

What Judging an Irish Wolfhound means to me

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

Firstly as many of you know this presentation should have been with my husband Peter but owing to unforeseen circumstances he had to remain at home. He sends his apologies to you all and best wishes to the organizers of the EIWC for a successful 2008 congress.

The brief for this presentation is “ What Judging an Irish Wolfhound means to me “. When preparing the presentation I realized I could talk for ever on this subject but fortunately for you all I am restricted by time so I have tried to give you a brief overall impression.

As previously announced my name is Pat Pask and for those of you who do not know me, along with my husband, I have owned and bred Irish Wolfhounds under the Baronglen prefix for 34 years. I was fortunate to be put in touch with Ruth and Leslie Jenkins of the famous Eaglescrag prefix when looking for my first Irish Wolfhound and they became very good friends of myself and Peter. Indeed Ruth was my mentor until she sadly died in 2004.

In the early 1980's the Irish Wolfhound Club of Great Britain headed by Ron and Helen Baird of Outhwaite fame took a lead in organizing education for potential judges. Because of my professional experience I was approached and asked to be an assessor of these possible future judges at the very first seminar run by the club and I have remained an assessor ever since. In addition I have served on the committee of the Irish Wolfhound club of Great Britain since 1995 in the post of Treasurer.

For me, as for most people, it is an honour and a privilege to be approached to judge the breed. I never have, and never will, think of an appointment as a right dependent upon position, academic qualification or friendships.

When I receive an invitation to judge I ensure I deal with the request promptly. I also clarify by telephone what is expected of me. Once accepted(usually on the phone) a formal copy of the contract is received clearly stating the committal of each party. This is duly signed and returned but I always ensure I keep a copy for my records.

I have always believed that exhibitors and their hounds should at all times be treated with respect. I ensure I speak curtiously and pleasantly and show kindness and patience with the exhibits. This is especially important when dealing with puppies. I feel that during the judging process the exhibitor is entitled to my undivided concentration and attention. As an exhibitor myself I feel upset if a judge is looking at what is happening around them rather than at the hound I have presented.

The day before the show I always read the Standard and List of Points in Order of Merit. On the day of the show I try to arrive at the venue early and find the secretary and

stewards and let them know I have arrived. Usually at this point one is offered refreshments and I have eaten some very nice cakes and biscuits over the years!!!

As soon as possible I go to my allocated judging ring. I check it is set out properly and that I am not looking into the sun when moving the hounds. I discuss my ring management with my stewards namely where the dogs will stand, where they will move and where I will require them to stand to enable me to write my critique.

When judging the exhibits I always try to be consistent and treat everyone the same . I also try to ensure I am clear in my selection of winners . I find it is embarrassing for exhibitors if the wrong person comes forward through confusion.

When the exhibits enter the ring and set up their dogs I usually ask them to move twice around the ring. I find this normally settles both the exhibitor and the dog though if it is a very large ring I will ask them to move once.

When an individual dog comes forward for examination (at this point the beautiful hound brought in by Andre to be my model arrives) I like to stand back and compare the dog to the general appearance description in the standard. To me this is the most important part of the standard as the description sets the Irish Wolfhound apart from any other breed.

At this time I look at the general outline and balance. Are the legs of correct height for body length? Is the chest deep? Is the topline strong? Is the dog well ribbed back? These are the sort of questions going through my head at this time. I walk around and look at the hindquarters. I like to see width across the pelvis, strong well muscled thighs, good width through the hocks. Again I stand back and look at the front assembly prior to examining the dog. I look at the head to see if it is typical, forearms should be muscular and the whole leg strong and quite straight. I would excuse puppies with slightly turned out feet as they have a tendency to turn in with age. The chest should be egg shaped when viewed from the front and there should be sufficient room between the legs.

After this initial assessment I begin to examine the points of the dog. To assess the head I think you must feel down under the long hair of the beard and the eyebrows to find hopefully a long strong jaw and moderately pointed muzzle. Seen from the front the head should get evenly wider from nose to occiput and viewed from the side the lower jaw should appear undercut---- not the bite, just the jaw. I do not like to see highly arched frontal bones as this tends to make the head look more like a Great Dane than an Irish Wolfhound. I look at the set and colour of the eyes. I like to see black pigment. I also like to see small ears carried like the greyhound and not too high or low set. The bite should be scissor but level is permissible.

After the head I move onto the neck. I run my hands from the occiput down to the shoulders. . I like to feel a long, strong muscular neck with an arch and without dewlap or loose skin about the throat. I do not like to see an ewe neck or a long thin neck. A word of caution here to everyone please do not overstretch the neck when showing and please

do not overstrip a neck as this can often create a weak looking neck. Remember, strength is more important than great length as Wolfhounds have to hold or throw their quarry and do not like the greyhound have to scoop it up from the ground.

Next I would check the forequarters. Shoulders are probably the most difficult to assess as they are very mobile. I remember Helen Baird at a Rally many years ago showing novice judges that the simplest way is to place your hand at the point of the shoulder, trace your way up the spine of the blade to the top and keep your hand there, run the other hand back to the point of the shoulder then on down the humerus to the elbow. The angle should be between 110 – 115 degrees. This sloping shoulder acts as a shock absorber enabling the hound to run for a long time before getting tired. Constant jarring from a straight set shoulder would become painful and cause the hound to tire more quickly. The blades should be long as well as sloping but should not meet at the top. Check the withers I find if I can get two or three fingers between the shoulder blades there is sufficient space to enable the dog to bend his head without the blade touching. Then I run my hands over the upper arm where hopefully I find plenty of muscle.

As I move on to the front assembly I am looking for a chest that is deep and reaching down to the elbow and egg shaped. The breast should be wide with a generous hand's width between the elbows and plenty between the point of the shoulders coming well forward as opposed to sinking back to form a hollow chest.

When judging the back of the dog I look for a long back with an arch over the loin. However I would stress the length should be in the rib cage and it should carry back almost as far as the arch of the loin. The loin should not be excessively long, for me and most others, I would say a hand span in length is sufficient. I like to see a broad strong loin. If it is weak it will affect the dogs ability to stretch and compress in the double suspension gallop and also in his twists and turns when hunting.

Next I go to the underline. I run my hands along looking for tightness. Please note muscles and correct weight control can affect this. Sometimes a bitch who has had a litter will show some slackness. What I don't want to see is a short sternum, no tuck up or very little body between loin and the ground.

When looking at hindquarters I like to see muscular thighs and in particular second thighs. I like to see them long and strong as in the greyhound with well let down hocks which do not turn in or out. The majority of power for galloping comes from the hindquarters so strength and angulation are very important. Firstly I check the width of the thigh then run my hands down through the second thigh looking for width and muscle. The width through the thigh enhances the leg shape and shows up the strength of muscle. The angulation is regarded as adequate if the thigh from hip joint to stifle is about the same length as the second thigh or stifle to hock. The length of the hocks should be in proportion to the dog but well let down, that is, shorter from the ground to the point of the hock in relation to the length of the second thigh. Looking at the croup it is important that it lies correctly. The pelvis creates the angle of the croup as it is tilted backwards. When judging I am looking for an angle of 30 to 35 degrees leading down to

the tail which should fit cleanly into the body. I do not like to see too steep a croup as this gives a tucked under appearance which is incorrect.

Next the tail should be long and slightly curved. The length should be to at least halfway between the hock and the ground. It should be thickly covered plenty of hair. It should not be curly. It should be flexible to do its job i.e. to act as a rudder.

Finally in male dogs I check for 2 testicles.

I then stand back and look at the dog again before I ask the exhibitor to move in a triangle, directly away and back to me. It is at this stage one is able to see how the dog handles itself without perhaps being propped up by the handler when in the stance position. The stride should be long and free flowing using the whole of the leg. This will produce the easy, active movement we all desire.

On the return of the dog I try to focus on virtues not faults. The perfect dog has never been bred but the one who shows confidence both standing and moving, who naturally holds his head proudly, who moves freely, smoothly and effortlessly and who quietly dominates the ring is the one who wins.

One final word I would like to say before I finish is for exhibitors. When showing your dogs I would suggest you present the dog to its best advantage. Give the dog your undivided attention for the duration of the class. Even though the judge is looking at other exhibits if you are in the judges vision make sure you are presenting your dog so you are catching their eye.

Please note this has been my approach to judging and I apologise to the experienced judges here today but my brief was to aim my talk at new and less experienced exhibitors. Please all of you accept it is not an exhaustive or authoritative list as I am always prepared to learn and improve. I do hope however that what I have said will help some of you understand what judges are looking for and I wish all the exhibitors good luck for tomorrow and Sunday.

Pat Pask
Baronglen Irish Wolfhounds.