

A Judges Perspective

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The ultimate goal of alpaca judging is to compare an alpaca's characteristics against the ideal standard then evaluate individual alpacas against others in the class. A judge will weigh up the good and bad characteristics of each alpaca and make their selections based upon their observations. The eventual winner will be the most complete alpaca or in other words the alpaca with the best balance of fleece traits and conformation. Judges must be precise, confident in their selection, and able to justify their decisions.

When a judge accepts a judging appointment they agree to abide and judge by the rules, regulations and breed standard of the country they are judging in. In Australia, judging criteria for halter classes is fleece 60%, conformation 40%.

Ideally a clean paddock if available depending on climate conditions makes it much easier to manage your alpacas for the show ring. Over preparation of an alpaca's fleece can adversely affect how it is placed in the ring. Removing the fleece tip for example can destroy staple definition.

Judging starts as soon as the alpaca walks into the ring. The judge looks at the alpaca's gait, watching foot placements as well as viewing the front and back legs to see if there are any conformational issues. We also look at body proportions to see if the alpaca is well balanced. Once all the alpacas have entered the ring we look at conformation again while the alpaca is standing.

The next step is a hands on assessment. Starting at the head the judge will check for a correct mouth and ears. We then run our hands down the top line assessing body condition, working down to the tail to see if it is straight. Lastly, the judge will check to see if the alpaca is male or female and if it is a male we inspect testicles for consistency, size for age and evenness.

Following the hands on assessment, the judge will assess the alpaca's fleece. If we are judging suris the primary fleece traits are lustre, density, lack of guard hair, fineness, handle and lock structure. All of these traits are important and are combined to come up with the best alpaca presented.

Lustre is what makes suris unique. Lustre, handle and micron is important because it is what gives the finished garment its magnificent natural sheen and softness. Many designers and manufactures believe suri fibre to be the most luxurious of all fibres because of its stunning lustre and silky handle.



Suris these days are displaying a number of different lock styles. As a suri breeder I do have my own preferred lock style but when judging we must set aside our personal preferences and choose the most consistent overall package of positive traits no matter the style of lock being displayed. We are looking for solidity of lock, which indicates lock density and helps hold the independent lock structure together. The lock architecture should be displayed from the top of the head running down the neck carried evenly across the body, and continuing down

the legs. We also look for consistency of micron, handle, lack of guard hair.

When judging huacayas, the fleece is visually different from suri fleece but we are still looking for the same positive fleece traits. Instead of locking however, we are looking for crimp structure and staple definition. Like the suri, huacaya can also have different fleece styles. The key fleece characteristics in huacayas are fineness and handle, density, character, lack of guard hair, length and brightness/lustre. All of the above qualities are important for commercial fleece processing.



As with suris, the judge is looking for the alpaca with the best balance of fleece characteristics. We want to see a huacaya with an abundance of fleece that opens up cleanly with a highly aligned staple. The fleece should have a fine micron that is uniform across the body with all the other positive fleece characteristics mentioned above. I also like to see those characteristics carried as far into the extremities as possible as this means more usable fleece with little or no waste giving the breeder more return for their fleece and an alpaca that will hopefully pass on these attributes to their offspring.



As a judge it is immensely rewarding to share your knowledge with fellow breeders. For exhibitors, showing is a great opportunity to showcase and compare your alpacas with others in the ring but most importantly it should be a learning and enjoyable experience.

(This article originally appeared in the World of Alpacas 2013, and has been updated by the author in 2020.)

Natasha Clark - The Australian Alpaca Association held a new judges intake course in the year 2000, which I attended and passed. I am now a Level 1 training judge which is the highest ranking in Australia and have judged all major shows in Australia including the National Show in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2019. I have also had the pleasure of judging a lot of major shows and National Shows in different countries. My knowledge of alpaca judging was broadened in 2004 when I participated in the International Alpaca Judging School in Peru and qualified as an International Judge.