

MORE THOUGHTS ON JUDGING

I fear that my article on staking of inflorescences of orchids has been misunderstood. I realise that age and experience do not count anymore in the modern world, so I will try to prove that I know what I am talking about by using facts and logic.

The rules that apply to judging orchids were not laid down by the A.O.C. The AOC adopted and in some cases modified the rules that existed when it came into being. I was there and I know this to be true.

There were these simple rules that applied to all genera, such as the flower to be circular in outline and slightly concave. The inflorescence could be tied up to the bottom flower, or in the case of a single flowered genus, to the bottom of the ovary etc.

It was accepted that manipulation was going to take place. There had been attempts to stop it, but as long as you didn't use cotton wool (no tissues were around then), which left incriminating evidence, it was not possible to police.

In reality once a plant is grown in an artificial environment, manipulation had started. The decision was 'forget it'.

The AOC added some fancy words and numbers, but other than that did little to alter what were sensible rules. Indeed then, as today, it would appear that apart from registering awards the AOC had no great influence on the activities of most orchid societies.

Actually the whole question of awards is an interesting one. I was there when my father, Leo Giles, along with a group of orchid enthusiasts, decided to copy the Royal Horticultural Society and incorporate an award system into the Australian orchid growing world.

The RHS had granted awards to outstanding orchids for a long time. They kept records of these and before a plant was judged reference was made to previous awards. The records at that time were actual paintings that were exact replicas of the flower. At the time my father became involved these were painted by a Mrs. Humphries. Indeed my father had her paint two awarded plants: a *Cattleya* 'Bow Bells' and *Cattleya* 'Bob Betts'. He forwarded her slides of the flowers, and indicated the exact size. When the paintings arrived they were almost identical to the flowers they represented.

The idea was to recognise and encourage hybridists.

The RHS granted awards to plants other than orchids. Presumably different people were involved. The Shasta daisy 'Easter Read' was granted an FCC. It was the first double Shasta daisy.

The local system worked for a while. It started from a low point. I believe a *Cymbidium* *Euterpe* 'Churchill' was the first plant to receive an award. It was an average flower but with an unusual colour (for that time). The system worked originally because there was constant improvement. However when the advances started to become less obvious the problems started.

Systems of appreciation, then points, then appreciation were tried. The rules were so difficult to understand that awards quickly became more like rewards. Growers knew when and where to take their plants for the best results.

To those who choose to argue with the above consider the following: When it comes to judging the Champion of show, it is accepted that competing plants have to be put side by side so a fair decision can be made. I have no problem with this. However these same people, who cannot look at a plant, walk across the room to the next plant and make a decision, then will look at a

plant and say 'this one is better or whatever than the one they saw last month, or last year or more'. Logically this is nonsense. Till such time as there are true to life copies of previous awards of plants of the genus in question, available at award judgments, the results are open to error. To make this possible, and have them available to all judges is not really very difficult in this day and age. It just takes a little initiative and effort. This would be a good project for the AOC. It would prove that other than just registering awards, there is a place for their organisation.

Now the Cymbidium Club of NSW is active. They have printed a booklet with their requirements for exhibition flowers. There are many sketches indicating both virtues and faults. These comply with world recognised standards and are helpful to anyone wanting to learn the good and bad points of a flower. Exact copies in book form would be better; maybe they have this in mind.

The Cymbidium Club NSW has not formed its own judging panel for what would appear to be a very good reason. At their annual show they have a section for other genera. This adds to the variety of the show and has proved to be very popular with the viewing public. They select the judges they require and approach them personally to see if they will participate. In the 2007 show there were judges from Victoria, South Australia and NSW. There was the usual discussion during the judging, but a unanimous verdict was quickly reached in each division.

The show was apparently a huge success and this in spite of an extreme frost that damaged a lot of plants. We recorded -5 degrees at the nursery (in Dural), and for the first time in 40 years had frost damage. The very large hall the show as held in was full of plants in flower. The oohs and aahs of the public as they walked in, was proof indeed that this was one of the finest displays of orchids seen in Sydney in a long time. I must add here I am not a member of the Cymbidium Club of NSW.

In his recent article Rob Smith says he is keen to see a variation in the type of plant and flowers that are exhibited. I think this is a good idea, and it is the prerogative of any club to make classes for any style of plant or flower that they see fit. However you cannot alter the standard of perfection as recognised worldwide. This attempt to overlook or bypass perfection seems to be catching. As regards his opinion that some cymbidiums that have been awarded, but then fail to perform for some people, there is a reason. It is mostly climatic.

There are a number of plants that thrive in NSW but will not do well say in Victoria or South Australia. Indeed there are plants that do well very close to the coast and further north, but don't do well in the western areas of Sydney. In the latter case I am fairly sure that it is temperature related.

Regarding very floriferous plants, there are a number of nurseries that aim at the so called pot plant market, (we call what we do, 'upmarket indoor decoration'), and one of the requirements is a lot of flowers for the size of the plant, and considerable progress is being made in this area. It should also be noted that colour is very important. Great progress is being made here as well. Still it must be remembered that cymbidiums take about six years to flower and be proved from the time of pollination.

It is through breeding that the spike habit aspect will be fixed. We are already producing clones that do not require tying above the bottom flower to produce a vertical spike. It should be remembered that hybridists took a diploid Lunagrad 'Elanora', which had a horizontal spike, converted it to a tetraploid, then to 'Cronulla' with spikes at 45 degrees, then to 'Khan Flame' with a vertical spike. The spike habit was fixed in two generations. If the clubs that Rob talks

about have ideas for a different style of flower or plant, these ideas must be put down in writing. Then the hybridists will know what they are aiming for. It is no good waiting for something to turn up and then make up the rules. That does not make sense. The popularity of cymbidiums seems to be growing every year.

While we may see things a little differently from one another, this is a good thing as we all strive to prove that our ideas are the right ones.

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