

Food for Thought: The Judges Commendation

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Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2003, Pages 75-76

During a recent American Orchid Society show judging, one plant was nominated for an award, initially for its appealing and unusual color. Thus the nomination could have been made for a Judges Commendation for this plant, for one reason. However, after some deliberation, the plant was nominated for a quality award and subsequently received an AM of 80 points.

Some time later, this event tempted my curiosity about the use of the JC for color, and I did some research.

I found the first reference to the Judges Commendation, outside of the American Orchid Society *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*, in the *Awards Quarterly*, July 1978 issue. R. Peterson discussed the JC from several different viewpoints; they are all still valid and worth reading. Twenty-five years later, it is time again to look at this award.

In the 11th edition of the *AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*, the phrasing states that the JC is "... awarded to flowers or plants, individually or in groups, for a distinctive characteristic or aspect of historical or other importance, that, in the opinion of the judges, is worthy of recognition. Judges Commendations must record the specific values for which the award is given. Granted without scoring by an affirmative vote of at least 75 percent of the judging team assigned."

This means that although the plant(s) may not qualify for a Certificate of Botanical Recognition, a Certificate of Horticultural Merit or any of the quality awards, there may be other considerations that justify some recognition. In my research, I have come to regard the JC as the "inspired award." A judge, nominating (or a team during discussion) has two options: If it doesn't fit into any of the other categories, it may be passed, or a JC may be considered. These different categories can be any of those criteria on the general point scale: form, color, size, substance and texture, habit and arrangement and floriferousness or other, more unique characteristics as novelty, rarity, educational value, breeding, special display, unusual collection, leaves, stems, etc. All of these reasons and more have been stated for granting the JC. The following list of some of these reasons shows their frequency of use from the beginning of the *Register of Awards* (June 1932) through volume 27 (December 1996) of the *Awards Quarterly*.

Of course, there are a few gray areas with this short list of statistics. If, for instance, no particular reason was stated, but the description gave a glowing account of the lovely color, it was assumed that color was the reason for the award and it was listed here as such (see Table 1).

Under display, culture, etc. we see commendations such as: *Dendrobium pierardii* 'Oroville', JC/AOS, "... the artistry and excellence of the display ... one large plant

pleasingly arranged to simulate a waterfall effect ...”; *Brassia brachiata* ‘Erica’, JC/AOS, “... one hundred seventeen blooms on a well-grown plant, nine spikes, excellency of culture for this area ...”; and *Angraecum* Orchidglade ‘Strothman’, JC/AOS, “... commended for robust growth and number of spikes, flowers and presentation on an ungroomed plant.”

When a JC is awarded for rarity, that can be subjective to place or time. It is nevertheless an education to see history in process, as two awards from 1970 will demonstrate: *Paphiopedilum papuanum* ‘Penn Valley’, JC/AOS, “... commended for its value to botany and to orchid growers” and *Paphiopedilum wardii* ‘Broadview’, JC/AOS, “... delightful, rare species.”

Size alone (or stem length) may be sufficiently impressive to deserve a commendation, as for *Scullyara* Orchidglade ‘Orchidglade II’, JC/AOS, “Four unusually large, white flowers with eight buds on four stems; too much reflexing of the segments for a flower award, but unbelievably large for the cross”

In all instances where I have researched the award under the heading of “Form,” this was not for the “Form Category” as in the scoring sheet interpretation, but it was awarded to flowers with peloric form as for *Laelia majalis* ‘Oviedo Mota’, JC/AOS, “... unusual splashed variety ... superior form ...”; *Cymbidium* Vidar ‘Harlequin’, JC/AOS, “... commended for highly colorful and symmetric peloric form; and *Cattleya* Waiakea Uka Delight ‘Providence’, JC/AOS, “commended for near-peloric form ... striking color pattern.”

Group displays and educational displays can merit recognition in the form of a JC. For example: a group of *Cattleya mossiae*, “... fine selections of *C. mossiae* showing several distinct types ... all well grown, fine quality”; a group of *Chiloschista* species: “A striking educational grouping of three very different color forms ...”; and a group of *Cymbidium sinense*, JC/AOS, “... nine well-grown and well-groomed plants of great educational value and beauty; commended for the variety of forms displayed”

New lines in breeding can be (and are) recognized with several different awards. The JC is one of them, as for instance *Dendrobium* Theodore Takiguchi ‘Splash’, JC/AOS, which was “... commended for a new departure in breeding” There is no mention of anything else, but from the name ‘Splash’ one might infer that this was, once again, a peloric flower. Of course, the combination of *Dendrobium tokai* and *Dendrobium stratiotes* together with the *Dendrobium phalaenopsis* definitely is a different line in breeding, but no Award of Distinction was apparently considered. Similarly, *Hausermannara* Lucie Hausermann ‘York’, JC/AOS, was “... commended for a new direction in breeding.” This hybrid of *Doritaenopsis* Memoria Clarence Schubert and *Vandopsis parishii* could perhaps have been awarded an AD or AQ, but since this was done as early as 1975 and no other Hausermannaras have ever been awarded, perhaps the choice of a JC was appropriate.

There are other interesting (and perhaps valid) reasons for commendation: *Paphiopedilum ciliolare* 'Swallow', JC/AOS, "... commended for outstanding stem (76 cm)"; *Lycaste Darius* 'Riopelle', JC/AOS, "... commended for being brought into flower ... this is acknowledged to be one of the few, hence rare occasions of this cross being flowered"; *Cirrhopetalum* Daisy Chain 'Woodridge', JC/AOS, "... commended for distinctive charm of a primary hybrid"; and *Phalaenopsis* Boediardjo 'Fran's Senteur & Senteur', JC/AOS, "... commended for spicy fragrance."

We see on this list 50 cases where nothing at all was recorded about the plant or why the award was granted. That negates the whole intent of the award and it might as well not have been made. This neglect can be avoided by simply prefacing the description with the phrase "Commended for ..."

In general, the judges are making good use of this award. Still it seems to me that we are using the JC too often for color. From an approximate total of 950 JCs, more than half (57 percent) were awarded for this one reason. Lately, we are obviously much occupied with this one criterion.

In 1985, out of a total of 29 JCs, 23 were awarded for color (more than 75 percent). Ten years later (1995), from 32 JCs, there were 24 for color (still 75 percent). Where is this award heading? Should we consider instituting a new and separate award for remarkable color in orchids?

For the sake of argument, consider the possibility that distinctive color is awarded separately. Would this not help the judges to focus on the many other distinctive characteristics that can be awarded? It looks to me as if we are right now putting an overload (in the shape of color recognition) on the framework of our JC, to the detriment of other criteria.

It is not without reason that we all must pass a color test before we are even considered to become accepted as AOS student judges. Correct recognition of a flower's true color is of major importance in any flower judging system. However, on the general scale, color is allotted 30 percent of the total score, not 50 percent or more. Are we overreacting to this most visual aspect? It has been stated that, as judges, we must first recognize our personal likes and dislikes and then relegate these partialities into an impartial judgement. I feel strongly that we are becoming unduly partial to color. We must admit this preference and then, cool and calm, impartial and just, make our logical judgement to award a plant correctly, not only for its color in the form of a JC and thus overlooking its other qualities. We can use the JC for extra special qualities and make it a less obscure award, which the orchid growers will be proud to receive for their plants.

Certainly, recognition of distinctiveness in color lies within the parameters of the JC, and we really do not need a separate award for this one aspect.

But we must relearn to relegate color to its place as an equal among the other criteria for a JC. More importantly, we should work hard at composing our descriptions so that we

really manage to communicate the impact of these wonderful three-dimensional flowers to a reader of the printed word. We have to take the trouble to point out, to those who were not there, the special features we are awarding. We have to learn to recognize these special features in spite of any color, and not become overly infatuated with this one feature. We have the option to give recognition to many more intrinsic qualities that we can admire in orchids. We must strive to write and read all kinds of wonderful, imaginative (and perfect) descriptions, naming the exotic, superb and breathtaking other qualities that can be recognized through the JC. Maybe then we will be able to enjoy reading a few more descriptions of clarity like the one for *Dresslerella pilosissima* ‘Eichenfels’, JC/AOS, in volume 14, page 14 of the *Awards Quarterly*, which is reprinted below:

“*Dresslerella pilosissima* ‘Eichenfels’, JC

One flower and two buds on one inflorescence; this fascinating plant, after much argument, cannot be awarded a CBR or a CHM and still do it credit as these awards now stand; CBR is not sufficient recognition, yet flower quality does not lend itself to our usual horticultural evaluation; nevertheless the plant is unusual and distinctive; pendulous deep green lanceolate leaves, linear, curving stem sheathed in brown bracts with dark green inflated tips and maroon pleurothallid-tribe flowers all densely clothed in long white hairs; hairs 2–4 mm long on the leaf glisten on both surfaces as the plant is turned in the light, the upper surface of the leaf also covered with distinct papillae projecting from the surface; hairs on flower shorter, except for longer ones clothing the ovary; flowers green with dense maroon spotting and veining; plant as a whole a remarkable, miniature orchid. Natural spread of flower 1.9 cm vertical, 0.5 cm horizontal; dorsal sepal 0.4 cm wide, 1.0 cm long; petals 0.2 cm wide, 1.0 cm long; no measurements given for lateral sepals or lip. — Exhibitor: Mr. and Mrs. H. Phillips Jesup, Bristol, CT (82-840)”

Perhaps this description for *Dresslerella pilosissima* ‘Eichenfels’, JC/AOS, written by Carl Withner, PhD, ought to be made required reading for all judges and trainees.

TABLE 1 Reasons for Granting the Judges Commendation

Reason	Total, 1932–1995	+1996	All
Color alone	517	20	537
Color and other	38	1	39
Display (including culture, quality, artistry, or floriferousness)	131	3	134
Rarity	56		
Nothing, or very unclear	50		
Size	34		
Form	34	3	37
Group display	27	3	30
Breeding	23	2	25
Other (including stem length, charm, fragrance, staminode,	17	1	18

historic value, etc.)