

Describing Awarded Orchids

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Part and parcel with the enjoyment attached to judging an orchid show or participating in a regional monthly judging is the onerous task of measuring and describing each awarded orchid for its publication in the Awards Quarterly. Often, an accredited or probationary judge participating in the judging writes the award description. In some areas, it is the task of the student judge or head clerk to perform this function, overseen by the Chairman of Judging. Whoever does it, the award description, along with the award photograph, remains the official record of that judgment, far beyond the fleeting life of the flower. As such, the award description is an extraordinarily important aspect of good judging. Unfortunately, it is treated far too briefly in the various editions of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. Few guidelines exist on what constitutes a good and proper comparative record of an awarded orchid, beyond simple measurements. Consequently, the value of the thousands of published award descriptions ranges from practically nil to occasionally excellent, with the vast majority merely adequate. Therefore, these descriptions are often entirely disregarded by judges. Let us take a look at a few representative problems.

Many of today's finest orchids have come up through the ranks as it were, achieving the high pinnacle of FCC only after having progressed through various point stages of the AM or even the HCC. Several outstanding flowers which come to mind are *Brassolaeliocattleya* Norman's Bay 'Low', AM-FCC/AOS, *Paphiopedilum* Orchilla 'Chilton', AM-FCC/AOS, *Paphiopedilum* Winston Churchill 'Indomitable', AM-FCC/AOS and *Brassolaeliocattleya* Malworth 'Orchidglade', AM-FCC/AOS. Obviously the award descriptions in these cases must or should have played an important part in determining the "improvement" of the same clone over a period of time. The award photography for *Blc.* Malworth 'Orchidglade', while not outstanding, does reveal substantial differences in the form of the AM and FCC flowerings. Take a look at them.

June 12, 1963 - AM of 83 points - "Two clear, medium yellow flowers; lip darker yellow fringed with pale rose; good form and substance. Natural spread of flower 5&1/2 inches."

November 27, 1963 - AM of 86 points - "Two yellow flowers on one spike. Natural spread of flower 6&1/4 inches."

February 21, 1969 - FCC of 93 points - "Two flowers on spike; an orange-sherbet yellow color, whisper of rose on margin of semi-isthmus, moderately ruffled lip; finest yellow ever seen by five of the judges. Natural spread of flower 5&1/2 inches."

The inadequacies of the AM descriptions, particularly the November 27, 1963 write-up, are obvious. No reason is stated for the higher AM score; the reader is left to assume that size alone indicated the need for a higher score. No mention is given in either AM description as to what kept the flower from achieving a higher score than it did. This omission of negative qualities is particularly noticeable when one reads the judges' statement of the FCC judging - "finest yellow ever seen ..." One asks: what did Blc. Malworth 'Orchidglade' lack in the early '60s flowerings?

The judges granting the FCC on February 21 had little written comparison to guide them in their deliberations. Their description is more thorough, and we find for the first time that the flower has a semi-isthmus lip. Considering the known historical tendency of most *Cattleya* awards to be to those clones with full-lipped mossiae type flowers, this statement is particularly intriguing. Was the semi-isthmus lip the reason for lower scores in 1963? If so, why the change in attitude by 1969?

The final comment justifying the FCC is the "finest yellow ever seen by five of the judges." Many people would agree with this comment after seeing the clone at its best, but there is a context of judgment left unstated. Which yellow clones, seen by the judges, form the basis for comparative judgment? In turn, since a ten-point increase in point score occurred between 1963 and 1969 - while the number of flowers, size and, within reason, color, remained the same - exactly what characteristics accounted for this increase? It was no doubt extremely clear in the minds of the judges at the time, and the accuracy of the judging is not questioned. But to a reader using these write-ups as guides in making present-day comparison judgments of yellow *cattleyas*, the information is far too general to be of real help.

A close perusal of all award descriptions will reveal one overwhelming characteristic. They are almost all positive in nature. That is, nearly total emphasis in the write-up is placed upon the good characteristics. Yet judging is accompanied by point scoring based on a scale of 0 to 100, with the required range for an award normally between 75 and 100. Award scores range from 75 to 96 in the published records. There is, in other words, a great deal of room for both an award and "error." While the positive qualities of a flower must be define, the negative qualities - those areas of a flower felt lacking and for which only an 80-point AM instead of an 86-point AM was awarded - should also be incorporated into the award descriptions.

Certain critics have felt that exhibitors would be hurt by a discussion of the negative qualities of a flower. The only answer to this is obvious: the flower, not the exhibitor, is

being judged; and hurt feelings reveal a lack of understanding of what the judging system is about. These negative qualities, incorporated succinctly and with perspective into the written record, could stand as excellent guides to judges in the future assessment of the same clone, of other clones of the same hybrid cross or species population, or clones in the same general line of breeding. Such a problem was evident in the descriptions of Blc. Malworth 'Orchidglade', AM-FCC/AOS.

The usefulness of incorporating negative characteristics into the award descriptions has occasionally been seen. *Paphiopedilum Orchilla* 'Chilton' received its first AOS award in 1971, an AM of 86 points. Few AMs of this rank are given. Over 90% of all AMs are in the 80 to 82 point range. Clearly the flower was extraordinary in the eyes of the judges. One wonders why it didn't reach the extra 4 points. Turning to the written records, the cause is revealed:

November 17, 1971 - "A magnificent red clone, dorsal sepal with maroon blaze paling to rose red; small, white border; petals uniformly rose red with faint brownish cast, pouch rose flushed; slight asymmetrical streaking in dorsal was flower's only fault. Natural spread of flower 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches."

The brief phrase "slight asymmetrical streaking" clears up the matter. This is one of the few *Paphiopedilum* award descriptions in which a negative characteristic was clearly stated. It points out two helpful things. One, higher awards to the same clone would have to eliminate this bad characteristic while maintaining or improving on the other good characteristics; and two, the other characteristics must have been truly outstanding for the judges to score so highly despite the flaw. *Paphiopedilum Orchilla* 'Chilton' received an FCC of 92 points in 1973.

January 3, 1973 - "A magnificent flower well held on a strong, 23-cm-high spike; overall deep mahogany red with even darker veins on the dorsal sepal, minute traces of yellow green showing through on the petals and pouch; dorsal has 0.5 cm wide white border; all colors extremely glossy; synsepalum has light mahogany-red spotted veining over a yellow-green background; a very well-proportioned flower. Natural spread of flower 10.0 cm."

The description is quite thorough, although there is no mention of the dorsal sepal flaw having been corrected. The judgments were at different centers in the same region. It seems only obvious that a reference to the 1971 AM was made, improvement noted, and a higher point score accordingly granted. How helpful it would have been if a correlation between the two judgments had been placed within the written record.

Nowhere is the lack of negative characteristics in an award description more noted than in lower awards to clones of a hybrid cross or species in which previous higher awards have

been granted. This occurred with Paphiopedilum Winston Churchill. After several showings, the clone 'Indomitable' received an FCC of 91 points in 1973. The description reads: "One flower, very well-shaped and -proportioned, on a very strong, 21-cm-long stem; heavy, rich, mahogany flush on petals, dorsal sepal and pouch, lighter on ventral; dorsal sepal evenly spotted red inside on a 1.7-cm wide, white border; extremely heavy substance. Natural spread of flower 11.0 cm."

Although the description is not that different from the previous AM description of the clone, very distinct statements are made concerning shape, proportion, stem and quality of color. In 1976, another clone of this cross was awarded an AM of 82 points, Paphiopedilum Winston Churchill 'Wyndmoor'. The description reads: "One flower on a 20-cm stem, dorsal light red-brown margined successively with chartreuse and white without, petals light red tipped chartreuse; pouch red brown with greenish yellow rim. Natural spread of flower 11.4 cm."

The size of the 'Wyndmoor' and 'Indomitable' clones are nearly the same, 'Wyndmoor' slightly larger. The stem length is nearly equal. Other measurements are more or less similar. The color description of the 'Wyndmoor' clone is reasonably precise, though without the superlatives found in the description of the 'Indomitable' clone. The reader wonders why there was nearly a ten-point drop in scoring of the two clones. The photography may reveal why, but if the photography were missing, as is the case with the HCC, how would we know what the difference consisted of? The award description of the 'Wyndmoor' clone, to be effective, should have contained distinct discussion on how it differed from the FCC standard already stated in the 'Indomitable' clone. How are judges in other areas, who may not have seen either the 'Indomitable' or 'Wyndmoor' clones in person, to make truly valid comparative judgments of other Paphiopedilum Winston Churchill clones that come to their judging tables? Personal appreciation, alone, is not a sufficient arbiter. Aesthetic sensibility against the sounding board of past history will create a proper judging.

The proper, thorough award description may be, in reality, the most difficult part of any judging, for it requires articulating what one thinks one knows instinctively. The description must be done with the greatest care and must be able to offer the greatest perspective and potential usefulness. The process of creating useful award descriptions should hold a much greater position of importance in the training of future judges and in the study of present judges.