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Where's the Fire?

Have you experienced this at the Weimaraner ring? The excitement of the crowd grows as the dogs are stacked and gaited; the choice for Best of Breed nears. The judge brings some dogs to the front of the line and individually gaits these favored animals. The speed of the gaiting increases to a dizzying, frenetic pace. The crowd whoops and cheers. It looks more like a foot race than a dog show, and finally, mercifully (before the handlers collapse), Best of Breed is selected.

The picture I've just painted of theatrical, exaggerated, quest-for-speed handling is rampant in our ring. Do judges like it? Does break neck speed show our dogs to their best advantage? Let's examine these two questions.

First, let's hear from the judges. I spoke to of several well-known, respected judges and asked them a very open ended question about how Weimaraners are presented. My question was simply, "What would you suggest as the biggest improvement to how Weimaraners are shown in your ring?"

I expected answers like, "Get them to go in a straight line" or "Have them better-behaved for the exam," but neither was not the first thing that came to their minds. Every single judge I spoke to gave as their first answer, "Have them slow down." Some offered additional suggestions but curtailing the excessive speed was foremost in their minds.

Secondly, is going at a fast speed the most advantageous for the Weimaraner? Our standard gives a good clue when it states, "*The gait should be effortless and should indicate smooth coordination. When seen from the rear, the hind feet should be parallel to the front feet. When viewed from the side, the topline should remain strong and level.*" No where does it say that the fastest dog wins.

Every dog has an ideal gaiting speed and it varies depending on structure, conditioning and behavioral traits of the individual animal. I can hear some of you thinking, "I show my dog at a very fast speed to show reach and drive." But can going like the house is on fire, work to a dog's detriment?

Since we show Weimaraners at a trot, it's important to understand the nature of that gait and how speed influences the appearance of a dog. The trot is a rhythmic, two beat gait where the diagonally opposite legs strike the ground together. The diagonal nature of the trot gives symmetrical, balanced propulsion. If there is deficiency in structure, the trot will make the unsoundness apparent to the trained eye.

Excessive speed is not best for your dog if it brings flaws to the forefront. At high speed, some dogs look like they are struggling. They take many steps to keep up, movement gets choppy, toplines roll, and it's impossible to see the accuracy of the footfall. A good handler knows what best suits the dog that is being presented. Ideal speed demonstrates effortless, efficient, fluid movement not just that the dog can move quickly.

Not all dogs should be moved at the same speed. Finding the perfect speed for a dog is critical to doing a good job of handling and presentation.

Apparently showing dogs at speeds that are too fast is not a new problem. Going back decades, there's a quote from Percy Roberts, whom many consider the all-time, quintessential "dog man." "If you race with your dog in this ring, keep running right out the exit. Your dog will not be considered."

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