

## THE AFGHAN HOUND ASSOCIATION CHAMPIONSHIP SHOW

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> MAY 2016

BITCHES – Judge Mr R Souza (Coastwind Afghans – USA)

I'd like to start my critique with a hypothetical scenario and a question for the breeders. Imagine yourselves leading sedentary or, at best, moderately active lives. Weeks, months, years pass. Then one day you are required to run a long, gruelling marathon against athletes who have been training for this same race. How do you think you would hold up? Could you even finish the race? Now, place your Afghan in this scenario. And one day he or she is required to enter the open field, pursue, catch and bring down game—a rabbit, deer, or even in some cases, a mountain lion. How do you think they would fare? Not well, I have no doubt. And if you're being honest with yourself, neither do you. This illustrates the point I want to make. Afghans, as well as some other hound breeds, are athletes. Or should be. They were never intended to be a merely decoration for a sofa. They are meant to be well muscled, primitive, hard bodied coursers and hunters and be able to function in that way.

I found almost no well-muscled, primitive, hard bodied bitches in my ring. They were, with the exception of a few, slack in the loin with a layer of fat obscuring any hip bones that might be underneath—hip bones described as “prominent” in the standard. The loose coming and going I saw over and over again related to the lack of muscle which also contributes to the weak top lines. There were also a lot of these.

This breed must be capable of hunting at full speed, over great distances, difficult terrain and bringing down game. Without the ability to do that they are not Afghan Hounds. They are a facsimile outline of their ancient ancestors. I, personally, have always thought that some kind of coursing requirement be necessary for a championship title. But how to put this idea into place? I don't have an answer.

The approach to finding a solution, as I see it, would be fairly simple and direct—find and incorporate a gene pool with substantial muscle built into its DNA. You can, if you wish, correct what needs to be corrected. It's possible. There are pedigrees throughout the world that can give you the muscle and consequently the stamina your dogs need. Other kennels have it. The VDOM dogs I've judged in the past had it. The Katwiga dogs and what comes down from them had it. The Akaba dogs had it. Mine did and do. Other sight hound breeds—greyhounds, whippets, salukis—have it. Muscle is just as much a genetic factor as anything else. Exercise can help enormously, of course, but it can't always do everything. If the metabolic programming for good muscle is not there, all the exercise in the world will not build it. We see the same thing in humans—some exercise regularly with little result, others seem to be naturally fit.

Another detail that struck me—the English standard specifically lists a ring tail as a requirement so I expected to find a high percentage of ringed tails. I didn't find nearly as many as I thought I would.

I don't believe this is new information for you. Over the years I have heard these same observations voiced often by others. David Roche, who was a well-known breeder of Afghans and Terriers and an all breeds judge (he did BIS at Crufts and many other important shows in England) and to whom I exported dogs over the years, made this complaint to me forty years ago. (For those of you who are not familiar with David, speak to long time breeder/exhibitors. They would have known him.) I've spoken with several other judges, colleagues of mine who have judged this and other shows in England, who in

private have agreed with what I've said but were disinclined to emphasize it publicly or write about it in their reports, unless the situation was brushed upon with no particular emphasis—gilding the lily, as it were. When I asked them why, the common reply was, "They (the English breeders) don't seem to care." Their words, not mine, and something I find hard to believe. It suggests complacency. I hope this is not the case. In any event I am not the gilder of the lily when it comes to frank evaluation of our beloved hounds. Never have been. Never will be. I have always been the harshest critic of my own dogs wherever I thought they needed improvement. I feel obligated to give the opinion I was flown over here to give. And I sincerely hope it is taken in the vein in which it is intended. It gives me no particular pleasure to say what I've said. And if it's any consolation, it's only one person's opinion on one day. At least consider it. Or, I don't know....wrap fish in it. To be sure, identifying a problem is the easy part. Solving it not quite so easy. Ignoring it would not be an option for me.

On the flip side.....I saw quite a few very nice heads as defined by the English standard. The American standard says "little or no" stop, suggesting to me the less the better, whereas your standard requires "some"—a slight variation unless you are a "head hunter" which I am not. The bitches' heads were generally quite good. And there was one bitch in particular that had quite the most beautiful head I have ever seen. I could have looked at her standing all day. On a lot of the exhibits side movement was acceptable. Good feet, generally. And I've never seen such a large number of wonderfully exotic Mandarin beards. There were many well-handled, professional presentations. Generally speaking, the majority of bitches were pleasing in outline, well-proportioned with a length of neck in balance with length of leg. And in the whole lot, only a couple of questionable bites. The overall lineup lacked sharp definition in finishing points—details that make the breed an angular, not curvilinear, one. But, keep in mind Afghans don't run on their heads, Mandarins are an intriguing, but not particularly essential, detail, and how well a dog is handled in the ring has no relevance to what they can do in the field. If you are satisfied with the state of the breed as you, not I, see it and don't see the need to change, that's your prerogative. If you want to improve what you have, you certainly can. I, personally, think we can always make things better. Satisfaction breeds stagnation. And in the case of our Afghans, it's much more satisfying to live with a fine athlete than a couch potato.

This said, and having perhaps burned all the bridges there are to burn, here are some specifics of my class winners. Unfortunately, the high tech tape recorder you may have seen me speaking into failed completely. So, all the detailed comments I made to myself were lost. I have remembered to the best of my ability those top class placements, but they are sadly brief. I apologize for this. Thanks to Susan Rhodes, Lesley Busby and Melinda Hitch, the photos they sent me helped enormously to fill in some gaps. My observations generally found more similarities than differences and on another day many of the ribbons could have been distributed in a different order.

#### Veteran Bitch

1st place: No. 145: Ch. Cubanba Northern Star--An exotic sable colored bitch who was well proportioned in outline; moved very evenly from the side and seems to have held up quite well as an elder stateswoman.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 193: Ch. Agha Djari's Who's That Girl; a typey blue; the same comments apply for this exhibit, a close second.

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 176: Metewand Mamabula: Blue domino; also with nice type overall; slightly weaker in the topline, but on a par with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

#### Minor Puppy Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 38: Gilari Crimson Magic--A bright red, animated puppy with a fuzzy ring tail who is in the "all legs" state of growth, but still showed much promise with an elastic, ground covering movement, even at this early age. I predict she will grow into her legs and cover the ground quite well.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 115: Gilari Vermillion Venus—beautiful shaded masked red who wouldn't stand still!

#### Puppy Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 96: Khasbek Licence To Win At Ashahni--A light red, compact bitch with a very attractive neck set, head carriage and a springy gait. Tightly put together and short coupled probably accounting for a little restriction in the side movement which was even but could have covered the ground more.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 138: Bondor A Golden Age Over Rhazmakh--A red mahogany and gray brindle; nice coat texture; would like to see more substance in the foreface. Soft muscle.

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 156: Shimalma Midnight Liaison--black masked red brindle; too long in the loin; soft muscle

#### Junior Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 13: Cloudside Flashlight At Karandikar--Blackish with a typey outline; soft in the topline but nice side movement

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 26: Sofico Griselda--blue domino; nice type; soft in the top; hip bones diminished perhaps by too much weight carried across the croup

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 149: Cloudside Flash Style--Black and tan/brindle; nicely proportioned; too fat across the croup

#### Yearling Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 16: Zilbec Zilanthe--Exotic self-masked cream with a pretty head and a nice dark eye and pigment; soft in the topline; a little more neck would enhance balance.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 33: Zilbec Zilandra--black masked red with a nice head and eye; soft in the top

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 102: Altside Henrietta Musgrove Via Saksfifth-- dark blue bitch also with a nice head and eye; very soft in the top;

#### Novice Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 26: Sofico Griselda

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 138: Bondor A Golden Age Over Rhazmakh

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 161: Drishaun Black Jasmine

#### Special Beginners Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: 138: Bondor A Golden Age Over Rhazmakh

#### Graduate Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 117: Boannes Isis At Heart: attractively coated red brindle; nice side gait; a little long in the loin.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 16: Zilbec Zilanthe

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 179: Gezancol Sweetness N' Light; unusual black masked sable and cream with a nice outline; more prominent hip bones desired;

#### Post Graduate Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 160: Joneca Taffeta--A pale, oyster blue brindle who was nicely short coupled with a refreshing bony back and prominent hip bones; (would have loved to have seen more of this on all the exhibits.); pleasing ring tail. I would have liked to have seen her cover the ground more evenly.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 83: Garamond Wineberry At Sochera; black and silver with a balanced outline; soft in the top

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 159: Maringo Rumor Has It Bichoux: black and tan; soft in the top and barely visible hip bones.

#### Mid Limit Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 131: Joneca Chiffon--A self-masked cream bitch with an exotic head and dark eye, nicely defined bony back, prominent hip bones and proper croup.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 137 Pahlevi Disco Diva At Orashan--A black bitch standing with good proportion; nice neck; soft muscle; if the tail were a bit tighter the ring would create a most attractive picture.

#### Limit Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 168: Sleepy Hollow At Yansukhim--A black masked red with nice Mandarin beard and appropriate coat; nicely detailed across the top; nice hipbones and croup

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 80: Alouann Glitz N Glamour Avec Algrahart--Lovely type dark bluish bitch with a pleasing head and eye

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 84: Calahorra From The Viennawoods--black with interesting foot markings; moved nicely from the side

#### Open Bitch

1<sup>st</sup> place: No. 191: CC Winner: Agha Djaris Fast Love At Audigier--Dark blue brindle bitch. Apart from being too big, the whole package was best suited to carry out the function required of the breed. She was adequately muscled and, I suspect, could be improved in this department by additional exercise, but still was more fit to go over than any other bitch on the day. She moved with purpose, authoritatively and with a decisive reconnaissance gait.

2<sup>nd</sup> place: No. 69 Reserve CC winner: Affietar Amazing Grace--A red bitch with a lovely head who, in outline, was beautifully proportioned and nicely detailed. I would have liked more substance and she was a little fancy in her front movement which might be improved with exercise.

3<sup>rd</sup> place: No. 186: Jazzmeenah Artemis With Charjaghan--Gorgeous shaded masked blonde; this is the one I referred earlier with the most beautiful head and outline; more prominent hip bones would have been a big plus; had she been stronger and more collected on the move she might have had the ticket.

Challenge Bitch: No. 191

Reserve Challenge Bitch: No. 69

Best Puppy: No. 38

Having commented on my experience in the ring, let me just close with my impressions outside the ring. You couldn't have had a more beautifully run show. Everyone involved was helpful, generous, accommodating, professional...there aren't enough laudatory adjectives to describe how I feel about your show and the people connected to it. I've always thought the English to be terribly well mannered, well-spoken, polite, cultured and well informed. Everyone connected with the show as well as not connected with the show confirmed that over and over again. I'd like to especially thank my hostess and guide before the show, Susan Rhodes, my generous host, Mark Cocozza, after the show, my fantastic ring stewards, Jeremy Bott and Masha Shaverneva, as well as Ian Fisher who filled me in on questions I had. I had many substantive doggy conversations before and after which is always the icing on the cake. Thank you so much for having me.