How Does Your Beardie MEASURE UP

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The Bearded Collie standard calls for a medium-sized dog, 21–22" tall (height taken at the highest point of the shoulder) for males, 2O–21" tall for bitches. It discourages height over and under the ideal by specifying any such deviation to be severely penalized. It is important to remember, however, that while the actual height of a dog can, in fact, be "scientifically" ascertained, it is more often simply the *visual perception* of a dog's size which the ringside viewer accepts as the ultimate criterion of height, however erroneous that may be.

Many factors can influence this visual perception. Two major considerations are (1) the relationship of any given dog to the other dogs around it and/or to its handler, and (2) specific structural and/or cosmetic considerations regarding the dog's appearance, itself.

The first consideration is easily understood: the eye tends to generalize a ring full of dogs—i.e., it tends to accept the *majority* as *average* and consequently may brand any deviation from that "average" as too large or too small. As an example, a 22" dog standing next to several 20" dogs will be obviously the "odd man out," and may therefore get looked on as being *over*sized, rather than the majority being perceived as being on the *small* size. Conversely, a 22" dog in a ring full of 23" dogs, will again be obviously the odd man out; however,this time he may be perceived as being *under*sized.

Similarly, a 22" dog with a tall handler will tend to look smaller than the same sized dog with a short one. When you start combining these factors even for our sample 22" dog alone, the number of possibly confusing visual signals increases substantially. But when you also consider that there are virtually endless combinations of dog heights and handler heights possible, it is obvious that one must cultivate a pretty good "eye" indeed to be able to overcome such misleading factors.

The second major consideration—structural and/or cosmetic variations—can be readily illustrated.

Every one of the ten Beardies depicted is exactly the same height at the shoulder. What varies from dog to dog are length of neck, length of back, amount of coat, markings (or lack thereof), and various combinations of those variables. Obviously, these are not all the possibilities, but this should serve to point out that apparent discrepancies in height can be heavily influenced by such factors as these, and others less easily illustrated—grooming habits, showing techniques, etc. The upshot of all this is to simply point out that the *eye*—especially the *ringside* eye—can sometimes be fooled into giving—especially the mouth—inaccurate information.

It is desirable, therefore, to try to "educate" your eye so that it becomes more discerning, and, therefore, more accurate in its perceptions. One of the first steps is to simply remain aware of the possibility of error. Another is to have your own comparative data on hand (or in head) and make use of it. By this I mean *measure* your own Beardies, *don't guess at their height,* and "file" this information away for future reference.

Obviously, the more accurate data you have at your command, the less likely it will be that you are "tricked" by inaccurate data. Like any other educaticnal program, the more accurate information you assimilate, the more successful the program will be.