

Another Award?

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We are often aware of superior individual flowers in our business of American Orchid Society judging, and each of our flower awards - Highly Commended Certificate, Award of Merit and First Class Certificate - recognizes that fact. In most cases such awards are granted to the flowers of only one or two clones of a given cross. There are many hybrids that never garner a single award, though an occasional flower may be granted a Judges' Commendation for unusual color or configuration. Even more occasionally, then, is an Award of Distinction or Award of Quality granted to a cross.

In the case of the Award of Quality we can recognize twelve or more plants with flowers of unusual quality. An Award of Distinction lets us award a cross that represents a new direction in breeding, when we can recognize it. In contrast to these awards to flowers, only one award at present goes to the grower - the Certificate of Cultural merit, and that properly recognizes superior cultural conditions maintained over a period, usually of years, necessary to produce a fine specimen plant.

Thus, there is a hiatus in our system, as there is no award that recognizes properly the hybridizer who made the cross in the first place. Most hybridizers make hybrids with a firm purpose in mind, and, considering the cost today of germinating and raising seedlings to flowering, the economics should stop the production of frivolous crossings. Even though the crosser's motivations are of the purest and highest order - to produce the ultimate red cattleya, striped phalaenopsis, blue vandal, yellow odontoglossum, or whatever - the results often fall short of the intentions! How often do hybrids combine the poor qualities of their parents instead of the best? Some hybridizers are in fact so indifferent to some of their offspring that they don't even want to name them, backing up the judging system when an occasional clone from an unregistered cross is awarded with only an HCC.

Contrast this with other greges where, it seems, nearly every plant that's shown receives an award. Are there really any plants of Paphiopedilum Vanda M. Pearman that aren't awarded - or Maclellanara Pagan Lovesong - or Sophrolaeliocattleya Hazel Boyd - or ... (to be filled in by reader)? We are forced by such awards to examine super-critically other flowers of the same crosses when they are brought to our judging attention, and yet still other clones may continue to be awarded. We are dealing with exceptional clones.

A consultation with the combined computer listing of AOS awards, compiled by James R. Fisher for the American Orchid Society, as of April, 1982 shows that it contains 18,520

awards. From that listing, we find that Asococenda Yip Sum Wah has top honors with 96 awards, the most awards given any hybrid. The second most awarded hybrid is Vanda Rothschildiana, with 85 awards (though these probably represent several remakes of the hybrid by different hybridizers). Third place goes to Cymbidium Lillian Stewart, with 84 awards. Going through the whole list, since our judging system began only 54 hybrids, out of thousands of crosses registered, have 20 or more awarded clones to their credit.

What separates these crosses from the others? If we analyze the taxa that receive so many awards we find there is usually a combination of outstanding characteristics: vibrant color combined of outstanding characteristics: vibrant color combined with fine form, substance or texture; unique size and markings with spectacular presentation; nearly perfect shape with floriferous habit and vigorous growth. Whatever the combination may be, it may exceed the hybridizer's expectations, or, at least, it combines the qualities that were anticipated when those of the parents are combined.

My proposal is to have a Hybridizer Recognition Award, based on a cumulative record of 20 or more flower quality awards from the same cross! Such crosses would probably have garnered Awards of Quality or Awards of Distinction had they been exhibited earlier as a group, but for one reason or another they were not. So, when the cumulative record unmistakably indicates a grex of overall superior quality - an international class hybrid, if you will - it is appropriate to recognize the hybridizer responsible for the inspiration and knowledge involved.

As far as the mechanics of such an award are concerned, I would propose a national subcommittee of three to five accredited AOS judges reporting to the Chairperson of the Committee on Awards at the semiannual and annual meetings of the American Orchid Society, Inc. The awards would be published in the Awards Quarterly, as are other awards, and a certificate granted "In Recognition of Hybridizing [whatever appropriate hybrid]" from specific parents, with clonal designations, when named cultivars were used. The judges of the subcommittee can monitor potential crosses and grant the Hybridizer Recognition Award whenever the necessary flower awards with overall quality accumulate, including both AMs and HCCs. The award need not be just an automatic one, if, for instance, all the awards were minimal. It is to be hoped that there might also be an FCC included, but that in itself should not be the basis for the award, nor be required for it. The subcommittee should have some leeway in this regard, both in the numbers of awards and the makeup of their quality levels. The subcommittee could also consider how many clones received which awards in other countries. The cost of the award should be billed to the hybridizer, adding insult to injury perhaps, unless the American Orchid Society, Inc. could find the funds necessary; or donations for the specific purpose might be solicited from hybridizers or commercial growers as a group.

Some crosses that produce little good seed, such as some far-out intergenerics, might be at a disadvantage for this award, with 20 flower-quality awards as a cut-off point, but this sort of thing can be considered fully by the subcommittee for the award. Such an award will carry much prestige and honor, and need not be limited to the United States or to AOS membership. The established record will be behind it! It should have an international scope, and therefore would advance the orchid "cause" throughout the world.

What do you think? Any response will be answered and forwarded to the Committee on Awards, if the consensus is favorable. One last thought - line breeding for several generations may result in more uniformly superior forms of species that can also garner quality awards in quantity. Should these be included with the hybrids?