

The JUDGE's Corner

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Those of you who made it to the June DSO meeting had a chance to see a portion of Wayne and Eleanor Shantz's judging seminar. We purchased the set of DVDs from the Pacific Northwest Dahlia Conference last winter. The PNDC sponsored their two-day seminar and recorded it at the request of the ADS. It is a very informative presentation! You can now borrow it from the DSO and I highly recommend it. Sharon will, no doubt, have the slides from the presentation I made at the meeting up on the website by the time you get this (assuming I get the slides to her in a timely manner!). You will find the table of contents of the 5 DVDs among those slides. I don't recommend any one of the DVDs any more than the others, but you might want to pick one that seems most interesting to you to start the series.

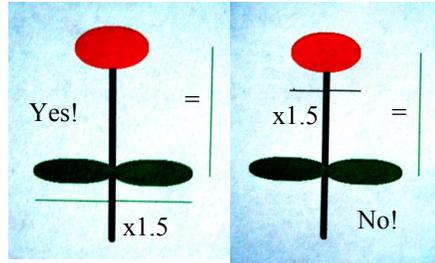
One of the most interesting items in the presentation, for me, was the discussion of stem (yes, stem! :-)). Take a look at the seedling on the right. How would you evaluate the length of the stem? If you didn't get to the June DSO meeting and if you have heard any of my judging seminars over the last 10 years, you would probably start by saying something to the effect: 'well, the stems appear to be about twice the diameter of the blooms, so they might be a little on the long side ...' If, on the other hand, you attended the meeting and if you have been carefully reading the judging manual, you would probably say something to the effect: 'well, the foliage is pretty big and the spread of the foliage is probably as large or larger than the length of the stem, so they are probably a little on the short side ...'

Yes, folks, Wayne's comments in their seminar presentation made me go back to the Guide to Judging Dahlias and start reading



again! I hope that one of the things you learned in our judging seminars is that it is important to read the GJD. This stem issue is an excellent illustration of the reason why! I still have the old judging manual stuck in my head!

You will find on page 36 “The length of the stem must be in proportion to the diameter of the bloom and the size of the foliage.” That is, the bloom is not out of the picture entirely. That means you can keep that old 1.5 times bloom diameter in the back of your mind. Read on through page 54 and you will find this:



“The center of the bloom, the stem length, and the spread of the foliage ideally will form a triangle with the stem length approximately one and one-half times the spread of the foliage.”

Frankly, I’m a little uncomfortable with this ‘discovery.’ Will we ever see a AA entry with foliage small enough that the stem length will be 50% bigger than the spread of the first pair of leaves? The “old” rule of thumb based on bloom diameter worked pretty well for those large blooms but pretty poorly for the small blooms. It seems that the “new” rule will work pretty well for the small blooms but not very well for the large blooms. We will probably end up in the mode of forgiving stems on big blooms that seem too short by the new rule just like we forgave stems on small blooms that were too long by the old rule. Again, from p. 54, “Ideally, the diameter of the bloom, the length of the stem, and the size of the foliage will reveal a pleasing balance and proportion.”

As I see it, friends and judges, we will need to have a little different perspective on stem length in future judging scenarios. We will need to consider the spread in foliage at least as strongly as bloom diameter when we are assessing stem length. The bottom line is that both the bloom diameter and the spread in leaves are guidelines to consider when evaluating stem length!

Let’s continue with the topic of stems. What are the other characteristics of stem that we need to keep in mind? The obvious one is straightness. I can’t resist including a picture of an old seedling. (It didn’t make it into the following year. :-)) Note that the

stem is actually pretty straight. However, there is a big (!) bend at the first pair of leaves. The first pair of leaves marks the joint between the stem (above) and the stalk (below). An otherwise straight stem that bends at the first pair of leaves or at a spur leaf should be penalized.



Here is another seedling with a less severe stem problem. In fact, from the front, this stem would look just fine. However, from the side, it is apparent that the stem curves into the back of the bloom. This is a relatively common fault on the show table, although this is a pretty severe example. How severe is it? Great question. If you were in a situation where you had to quantify the fault, what would you deduct? How would you start to consider that question?



I suggest that you ask yourself if this stem is a “passing” stem. My conclusion would be that it is not, even if there were no other problems with the stem. Let’s assume that is the case. Since “passing” is 85% (right, judges?!) and Stem is worth 10 points (right, judges?!), our penalty is going to be at least 2 points (right, judges?! :-)). That might be a reasonable penalty if the stems on the other 2 blooms were better. However, if this stem is typical of the other stems, a penalty of 2 points would be generous. A score of 60 or 70% (-4 or -3) would probably be more appropriate.

On the right are a couple entries from our Seedling Seminar at Pettiti’s last October. It is not easy to tell how well the entry on the left conforms to the stem length guideline based on the spread in foliage, at least



in part because there seems to be a substantial variation in the spread in foliage among those blooms. (That would be a Uniformity issue, not necessarily a stem length issue.) The stems in the entry on the

right are, however, probably about 2x the spread in the foliage. Thus, they are a little too long. The stems on the right entry are also crooked and appear to bend at the back of at least two of the blooms. (Why the heck did I bother to put that entry into the seminar?! :-))

Would you give either set of stems a passing score? I think the right answer is clear for the entry on the right; that is “no!” What is the right penalty for that one? I would say that -3 or -4 is probably appropriate. The entry on the left probably deserves a passing score if we give it a break on stem length. If we were able to determine that the stem lengths on that entry actually varied from say, 1 to 2 times the spread in the foliage, we would probably need to flunk it for Stem. Remember that a failing score for Stem is only -2 ; 85% corresponds to -1.5 . In the picture, the stems appear to be largely straight and reasonably strong.

The Guide to Judging Dahlias cites several other stem quality issues. On the positive side, stems should be “round, smooth, and of adequate diameter from the bloom to the first pair of leaves and continues straight to the top of the ... container.” Conversely, it should not “taper excessively” over its length. It should not be ridged, too large or too small in diameter, weak or rubbery.

The score sheet says that the stem should also enter directly below the center of the bloom. The judging manual, on the other hand, suggests that the position of the stem in the bloom is a symmetry issue. The bottom line is that if the stem does not enter the center of the bloom, the stem is either crooked or there is a symmetry problem with the bloom.

Before we wrap up the discussion on stem, it is appropriate to take a look at a great stem. We all know a stem expert; his picture is at the left with the largest entry at the Chicago National Show. Dick (Westfall) stakes his blooms and consistently shows stems that deserve 10 (or 11!).



Bring some entries to the Cuyahoga Fair on August 10. I'll bet there will be a lot of Blossom Gulch seedlings in bloom by then.

Remember, too, to work on those judges tests. Now is the time to get them completed!

See you at the Cuyahoga Fair! Ron