



BASSET HOUND – USE OF THE RAMP DURING INITIAL EXAMINATION

Thirty years ago the BHCA won its battle to stop judges from requiring the “tabling” of Basset Hounds. At that time the AKC offered a compromise solution to the “tabling” of Basset Hounds – the use of the RAMP. Many exhibitors applauded this solution and the others just needed to get used to it until now it is as natural at a breed specialty show as giving out the ribbons. Two problems . . . 1) it was not until 20 years ago that the AKC actually listed the Basset Hound as a “ramp” breed and 2) over 30 years later in 2008 we find that judges at most all-breed shows do not make use of the ramp to judge the Basset Hound and instead judge them on the ground/floor mat. Is that the best we can do?

The “unofficial rules” when cited by an AKC Rep during a judge’s review tell you to abide by the following AKC suggested guidelines. They are made with a concern towards the judge’s personal safety since all dogs are not handled by experienced handlers. Therefore the AKC states:

- Do not kneel in front of a dog.
- Do not bend over face to face with a dog.
- Do not hover over a dog.
- Do not bend over cheek to cheek with a dog.

Bassets may not be small and intimidated like toy breeds but lots of them still don’t like someone coming down on top of them. Plus, AKC doesn’t like a judge to bend over and have someone down in the dog’s face. You’d think that the AKC was actually encouraging the use of the ramp when judging dogs as low-stationed as the Basset Hound and any other of the listed “ramp” breeds. If so, most of the judges still have not understood that message. The Basset Hound Club of America spent and continues to spend thousands of dollars each year distributing our Educational CD to all judges allowed to judge Basset Hounds and running judges’ seminars; yet we still have a problem with the breed not receiving a proper evaluation by the judge who is not using the ramp in the all-breed ring. In the words of the BHCA Judge’s Education Chairwoman, Breeder/Judge Mrs. Betsy Deans:

“The ramp makes hands-on evaluation much easier. BHCA’s argument is exactly the same as that of the table breeds. Because of the short height, the breed can be better evaluated with some elevation. The large breeds and the small table breeds are afforded the opportunity to be evaluated at an optimum level. That being the case, shouldn’t all the breeds have the same opportunity for optimum evaluation?”

By the AKC allowing “judge’s discretion,” it and the Basset Hound Club of America parent club have, for 30 years, condoned inadequate evaluations in the all-breed rings while hoping against hope that things would eventually change on their own. The lack of ramp use when judging the Basset Hound continues to occur even after exhibitors request a ramp and even when the superintendent is thoughtful enough of the breed, the exhibitors and the judge to place the ramp at ringside. This has happened over and over in ring after ring for the past 30 years. Interestingly, had the breed been allowed to continue to be “tabled,” there probably would be no question that it would be judged in that manner every time it went into the ring since “tabling” of the “table” breeds is common practice. According to a June 2007 AKC Judges’ Operations Department clarification memo: “. . . table breeds must be judged on the table”.

Referring to the BHCA’s newly revised JEC CD Mrs. Steidel states in an article for the Perspective (AKC Delegate Newsletter) entitled “A No vote for Mandatory Ramping of the Basset Hound”: *“The entire BOD and the JEC committee viewed and approved the revision in late summer. A few months later the BOD is requesting mandatory use of the ramp! It appears a hasty decision. What could have transpired in such a brief time that has turned polite request to mandatory use?”*

What transpired was a serious Board of Directors discussion and eventual realization that three decades of “polite requests” had made little or no difference in the AKC all-breed ring and that leaving things to “judge’s discretion” as a means towards an end during our lifetimes was and is a fantasy. As an AKC Delegate Mrs. Steidel knows that there is a specific process to get any AKC rule or guideline changed and since the BHCA is a member of the AKC, it must abide by that process. Rules do not change because we approve and produce a revised BHCA CD. What appears in the BHCA Judges’ Education CD is in keeping with current AKC rules. If 30 years of BHCA “polite requests” provides for a “hasty decision” – what does it take for a considered one?

Mrs. Steidel is a member of the Channel City Kennel Club in California and is their AKC Delegate. How she votes on behalf of her all-breed club is of little concern to BHCA members. Not everyone agrees with everything. To quote a BHCA Board member: *“I sat in a judges’ seminar of which Kitty chaired at the 2003 Nationals in Gettysburg. In that seminar, she informed those present that she didn’t like the ramp and didn’t use it.”* Possibly Mrs. Steidel meant only in the all-breed ring since she does make use of it at specialty shows that basically give judges a mandate by automatically placing the ramp in the ring. Within the Basset Hound community there is a minority of breeder-judges who disagree with the mandatory ramping of the breed but their arguments (including those cited by Mrs. Steidel) are merely about the availability of ramps and/or the time taken to place into the ring, etc. These arguments are easily dismissed since they are not the concern of the breed’s parent club; they are the concern of the show superintendent. Even as the AKC tells the judge in writing approximately how long he/she should spend evaluating each class, it also states: *“. . . take the time needed to properly judge each class.”* Does not the Basset Hound deserve a proper hands-on evaluation within the all-breed show ring? Should it matter whether there is one dog in the ring or one hundred? Did that one dog’s owner not pay the same entry fee for the same level of evaluation?

The AKC places judges in control of their rings and use of ramp is at the “judge’s discretion.” At the same time, the AKC also states: *“With this authority comes the responsibility to be thoughtful and considerate as you judge according to all AKC Rules, Policies and Guidelines. Be as systematic in your ring procedure from dog to dog and class to class as conditions permit, but do take the time to encourage apparent novices.”*

Can you be thoughtful and considerate of the Basset Hound breed if you ignore the expressed wishes of the parent club on how to judge its breed? Again, from that AKC Judges Operations memo, *“. . . the parent club shall determine the best way to judge its breed and that decision will not be pre-empted by AKC.”* It has been the long-held policy in both written and verbally expressed forms of the parent club (Basset Hound Club of America) for AKC judges to make use of the ramp when judging the Basset Hound. The BHCA stresses its use in its Judges Education seminars and educational CD’s. For 30 years, the BHCA has made request after request of judges’ organizations to encourage the use of the ramp with Basset Hound conformation judging but to little or no avail. This new request of the AKC Board of Directors and AKC Delegates comes from the parent club only after three decades of disregard for the wishes of the parent club and individual exhibitors by most judges in the AKC all-breed ring. Not only does the Basset Hound breed deserve a thorough once-over whereby the judges are able to touch, feel and more easily see those physical attributes of this dwarf breed of hound but the use of the ramp is also easier on the hound, the exhibitor and the judge. As stated by Breeder/Judge Sanda Launey . . .

“Use of the ramp is strongly urged for proper assessment of the Basset Hound’s unique achondroplastic structure and the balance of form to function. The ramp provides accessibility for thorough examination and assessment of important elements of Basset Hound breed type and structure. Without it, all important essentials of the breed would be five inches or less off the ground. Grass and ground cover can hide feet and create optical illusions about length of leg. When looking down upon a grounded basset hound exhibit, various kinds of mismatched fronts are often obstructed by the headpiece and a prominent sternum. The ramp elevates the Basset Hound for an unobstructed view and promotes equal examination of every hound exhibit.”

No one is fooling themselves – no change at the AKC will happen overnight and certainly not just with the BHCA’s formal request within the Delegate body. There will be continued objections from those who wish to protect the judge’s prerogative within the ring or for whatever reason, continue to provide lame excuses for superintendent organizations. Again, the “table” breeds went from recommended to “. . . *must be judged on the table*” so there is precedent for change. Only when the mandatory use of a ramp during the initial examination of the Basset Hound breed is implemented will the Basset Hound receive a chance to be viewed to its best benefit, not only by breeder-judges who should know how to thoroughly examine the breed but by those AKC judges who know little of achondroplastic structure since most of their experiences were with normally formed canine structures. The Basset Hound is a unique breed in that it is a large heavy hound on short dwarfed legs. Proportions regarding weight of hound to size of bone, placement of shoulder assembly and what the BHCA refers to as the "wrap around" front all combine to make this breed different than any other canine. The Basset Hound standard has a height disqualification; on which part of uneven ground would you like your dog measured?

The excuses served up as reasons against the mandatory use of a ramp to examine the Basset Hound in Mrs. Steidel’s article are concerns for the superintendent; not the BHCA. The interest of the parent club is the consistent fair treatment of its breed within the all-breed ring; not the ramp-design (unless safety is an issue) or how fast a ramp can be placed into a ring or by what means. “Necessity is the mother of invention” so with the mandatory use of the ramp a proper ramp not only will be produced; it will be placed into the ring by those superintendents who have the contract arrangements for that show. In fact, the AKC has specifications and a rendering of a ramp on their website. The argument that there may be delays and confusion bringing the ramp into the Group ring is without merit. If it's mandatory, then the superintendent makes a point of setting up each and every time as he does with the table. If “change” itself is the issue of long-in-the-tooth or set-in-their-ways judges then they may request that they do not judge the Basset Hound breed when they get their list of the breeds to judge at the all-breed show. The bottom line is that the Basset Hound is examined at its best advantage on the ramp, whether you are a young or an old judge. The breed also should have the right and courtesy not to be hovered over or used as a prop for some judges to get themselves up after bending over and examining them on the ground. The breed deserves the same dignity and respect shown to the table breeds.

The following comment was posted on the Judges-L internet group and is here used with permission of Mrs. Pat Gilbert (Saluki breeder/judge and judge of many other hound breeds including the Basset Hound):

“I find that judges that don't use the ramp often do not get down both sides of the rib cage far enough to check where the sternum bone ends amongst other things. They seem to miss such essentials as lower legs and feet. I would much rather see a thorough examination on a ramp than have someone struggling to bend over far enough to reach their toes. Worse yet, to have a judge lose their balance and steady themselves with my poor dog's back.”

I know personally that since I became a judge, and as the years progress in my judging career, that I am not as agile as I used to be when I exhibited more often. Ahem! I love the ramp. I love it especially after lunch. The Basset Hound Club of America has asked for a very long time that even if we have an entry of one hound, we use the ramp. I respect their wishes and will use the ramp at the Breed level, Group level and Best in Show level.

As to both the table and the ramp in the ring. It does not bother me at all. I line them up in my Juniors' ring. Since Juniors are supposed to be judged in the same fashion as conformation, I, as a conformation judge, can deal with it. I treat the table and the ramp as tools to complete my job. An obstacle course with the addition of the ramp? I don't see how that addition affects an around and down and back and occasional around again for the gallery at any level. I believe anything that helps judges to make better evaluations and get more information in their examination is good. It should be looked at as useful not as a pain or hindrance.”

Use of a ramp with the Basset Hound breed is of benefit to the hound, to the exhibitor and to the judge. Why would anyone not wish to allow anything that makes judging the breed easier on the judge, the handler and the hound not automatically available in the ring? Should a judge wish to be thoughtful and considerate of him or herself, the exhibitor, the Basset Hound (who is usually being hovered over by the judge and the handler on his/her knees), to the spectators and lastly to the idea of a proper evaluation of each and every dog in the ring no matter the number of entries, they would make use of a ramp. To require the use of the ramp when judging the Basset Hound breed in all AKC rings has been 30 years in coming – it’s time to make it happen.

BHCA Board of Directors:

Randolph W. Frederiksen	Breeder/Exhibitor – 36 years		BHCA Life Member	BHCA – President
Robert E. McDonald	Breeder/Exhibitor – 22 years	AKC Judge		BHCA – 1 st VP
Jerry Rush	Breeder/Exhibitor – 39 years	AKC Judge	BHCA Life Member	BHCA – 2 nd VP
Clay Williams	Breeder/Exhibitor – 34 years	AKC Judge (former)		BHCA – Rec. Sec.
Barbara Brandt	Breeder/Exhibitor – 36 years			BHCA – Cor. Sec.
Brian Pechtold	Breeder/Exhibitor – 22 years	AKC Judge		BHCA – Treasurer
A. Kenneth Engle	Breeder/Exhibitor – 48 years	AKC FT Judge	BHCA Life Member	BHCA – Director
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Robert Opeka	Breeder/Exhibitor – 30 years	AKC Judge	BHCA Life Member	BHCA – Director
Claudia Lane	Breeder/Exhibitor – 38 years			BHCA – Director
Archie Kintner	Breeder/Exhibitor – 20 years			BHCA – Director
Barbara Wicklund	Breeder/Exhibitor – 45 years		BHCA Life Member	BHCA – AKC Del.

AKC Judging Ramp Specifications:

If your club uses a licensed superintendent for its events, appropriate ramps are included with their standard equipment. To assist those clubs that do not use the services of a licensed superintendent, the AKC has established general guidelines for construction of a judging ramp.

- Construction**Wood is preferable; however, any stable material may be used (e.g., metal, pvc)
- Surface**Rubber-matted
- Length** 4 feet
- Width**..... 2 feet
- Height**..... 15 – 24 inches