

# OWNER/HANDLER OVERLOAD

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“Something has to be done about the Owner/Handler series.” That statement, in one form or another, has become a common refrain among judges. There is no question that the addition of the Owner/Handler series has been a success in terms of increasing entries at all-breed dog shows by encouraging owners to compete. It has given owner/handlers a way to continue to participate in the sport all the way to Owner/Handler Best In Show without having to compete with professional handlers. This may be a good thing for the sport even though, like the grand champion competition, it may only be a temporary, stop-gap maneuver with regard to declining entries.

As participation in the Owner/Handler series increases, it is becoming somewhat of a burden for the judging community. When the Owner/Handler groups contained six or seven dogs judges were happy to accommodate clubs when assigned a few of these groups to judge at the end of the day. Now, the Owner/Handler groups are nearly as large as the regular groups, yet some clubs still think nothing of assigning three or four of these groups to a judge on top of a full load and two or three regular groups. This could easily result in a judge judging 250 to 300 dogs, thus extending the judging time to 9 hours or more!

Works fine on paper — start at 8:00 AM and finish by 6:00 PM. When making such assignments, it seems no thought is given to the fact that many of our multiple-group judges are near or beyond retirement age and might not enjoy an eight to nine hour judging marathon on concrete, or worse — outside in poor weather on bumpy ground.

Of course, some judges want to do Owner/Handler groups since they count towards additional breed applications. So long as judges volunteer for these additional groups there is no complaint. But most often these groups are assigned without the judge’s knowledge or any appreciation of the added burden being imposed on the judge. Here is where some guidance by the AKC would be appreciated. Perhaps a policy suggestion that for every Owner/Handler group assigned to a judge, the judge’s breed judging maximum be reduced by ten dogs. As an example, a multi-group judge assigned to judge two regular groups and three Owner/Handler groups could only be assigned a maximum of 145 dogs in breed judging rather than 175 dogs. Under this example judging time would be limited to between seven and eight hours assuming a 2.5 minute per dog rate in breed judging and 1 minute per dog rate in group judging. Of course, group times may be longer when clubs assign judges different groups than what they have judged in the breeds (i.e., judge hounds and terriers all day then have to judge the Non-sporting and Working Groups)

Absent AKC limitations on the assigning of Owner/Handler groups, some judges are putting in their contracts language that gives the judge some control over such assignments. For example, "Owner/Handler and all other non-regular groups may not be added to my assignment without my prior approval." As independent contractors, we have the right to negotiate these matters with a club. For your own protection I would suggest you consider using this form of control over the maximum work load you may be assigned.\*