

Subject: Group Realignment - from Sec'y of Realignment Com.

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GROUP REALIGNMENT - AN OVERVIEW

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AKC Realignment Committee, Secretary

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Dog shows had their early beginnings in England in the mid 1850's. Fanciers were hunters and primarily exhibited Pointers and Setters. County fairs held competitions for Foxhounds. Toy and terrier breeds competed at the local pubs and taverns. Eventually, classifications of Sporting and Non-Sporting were decided. Often a dog was entered in Sporting in one show, and then Non-Sporting at a different show.

Time brought on other changes. In the early 1900's in the US, divisions were made into: Large Dogs, Medium-Size Dogs, Small-Size Dogs, and Cage Dogs. This system was certainly helpful for the bench-show system. By 1925, five groups were organized: Sporting, Working, Terrier, Toy, and Non-Sporting Group. In December 1930, the Sporting Group was divided into Sporting Group and Sporting Group (Hounds). Hounds basically hunted non-feathered prey. In 1937, the Sporting Group (Hounds) became the Hound Group.

In October 1982, the Board of Directors appointed a study committee to review and make recommendations regarding the alignment of breeds into the Group. That committee (consisting of delegates and non-delegate judges, and a Board member) made various recommendations to the then seated Board; one of which was the splitting of the Working Group and in 1983, a seventh group, the Herding Group was official.

Since that time, more breeds have continually been added to AKC registry and gradually accepted into one of the seven groups. New breeds are still being added and it is projected that, in a few years, the size of our current Groups will be unmanageable. As of this writing, about two dozen FSS breeds are actively involved with the process of recognition for either a Group or Miscellaneous group status, with more constantly starting the process. This has caused the topic of realignment to be of gradually heightening concern for the past half dozen years.

Recently, a "special attraction" competition of the Northern Breeds Group held in the Pacific Northwest met with great success and positive feedback. This is indicative of how, managed correctly, change in Group makeup can be both helpful and accepted.

The AKC Board of Directors, at its October 2007 meeting, appointed an exploratory Group Realignment Committee "To evaluate the current alignment of breeds within the seven variety groups to determine if a different alignment would better serve the Sport now and in the future as new breeds become registrable."

This committee consists of: Tom Davies, Chairman; Marieann Gladstone, Secretary; Karen Burgess, Robert Fisher, Tim James, Dr. Alvin Krause, Dr. William Newman, John Nielson, Dr. Robert Smith, Robin Stansell, and R. William Taylor.

If you look at the make-up of this committee, you should notice that the membership of 11 is made up of not only 6 AKC Delegates and two Board members, but also a Canadian breeder/exhibitor/judge, two AKC Staff, all-round judges and a Superintendent. Committee members have backgrounds in judging, professional handling, and show chairing. Obviously all have been involved in the process of breeding and exhibiting for many, many years. Its members live in the East, West, North, and South and across the border and collectively they represent centuries of sport involvement. The fancy was well represented on this committee, such that they can be reasonably assured that valid and helpful conclusions will be achieved about the realignment of our Groups.

There is a great deal of misinformation being discussed among the fancy as to just what the Realignment Committee is doing and what its powers are. We (like the 1983 Realignment Committee) are an AKC Board appointed committee and as such, are mandated to report our conclusions to the Board.

We have suggested an increase in the number of Groups from seven to ten. We will not mandate the division of breeds within the Groups. We have made several recommendations thus far, and have queried the Parent clubs of those breeds that may be affected. We will be relying on those Parent Clubs to give us their input on our initial recommendations. Our final recommendation will, for the most part, consider that input.

Groups are generally organized by similar function, size or structure. We have suggested the formation of a "Northern" Group which will consist primarily of the Spitz type dogs, along with a few closely related breeds. This Group is not entirely based on function (some pull - Siberian & Samoyed and others hunt - Elkhound & Finnish Spitz, for example), but perhaps a bit more on form.

One of our other suggestions will be the split of two groups, one of which is the Hound Group. The logical split will be into sight and scent hounds. The second is the Sporting group. Again, a logical split is into Pointers & Setters, and the other being the Retrievers & Spaniels. In each case, which breed goes where is obvious in most cases, not so obvious in others.

Additionally, we have dropped the Non-Sporting group designation, and replaced it with a Companion Group. It will consist of primarily medium sized breeds whose principle function is as a companion. Remember, in the beginning, "Non-Sporting" referred to a dog that was not a gun (or hunting) dog. Today, it carries an entirely different connotation.

Our discussions were not always in agreement, there has been different viewpoints, but we are working together to come up with something that will make sense to the realignment. Whatever the result, it is obvious that everyone cannot possibly be completely satisfied. We believe those with an open mind and with a strong concern for the welfare and strength of our sport will see that our proposals will succeed. This will be especially true if we can all manage to keep the "what's good for ME" personal agenda out of the discussion. How one breed in a Group affects another breed in the Group is not one of our issues, nor is it a consideration of this committee.

Of course, a major change of this nature has a domino effect to other issues and those issues will need to be addressed. For example, we have been assured that the Superintendents expect to have only relatively simple software issues to handle.

The time factor of judging Groups was discussed and it was felt that this could be handled with proper scheduling of breeds and judging groups earlier in the day. Some have commented, "10 GROUPS! We will be here till dark doing Groups!" Yes, there would be more groups, but there will be fewer dogs in each group. Scheduling breed judging will be critical and being able to start a Group a half hour after the judging of those breeds will keep the show moving along.

What about judges? The committee will address recommendations to the Judges Department, including judges being tested to be approved for breeds in a newly formed Group. This is already done with adjunct breeds. Hound Group Judges now will suddenly be approved for two Groups, as would Sporting Group judges!

Certain breeds have already shared their questions and concerns with the committee. The opinions of these parent clubs and club members are very welcomed. Among the questions the committee discussed are:

Italian Greyhound: It is a true sighthound? Does it belong in that Group?
Should they be standing with the Greyhound, Whippet, etc?

Basenji: Is it a sighthound? Does it belong in another group? Which one?

Bulldog: Some have suggested that it belongs in the Working Group.

Dalmatian: Some have suggested that it belongs in the Working Group. Stand the Dalmatian, the Rhodesian Ridgeback and the Pointer in a row - do they belong together?

Rhodesian Ridgeback: Is it a hound? Does it belong in the Working Group? Or even the Sporting Group next to the Pointer?

Pembroke Welsh Corgi: It is from Spitz background, so Northern Group or Herding?

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel: Companion or Toy?

Miniature Schnauzer: Does it belong with the other two Schnauzers? They are distinctly different breeds, yet are similar in appearance and phenotype.

Shih Tzu: Companion or Toy?

Poodle: Does the Standard belong in the Sporting Group?

And WHAT DO WE DO WITH VARIETIES???

In the early years of dog show competition, some breeds were divided into varieties for competition. Today, AKC does not permit breed separation into varieties. There were so many Cocker Spaniels being exhibited that they were divided into varieties based on color. Should so many Cocker Spaniels compete in the same Group against other Sporting Dogs, based merely on their color?

The 1983 Realignment Committee suggested that the various Varieties compete amongst themselves to select a single Best of Breed and that dog would go to its particular group. For example, if the 3 Poodle Variety winners were judged to select one Best of Breed, only that one BOB Poodle would go to the Group. The Fox Terriers went the route of becoming separate breeds – a Wire Fox Terrier and a Smooth Fox Terrier are both represented in the Terrier Group. We have the two Collie varieties, the Manchester's, the Dachshunds, etc etc. All this is for consideration, but each as a separate issue.

These are all questions that this Committee is asking you to consider and give input! We hope that you will share your questions and ideas with us while the committee's work is still ongoing.

One additional point to mention: When the Herding Group was formed, the record indicates that certain breeds that may have been slighted in the larger, and very competitive Working Group finally gained recognition with awards in their new Group. The Belgian breeds, the Cardigan Welsh Corgi, Australian Cattle Dog, and other Herding breeds now earned quality recognition. This will happen again with the Realignment of the Groups. More of the lesser-known breeds will gain their rightful recognition.

With ten Group winners competing, there will be more ribbons and rewards and more people happy at the end of the day. Why give out only 7 Group Winner when 10 Group Winners can result as well? If 10 Groups are competing for Best in Show, should we also reward a Reserve Best in Show?

The Committee has and will continue to welcome input from those most affected breeds and indeed from the entire fancy before our final recommendation is brought to the Board of Directors and any final report will be brought to the Delegate body for a vote. We all survived

the formation of the Herding Group rather well and we will survive another realignment, which should also freshen and revitalize the sport.

It is evident that our history that our sport is ever-changing, and keeps up with the time. Will you be part of it? Will you cast your vote to improve the sport we love and to which we devote so much of our time?

The committee welcomes your input, which can be directed to Jim Crowley (jax@akc.org) or to any of the members of the committee.

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