

## Table Talk

*By Karen Piper (as published in the Pinscher Patter, March 2004)*

While at a dog show recently, I overheard an exhibitor complaining bitterly that the judge had criticized her dog's behavior on the table. The individual was quick to indicate that "MPCA had sent a directive to judges indicating that this breed was not to be judged on the table." I was left speechless. I don't know if what this person was saying is true or not, but if it is, I believe such an action could prove disastrous for the breed if interpreted to literally.

I agree, wholeheartedly, that the Miniature Pinscher should not be "judged" on the table but perhaps not for the same reasons that the complaining exhibitor obviously had. It is not difficult to pose a dog on the table and correct some faults that it may have (i.e., setting the feet to offset an east/west front, stretching a dog to cover up less than perfect rear angulation, pushing the tail up to play down a poor tailset or dropping croup). A dog that is posed to perfection on the table may actually be quite unsound on the ground so; from that standpoint, they should not be judged on the table.

"Posing" a dog on the table should not be the reason for its being there but rather it is the place where the dog is to be examined by the judge - to check the bite, eye color, head, proper structure, testicles, etc. This is necessary to make a hands-on determination as to how the dog structurally compares to the standard and assure that it is free from disqualifying faults. This examination should assess soundness as well - mental and physical.

Herein lies the problem. We are seeing more and more dogs in the ring that simply will not tolerate the examination on the table. I am witnessing anything but posed dogs. Instead, I see exhibitors with their right hand tightly wrapped around the dog's throat to hold the front in place, whilst the left hand is under the dogs bottom to keep it upright - often suspended over the table with its little toes barely touching. If it weren't so painfully embarrassing, it would be downright comical. I don't think this is the "animation" our breed standard refers to. Indeed, a judge should not have to get a dog in a death grip to examine its bite or pick its rear up off the table to check its testicles. Judging should not stop while the table is being cleaned when a dog has relieved itself on it because it is terrified. There is a red flag in the air here folks. I have to ask myself and maybe others should be asking as well: "Are we beginning to have horrible temperament problems in this breed or are exhibitors just getting lax on socializing and training their dogs?"

Hiding behind a statement that "the breed should not be judged on the table" is playing the ostrich scenario rather than dealing with the potential problem. Nowhere - in the standard or on the AKC video - does it say that the dog should not be examined on the table. Let's not confuse judging with examining. Why should this breed be excused from proper behavior on the table? What message are we sending to the judges, exhibitors of other breeds and spectators about the temperament of the Miniature Pinscher when it won't stand for examination?

Granted, occasionally you get a dog that starts out like gangbusters in the show ring as a puppy and then simply decides they don't like it. Just like humans, not all dogs enjoy doing the same activities. When this is the case, the savvy exhibitor senses the problem and switches to an activity that the dog is happier with such as obedience, agility or being a couch potato.

I would strongly urge all breeders/exhibitors to work a little harder on socializing your puppies; train them on a table starting at a very early age and get them out to classes and interacting with people. Learn to recognize which puppies have not only the quality but also the attitude/temperament that fit the standard and belong in the show ring and which ones would be happier curled up on our sofa. It is not about the number of champions you have produced but rather the quality of those champions. Acting up on the table at the first few shows is expected and acceptable for a new puppy just starting out or even an older dog that is new to you. When we are seeing an alarming increase in the number of teen and adult dogs -- with ring experience -- displaying such outrageous and unacceptable behavior on the table: then, "Houston we have a problem" and playing King's-X with the judges is not going to solve it.