

The AOS Show Trophy

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The AOS Show Trophy is the most prestigious trophy awarded on a regular basis by the American Orchid Society's judging system. It is a trophy that all of us would like to win or would like to win again – kind of like having the Oscar, Emmy and Tony Awards, all wrapped up into one.

The Handbook on Judging and Exhibition states that the purpose of the AOS Show Trophy is to encourage the improvement of the standards of exhibits. This article presents a brief overview of the history of the trophy and an opinion regarding the effectiveness of our current scoring/ballot system.

It is odd that a trophy with the stature of the AOS Show Trophy has such a poorly documented history. A quick review of the *AOS Bulletin*, *Awards Quarterly*, or a perusal of the minutes of past Trustees Meetings reveals little concerning the conception and subsequent development of the trophy. To be sure, there are numerous articles and papers on how to design/build an exhibit and how to judge an exhibit. Furthermore, there are no records as to how many trophies were awarded now or then, to whom, or where.

History

According to Ernest Hetherington, it was clear in the organizational minutes that the founders of the American orchid Society wanted a way to recognize superior exhibits. To this end, the President's Trophy for the most meritorious exhibit was created (*Awards Quarterly* (18) 2: 90, "A Short History of the American Orchid Society Judging," by John D. Stubbings). Prior to the formalization of our current judging standards at the St. Louis Trustees Meeting in 1949, the procedures for granting this award were, by today's standards, somewhat subjective. In 1952 a two-inch silver medal was made available to be given at shows with the proviso that it was not to supersede the President's Silver Trophy (Ibid). Shortly after the creation of the medal, the President's Silver Trophy was retired. The silver medal was later replaced with the bronze medal, which was followed in 1971 by the clear, plexi-glass trophy and finally by our current trophy and finally by our current trophy.

Through the years we have seen changes not only in the style of the trophy but also in the emphasis on size of the display as well. We have seen a reduction of the original area requirement of 50 square feet and over to 25 square feet, to no size requirement at all.

Scoring

Presently our Ballot/Scoring sheet equally divides the emphasis on the importance of a display between design and plant quality. In private informal discussions with judges from different sections of the country, the consensus seems to be that in high interest areas of the country or at the large, well attended shows, this type of balloting system

appears to work well. Normally at these types of shows those individuals or companies putting in the larger displays also had the time/resources to develop a well thought-out design along with quality plant material. It was acknowledged that at the smaller shows this was not necessarily the case. At these shows the influential factors are often the size of the exhibit and the number of ribbons and trophies in the exhibit. At this level it is easy for the AOS Show Trophy to become merely a party favor to the host society because of the geographical ease in assembling such a display. Since the vast majority of the AOS sanctioned shows are small, local shows, this can become an unfortunate trap.

Training

As with all other aspects of judges' training, instruction in scoring the AOS Show Trophy varies widely from region to region. Little is mentioned in the Training Aids Manual on the subject of design judging. Training for the most part seems to consist of either practice balloting by student judges and/or "the walk about" where student judges tag along with accredited judges and learn by informal discussions.

Recommendations

If it is true that current judging methods in some of the smaller shows may not be as appropriate as at the large shows, what can we do to impact this in a positive manner? The following are some possible approaches:

- Recognize that basic design concepts such as balance, dominance and proportion are teachable concepts and as such, should be addressed more aggressively in our judges' training.
- Ballot/score for the AOS Show Trophy first in a show, prior to ribbon judging. This would eliminate the "count-the-blue-ribbons-and-trophies-method.
- Award the trophy as often as possible. Nothing will discourage exhibitors more than having the perception that the trophy is never given. Their reaction is "why try?"
- Publicly announce the trophy winner, point range and average score.
- Publish the name of the winner, basic display and scoring information in the Awards Quarterly. Such basic information might include: size of exhibit, theme, notable plants and/or props and score.
- Adopt a revised point scale form for AOS balloting which emphasizes the design aspects of the display. Such a breakdown would allow for the scoring of individual aspects of the display. Such a revision could also reexamine the concept of flower quality and make some allowance for the magnificently well-presented flower that sometimes gets overlooked because it is not in current vogue (see the PROPOSED Ballot for AOS Show Trophy).

Conclusion

The AOS Show Trophy – a trophy debased by a system gone mad? Not really, but perhaps a trophy that could be enhanced with a few minimal adjustments.

Current Ballot for AOS Show Trophy

	Possible Points
General Arrangement (Design)*	35
Quality of Flowers	35
Variety	20
Labeling	10
Total	100

*Includes Balance, Dominance, Proportion, Rhythm, Scale and Contrast

Proposed Ballot for AOS Show Trophy

	Possible Points
General Arrangement (Design)	
Balance, Proportion and Scale	20
Rhythm	10
Dominance and Contrast	10
Theme	10
Subtotal	50
Quality of Flowers	
Distinction*	15
Freshness	15
Subtotal	30
Variety	10
Labeling	10
Total	100

*Includes the unique, scoreable qualities of the flowers, other than freshness