drifted away when they realised that no immediate announcements would be made as to who had won. Nearest analogy is One Day Cricket versus a Test Match, spectators relate to the pace and drama of the one day matches, far more than to the Tests, because a result is finalised.

So - Sydney Royal 2007? The general consensus is that the “experiment” failed and will deteriorate even further if it continues, the entry was down across the board by almost 200, last year for conformation there were 3523 entries, this year the last number in the catalogue for conformation is 3330 but this is inaccurate as it includes the numbering for the Breeders’ Groups, of which there were a wonderful 71 entries, and perusal of the catalogue reveals there are several missing numbers, so total conformation entry is 3256 individual dogs. It was great to have the Veterans Classes but the vast majority were already Champions and often Grand Champions, so they could have competed in the old Open class, although of course better allowance is made for their age when they compete as Veterans. How sad if a Veteran won Best of Breed who was NOT a champion for some amazing reason, and these things DO happen, or a few points short of their Grand Championship but could gain no points for either. Far better to hold the Veterans classes, scrap the Specials classes, and allow them all to compete for Challenge on a more level playing field.

Most people felt that the new procedure greatly fosters the “winning isn’t everything it is the ONLY thing” mentality, load the dice even more in favour of the



big guns. In contrast, some people whom I greatly respect and who have themselves done huge winning at Royals over many years felt that it was a good thing, to encourage people only to bring out what in their opinion was the single champion that they felt had the best chance of winning the Group and on to a place in Show, and leave all the young champions at home, a sad thing in our opinion. These people were also now of the opinion that a win in the Champions class, or hopefully Best of Breed, was now more important than to win a Challenge, so don’t bother to take any young stock anyway. They also surprised me by saying that a Specials class in this country was a good thing, as it gave others more chance of titling their dogs if they did not have to beat established champions, especially in those breeds where there are some “unbeatable” top dogs! We have ALWAYS had to beat established champions in this country, as they do in the UK, it adds greatly to the quality of our champions in our limited gene pool, where it is already sadly too easy sometimes to title an Australian champion anyway. Having said that, it is also sadly TOO EASY to title an American Champion, precisely for that very reason, that the top dogs are out of competition for the points and the pro handlers sadly know all too well where to go to quickly title a dog for a client. That is their livelihood and they are fully justified in earning it, but all too often a top youngster who could make a big contribution to the breed is then never seen again, as the cost of “specialling” it is far too high. If you look at the beautiful American glossies, you will see many dogs who are tops in their breeds in the rankings who should not be there but they are, because the system works that way.

Sydney Royal 2007 - the old adage applies. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” - it wasn’t broke and it hasn’t been fixed, but seriously wounded instead.

And by the way, we are not disgruntled losers, we won a class of three Puppy Bitches and to Stuart’s great amazement he was immediately also handed a Challenge ribbon, I had not told him beforehand that the Junior and Intermediate single bitch entries were absent and the Open bitch moved up to Champion. As the breeders of bitches who have won at least 12 Royal Challenges in one breed in four States, we won’t be proudly advertising this one. WENDYE SLATYER

169 BOB many CCs refused but only 1 breed non awarded
45 BOBs wen to non-champions
18 were from breeds that attracted a single figure entry
3 puppies that were BOB, Corgi Cardigan, Pharaoh Hound,
and Welsh Springer, did not win “Puppy on the Day”
so could not return for Specials.