

JUDGING PRIORITIES - Bob Vandiver

As a member of the Doberman Judges Education Committee, I have received a number of calls in the last few months from handlers and breeders who I respect. They are the mature individuals who know what they are showing.

Their complaints aren't that they aren't winning, but sometimes they are winning (or losing) for the wrong reasons. When they speak with a judge after the breed is finished, they find that the judges chose a certain dog because "it was so square." Never mind that it was stick straight front and rear, or had the topline of a terrier.

Recently I attended a dog show and observed a permit judge in action in the Doberman ring. This person is a well-known and well respected judge.

In one class of bitches he had three representatives. Two were very good examples of the breed. One was considerably less so. To my surprise, the lesser bitch won the class and went on to Winner's Bitch.

The permit judge saw me watching at ringside and came to me later to discuss the breed. The discussion went quickly to that bitch class because he heard that his Winner's Bitch was third in the class on the prior day under a breeder judge. In our discussion, he justified his choice because "I made my first cut on square." I didn't have an immediate answer and the judge needed to leave to start judging another breed, so we weren't able to continue the discussion.

On the way home I started to think about his statement. Have we oversold the concept that square is the most important characteristic of the breed? Maybe so. I know that when asked to describe a Doberman, a typical breed person starts with "it's a square breed," and then goes on from there.

Yes, square is important. It's one of the defining characteristics of the breed. But to immediately exclude other exhibits based on that one factor can't be right. There has to be some consideration of all the major virtues and deviations, not just one.

So what should that judge have considered on his "first cut?" That depends on the judge's priorities, but selecting any one attribute may leave the best dog out of the running.

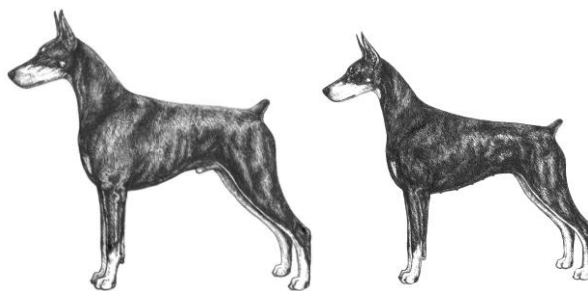
There are some "must haves" and many "wants" in judging.

The first "must have" is to find breed type. When the class enters the ring, the first decision should be "which dog most resembles the ideal Doberman?" The overall picture (the profile) is the confluence of the desired attributes from the breed standard. This is a visual comparison of what stands before you, relative to the mental picture you have of the ideal.

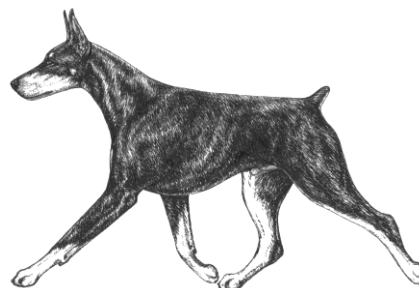
The overall profile of the dog should include the head as well as the body proportions (square, body depth equal to leg length, prosternum, heavy bone), angulation (90 degree front placed well back, rear balancing front), a correct neck and tail placement/carriage, and planes (topline, head).

It seems complicated, but it's no more difficult than finding a particular car or flower. If you have the right picture, you can find right one just as a picture of a Porsche or a rose will help you identify the right car on the lot or the right flower in the nursery.

Here's a photo of the ideal Doberman dog and bitch that you are looking for:



The next priority is how they hold themselves when they go around. They should look very much like the ideal profile, but with legs moving correctly and head slightly dropped as illustrated in the photo below:



It's amazing to me how many times a class enters the ring and my first thought is "Wow, this is a good class" only to find when they move they are lacking reach

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and/or drive, going off in the topline or tailset, bouncing, or any of several other problems. The search for the best Doberman just got a lot more difficult.

So, in the first few minutes when they have entered the ring and then gone around, you have made some major decisions. and it wasn't on one attribute like square. You have decided which ones have the best profile and can move while keeping that profile.

Fortunately, many times there are several dogs that rise out of those first two decision... profile and movement. They have passed the first two "must haves."

A full body evaluation is next on the priority list.

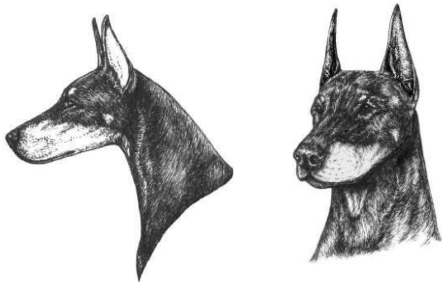
Now is the time that you start setting priorities. This is when "I made my first cut on square " is appropriate.

This is the point at which head, bone, feet, muscle tone, conditioning, down and back movement, and many other essentials are evaluated. It's also the point where judge's opinions diverge substantially, and that's OK.

The head is a breed defining characteristic and it must be given due consideration and must be high on the priority list. As in the first priorities in judging (profile and movement), head must be of correct Doberman type. No matter how well a dog matches the profile and movement, if it does not have an acceptable head, then it is not a correct Doberman.

That being said, will you give a little on the head to be square? Or will you give a little length for a better head? Your decision.

Below are the images of a correct head that you must have in your mental picture to complete the three most important priorities in judging.



Breeders and judges all place emphasis on the areas that they feel are most important.

Some judges cannot accommodate a dog with a less than superior head. I've often heard it said that " the

head is the first thing you see, and I want it right." OK, that's a major priority for you and you can weigh it more heavily than other characteristics.

Others may consider proper front angles to be a major priority, as the correct front is noticeably absent in many Dobermans. It's hard to successfully breed and easy to lose.

Still others may consider the rear to be the most important characteristic, as that's what furnishes most of the power in forward motion.

With so many options and so many individual "druthers," you can see why judging seems to be inconsistent. Good judges aren't inconsistent, they just have different priorities from one another.

If judges select a Doberman that most closely matches his mental picture for profile, movement, and head, then he should not be expected to choose the dog that you or another judge would select. Judges can put up different dogs for different reasons, and as long as they can articulate why they chose a certain dog, then it is the right dog for them.

I know that we Doberman people emphasize square to every judge and anyone who asks about the breed. Apparently, many judges are making their first cut based on square. It's important, but it's only one attribute.

The point here is to make your first cut based on the most important points, and not one or two specific characteristics .