

“The sticky wicket”

Proper measuring technique for AKC judges

by Mary Dukes, AKC Executive Field Rep

Recently we have seen a number of judges having some problems with correct measurement technique. If you judge measurable breeds, proper measuring technique is a fundamental skill that you must master. There is indeed a specific technique and procedure that judges must utilize when performing a measurement on a dog to be fair to the exhibitor, the dog and to assure that the measurement is true and accurate.

To measure, or not to measure....

Whether the judge chooses to measure a dog or the measurement is the result of an in ring exhibitor protest, the measurement technique itself is the same. I should point out that if a judge thinks a dog may be over or under size, it is the judge's OBLIGATION to measure the exhibit. This is a mandatory part of your job in judging to the standard of the breed for which you have been approved and entrusted to judge.

The Wicked Wicket.

Once the decision to measure an exhibit has been made, the first step in the process is to inform the exhibitor that you will be measuring their dog. Next have your ring steward call the superintendent to bring the wicket to the ring. Be sure you notify the superintendent which breed you will be measuring so that the correct size wicket is delivered. If there are multiple dogs in the class, you should continue examining the remaining exhibits while waiting for the wicket to arrive. If you are judging a large entry of a measurable breed, you may choose to request the wicket prior to the start of your assignment.

With the proper wicket in hand, call the exhibitor to your judge's table to observe you set the wicket. Lay the wicket flat on the table to set each leg to the appropriate height. You should always re-read the breed standard disqualification immediately prior to measuring so as to be **absolutely** certain of the height at which you will be setting the wicket and to remind yourself **exactly** how the standard reads. This can make a difference as to whether a dog is disqualified or not. For example, if a standard reads “over 20 inches at the shoulder to disqualify” you will set the wicket to 20” to measure the dog. If the wicket is touching the dog's withers (highest point of shoulder) AND both legs are touching the surface on which you are measuring, the dog is EXACTLY 20” and not to be disqualified. Conversely, if the standard reads “20 inches *and* over to disqualify” the same dog and measurement would result in a disqualification. Be aware that a very slight difference in wording can make a very big difference in meaning, and it is very important that you as a judge are sensitive to and aware of this nuance.

Be sure to screw each leg in tightly so the legs are firmly set. Then, with the wicket still laying flat on the table, use your metal measuring tape (which you should always carry in

your briefcase – if you find that you do not have one with you [*shame on you!*] call for the AKC Rep, as we always carry a tape with us) to measure each leg of the wicket individually. Confirm that they are both set to the proper height. The exhibitor should be part of this process in that they watch you set and measure the wicket. Once finished, ask them to concur that the wicket is indeed set to the proper height.

Get it right and don't scare the dog!

Now that the wicket is properly set it is time to actually perform the measurement on the dog. The dog should be measured on the surface that it is typically examined, the table for breeds normally examined on the table, the ground for breeds normally examined on the ground or the ramp for those breeds which may be judged on the ramp. If you are performing a measurement on the ground on an uneven surface you must ask the superintendent to bring a board to the ring on which to stand the dog to perform the measurement. This should be requested at the same time as the wicket if there is a need for such.

Where to measure the dog is generally pretty straightforward, smaller breeds on the table and larger breeds on the ground, but what do you do in the case of a breed like the Whippet where it is equally acceptable and at the discretion of the judge to examine the dogs on the table, the ramp or the ground? Although this decision lies completely with the judge, many judges in this situation will ask the exhibitor if they have a preference as to where the dog is measured (typically on the ground or on the table unless the judge is using the ramp for their examination process) and will then grant that request. (As an exhibitor of this breed, I always very much appreciated being given this option). It should also be noted that this option (ground or table for measurement) should extend only to the measurement itself, wherever (table, ramp or ground) the judge has chosen to examine their dogs must remain consistent throughout the entry.

Next you will ask the handler to stack the dog at the chosen measuring location. The dog should be in a natural stance, four square, with its head in a natural position. If the handler does not stack the dog to your satisfaction, you must request that they re-stack the dog so that you, the judge, are content that the dog is standing in a normal stance where its true height can be determined. You may give the handler a couple of chances to get it right, telling them what adjustments you would like them to make, but if the handler continues to be uncooperative (either intentionally or unintentionally) or the dog becomes difficult and cannot be stacked to your satisfaction, you must excuse the dog and mark your book “excused, unable to measure”. You, the judge, **ARE NOT** permitted to physically assist the handler in stacking the dog or touch or hold the dog in any way during the stacking or measuring process.

Once the dog is satisfactorily stacked you will ask the exhibitor if they are ready and you will proceed with the actual measurement. Approach the dog in a normal manner appropriate for the breed. Hold the wicket in your right hand and down at your side as you approach the dog. Be very aware that most dogs will be suspicious when approached

by a stranger carrying a large metal stick, so try to make your movements as smooth, efficient and natural as possible as you approach the dog.

You will touch the dog at the withers (highest point of the shoulder) to make clear where your measurement point will be. This is the only place you are permitted to touch the dog during the measurement process. **DO NOT** hold the dog's muzzle or move its head up or down, **DO NOT** re-adjust its legs. Then you will bring the wicket forward from the rear of the dog, place it only on the highest point of the withers and leave it only long enough to determine if the dog is in or out and then remove the wicket. At all times take extreme care not to inadvertently bump the dog with the wicket's legs. This will spook the dog and annoy the exhibitor. Additionally, do not release the wicket from your hand at any time while you are actually measuring the dog. This can result in the wicket falling on the dog who will now be really spooked and you also have an exhibitor who is **REALLY, REALLY ANNOYED** and will not hesitate to hunt down the AKC Rep at the show and tell them over and over again what a moron you, the judge, are.

Immediately after completing the measurement, inform the exhibitor of your decision as to whether their dog measured in or out. Realize that many exhibitors may be nervous and flustered by the experience so please be polite, clear and direct, such as either, "Today your dog measured in, please take your place back in line", or "I'm sorry, today your dog measured out and is disqualified under the breed standard". In the latter case please do not hesitate to advise them to seek out the AKC rep for clarification if they have questions or tell them that you will be happy to discuss it with them after judging is completed. This way the exhibitor can get any questions answered, and you can continue judging your class.

Tying up the loose ends.

Any dog that is measured must be noted in your judge's book and also whether it measured in or out. If you measure a dog in, you should note adjacent to the dog's number "measured – in". Conversely if the dog measures out, you will note by the dog's number "DQ – measured out". Also, if the measurement is the result of an in ring protest that should be noted in your book, clarifying the armband number of the dog measured and the outcome as well as the armband number of the exhibitor filing the protest.

As an AKC judge who adjudicates on measurable breeds, it is your responsibility to become proficient at the proper technique to measure a dog. You owe that to the breed, the exhibitors and the individual dogs. Press on and keep measuring!