

Description Tag Lines

By Catherine R. Higgins

The purpose of this article is to examine the use of tag lines in the descriptions written for AOS awarded plants and published in *Awards Quarterly*. I define tag lines as those phrases in an award description placed after the substance and texture statements to elaborate on why the plant received its score. They often begin with the phrases “commended for” or “awarded for,” although occasionally they are used to explain one or more defects in an awarded plant.

I decided to examine this subject because of my experience processing the awards for the Mid-Atlantic Center. Several senior judges advocated against their use. Yet, I saw quite a few award descriptions from our Center as well as from other regions used them. So I decided to test for their prevalence in all the regions of the AOS judging system, and to analyze their usefulness when they do appear.

Frequency of Use The first step in this process was to determine how frequently AOS judges write tag lines that survive the editing process and make it into the official record. I consulted issues 1 and 2 of Volume 35 (2004) of the *Awards Quarterly* and counted their appearance by type of award. The results appear on Table 1. Out of 967 awards, 18 percent were published with a tag line. The frequency with which a tag line appeared varied by type of award. Ninety-one percent of JCs, 48 percent of CHMs, and 36 percent of CBRs had a tag line. Among cultural awards, almost half (47 percent) of the CCEs, but just one in five CCMs (21 percent), appeared with a tag line. Among flower awards, almost one in four descriptions for an FCC used them, but only one in ten among AMs and HCCs. There were none used for AQ awards.

The use of tag lines is perhaps surprising given that the AOS is officially neutral on the subject. No directives pro or con appear in any of the published material on description writing. Yet they have been used by all centers, although some centers apply them more frequently than others. Their use has apparently spread through informal channels, almost certainly as judges read their colleagues’ descriptions in the *Awards Quarterly* and adapt the practice to their own description writing.

Content and Critique The distribution of their use among award types makes sense given the award specifications in the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*. A JC requires that a flower or plant display “a distinctive characteristic or aspect of historical or other importance” that is appropriately identified in the award description. A CHM is awarded to a “species or natural hybrid with outstanding esthetic appeal that contributes to the horticultural aspects of orchidology.” Presumably, those “aspects” can be identified. A CBR is given to a species or natural hybrid for which there is no prior award and, thus, no prior description, thereby requiring judges to write a full and detailed description. For an FCC or a CCE, a tag line can identify the qualities that convinced the judges that the flower or plant merited an exceptional score.

The examples in Table 2 (pages 83–84) illustrate how judges are using tag lines. Table 2 includes only tag lines from the first issue of the 2004 AQ; those that follow in the text are selected from the first and second issues. Examples were selected to illustrate diversity of use and application across all centers.

Paphiopedilum Incabuena ‘Susan’s Choice’, which received a JC, was “commended for charming multifloral habit, not apparent from known, published ancestry.” A CHM of 86 to *Lepanthes telipogoniflora* ‘Vikram’ recognized that the “wonderful culture of [the] plant and number of flowers and buds, while insufficient for a cultural award, figured heavily in granting [the CHM] award; one of the finest miniatures ever seen at this center.” *Habenaria ciliolaris* ‘Mellow Green’, which received a CBR, was “recognized as a robust example of a rarely seen terrestrial species from Taiwan.”

Similarly, an FCC award of 90 to *Cattleya intermedia* fma. *alba* ‘Stephen’s Price’ recorded that the “plant represented the fullest, most floriferous plant of type on record to date.” The CCE of 94 to *Pleurothallis gelida* ‘Free Spirit’ was “upgraded from 2001 CCM due to approximately 10 times the number of flowers.” *Brassocattleya* Spotted Clown ‘Arbec’, which received an AM of 82, was “commended for presentation and noteworthy substance.” *Isochilus aurantiacus* ‘Joyce Sarah’, which received a CCM of 87, was “recognized for floriferousness and jewel-like quality.”

However, more than several of the tag lines raise questions about their usefulness and application. One of the problems is redundancy. By definition, a CBR is awarded to a plant “deemed worthy of recognition for rarity, novelty and educational value.” A tag line that states that a CBR was “awarded for novelty, rarity in cultivation and educational value,” as many do, imparts no additional information and is thus redundant to the award itself. An additional problem appears with information that could easily and more appropriately be folded into the standard format. The tag line for a CCM that was “awarded for symmetrical distribution of flowers” could easily have been eliminated in favor of a clause that indicated a symmetrical distribution of the flowers within the description of the inflorescences.

Tag lines that indicate why a flower did not receive a higher score have their advocates. Phrases such as “irregular arrangement reduced score” (for a CCM of 84), or “slight notching on petals lowered score” (for an HCC of 78) appear frequently on award descriptions. Those who favor them argue that they are useful when “the description sounds too good for the relatively low score” (Phil Jesup, personal communication). The “cons,” whose opinions I hear frequently at the Mid-Atlantic Center, point out that the information about a defect can be included within the standard description format, and that the low score itself indicates imperfections. Furthermore, they argue, a description writer may not know all the reasons why the judges did not assign a higher score to a plant. Although our judges often express opinions about a flower’s strengths, because we judge as a group in an open room where the plant’s owner is usually present, detracting comments are not always shared. Therefore, a tag line that reads, “narrow and slightly pinched dorsal sepal reduced score,” may misrepresent the reasoning that some judges used to arrive at their score.

This review suggests several guidelines for their application. First, tag lines are useful for JCs and botanical awards when they describe the novel characteristics of a plant that merited an award. Second, tag lines are appropriate for flower and cultural awards when they impart information that cannot be captured in the standard description format. One of these is to indicate why an award was upgraded (see the example above). Another is for those awards for which the judges want to share the “wow” factor that caused them to assign a plant or flower a very high score. “The subjective rationale for granting awards isn’t always evident merely from bare-bones descriptions,” Phil Jesup argues, especially, I would add, when the flower or plant has that knocks-your-socks-off appeal. In those unusual cases, a tag line may make sense.

At a recent monthly judging at our center, we added a tag line to the description of a cymbidium that received an AM of 86. We used the standard format to describe the inflorescence and flower. Because the plant received a flower award, the standard format gave no indication of its spectacular presentation: a single pendulous and very dark inflorescence set off by tall, upright and very clean foliage. Therefore, we added a tag line that reads, “inflorescence set off by immaculate, succulent, vertical foliage.” It contains no redundant information; it is useful because it identifies an additional attribute that, while not germane to the scoring, contributed to the plant’s overall impact on judges.

In summary, I support the use of tag lines when they add information that does not easily fit into the standard award-description format. I expect that this standard is easier to meet for Judges Commendation, botanical and very high cultural and flower awards, which means that tag lines should probably be avoided for lower-scoring awards. Their use for detracting comments should be at the discretion of each center’s chair. Finally, I hope that this review will stimulate discussion among description writers and readers within and among the AOS judging centers.

Table 1 Percentage of AOS Awards with Tag Line, January–June 2004

Award	Number of Awards	Percentage With Tagline
JC	23	91%
CHM	69	48%
CCE	15	47%

CBR	74	36%
FCC	13	23%
CCM	80	21%
AM	319	10%
HCC	370	10%
AQ	4	0%
Total	967	18%

Table 2 Selected Description Tag Lines

Plant Name	Award (points)	Tag Line
<i>C. leopoldii</i> fma. <i>coerulea</i> ‘Kathleen’	JC	“... commended for the blue lip color variant of this species.”
<i>Elepogon</i> Carson Whitlow different orchid breeding.”	JC	“... this hybrid of two terrestrial species from continents not usually seen in cultivation is a rarity in orchid breeding.”
<i>Paph. sukhakulii</i> ‘DeeDee’s Green Cap’ sepals and pouch.”	JC	“... awarded for brilliant emerald green of exceptionally dark color on front of pouch.”
<i>Pleuro. radula</i> ‘Leon’ of flowers above	CHM (81)	“... plant commended for artistic presentation cordate foliage.”
<i>Eria pulverulenta</i> ‘Chappy’ attractive growths of genus.”	CHM (81)	“... commended for pleasing flower habit and differing from other known cultivated members of genus.”
<i>Dracula minax</i> ‘Petite Fleur’	CHM (82)	“... awarded for rarity and esthetic appeal.”
<i>Sobralia macrantha</i> ‘Arborview’ uncommonly seen	CHM (83)	“... recognized for unusual color form of an plant with ephemeral flowers.”
<i>Max. ponerantha</i> ‘Woodstream’ miniature with	CHM (84)	“... awarded for charming, well-proportioned intense dark color and excellent presentation.”

<i>Stanhopea napoensis</i> 'RSK' described	CHM (85)	"... plant noted for being an interesting recently species; origin Ecuador."
<i>Lepanthes telipogoniflora</i> 'Vikram' flowers heavily this Center."	CHM (86) and in	"... wonderful culture of plant and number of buds, while insufficient for a cultural award, figured granting award; one of the finest miniatures ever seen at this Center."
<i>Epi. anceps</i> 'McHatton/Young' attractive species."	CBR	"... commended for pleasing small flowers and foliage; a seldom seen but widespread species."
<i>Gastrochilus japonicus</i> var. presentation of <i>Kashinokiran</i> 'Tom'	CBR	"... recognized for rarity, novelty, unusual flowers and educational value."
<i>Habenaria ciliolaris</i> 'Mellow Green' seen terrestrial	CBR	"... recognized as a robust example of rarely species from Taiwan."
<i>Onc. lineoligerum</i> 'Bryon' value."	CBR	"... awarded for novelty, rarity and educational value."
<i>Por. pilifera</i> 'Lillian Sparks' saturated seen terrestrial."	CBR red	"... recognized for striking display of brilliant, flowers with contrasting green bracts on this rarely seen terrestrial."
<i>Pleuro. pectinata</i> 'Bryon' flowers and rarity in	CBR	"... recognized for interesting, attractive cultivation."
<i>C. intermedia</i> fma. <i>alba</i> 'Stephen's Price' floriferous plant of type	FCC (90)	"... plant represented the fullest, most on record to date."

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Plant Name	Award (points)	Tag Line
<i>Enc. citrina</i> 'Rollie Wilson' seen by the judges."	FCC (91)	"... most exceptional form of species ever seen by the judges."
<i>Phrag.</i> Jason Fischer 'Krull-Smith'	AM (80)	"... shape of dorsal reduced score."
<i>Bc.</i> Spotted Clown 'Arbec' noteworthy substance."	AM (82)	"... commended for presentation and noteworthy substance."
<i>Paph.</i> Norito Hasegawa 'Eddie's flower with clear Sunshine'	AM (82)	"... awarded for unusually monochromatic color and size."

<i>Yamadara</i> Saint Thomas ‘Sanctuary’s over the Lemon Drop’	AM (83)	“... commended for a significant improvement <i>Epidendrum rufum</i> parent.”
<i>Dracula hirtzii</i> ‘Rona’ size and presentation.”	AM (85)	“... awarded for sensational color, superior
<i>Phal.</i> Cygnus ‘Empire’ arrangement justified a	AM (86)	“... a higher flower count and superior higher score over previous 83-point AM.”
<i>Paph.</i> Saint Swithin ‘Debbie’ commanding display	AM (88)	“... awarded for exceptional proportions, and gorgeous color contrast.”
<i>Milt.</i> Lila Fearneyhough ‘Steve’ score.”	HCC (75)	“... poor habit and arrangement reduced
<i>Wils.</i> Calico Gem ‘Pedregal’ and	HCC (76)	“... recognized for improvement in flower size floriferousness over AD to same clone.”
<i>Onc.</i> Orchidom Happy ‘Loni’ score.”	HCC (76)	“... slight rolling of basal sepal reduced
<i>Asc.</i> Crownfox Yellow Sapphire ‘Anne Henderson’ overall effect.”	HCC (77)	“... moderate flower crowding detracted from
<i>Phal.</i> Melinda’s Jewel ‘Top Star’ lower half of each	HCC (77)	“... flowers noted for striking white marks on petal giving harlequin-like appearance.”
<i>Phal.</i> Sogo Chin Chien ‘Butter’	HCC (78)	“... slight notching on petals lowered score.”
<i>Aganax</i> Eva’s Blue Amazon ‘Arbec’ intensity in lip	HCC (79)	“... noted for extreme floriferousness; lack of color reduced score.”
<i>Paph.</i> Julius ‘Meg’ maturing flowers.”	HCC (79)	“... noted for rich mustard base color on
<i>Onc. viperinum</i> ‘J & L’ awarded for excellent plant.”	CCE (92)	“noted as a difficult-to-cultivate species; flower count displayed on a beautifully grown
<i>Pleuro. gelida</i> ‘Free Spirit’ approximately 10 times the	CCE (94)	“upgraded from 2001 CCM due to number of flowers.”

Lc. Trick or Treat 'Orange Beauty' CCM (83) "... earlier staking would have enhanced presentation."

Note: The examples on Table 2 are from the *Awards Quarterly*, Vol. 35, Number 1 (March 2004). Examples in the text are from both Numbers 1 and 2 of Vol. 35 of the *AQ*.

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