

**THE MOON ISN'T MADE OF GREEN CHEESE**  
**by Joan Mason**  
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There is nothing new in this world so we are told, which could possibly be questioned' out of this world is a different matter, we know now the moon isn't made of green cheese and soon there will be more information on the planet Mars than was ever imagined possible. However most of us live on a lower level, our difficulties and problems tend to be more mundane and to re-occur at intervals. With this in mind I jotted down some of the points that have been mentioned over the past few months. There is no particular pattern, just odds and ends which apply across the board not only to novice owners.

"Tetchiness" in dogs, usually more of a problem with males in close proximity but not unknown in bitches also. In fact I remember very many years ago when the late Frank Angless was huntsman to the North Warwicks, Frank said "if you have two dog hounds who don't get on they will usually sort it out and resolve who is 'top dog' but if two in the bitch pack disagree, the feud will go on forever". Well in fact, I'm not really talking about dogs who are carrying on a feud but the short sharp disagreement one sometimes hears when a group of dogs are together. Particularly when on leads. This seems more likely to happen at a show than at a 'working' activity. I imagine because at the latter handlers tend to have their dogs under closer and steadier control.

How often one hears a dog being maligned on grounds of doubtful temperament because he has grumbled at another dog. Frequently the blame lies less with the dog being blamed (dog 'A') than with dog 'B' whose owner has probably been chatting and not concentrating which has left dog 'B' free to sniff around dog 'A's rear end. No self respecting male will stand this. It is a natural instinct to say "get off". It is, in fact, the handlers who should take care and keep a reasonable distance. This applies equally at the ringside or in the ring. Give your dog space, you are there to show him to advantage. Also I feel, judges and stewards should themselves tell exhibitors not to crowd one another. At National Gundog last year I asked the steward, Bob Allen, to make the point to exhibitors before each class and there was not a single murmur. You have to remember also, that at a show the exhibit tends to be hyped up because in the ring they are being encouraged to show off. A further point is, that if a dog is repeatedly having to warn off other dogs it can become a habit ; what started as a warning to other dogs to maintain masculine self esteem can develop into aggression against other males. A self defence mechanism, the message is, either in or out of the ring, keep your dog in mind, after all you have spent hard earned money to be there and the ever knowledgeable ringsiders will label an animal 'bad tempered' all too quickly. Over the years I have seen several dogs who, in fact, had the kindest of natures labelled in this way.

It is a fact that in this day and age, many people whether it is their preference or not, live very urban orientated lives which means that the normal day to day routine does not bring them into contact with basic animal behaviour. Hence the profusion of 'animal behaviourists' who make a good living explaining why an animal exhibits certain patterns of behaviour which are usually either , reaction to the animal not understanding what is required of him, an unsuitable environment or inherent basic behaviour and response to certain situations. It is this latter which tends to be misunderstood, and again is most likely to arise at shows. This is the question of "protective" response and is perfectly normal and understandable. There is the male who lives with either one or more bitches of whom he is going to be very protective when other males are near. The dog who is devoted to his owner and also feels responsible for his or her possessions. What happens at a show? The dog (or bitch) is left alone on a bench with this blanket but also nearly always with a bag or a coat belonging to his owner. When other dogs pass, particularly if they approach the bench, the absolutely natural reaction for the benched dog is to be 'on guard'. In the dog's mind he is protecting his owner. No-one blamed Greyfriars Bobby when he refused to leave his owner's grave!

In other words, much of the onus of dog behaviour rests with the owner who should always be thinking one step ahead of the dog. We have talked mainly about males but many of the comments apply to bitches also, with an important addition, bitches who have just been or who are coming into season are frequently very edgy about being crowded or sniffed PMT no less! Either 'pre' or 'post'! Not aggression.

It is worth remembering that for a dog or bitch to take part in an activity with any degree of success, there are certain necessary attributes, the dog must have the interest, desire even, in the first place, combined with courage and determination. To succeed the dog must have that bit of edge. You can't have it all ways.

Whatever activity you do take up with your dog do be prepared to 'make haste slowly'. In other words even with a training class, go once or twice with your dog as onlookers, get the feel. With working tests and even more so if in time you would like to Field Trial, having watched as a spectator approach the secretary and ask if you can help on the day with some form of stewarding. If you can be 'in line' you will have an excellent view of the dog work and the handlers. Above all, whatever the activity be prepared to learn the rules, not just stated regulations but the far more difficult 'accepted rules of behaviour'. Transgress with these and you could be finished before you start! This comment applies to showing as well.

Mention of shows lead on to another prickly problem – judging. With the enormous number of Open Shows now being held more judges are needed which leads at times to people with relatively little experience being invited to judge. Consider carefully before accepting. It is not easy to withstand peer pressure and this will be considerable. In fact the ideal way before accepting a judging appointment is to steward. This way you learn ring procedure, the correct way for judging books to be completed and if you can steward for some experienced judges learn a lot from watching and listening to them.

On the subject of actual judging procedures and ring management – two or three items have come up, particularly relative to championship shows. It is quite a shock after judging at Open Shows to suddenly have a much larger entry to get through. It is absolutely essential to unobtrusively keep an eye on your watch and time yourself. Every exhibitor has paid for your time and must be allowed a fair share of your attention. Also, remember that the bitch classes will be larger than dog classes so it doesn't do to be lackadaisical with early classes and then have to rush through the later classes.

Be clear with directions, you are responsible for the management of the whole ring, not just the dog you are looking at. If you have occasion to make a short list, either yourself, or ask the steward to make clear, that this is what is taking place. Once the short listed dogs have been called forward the others can be thanked and allowed to leave the ring. The selected dogs should then be moved back leaving the centre of the ring clear. When selecting the final line up, exhibitors should be clearly called to the centre of the ring and placed from left to right in descending order. If there is any likelihood of a change of placings at the last minute make this clear also.

It is totally inadvisable to address exhibitors by name. I know there are people who feel that Madam or Ma'am or Sir sounds stuffy but it is infinitely preferable to using Christian names for some (I suppose these days one is supposed to say 'forenames'!) and 'you' for others. Many years ago, not long before she died, I was chatting with the inimitable Violet Yates and she said "You know luv, when I were judging I never had no friends once I were in the ring". When she was young, she used to work extra nights in the mill to earn enough money to show her dogs. And what a legend she became in the dog world.

Just harking back to actual judging procedure. It is very common practise indeed, many stewards encourage the judge, to sign all the sheets before starting judging and also, will say they will fill in the placings. Both of these practises are against Kennel Club ruling. You sign each sheet to say the listed placings are correct and that you, the judge, have completed the placings. Should there be a query after judging, it is the judge who is held responsible not the steward.

Finally something that I find quite interesting and which some breeds have had to cope with for years. Two judges, which can mean that final placings need agreement between the judges or, a previously appointed referee is called, whose decision, is of course, final. Those of us who have judged to any extent overseas will be used to this, although I must say that to get uniform decision between four judges of different nationalities can be hairy in the extreme. I actually feel one 'senior' judge is preferable. (I'll resist temptation to say "providing I'm the senior judge!").

With ever increasing entries, as a breed we are probably going to be in the two judge position more than hitherto. Obviously, my main experience has been abroad; to my concern, on many occasions I found that judges seemed to feel they must put forward either the dog or sometimes the breed they had judged. Not the best of the dogs represented regardless of breed.

Now it seems to me that when the time comes to choose the BOB or BIS it is not a matter of promoting the dog or bitch you have put up, but the one which truly appears to be the best specimen. If as happens, the judges have different views then the referee should be called at once. There should be no question of one judge trying to influence another, which I have seen in Europe.

In other words, the final decision should be totally un-biased with the award going to the dog which appears best on the day.

We have talked quite a lot about temperament as related to 'strong-minded' behaviour. I hope by now you will have realised that there is a difference between this and actual inherent aggression. In truth, I have never met a 'rouge' Flatcoat, strong-minded maybe and this is manageable, but not evil.

It is worth remembering the 'other side of the coin'. I am constantly amazed at the depth of a Flatcoat's love and devotion to the human race. Even those who have lived in unhappy circumstances of neglect and mis – if not mal- treatment are still prepared to be trusting and loving. A human who has undergone similar experiences would consider this an excuse for delinquency. We have first hand knowledge of this as two years ago we took in a bitch (unseen) who was about to be abandoned and who had spent years tied in a yard lacking companionship and affection. She had every reason to be suspicious of humans or even dislike them, yet she didn't. She was very withdrawn and dejected but her inherent good nature was such that she was prepared to trust not only us, but dogs also. She is now a happy, confident, brimming over with affection and at times, i.e. frequently, demanding Flatcoat. I am going to remind you again of Joan Shore's words after Finn died – "We did so much together and it was always fun". May you have fun too.

*(This article was first published in 1997 by the late Joan Mason)*