

Interview with Spanish magazine 2008

To familiarize our readers with who you are, please tell us about how and when you became involved in Dog Shows and with what breed or breeds? Let's start with your beginnings in dogs. Do you come from a doggy family?

For as long as I remember, I have always been interested in dogs. My family was never keen on animals which made me even more determined to have a dog of my own, supported by my paternal grandmother. She was a great dog-lover and had owned several breeds of dogs including Giant Schnauzers and Kerry Blue Terriers and it was she who eventually persuaded my parents to let me have a dog, a Scottish Terrier. My first dog was born in 1970 and I have remained faithful to the dog world and that breed ever since then.

What is your first memory of a dog show?

My very first dog show was the big Stockholm show in 1969. I travelled there with my grandfather and a friend of his and I still remember the show well. I had already started to look out for Scottie breeders as I was about to have my first dog. Scotties were judged by Hans Lehtinen from Finland and he gave BOB to the famous GB Ch Brio Pickpocket, who made his debut at the show and later went on great things in the ring. By that time I had already started to subscribe to dog magazines and remember walking round at the show ticking off names of dogs that I had heard of or seen pictures of!

What has been your greatest thrill in purebred dogs?

The greatest thrill has been to be able to share my life with dogs that I love and to meet many wonderful people and see places that I would never have been able to visit had it not been for dogs. I also please me enormously that my own homebred dogs have had a major influence on Scottish Terriers in many countries and I very proud of the fact that I have managed to breed dogs that have been top winners almost all over the world.

Your biggest disappointment?

One of the disadvantages of the dog game is that there is so much jealousy and nastiness! It hurts every time people spread false rumours about you and your dogs, and I have had a few bitter disappointments with people whom I thought were friends but proved to be quite the opposite!

It also worries me very much that Scotties decline in numbers almost everywhere and that so few people really seem to understand the finer points of the breed.

Please, name two or three of the most significant dogs you have owned or bred?

I have bred around 120 champions in three different breeds, mainly Scottish Terriers but also Pekingese and Labrador Retrievers, so this is a very difficult question to answer. However, on reflection I think the Scotties Ch Raglan Rory (Top Dog All Breeds in Sweden 2001 and Top Winning Terrier of All Times), Ch Raglan Royal Serenade (Top Terrier 1996) Ch Raglan Royal Commander (Top Terrier 1984 & 1985) and GB Ch Raglan Rose Maiden at Brio (Top Terrier in the UK 2003 & res BIS at Cruft's 2004) have perhaps been my best dogs so far. They were all perfectly constructed and had wonderful breed type, but also great overall quality which made them shine a little extra at home and in the ring. Furthermore, they had perfect temperament and movement and I enjoyed having them around every day.

They also produced winning stock and were thus able to influence the breed as a whole – a sign of true stardom in dogs!

Please, name two or three of the most significant dogs you have ever judged and why you found them so?

As a judge I meet thousands of dogs every year, so another difficult question to answer!! The Kerry Blue Terrier Ch Torum's Scarf Michael would certainly be one of the best dogs that I have ever seen. He radiated quality and came into the ring like a king. His personality, construction and sound movement made him a great dog and he hit you instantly when he came into the ring – a wonderful dog.

I also admired the British Chihuahua Ch Belmuriz Brevier, who had tremendous character and personality and he did not miss a trick in the ring. I am sure that he thought he was a much bigger dog!!

Another dog that made a huge impression on me was the Spanish bred white Standard Poodle Ch Maneetas del Zarzoso Fuego Fatuo, bred by Carlos Fernando Renau, but shown for a time in Finland by Juha Palosaari and his ex-wife Tiina. He was yet another charismatic dog who literally laughed at his opposition and one could not help being drawn to him when he entered the ring.

The American Sealyhamterr Ch Efbe's Hidalgo at Goodspice, is another dog that I rank very highly. I had the honour of judging him in the USA last autumn and found him quite lovely.

There have been many other great dogs over the years and I could easily compile a much longer list, but one thing is for sure and that is that great dogs all combine type, movement and great style – canine movie stars with star quality!

What are the most important characteristics you feel a judge should have?

A competent judge should have a talent for beauty, symmetry and proportions and the ability to make quick independent decisions. He should also have the courage to follow his own convictions. In addition, he must study and improve his knowledge of dogs constantly and be dedicated. A top class judge rarely has time for much else in his spare time!

If you could choose to have only one breed of dog to live with for the rest of your life, which would it be? Why?

It would of course be a Scottie – a breed that I have now lived with for almost 40 years. They are very adaptable, strong-willed and independent with wonderful personalities, and I cannot imagine life without a Scottie by my side!

What would you consider your greatest achievement in dogs?

The dogs that I have bred that have done well in the ring and the good stock that they have produced to further the breed in future generations

What single piece of advice would you give the person who is just about to begin his judging career?

Try to see as many good dogs as possible in order to get a mental picture of outstanding dogs of each breed. Talk to knowledgeable breeders and judges and always judge independently.

The most important piece of advice of all is however that you must see the dog as a whole and not let small points or minor failings influence your decisions. Many judges pay too much attention to minor shortcomings instead of looking for overall balance and beauty.

What is the most important significant change you've observed in the purebred dog from when you began?

The number of breeds have escalated and there are now so many more shows and judges than before. I am not sure that all these judges have a solid background of knowing and living with top class dogs, which may be one of the reasons for the diversity of opinions in dogs today

Which are your favourite dog shows?

There are wonderful shows all over the world, some with great number of dogs, others with a genuine atmosphere and others with a beautiful overall layout. On reflection, I think the American shows would be hard to beat for professional layout and sheer beauty, the Scandinavian shows for excellent organisation and hospitality, but the British shows are still hard to beat if you want to experience the atmosphere of a REAL dog show with large number of participants!

Have you ever had the opportunity to judge in Spain?

I have judged in Spain many times, and always found worthy winners and dedicated exhibitors.

In general, how do you feel that shows and judging have changed in your lifetime? Are things worse or better than before?

I honestly believe that there are too many shows, all of which need good judges and there not enough knowledgeable judges about. It takes a long time to be a good judge and I feel many debutant judges progress too quickly, which could affect future breeding programs and thus future generations of dogs.

On the plus side, I think shows are now better organised as whole and that judges consider health in pedigree dogs much more now – a very good development.

Do you follow a particular system or order in judging?

As an FCI judge I was taught to judge in a specific way by grading each dog and also to be able to write a critique on each dog. This has subconsciously helped me as I have been forced to read the breed standards very carefully!

My actual method of judging is fairly traditional, but I put a lot of emphasis on movement, style and deportment and often base my top decisions on how a dog carries himself on the move.

What did you find the most difficult part of judging to master?

I still find it difficult to remember the various disqualifications and exact measurements for each breed, so I always check that before entering the ring so that I have not forgotten anything.

When you are judging, what qualities do you admire most in a dog?

Correct outline, overall balance and symmetry, good movement plus star-quality!

What qualities do you admire most in a judge?

A natural eye for balance and symmetry, knowledge of breed standards, personal integrity and an ability to distinguish between major faults and minor failings.

Dan Ericsson

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