

The Rarely Used Awards

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There are three important but rarely used awards in the American Orchid Society's awards system: the Judges' Commendation, the Award of Quality and the Award of Distinction. These awards are rarely seen in that the latter two, particularly, indicate extremely important, even milestone advances, primarily in the creation of hybrid orchids. The first award, the Judges' Commendation, is given more frequently but often held in less than high regard. If any award could be said to be "lesser" - in use though not in theory - it may be the JC. This is unfortunate, for the use of the JC can be extremely imaginative, helping immensely in singling out the extraordinary and unusual.

Because these three awards are so infrequently seen and due to the stipulation that no photographs of the JC are required (our pictorial record is sadly lacking in several ways) readers might find a general discussion of these awards interesting and helpful in understanding judges' determinations.

Let us take the Award of Distinction first. The illustration of the lovely *Epilaelia Connie*, AD (*Epidendrum flabellatum* x *Laelia milleri*) serves to symbolize this award. The definition of the Award of Distinction, in the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, reads as follows: "given once to a cross, exhibited individually or severally, representing a worthy new direction in breeding. Granted by a unanimous decision, without scoring, of the judging team assigned ... Photographs required..."

This award, then, spotlights a distinctly different yet meritorious avenue of hybridizing. We would therefore not expect, for example, a hybrid cross of *Laelia milleri* and *L. harpophylla* to receive this award, since there have been numerous often quite excellent hybridizing results within the rupicolous *Laelia* complex. However, the mingling of the floriferous *Epidendrum* and the brilliantly colored *Laelia* to produce a floriferous, brilliantly colored hybrid is indeed something quite distinct and meritorious. Let us look at the award description to see if it reflects the published requirements of the AD:

"A group of four plants given an Award of Distinction for unusual results in color inheritance: flowers with red-orange sepals and petals and bright orange lip with red veins; flowers larger than expected and fine, branched spike habit."

While terse, the description does cover the main points of the Award of Distinction, though to other judges and interested readers, unfamiliar with the multitude of Epidendrum species, some note on the color of Epidendrum flabellatum - and why the color inheritance is unusual - would make this succinct description even more informative. The "fine, branched spike habit" is also unqualified. Readers, one supposes, are expected to know that rupicolous laelias are rarely branching in their inflorescences. Thus, for this desirable trait (if more flowers are always desirable) to come through in a hybrid is a welcome departure from the norm. At any rate, readers interested in the awards system should pay particular attention to the Award of Distinction. From this may proceed the interesting new "looks" of the future.

The Award of Quality, while equally important, praises improvement in already established lines of breeding, rather than indicating new directions. The definition of the Award of Quality is as follows: "Given once to a cross, exhibited as a group of not less than 12 plants or the inflorescences thereof, of a raised species or hybrid, which may or may not have been made before, when the result is sufficient improvement over the former type. Granted by a unanimous decision, without scoring, of the judging team assigned ... Photographs required."

This award differs from the three flower awards - Highly Commended Certificate, Award of Merit, First Class Certificate - in that the latter single out outstanding clones while the Award of Quality indicates a cross which is consistently outstanding, hence the symbolic 12 plants exhibited at once. Naturally enough, crosses which achieve this award are ones for horticulturists to be aware of. Cattleya Irene Holguin, AQ (Astral Beauty x J. A. Carbone) is an excellent example of this award. The description reads: "Excellent overlapping flowers with lavender sepals and petals; lower two thirds of lip a rich magenta purple; yellow-orange on upper lip, deepening to orange in throat. Quality outstanding for this type of breeding, since most are first bloom seedlings." At this judging in 1969, five clones of Cattleya Irene Holguin received flower awards, one AM and four HCCs. It would be interesting to readers for the judges to have indicated in the award description how this cross improved, consistently, upon the already awarded Cattleya J. A. Carbone, one of the parents. Improvement is after all the basic requirements for this award. Important terms such as "quality" and "outstanding" remain vague and undefined. All that we know is that the flowers were excellent, and that sufficient numbers were consistently excellent. We do not know how excellent or how improved over top clones of the parents or similar hybrid crosses. Subsequent Awards of Quality have been far less expansive in their written descriptions. This is unfortunate, for such an important and indicative award could and should be used as an expressive guidepost towards assessing future crosses bred along similar lines.

The Judges' Commendation is a somewhat "country cousin" award. Its definition reads: "Awarded to orchid plants or flowers individually or in groups, which in the opinion of the judges have some notable quality they are unable to score. Judges' written commendation must record the specific value or values for which the award is given. Granted unanimously by the team of judges without scoring. No photographs required." It is obvious that the imagination and experience of the judging team will be taxed considerably in the proper administration of the Judges' Commendation. First, they must determine that they cannot award the flower or plant under existing categories, implying, at least, the application of these categories to the flower or plant; and second, they must then assess and articulate those qualities which are outstanding but for which there is no ready language in the judging process. This is much more difficult than it may appear - or even as it is often practice.

Take a look at some of the problems. First of all - and this serves for the other two awards described in this article - the requirement for unanimous agreement is most unfortunate. This requirement arose, understandably enough, out of the necessity to be certain that such important awards as the AQ and AD be sufficiently supported by the judging world, as their influence would be extensive. However, within the AOS judging system, at least two distinct methods of judging exist. One, the team method in which the basic minimum of three judges (one probationary to two accredited) assesses a plant; and two, the roundtable method in which all judges present screen and judge each submitted flower. Whether one system or the other is better is not the question here. The problem is this: on a team of 3 or slightly more judges, unanimous agreement on such important awards would seem necessary. For one in three to be in disagreement is a serious consideration, far more serious than one in fifteen, for example. However, it is equally reasonable to assume that such important awards should be assessed by a maximum number of judges in order to gain an opinion which most comprehensively reflects the attitudes of the judging world. Unanimous agreement in a team of 10 or more is well nigh impossible. And there has been a documented case, out of many such, in which 11 judges voted affirmatively, 1 negatively. By the unanimity rule, the award was cast aside. This is totally illogical, for the judgment, far from being either a unanimous or even majority opinion, becomes the opinion of one individual. Should not some compromise between these two systems exist? Should not, in cases requiring unanimous consent, indicating extremely influential and important awards, as large a group of judges as possible be required to assess? And if so, is it not also logical to gain a majority opinion, rather than as is presently required, for the majority to submit to the minority of one?

Second, the "no picture" requirement for the JC - and for the HCC as well - while reflecting economy cuts in the expensive awards system, does undermine the complete pictorial record the Society is attempting to create. And in a much more subtle way, it undermines

the psychological importance of these two awards as well, making them second class citizens as it were. To wit, I offer the tantalizing description of a recent Judges' Commendation, without the picture we wish we could provide. "Judges' Commendation - " for a group of *Ophrys fusca*, *O. scolopax* and *O. specula* well grown." This was the first time in the published records of the AOS awards system that the terrestrial genus *Ophrys* had been awarded - and we lack a pictorial record!

Through the editor's machinations, occasional pictures of the Judges' Commendation clones come into existence. Several are shown in this article. Obviously the written description is crucial to the usefulness of this award. That unique characteristic for which the clone was awarded must be stated clearly. The description of *Cattleya* Doreen Cassella 'High Point', JC (*Brabantiae* x *intermedia*) is quite to the point: "Three flowers; commended for unusual markings and pleasing color on a dwarf hybrid; overall color lavender-pink petals with dark rosy blotch on petal tips, tapering to a dark line at base of segments; sepals patterned with fine rose dots. Natural spread of flower 8 cm."

Since much judging in the past, and continuing into the present, has been almost fixated on increasing the size of flowers, it is reasonably understandable that the judges felt that they could not score a dwarf "*Intermedia Aquinii*" flower within normal pint scales. The term "dwarf hybrid" is somewhat ambiguous. Do the judges imply dwarf habit in addition to dwarf flowers or only dwarf habit (can three-inch flowers really be considerable dwarf?) etc. Some comment on the *C. Brabantiae* influence, the first hybrid orchid to be awarded by the RHS, and therefore the influence of *Cattleya aelandiae* on "dwarfness," would make this otherwise clear description somewhat more illuminating.

In a species as variable as *Rhynchostylis gigantea*, with a number of color forms recognized throughout the judging world, intriguingly colored clones occasionally appear, illustrating the usefulness of the Judges' Commendation. One such clone is *Rhynchostylis gigantea* 'Maroon', JC pictured here. The normal coloration of the species is either the nearly solid red-purple of the clone 'Mem. J. Rodriguez', AM/AOS, also shown here, the composite white-pink flowers of the type species or the solid white of the alba forms. The description of the 'Maroon' clone is therefore extremely important in making any distinctions: "Commended for extraordinary darkness of coloration. The "Black Orchid" may yet exist." Showing the need for accurate, comparative description, the species has also produced one other clone awarded a Judges' Commendation, *Rhynchostylis gigantea* 'New Breed', JC - "Unusual color variation; plant flowering for first time from cross of two very dark varieties; strong purple coloring to sepals and petals with very white color in base of lip, purple on outer edge of lip."

All three awards discussed, though rarely given, are worthy of close scrutiny both by readers interested in the judging system and by judges themselves. The potential for future

arising from these awards is great. Thus their administration is at least as important as the more frequently granted flower, botanical and cultural awards.