

What Judges Look For...On your way to Winning

By: Richard Anthony & Kristine Vance

When cutting, grooming or entering a rose into competition, your thoughts should revolve around how well your rose or roses look in comparison to what judge's look for during the judging process; in other words how your roses are going to be judged when compared to the standards that they are judged by. We are not going to examine the entire gamut or process or all of the specific classification of roses. What we are going to attempt to accomplish is to provide you with a cursory review of what horticultural judges look for when judging a Hybrid Tea rose. There are many **similarities** (when comparing other roses to Hybrid Teas) when judging other roses and a few **material differences** (OGR's being exhibited stem on stem) that you will pick up as you become more comfortable with the exhibiting process. The more you learn, the better the exhibitor you can eventually become. Keep in mind that you can **remove** anything (except sepals in an English Box entry) you want from a rose **BUT** you **CAN NOT** add anything to improve you rose.

Size – accounts for **10 points** of the point scale. Many exhibitors and judges alike down play size and often consider it the least important element of the **100 point scale**. Average size of a normal sized (**consistent of the variety**) bloom is what a judge is basing his comparison on when judging your rose; something smaller than normal warrants less consideration (points) and a larger specimen (better than what is typical of the variety) moves up accordingly. Bear in mind it is not a comparison of sizes of different cultivars (**Kardinal** which is relatively small when compared to a much larger **Moonstone**) but rather Kardinal compared to a Kardinal that the judge saw at the last rose show he/she judged at and the same standard applies to Moonstone as well. Don't lose sight of the fact that in most instances "**Big is Better**" but not always as we have lost to exceptional smaller roses on more than one occasion (**Madeline**).

Form – accounts for **25 points** and in our opinion is the most important element of the point scale. We go to great lengths to insure our best roses have impeccable winning form. The **Guidelines for Judging Roses** state that a rose when viewed from overhead should be "**symmetrically arranged in an attractive circular outline, tending toward a high center.**" In actuality, if a rose does not have a circular shape and a well defined center it is not going to receive a blue ribbon. A rose when viewed from the side should take on a triangular shape (**Touch of Class**) but many excellent cultivars such as (Crystalline and Moonstone are more flat or cup shaped when viewed from the side). The guidelines further state that an exhibition **rose** with near perfect form should be "**two thirds to three fourths open**" and the "**outer rows of petals should be close to a horizontal plane.**" There is an unwritten but often strictly enforced rule that petals that fall below the horizontal plane will be penalized severely; we have experienced this and it is not pleasant we assure you. Our experience at local, district and national shows tend to uphold the theory that "Big is Better" and that "**Pin Point Centers**" are necessary especially when moving up the level of competition.

Color and Substance – These two categories when combined account for **35 points** on the point scale; by far the most important category assuming the rose has good form and a well defined center. More often than not, neither category weighs heavily until it is time to judge for **Queen**. This is when a “**Lack Of**” comes into play as opposed to the other way around. The actual color of a rose is immaterial and in theory is not supposed to be a factor in judging; unfortunately this is not always the case. Color involves **Chroma** and **Hue** but for all intents and purposes a rose with outstanding **Color (Abbey’s Angel and Marlon’s Day)** captures a judge’s attention; it is something that stops you in your tracks and begs for you to look at the rose again. Substance, according to the guidelines, is the “**moisture and starch in the petals.**” It is what most exhibitors consider as “**Freshness**” and is prominent when it is **absent** or in the process of **losing** substance. Simply stated, a rose with ample substance generally looks very fresh.

Stem and Foliage – accounts for **20 points** on the point scale and typically a rose that wins will have a fairly straight stem and adequate foliage arranged in a staircase manner to compliment the bloom and will often have a Christmas tree effect when viewed from the side. Hybrid Tea roses should have bottom leaves of five to seven leaves per leaflet. A judge looks for dark green shiny leaves without obvious insect damage or fungal blemishes. Oversized leaves may be trimmed to improve the overall appearance of the entry. Unless you have a very crooked stem or severely damaged leaves, this may be the least most important category. We typically take so many roses to a show that often we do not clean, polish or trim our leaves unless absolutely necessary. Here’s a perfect time to say “Do as we say....not as we do”!

Balance and Proportion – accounts for **10 points** on the point scale and often is a nonentity when judging unless it approaches one extreme or the other; stems either too short or too long for the size of the bloom. A winning rose is typically displayed so that the bloom is in complete balance and proportion with the stem and foliage. A good exhibitor understands completely this concept and also recognizes the answer to the question regarding if a rose is staged too high or too low. This is a “**you know it when you see it**” type of category as the rose is either in or not in Balance and Proportion.

The final issue concerning a rose that is being judged is often referred to a Distinction or what we call the “**WOW**” factor. It is not in the Guidelines but trust us in that it definitely does happen. Think back to when you saw the first bloom of a new rose bush and you went “Wow” or the time you saw an exceptional bloom at a rose show and you stopped and looked again; this is Distinction or the “WOW” factor in play and when a judge encounters this a trophy more often than not will follow. Distinction or Wow can and often will impact each of the six categories that roses are judged on with size, form and color more often than not weighing more heavily than the others.

As always, if you have questions about this or other articles that we have written, please direct them to either Richard at RJA4CPA@aol.com or Kristine at Beancntr30@wideopenwest.com. Good luck and have fun at the show.