

## The JUDGE's Corner

Ron Miner - baronminer@aol.com

### Evaluation of Form in Fully Double Dahlias

Last month, we discussed most of the key attributes in evaluating Form in fully double dahlias. Four high priority characteristics that need to be considered in judging the quality of the Form of fully double dahlias are Symmetry, Contour, Development, and Trueness to Form. I ran out of time and space to discuss the last characteristic, Depth. We will cover that item this month.

The relative values of the elements of Form are found on page 40 in the ADS Guide for Judging Dahlias (GJD). In evaluating a seedling, the Symmetry, Contour, Development, and Trueness to Form are of equal value (5 points each). Depth, or size proportion, is of somewhat greater importance (8 points).

A brief review of those first four attributes is worthwhile. Which aspects of Form come into play when comparing these two Clearview Royal blooms? The differences in the shapes of the ray florets on the bloom on the far right is apparent as a result of the lighter color of the face of the ray florets. That is, the symmetry



*Two Clearview Royal blooms*

problem is made more apparent by the face color. In hindsight, however, the problematic appearance of the center of the bloom on the right could also be considered a Contour problem. In a discussion of Contour, our GJD, p. 18, says that “The ideal bloom will have ... ray florets that appear to spiral in a regular formation” from the center of the bloom. Thus, if you disagreed with me on this example when you read last month’s column, you had a good point!

What Form characteristic comes to mind in comparing these Hollyhill Miss Whites? The bloom on the left provides a clear example of a sunken center. Take a look at page 17 in the GJD. The last sentence under Symmetry says “Possible faults of centers include centers ... oblong, depressed, protruding or presenting a flat face.” It isn’t obvious to me why the depressed face would be Symmetry fault, but that is how the GJD lists it. The key point here is that the depressed center is a Form fault and the degree of the fault depends on the severity of the depression.



*Hollyhill Miss White, MB W*

Perhaps the easiest Contour faults to identify are gaps. Both of the Anthony Armelines on the right show gaps. The gap at 9 o'clock in the bloom on the left, however, is worse than any of the gaps in the bloom on the right. The "irregular formation" of the ray florets around 6 o'clock in the bloom on the right should be considered a contour fault, too. "Judges must also examine more than the outline of the bloom; they must inspect the arrangement, placement, and uniformity of ray florets." (GJD, p. 18.)



Have you ever been tempted to leap to the choice of a bright, colorful entry sitting on a bench without looking at the back of the entry? (Who hasn't!?) I hope that the pair of Hollyhill Jitterbugs on the right are sufficiently different that you would want to examine each closely, including the backs of the blooms, before leaping to a conclusion.



One of the many lessons I learned from Dick Westfall was to make sure that we follow the dictate in the GJD, p. 18, that "the mature bloom at the peak of development with some faults merits first choice over an immature "clean" bloom." On a number of occasions, I asked Dick to confirm for me that we had not left the Best in Show out on the tables with a 2nd place ribbon. That was not normally the case, but the lesson to be learned is to make sure that we give fully mature blooms a break.

The two Crazy 4 Davids below are at different levels of maturity. The bloom on the right is still evolving toward its SC Form. The bloom on the left is more mature and shows its SC characteristics more clearly. True-ness to Form can be an important issue in a show setting



where there a lot of different cultivars in the same class. I've heard it argued in a judging team that "bloom is about as good as that cultivar gets." That may be true, but if its competition is otherwise as good and has a Form that is higher on the "Form Mountain," the entry with better inherent Form should get the nod.

## **Depth**

Depth is the distance from the front of the bloom to the back of the bloom. Size Proportion is the ratio of the depth to diameter of the bloom. Size is frequently described as the product of the depth and the diameter—for determining the largest bloom in the show, for example. Our focus here will be on Size Proportion. That is the variable that is used to describe the merit of an entry's Form.

The annual ADS Classification and Handbook of Dahlias (CHD) includes the ideal definitions of Form. You should always refer to the most recent CHD because the definitions evolve with time and you need to use the most recent publication. The 2018 CHD lists five forms that have an ideal "depth" that is three-quarters the diameter of the bloom and that should not exceed the diameter of the bloom: FD, ID, SC, C, and LC.

The depth of IC cultivars should be at least half the diameter of the bloom. The depth of WL dahlias should "never be more than one-half the diameter of the bloom."

The depths of BA, MB, and P dahlias are not described in the CHD but the GJD describes them as "ball shaped," so we can infer that the ideal depth would be equal to the diameter.

I see a disconnect between the foregoing official descriptions and the actual practice at shows. Blooms with depths greater than three-quarters are often perceived to better than blooms with three-quarters depth. That is, blooms deeper than the "ideal" depth are favored over those with "ideal" depth. I generally do not disagree with that perspective. However, my counsel would be to weigh the benefit of the extra depth, beyond the ideal, only very slightly.

On the other side of the ledger, depths that are lower than three-quarters of the diameter for the above list should be appropriately penalized. (Shallow blooms are often immature blooms.) For WL, depths greater than one-half should be penalized.

*Ron*