

In the Show Ring: Understanding Oral Reasons

By Lavona Fercho

Good livestock judges have an acquired mastery that average judges do not possess. The good judges skillfully assess animals against a standard accepted as ideal by the industry. They evaluate the anatomy and phenotype of each animal in a class, against each of the others to find the winners, then defend their placements with a set of oral reasons.

The good judge knows he or she will be speaking to two types of exhibitors: the prominent breeders, masters of judgment in their involvement with shows and outcomes, and the new exhibitor who is there to learn from the experience.

The oral reasons by the good judge will be accurate, concise, presented in a comparative mode, and in a manner that is pleasant to hear and clear for all to follow. The average judge will present reasons in a more descriptive mode, lingering somewhat on each of the animals in the winners line-up.

An exhibitor may come up to a judge after the show to ask what he or she thought of their animal. Either the exhibitor was too nervous to listen to the judge's oral reasons as they stood in the winners line-up, or the judge's oral reasons were not succinct enough for the exhibitor to understand.

If judges are asked this question outside of the ring they can first assess the experience of the exhibitor to help them understand oral reasons. They can then review the organization and delivery of their own oral reasons, to ensure specific terms used are clearly and comparatively presented.

The developed techniques to teaching or assessing livestock judging involves four basic steps.

The first step is the Information the judge must have to bring to the ring.

Primarily, knowledge of the species, including the mental image of the ideal of the species being judged.

The second step in the procedure is Observation. This involves the judge having sufficient anatomical knowledge of the animal to recognize correct form, and the sharp eye to discern the relationship between form and function.

Third is the judge's use of Comparison. With this step, the numbers of positive characteristics are weighed with the primary, moderate or lesser negative faults, against each of the animals in the class.

The fourth step involves Decisions. This is probably the most difficult task as it involves the ranking and placing of animals in the winner's line-up, then logically defending these placements with oral reasons.

Oral reasons are formed from the Comparison and Decision steps of the judging. The judge makes decisions for the winning line-up based on the number of positive qualities of each animal standing in the line-up, ranked in descending order.

The experienced exhibitor will listen to the oral reasons and determine the judge's experience by how they are presented. The good judge will present in a comparative format, comparing the strengths of positive qualities each animal has standing over each of the others. The average judge will present in a descriptive format basically describing each animal as it stands in the winner's line-up.

A brief example of descriptive and comparative reasons in an alpaca halter class follows.

Descriptive Example

"I started this class of yearling white Huacaya females with number two. She is an eye catching female of correct proportions. She is nicely balanced. She is structurally sound and tracked well front and rear as she moved around the ring today. She has fine fleece throughout the blanket with the nice band and brightness. Standing in second place is number four. She is a big girl with a bold spring to her rib, and a long body. She has dense fleece throughout the blanket with a consistent wide crimp."

This example tells the exhibitor about the two alpacas but does not the compare strengths of each, nor why two

placed over four. The exhibitor may leave the ring still wondering why their animal placed where it did.

Comparative Example

"I started this class of yearling white Huacaya females with number two. She presents the most complete package in her class, with the best overall style and balance. She has a straighter top line and is most correct in rump set. She is more structurally correct and straighter in foot placement and tracking, both front and rear as she moved around the ring today. She carries the most uniformity of fleece, expressed in fineness, softer hand and brightness throughout the entire blanket.

I will grant the number four female standing in second place has a bolder spring to her rib, and more body capacity than the first place, but does not have the proportion and balance, in profile and movement of the first alpaca, as observed here today. She also has a stronger expression of crimp and slightly more density to her fleece though not the uniformity of fiber quality throughout the blanket to move her higher in her class today."

This comparative example highlights the strengths of the first and second place alpaca, listing the multiple strengths first place has over second and how second place compares to first place. Reasons are also concise in keeping the presentation within a two minute time frame.

With the main objective for oral reasons being the opportunity for the judge to explain to exhibitors the order the winners placed, it is important for each judge to ensure exhibitors understand. Comparative reasons should become the goal, and the difference between the good judge and the average judge.

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About the Author

Lavona is a graduate with a Masters Degree in Education. She has extensive Judging and Instructing credentials. She has judged National llama and alpaca shows and instructed judges clinics in Germany, France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. Her published camelid articles encompass many aspects of raising, breeding and showing both alpacas and llamas. Lavona is Chair of the Judges' Committee, for the Alpaca Llama Show Association.

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