

JUST WHAT IS A HONEY SHOW?

Ann W. Harman
Flint Hill, VA

OK, so a honey show is just like a horse race! Enter to win and gallop off with a prize. Right? Wrong. To see just what a honey show is we need to step back in history a bit. Back to the time without many newspapers, no telephones, no TV or radio. How did people advertise? How did farmers let others know they had the finest pig or hay or corn? You wanted people to buy your corn for the best price, but how did you let them know it was the best in the county? At the agricultural fair, that's where. So these contests were truly the best way of advertising.

We've sort of lost sight of that today since newspapers, then radio and TV, and now the Internet have taken over the job of advertising. However, a honey show is still about marketing. Preparing entries should be an exercise in how best to prepare your honey for sale. You want your honey to be clean, in a new container so that a customer will say "Wow! I'll buy more of this honey." Your customers are not beekeepers. They do not want to buy a sticky jar and open it to find mysterious "things" floating on top.

Therefore the judging criteria reflects what the customers want, only they do not think in such terms. We'll have a look at judging criteria and what those items mean.

Judging criteria are not standard throughout the US, although it would help if they were. If you are planning to enter a honey show the best overall advice I can give you is—know the rules and judging criteria of the show you plan to enter. Then do not assume another show will have anywhere near the same rules and criteria. Learn what the judging standards are so that you are prepared to enter that particular show. Ask questions before you enter to avoid disappointment and confusion.

Judges seem to be considered in the same class as umpires. Blind and dumb. Granted, there may be a few judges out there who may fit into that category but for the most part they are good people who are trying their best to do a good job. You may indeed receive a blue ribbon in one show and not even place in the next show. That may actually indicate the overall level of entries in a show, not the competence of a judge.

What makes a good judge? One who has a complete understanding of the criteria. One who can also make decisions. One who is happy to explain the decisions and what they mean. And one who will admit it if a mistake is made and try to correct that mistake.

Believe me, judges find all sorts of strange entries. Jars with two different colors of honey in the same jar, jars filled with something that resembles sludge, wax that looks as if the entire hive had been thrown in the melting pot, creamed honey that requires dynamite to remove it from the jar, and mead that has turned to vinegar.

It is always helpful to the person entering if the score sheet is given because in that way the beekeeper can see where there is room for improvement. Also, judges should be encouraged to put constructive comments, when appropriate, on the score sheets. People entering should see the score sheet as an education, not as a punishment.

Are the honey shows of today much different from those of the past, say of the first part of the 20th century? In some respects, yes. Gone are the gigantic displays using 100 or more jars of honey. Gone are the classes that required 24 jars as one entry. If you have access to some of the old bee journals you can see photos of the extravagant honey shows.

So honey shows have, for the most part, kept up with the times. However there are still a few things in some judging criteria that are leftovers of the past. Will these items finally disappear or be replaced? Probably not. Beekeepers are conservative and reluctant to make changes.