

## Attempting To Show a Field Dog

by Joan Donnell

Rumor has it that a show judge, after going over one of the specimens he or she was judging, stepped back and told the owner to have the dog checked by a veterinarian as the pup had these strange lumps all over its body. Whether this story is fact or fiction, the unfortunate part is that all too many show judges will ignore any dog that shows any indication that the animal is not overweight or has any semblance of a muscle. They do not seem to understand what a muscle is all about or its purpose. With my own dog, in a sweeps class, the judge pulled away after going over the dog as if it had some contagious disease. The unfortunate part of this is that this man may eventually be licensed to judge our breed. An aside - his breed was being lobbied to be removed from the sporting group not too many years ago.

Our field trial dogs are finely tuned athletes - as finely tuned as any human athlete - and are as much a running machine as any human that we send to compete in Olympic track events. Any dog that is expected to run in the heat for 30 minutes, or for an hour in any and all kinds of weather, cannot carry any excess weight without it taking its toll.

Another area that has finally been addressed is the coat. Not long ago we had dogs with long flowing coats showing up in the ring. They were the only dogs who could win these beauty contests. Unfortunately, this is what dog shows seemed to have turned into at one point. -ABC has finally addressed this problem and it has improved markedly. This one gallon bag of thistles was removed by my husband from the body of one of our dogs after one trip through a field on a hunting trip. The dog had already removed at

least this many herself while riding back to the motel. She does not have a profuse coat. However, any dog that is running in the field cannot come out of a trial, hunting test, or trip to the hunting field, and compete with show dogs, many of which never see a field. After running through brambles, briars and thistles these poor dogs may not have much coat left, especially feathering. This, in addition to not carrying 10 pounds of extra weight, is a distinct disadvantage. A friend has just taken her Britt through to a dual title. However, this meant taking him out of field training, adding an extra 10 or so pounds, and then attempting to slim down this poor animal so that he could run again a couple of months later. I don't feel that it is at all healthy for our dogs to be put through these up and down weight gains and losses - any more than it is for we as humans to abuse ourselves in this manner. Any judge that is worth his or her mettle should be able to separate the wheat from the chaff.

To get our dogs in top shape - especially for one hour stakes - a great deal of reading is done with the dogs pulling on reading harnesses. On some of the dogs it tends to build up muscles to the point of their appearing to be bulky in the front end. I have seen this in a number of very good field dogs with excellent conformation - but not all field dogs - they are just well muscled. It is not a fault - it is just that show judges have not been educated as to what constitutes a muscle.

Jodi Engel from the Oregon Brittany Club has brought show judges out to their trial grounds after specialty and walked them up and down the lines of field dogs, attempting to point out that these dogs have nothing wrong with conformation. This is also where

the judges were shown the horse trough that was used to bathe the dog that won Winners Bitch. Unfortunately, I have not seen that it has done her or us much good - although she does persevere and keeps on trying. She has even put some of the braver judges on horseback to follow a brace or two to give them a better feel for what our Britts do in the field and what they are all about. This is something that should be done at the national level, but will be impossible if the show site is removed by these many miles.

Another point I have to bring up is the heads of some of the Britts I have seen winning in the show ring. They seem to be part bullmastiff and not at all the typical Brittany head. Why are these dogs being given points towards a championship? In the field, we withhold placements if a first place has not been earned in the opinion of the judges. How often is a first place or points withheld in the show ring? This is something we need to address and to think hard about. Just to give out blue ribbons and points for the sake of giving out blue ribbons and points does not seem to be achieving our goals.

I feel it is time that the American Brittany Club faced up to the fact that without a continuing education program for judges, with backing from the American Kennel Club, we are headed in the same direction as the Irish Setter, English Setter, German Shorthaired Pointer, English Pointer, Springer and Cocker Spaniels, and all those other breeds who no longer can perform the tasks for which they were originally bred. Do we really want this split to take place with the Brittany? I see it coming very rapidly.

Thanks for listening.