

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

*AKC Judge E. “Katie” Gammill shares her perspectives on breeder and exhibitor pitfalls, the AKC’s Grand Champion initiative, and the future of the fancy*



## Where Are the Points?

Do breeders and owner-handlers no longer understand the sport of dogs? “Show and go” doesn’t get the job done. You are either in, or you are out.

Here are a few examples:

- People bump a dog up to Specials class without first asking the competitors if they would prefer that the dog stay in the classes and hold the major.
- People double-enter and don’t show up. Owner-handlers drive miles to get to that major, only to find someone else “slept in” or didn’t go.
- Time and again, we hear “the major broke,” but sometimes exhibitors come to ringside to get a number, see that a few numbers haven’t been picked

up, and assume there is no major. Later, they find that it is THEIR FAULT that the major didn’t hold, because they didn’t compete and the rest of the armbands were picked up at the last minute.

- I regularly see Best of Breed winners opting out of Group competition. Do breeders still count the “Specials,” especially now with more Specials being shown to compete for Select wins and Grand Championship points? Did you know that, if ANY breed in the Group has a major and your dog wins the Group, it counts as a major for your entry? Sure, Groups are tough, but a judge gave you the honor of representing your breed, and you skip Group competition?

## About the Author



An AKC judge since 1977, Edna “Katie” Gammill currently judges the Working and Herding Groups, a variety of Hounds and Toy breeds, as well as Junior Handling and Best in Show. She has enjoyed judging numerous nationals and breed specialties.

A dog and horse breeder since 1965, Judge Gammill is now a retired buyer of hydraulics and electronics for Ingersoll Rand. Between judging assignments, she is a freelance writer for [www.thedogplace.org](http://www.thedogplace.org) and was acknowledged by that organization for receiving the “Most Requested Reprints” in 2011. Judge Gammill also writes for other magazines and authors the monthly *Dog Speak* newspaper column.

A breeder of Australian Cattle Dogs and Shetland Sheepdogs, Judge Gammill is a member of the Mattoon Kennel Club, the American Shetland Sheepdog Association, and several breed specific organizations. As an officer of the Charleston Area Dog Club, Judge Gammill participates in many facets of public education, including Bite Prevention Programs in lower grades and local Know Your Breed seminars. She also teaches puppy socialization, basic obedience, and conformation classes on a limited basis.

Married 54 years, Judge Gammill and her husband, Paul, are both retired and live on Indian Creek Farms near Lerna, Illinois.

## Breeders Discouraging Breeders

Breeders are, and will always be, the backbone of the sport and the future of dog shows. When I read, "we must do things to attract newcomers to our sport," and then hear complaints from puppy buyers who speak of complicated and unreasonable contracts, breeding restrictions, exorbitant prices, and in some cases rudeness, is it any wonder that buyers run to the nearest shelter for their pet? Between our actions, the lack of breeding litters, and restrictions, we don't have to worry about Animal Rights Activists. We are shooting ourselves in our own proverbial foot!

I have attempted to teach new breeders or owner-handlers, only to have them disregard my effort. The future of the sport depends on them, but I suppose it is the times. I can say, "What was" worked a lot better than "What is." If we refuse to honor the sport of dogs and play by the rules, we defeat our purpose. If we all breed what we like and disregard the standard, we will join the ranks of the "doodle dogs."

## Breeding To The Breed Standard

Another example: Why won't the breeders and handlers stand up for the Standards? I love breed type, the look of eagles, the virtues that separate one breed from another. A big, substantial Great Dane one can "look in the eye" represents the Apollo of the breed. Nobility is a look; I love the keen presence of each individual breed, be it large or small. I grieve the loss of these attributes, but they can be preserved IF breeders take breeding to the standard seriously and evaluate their dogs honestly.

When evaluating dogs, does one keep a dog for a single attribute, or does one choose the overall dog? It starts there. IF you breed for eye improvement and it shows up on the worst puppy in the litter, and you choose to keep that "eye," the next generation will take you backward. IF you choose the best overall puppy, keeping your positive virtues intact, your reward comes when you later breed that dog. In the next litter will be a choice of an overall puppy that incorporates the desired eye. This requires patience, but "socks in" your virtues and moves your program forward.

There are breeders, and then there are BREEDERS! True breeders know how to incorporate a virtue into their program without losing their own "look." Meeting a breeder with four generations of "OFA excellent" hips in her dogs, she asked me, how could it be that all the puppies in the last litter were dysplastic? I'm no expert in genetics, but I am an expert regarding "You plan, Nature laughs," keeping us on our toes! It has always been that way. But the sport and a good breeding program will survive if we just carry on.

## Present and Future Breeder Tools

While I was initially hesitant regarding Select Dog/Bitch awards, I see it now as an opportunity for newcomers to view "greats" of many breeds. Newcomers to our breeds have not seen these older dogs in their prime. Today's Best of Breed class, where judges select our "Award of Merits" - the Select Dog and Select Bitch - often lets people see dogs that haven't been in the ring for many years. Entering BOB to pursue finishing your dog as a Grand Champion allows newcomers to see quality they may have missed. It might make them consider using an older champion for stud; it may let them see champion bitches from a line they are contemplating. If not for this new title, many of these dogs would remain home in kennels, never to be considered.

With today's widespread availability of frozen semen, opportunities abound. Frozen semen and the Grand Champion program allow evaluation of and access to studs long forgotten and may afford a fresh approach to getting a breeding program "back on track."

Many dogs age well and are still breathtaking. It's regrettable that only one dog and one bitch can be recognized when so many are so deserving. Take advantage of this opportunity to improve your breeding program.

The future of dog shows and of your breed is in your hands. It's a worthwhile responsibility. Don't sit back and think that others are fighting the battle to preserve either one just for you. Get involved before it's too late and the privilege of owning a dog is taken from us all. BREEDERS ARE THE FUTURE OF THE SPORT.



Look at those Grand Champions! What an opportunity for younger breeder/exhibitors to once again view the magnificence of such individuals!

We now see the "overall symmetrical appearance" once taken for granted, before breeders started "breeding PIECES" instead of dogs. BEFORE some judges ceased to take the entire dog into consideration when judging. These dogs were victims of "type change." Simply put, "type change" is the concentration of an obvious fault that becomes so commonplace, it appears as a virtue. Overwhelming the ring, the correct dog bred to the standard is so different that it appears to be incorrect!

Are these "Select" dogs/bitches making a difference? As more of these past Champions enter my ring, I am impressed with their virtues and lasting quality. Some muzzles may be gray, but those old ones are something to behold.

**Editor's Note:** This article was published online by The Dog Place and is reprinted with permission. View the original article at [www.thedogplace.org/SHOWDOG/Future-of-dog-shows\\_Gammill-1203.asp](http://www.thedogplace.org/SHOWDOG/Future-of-dog-shows_Gammill-1203.asp).