

## **SSTS Markaryd 15 May 2023**

I would like to thank everyone for such a lovely day judging the club show. The venue was perfect (I think one of the best grass rings I have come across), the running of the show was superb, I had THE best ring secretaries & the weather was amazing! No show can take place without the exhibitors & I thank everyone for entering; the whole atmosphere of the show from my perspective seemed happy, relaxed, supportive & fun – exactly what a specialty, or any dog show should be.

I have had Tibetan Spaniels now for 45 years & have judged for the SSTS 4 times now, in 1994, 2002, 2014 & now 2023 so I think I can say I have a long view of Tibetan Spaniels in Sweden. I do think the dog world is very different from when I started: there are far fewer 'big kennels'; people don't have so many dogs; generally, judges are becoming less and less specialised and the costs of showing have become so high people are going to fewer shows and not showing so many dogs. I have always taken dog showing seriously, both as an exhibitor and as a judge, but I think I feel more than ever my responsibility as a judge when I stand in the ring knowing that people have spent their money & given up their time to be there. All I can hope, whatever your result on the day, is that you feel you truly know what I thought of your dog on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2023.

I don't think I had judged a dog entered here before & as I've only been to 1 show in Sweden in the last 3 ½ years & have deliberately removed myself from most Facebook links, I can honestly say all the dogs were new to me. I was certainly surprised to end up with ½ brother & sister for BIR & BIM and their father for BM2!

BIR Schilleshof's Oliwia is a lovely feminine, unexaggerated bitch with that little bit of 'extra' that really shouts "Tibetan Spaniel" to me. She was shown superbly by her handler, allowing her personality to really come through. She gained her title on the day & it is certainly well deserved. She was pushed all the way by the male Kangris Dusty Daze. He caught my eye when he came into his class & I have to confess I immediately thought 'this could be my winner'. I understand that this is a new handler/dog team & they did really well together & will do even better when they have a bit more experience. He really is a promising young man.

The first thing I want to say before discussing the entry more generally, is each & every person took the best dog to the show - and they took the best dog home. What happens in the ring is but a few moments in a dog's life & the time we get to share with them. I very much focused on the positives of each dog & I was keen to highlight breed specific points that make the Tibetan Spaniel the individual breed it is, as I know from my own experience as an exhibitor that these are things that often appear to be overlooked.

What I think pleased me most was temperament, all the dogs had excellent temperament, not one was nervous or unsure & all were in excellent condition enjoying their day out.

Size was generally acceptable but does need keeping an eye on as a few were getting very close to "too big". Bone was usually proportionate but a few were tending to be too heavy. Shoulder & rear angulation was generally acceptable, only one of two had upright shoulders or lacked sufficient hind angulation. I was pleased there were not so many with the exaggerated forechest & overly deep chest which seems to have been creeping in in the last few years. Coats were good, fine & silky with undercoat and I was pleased to see a good number carried the correct ear & foot fringing.

Obviously my dislike of tight leads is well known and I am delighted to say most dogs moved out happily on loose leads demonstrating the typical breed action I look for. As always in Scandinavia, movement is overall is pretty good, straight, strong & with good drive. I believe correct exercise & good muscular condition plays a big part in this.

These were the positives, but I must also be honest – overall I feel the quality of the breed is at the lowest I have seen in the almost 40 years I have followed it in Sweden. Whilst in the past there may have been quite a distribution between excellent & poor-quality dogs, I feel that the breed is settling into the territory of being 'mediocre overall'.

The two things that bothered me most were overall proportions & heads.

The standard asks for a dog that is slightly longer in body than height at withers & both my top winners fulfilled this. A significant number were, however, too long in back, often accompanied by a poor topline; whilst others were way too short in leg accompanied by fronts that were bordering on being 'overbowed' – something I have not seen for a number of years. I would respectfully ask that breeders consider this when planning where to go for the next generation. You should be able to tell what breed you are looking at by its' silhouette and outline & proportions are key to this.

Heads were disappointing. I found myself saying 'lovely head' or similar very rarely. When I say 'correct head' I mean that, yes it has proportions, length of muzzle, cushioning & depth of chin that is acceptable but it hasn't got that 'extra' that makes my heart flutter. The head is one of the hardest things to describe & our standard certainly doesn't help in this aspect but a good head immediately brings the words 'bright & expressive' to life. Sadly, I saw heads that were lacking in expression &, of particular concern, really a bit "mean". Both of these seem to be caused largely by eye shape – some being too round but others, perhaps more worrying, by eyes being too small & narrow and set rather obliquely. The standard is quite clear on this point "oval, bright and expressive, medium size, set fairly well apart but forward looking. Please note – an oval eye is different from an almond eye ...

So going forward, and I say this humbly as I think only 1 or 2 people active in the breed now will remember me as a 'breeder' and I fully accept that this is not a path I will be treading again, what do I think...

I urge people to go back through the old publications, look at the dogs of past (accepting that handling, presentation & photography were not as they are now!). I won't name kennels so I can remain 'neutral' – but look at the pictures of the founding kennels of the breed. Look honestly at your own dogs, know what is good & what you need to improve. Be aware of the traits they are passing on. Line breeding is no longer as acceptable as it was, but don't just look at the dog that you are thinking of using, look at its parents, its siblings, the progeny it is throwing. If you haven't seen the dogs, ask people who have. Try and use dogs that are strong in the points you need. Be prepared to travel. A dog is not necessarily suitable because it lives nearby. Please do not breed for colour – any colour is acceptable & one of the joys of our breed is that bit of mystery! Think carefully before dismissing using a dog - I never cease to be amazed that people will reject using a dog because of a 'possible' issue from a dog 3 or 4 generations back, but then happily use a dog whose pedigree is unknown to them. It is up to you whether to choose the 'known unknowns' or the 'unknown unknowns' but consider it.

I have not mentioned health here I realise, but of course that underpins everything. I am assuming that breeding only happens after the necessary tests have been carried out – and here I consider the 'extra's' such as patella examination to be as important as the obligatory tests.

I've gone on long enough so I will end once again by saying "thankyou" – not only to the SSTS & the exhibitors, but also to the breed that has given me so many experiences (both up & down!) and allowed me to meet so many special people over the years, all of us united by the love of a small, independent character from Tibet.

Helen