

IDENTITY THEFT



By Lisa Dubé-Forman

Fraud is a vehement and powerful noun describing particular instances of trickery and deceit. Instances involving breach of confidences and when the accusations involve purebred dog events, they cast even more of a dark cloud over the sport of conformation.

We usually associate identity theft to persons, but it is also applicable to dogs. I speak of purposefully entering and exhibiting a dog under another dog's registered name and number. Fraud perpetuated to gain a dishonest advantage, ultimately to attain championship or even ranking points. Currently, there is no system in place that confirms the identity of an entry as the dog listed in the judging catalog. AKC shows are based on a *passé* honor system.

Recently, a familiar figure in the sport of purebred dogs divulged personal encounters with impostors. They related instances of a competitor exhibiting different dogs, but all under the same registered name and number. Depending on the known preferences of the presiding judge on each day of competition, the dog would be a particular height one day and smaller on another. So common was this fraud that ostensibly a number of fanciers across the country were aware of or suspected this exhibitor's duplicity. My source went on to relate another example where a breeder who was quite skilled in coloring (an ability that is much more difficult than it sounds) presented the same dog in

competition under other registered names. This so-called breeder's *modus operandi* was to exhibit several puppies from a litter in the puppy classes, then put them away for months. Later, the now older pups would return to the breed show ring, one at a time, and were exhibited in the Open Class where they moved on to Winners competition and were awarded points. At first, nothing seems out of the ordinary with this except that, after scrutiny, it was strongly suspected that the same dog was used as an impostor entered under the various puppies' registered names.

Though I have been aware of identity theft cases in the sport throughout these many years, I had not reflected on the true magnitude of its influence, having viewed it as a secondary fever or infection. However, in the advent of all the bad publicity our sport is receiving, I view the fraud's effect much differently now. I speak of the most recent negative AKC public relations fiasco being Episode 205 on HBO Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel. In short, broadcast journalist and correspondent Soledad O'Brien's segment titled *Unsafe Dog Breeding* infers that purebred dog conformation events are shameful practices emphasizing and perpetuating unhealthy, purebred dogs. Regrettably, this was yet another case of the media questioning and claiming unsafe breeding methods as it highlighted a causality, the needless physical suffering of beloved companions. In fifteen minutes, the sport and its breed-

continued on page 78



IDENTITY THEFT

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continued from page 76

ing practices were effectively vilified. Parenthetically, this segment now also identifies dog show judges as culpable whereas before the scorching denunciations were focused primarily towards AKC and dog breeders. Judges who, up until now, may have viewed their role in this sport as loyal soldiers, doing as instructed, lest they incur the unwanted attention from AKC.

How long will this illusory state of happiness continue before we all virtually come together and demand that changes are instituted, much needed and logical changes, that will instill respectability back into the sport of conformation events? It is futile to argue that there are few to no problems in this sport as this argument holds no water. Even more, it is maddening for pragmatic, vanguard fanciers to have to sit back and observe the utter senselessness of our current conformation events status quo. In particular, the AKC rules governing the spectacles of kennel club conformation shows are in great need of modernization, pitifully long overdue.

Important changes needed for infusing decency and propriety so that it may buoy up the spirits of the often touted 'backbone of the sport,' but also receive support from the general public and the media. One plain solution set forth by the earlier cited source is to require that all AKC entries be microchipped for identification purposes. After deliberation, I believe that the verification of identity can be enforced in one of two ways. One is that all dogs enter the ring and are scanned with the number cross-checked with that of the microchip number listed in the show catalog. The alternative is to require all entries be microchipped and if it is necessary to prove the identity of a dog, a scanner is called to the ring in the same procedure as the scale or wicket. Additionally, another change I persistently dwell on, for years now, is that all AKC Judges should be required to complete or write a critique with qualification and placing of his or her entries. Analyses composed in a positive manner but openly and strictly state the deviations found, thus, the reason for the dogs' placement. Our AKC judges must be encouraged to explain their decisions to interested exhibitors. This is customary in Fédération Cynologique Internationale and United Kennel Club shows so why can't it be performed here as well? One other action point I have pressed on is AKC judges fulfilling general continuing education requirements every three years.

I realize that the mere discussion of mandated microchipping may have some precariously teetering out on the figurative ledge. Some are even looking up to heaven grabbing at their chest as if experiencing a cardiac arrest, like Fred Sanford from the 1970s sitcom Sanford & Sons paraphrasing his "This is the big one, I'm coming to join ya." Others might claim this requirement is cost-prohibitive effectively deterring conformation entries even more or the procedure will take too much time. The first reasonable retort is that many dogs already are microchipped with Indigo ISO, HomeAgain, Avid, Datamars, 24 Petwatch, PetKey, K9microchips, or 911chip brands. Any newly microchipped dogs in competition do not have to register with recovery services if the microchip was not bundled already with the initial purchase, therefore, that cost is eliminated. Single microchipping, for example, Indigo ISO, is a reasonable \$15.95 with additional discounts available for volume purchases. Lastly, there are numerous

kennel club microchipping clinics offered around the country that eliminate veterinarian expenses. Also, microchip scanners, such as QuickScan, read all pet microchips currently sold in the US, therefore, are suitable for AKC events. As for the time needed to scan an entry, this is performed in conjunction with checking off the armband numbers in the steward catalog as the individuals enter the ring, thereby taking seconds to complete.

Skeptics may stress that I am seizing on isolated incidents and there is simply not enough of a problem to warrant compulsory microchipping — indeed they might call me a reactionary. A rational response is if everyone is aware identity theft occurs at conformation dog shows, the extent of the offense, small or large, does not justify allowing it to continue free from restraint or inhibition. Shouldn't those with the power to make changes stop wringing their hands and instead do something about the problems?

I speak not about the AKC corporation but the rightful leadership role of our Delegate Body. Indisputably, the AKC Charter vested sole power to the delegate body to make any rule affecting the governing of dog shows and field trials and the clubs or associations formed to conduct them — NOT the AKC Board. This is a clearly defined outline, but the Delegate Body have yet to produce substantive changes to the Rules Applying to Dog Shows that will uplift and effect enthusiasm and hope into the sport of conformation. What I propose are the beginning steps because we must understand that recent public relations debacles and any future propaganda will continue to erode away any remaining support base, despite AKC's social media followers. Unremarkably, even some of these stalwarts are tsk-tsking, shaking their heads in disbelief.

The Delegate Body must take the lead. Until they do, AKC conformation events will suffer further humiliation in televised discourses, mocked in the media with the slogan "Happy, Healthy Dogs." A catchphrase quickly seized upon from the aforesaid HBO broadcast, mostly due to its woeful repetition by an AKC representative during the interview. Even more embarrassing, the ridicule continued on HBO Real Sports Episode 205 *Overtime*, an additional and separate televised conversation. In it, "Happy, Healthy Dogs" turned out to be the favorite and comical punch line of journalists Bryant Gumbel, Soledad O'Brien and also Mary Carillo, the very familiar sportscaster and previous co-host of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

Mr. William Kendrick infamously stated that the AKC Delegate Body was the sleeping giant who had not exercised its powers. But why? Why hasn't the Delegate Body invoked their rights and privileges? They have the power to effect positive change within our sport and ultimately, the court of public opinion. Yet, they remain apathetic. "The great menace to the life of an industry is industrial self-compacency" — *Joyce Oates*



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