

It's About Attitude

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There have been many articles written in this, and other, publications discussing those aspects of the standard that breeders consider critical to defining the Miniature Pinscher. Movement, type, size are just a few of those specific items that have been addressed.

After 13 years in the breed, and some experience in both the confirmation and obedience rings, I feel that there is one section of our standard that is starting to lose importance with judges, to the detriment of our breed as show dogs and pets.

Our standard describes the Miniature Pinscher as having: "Fearless animation, complete self-possession, and spirited presence". And, for me, dogs must display this temperament, especially in the show ring.

As dog shows have progressed in to our "modern" times, we all have begun to realize that a good deal of emphasis, for better or worse, is now placed on the "show" part of that phrase. I certainly appreciate seeing a dog displaying that "spirited presence" in the ring. And I know that dogs can overcome other tangible faults when they are "showing" themselves. That is why it is especially difficult for me to watch a class of dogs being judged where there is one that is not displaying this attitude. I feel bad for the exhibitor because I know that, while we would all love to have these might "kings" keep four on the floor and follow our "instructions" in the ring, we would rather they made fools of us with their sometimes outrageous "spirited presence" than have to coax an obviously nervous dog around the ring.

We all know which faults of structure we will accept, given an overall quality dog, and those we can not accept regardless. I have had, as I am sure you all have, a dog place at the end of a class, or not at all, because of a certain fault that the judge would not accept. A wide skull, long toes, etc.

While I believe that, most of the time, I can understand a judge placing my dog given a fault that he/she might not like, I have a hard time being placed behind (or not at all) a dog that is not showing proper temperament. Of course any one would naturally not appreciate being given a low placement but, what is really beginning to disturb me is that I am seeing improper temperament being "rewarded" more often at shows.

If a dog being shown has its tail and ears down as it is being gaited, or standing/stacking. I feel that not only is this dog not exhibiting proper temperament, but that it is not possible for any one to accurately judge other aspects of the standard; tail-set, top line, gait; of such a dog. How can you tell if the dog's movement is: "a high-stepping, reaching, free and easy gait" or the tail set is: "High, held erect, docked in proportion to size of dog", or the top line is: "..level or slightly sloping toward the rear both when standing and

gaiting", if the dog's tail is "clamped" to the rear? In the same vein, how can you tell if the ears are: "set high, standing erect from base to tip", if they are held down and the head is also being held in a lowered position?

For each class, the judge has to determine the best dog based on each dog's faults and strengths and what they will or will not, accept. I have observed that, many times a dog that is not "showing", head, tail, ears down, has many strengths when you see them again displaying proper breed temperament. But when I see them in the ring missing this critical element of the standard, it is pretty much impossible for me to evaluate the other elements. I would not even attempt to judge the dog's overall quality as I feel it would be unfair to the dog as well. And to see a dog being "rewarded" by placing, or even winning (and yes, I have seen that) a class when they are not displaying proper temperament causes me great concern. Given those other faults that do not directly effect each other, i.e., wide skulls do not interfere with evaluating movement or top lines, it is difficult for me to understand how a dog, not showing proper temperament, can ever be effectively judged on its overall quality.

Certainly it is possible, and I have experienced it myself, that a dog has a "bad day" and simply won't "get up" to show. This does not mean the dog has a bad temperament or that it is not a good quality animal. But, if the dog is not displaying proper temperament, how can you really evaluate the dog's overall quality?

While the "show" in dog show is important, we must also remember the basic reason that dog shows were started - to evaluate and choose the best dogs for breeding. To place dogs displaying improper temperament over dogs that are showing proper temperament, regardless of other tangible faults does a disservice to our breed. If these dogs win classes, and possibly even win points, they are, in essence, being promoted as good breeding stock. They are also being promoted to the public, potential pet owners, watching the show as good examples of our breed.

The non-tangible strength - proper temperament - of this breed, the "big dog" in a little package, the "spirited presence" is the center from which all tangible strengths are supported. Without that attitude, they can not be great show dogs.

When it comes to showing and living with our great breed, for me - ***It's about attitude!***