

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

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We can first examine the judging criteria, or score sheet, for extracted honey, the most common entry in a honey show. Most of the honey sold in the United States is liquid, extracted honey. However, the rest of the world uses crystallized honey, whether naturally crystallized or made by the Dyce process.

Judging criteria are a set of standards shown by assigned points that usually add up to 100. Judging is done to see how close to those standards a particular entry comes. This enables honeys of different colors to be judged together. One honey is not judged against another honey—only the standards. Therefore, honey shows will differ in the number of classes they have for honey, separated by color. Whether honey is light or dark makes no difference. The arrangement by color is up to the designers of a particular show. Small shows will have fewer classes, large ones may have 5 or 6 classes. Generally it is up to the person entering to select the class, with the help of the person taking the entries.

The overall appearance and suitability of the container actually is an important marketing characteristic. The lid should be new, not dented, nicked or rusty. Do you buy rusty-looking cans or jars in the supermarket. I don't think so. If the container is sticky it can lose points. It meant the beekeeper was sloppy. If honey is left on the threads of a jar before the cap is put on, that honey will gradually seep down the jar. No customer wants to get sticky hands from handling a possible purchase.

The density, or water content, is important. This is read with an instrument known as a refractometer. The scale in this instrument reads in percent water in a sample of honey. Why is water content so important? Too much water, over 18.6%, will cause honey to ferment while in the jar. The fermented honey is not a marketable product. Too low a water content, below 15% makes honey entirely too thick to do much with. This honey will not work in a squeeze bear or other pourable container. It will blow the top off the bear. It will tear up a piece of toast. Large producer/packers blend such dry honey with high moisture content honey to arrive at a manageable 16.5 to 17.5%. This is why honeys in that moisture range receive the most points. Besides that is a good range for making creamed honey. If the honey is too dry, creamed honey will be too stiff to use.

Crystals can be a real problem. Very fine crystals may not be visible but when put under polarized light in a polariscope the crystals can be seen. Coarse crystals are unpleasant to eat—they are crunchy and customers expect honey to be smooth. Fine crystals, especially in large quantity, indicate that the honey will crystallize (granulate) naturally in a matter of time. This may take a month, 6 months or longer. Did you know that many customers think that honey that crystallizes on their kitchen shelf, or refrigerator, is spoiled and they throw it out? Therefore, the fewer the crystals, the better.

While the jar of honey is under the polariscope lint and dirt can be found. Why is lint not desirable? Because it acts as a nucleus for crystals to form. Miscellaneous, unidentified particles will also act as starters for crystals but what is worse is if the customer spots something floating in the honey. A beekeeper may think it natural, but the customer perceives it as—dirt. Not desirable.

When the jar is opened to take a sample for the refractometer, wax particles, dirt particles, lint and foam can be detected on top of the honey. Here again the customer perceives wax pieces as something foreign. To the judge wax pieces, lint and dirt indicate sloppy extracting, straining and bottling. All these are under the beekeeper's control. Foam, to a customer, means something is going wrong inside the container. The customer suspects spoilage or fermentation.

While the jar is open the honey is judged on flavor. It is never judged on whether the judge likes the honey or not. The judge is looking for a fermented taste, for a burnt or scorched taste, or a

too-much-smoke taste. The flavor criteria is frequently misunderstood. It does not matter whether a judge likes buckwheat honey or not, if it is not fermented, scorched, or smoky it receives full points.

Uniformity of color sounds simple enough. However some beekeepers have put two different colors in one jar. If multiple jars are required for an entry, some beekeepers will just enter one bottle of one color and another bottle of a lighter or darker honey. The customer may see the same label on each jar and decide that something must be wrong with some of the honey. The judge really wants to judge one entry of the same honey. Otherwise it becomes two or more entries. So uniformity of color does have some meaning.

Accuracy and uniformity of fill is another criteria. Does it really matter how full those jars are? It sure does. If there is not enough honey in the jar you are giving short weight to your customer. That is illegal. If the jar is too full the honey will slop out when the customer opens the jar. A sticky customer is not a happy one. Besides, if you have put too much honey in the jar you are cheating yourself. That's dumb. All the jars in an entry should be filled the same.

What is the fill? The queenline jars, as well as other jars, have a bead that runs around the jar below the threads. The jar is meant to be filled above that bead. There will be no visible gap between the bottom of the cap and the level of honey. The customer sees this as a full jar, not one that appears short. The level of the honey should be fully  $3/8$  inch down from the top of the jar. Anything less than that and the jar is too full.

Perhaps now you can see that the judging criteria have meaning in the customer's eyes. Perhaps you can see that entering a honey show gives you practice in making your honey a good product, one that reflects that you are a careful beekeeper who is proud of that product.