

Staffordshire Bull Terrier Show Entry Survey

Introduction

Over the last eight years mean average SBT entries for all types of show have dropped by nearly 20%. Different categories of show have different rates of decline but in all categories the decline is significant. There has been a great deal of discussion about factors behind this decline but this has been anecdotal and subjective opinion, I have not seen any hard evidence to support any particular viewpoint.

To help shed some light on the subject a survey was constructed to explore people's perceptions and experiences. Responses were canvassed via the N&DDSBTC email system and also through Facebook. Thank you to the Notts & Derby Committee for permission to use their email lists in an effort to help the breed.

The survey received 92 responses, approximately half via each route. The 92 respondents included new and more experienced owners and breeders and these represent a wide spectrum of views from within the breed. The survey was closed after 92 responses because fresh entries were not making any noticeable change in the picture. The fact that the last thirty responses made no substantial difference to the pattern of significance established by the first sixty suggests that sufficient responses had been received to provide valid and reliable results.

The survey had two sections: an investigation of the factors influencing people's choice of which shows to enter, and factors influencing people's level of overall entries compared to four years ago.

Factors Influencing Entry To Particular Shows

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of five factors when deciding whether or not to enter a particular show: cost, distance of travel, the judge, the venue, and social opportunities.

Separate responses were requested for Breed Club Championship Shows, Breed Club Open and Limited Shows, General and Group Championship Shows, and General and Group Open Shows.

In each case, the maximum score for a factor is 4 which would mean all respondents ranked the factor as very important. A score of more than 3 would be very high in this system. The minimum score possible is 1 where all respondents rank the factor as not important. A score below 2 would be a very low score in this system. The responses have been collated and represented in graph form for easy visual comparisons. The graphs are in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

Respondents also had the opportunity to enter comments in case there were other factors not listed. The individual comments are catalogued in Appendix 2.

Judges With a rank of well over 3 across all four show categories, the unequivocal message is that the judge is the largest factor when people decide whether or not to enter a show. This is in line with much of the anecdotal evidence in the public domain of ringside and social media chatter.

Reading the additional comments, there are two main issues that people have with judges: some judges are being used too frequently, and there is widespread concern about the quality of judges. There will be more discussion of this in the second part of this report when examining the underlying causes of the decline over time.

The results for the four other factors show them to be less important but with subtle differences according to the type of show.

- Cost The importance of the cost factor is further below the judge factor than might be expected from the general trend of public chatter on the issue. This is especially true for Breed Club Open and Limited shows but these tend to be the cheapest shows and also might engender exhibitor loyalty supporting the clubs. Cost is more significant for General Championship Shows but they do tend to be more expensive and have little owner loyalty. The general rankings across all show categories is not particularly high and this would indicate that reducing entry costs would have limited impact on the entries. Many people enter shows for their own reasons largely irrespective of the cost of entry.
- Distance of travel follows a similar pattern to but is more significant than cost. This is not surprising as travelling long distance is a cost in itself which is greater than the actual entry in most cases. The data suggest that people are prepared to travel further for a Breed Club Championship Show while there is little difference across the other three categories. Distance is not something that can be altered and so can play no part in any efforts to arrest the decline in entries or restore them to their former levels.
- Venue Shows are held in a variety of venues, some pleasant and/or dog friendly, others not. The quality of the venue does affect some people's decision on entry but not often. In any case, no club is likely to change its venue in the hope of increasing entries, nor should they on this evidence.
- Social It is interesting to note that many respondents enter shows in the hope of meeting friends but this is a minority concern and consistent across all types of show. There may be opportunities for clubs to exploit this by introducing social activities at their shows. I leave that to others to make suggestions.
- Comments Most of the individual comments in this part of the survey reinforced the scores. Separate issues raised included: work commitments clashing with show dates, and some people saw open shows as a social event to attend rather than enter because wins only counted to JW points. One useful suggestion is that reduction of entry for extra dogs in addition to extra classes and allowing easier access for not for competition dogs might increase entries.

Changes In Show Entries Over Four Years.

The second part of the survey asked people if there had been a change in the number of championship shows they had entered this year compared to 4 years ago. The responses, 75 of the 92 people who took the survey, showed an overwhelming 75% who had reduced their entries and 20% had entered no championship shows at all this year.

If they had reduced their entries, respondents were asked to rank a range of factors that might have influenced their decisions. The list of factors was drawn from the discussions at ringside and on social media mentioned above and centred on the three main reasons that have been put forward for the decline in entries: fewer dog registrations, economics and disillusion with judging. Additional factors were included after reflection on what else might affect people's decisions. The listed factors were: no longer having dogs, dogs not enjoying showing, dogs not being of show quality, cost of entry, cost of travel, competence of judges, integrity of judges, ringside atmosphere, bad experiences at ringside and on social media, new hobbies and interests taking over, new commitments such as family or work, and personal issues such as health. Once again, there was the option for comment in case there were important factors not listed.

As with the rankings in the first part of the survey, the maximum score for any factor is 4 and a score greater than 3 shows that the factor is very important, the minimum score is 1 and a score below 2 shows that factor plays no significant part. The rankings are displayed as a graph in Appendix 1.

Judges As with the results on show choices, perceptions about the championship show judges were clearly the most influential factor. Of the 63 respondents who expressed an opinion, 90% said that incompetent judging had been important in their decision to enter fewer shows. Worse still, 95% said their perception was that some judges lacked integrity and this was a significant factor in their decision to enter fewer shows. I know there are people in the breed who reject the accusation that many judges award CCs to dogs that they know are not the best present. Whether individual or indeed many judges are corrupt cannot be answered by this survey but the important message is that the perception is widespread and deep rooted. This perception is highly corrosive and appears to be the most important factor in declining show entries

Costs Similarly to data reported above, cost is a significant factor in people entering fewer shows and travel cost is more important than entry costs. However, it is significantly less important as a cause for the decline than mistrust of judges.

Ringside Atmosphere There is a perception that the atmosphere at shows has deteriorated and this is leading to some people withdrawing from the show scene. This is one area where clubs can have a real impact. This survey offers no solutions, but hopefully it will spark a debate within the clubs that might lead to improvements that will, if not rekindle a love of showing in those already lost, at least help retain those who still enter and those who might begin showing in the future.

Dogs Factors associated with dogs do not feature as highly important in the data. In particular, people not having dogs is on the border of being not at all important. This contradicts the argument that the declining number of registrations and so a drop in the number of dogs available to show is the main cause of declining show entries. The majority of survey respondents are entering fewer shows and yet only a minority say this is because they do not have a dog to show.

It is beyond the scope of this survey but the following thoughts may be relevant. Overall SBT registrations are declining and registrations of traditional show colours such as reds, peds and black brindles are declining even more sharply. However, there are two distinct populations of SBT, the show community and others, and the show community has always been a small minority of the overall breed. A reduction in registrations may not be associated with a reduction in the show population. The anecdotal evidence of litter announcements on social media suggests that there is no significant decline in breeding among the people of the show world. Of course, this issue would need further investigation before anything could be established.

Bullying Much has been made of cyber bullying and, when it happens, it is terrible for the victims. However, it is a positive thought that the survey shows that its importance to the whole picture is negligible.

Other factors The other factors listed and the individual comments relating to further factors all show themselves to be minority concerns.

Suggestions At the end of the survey respondents were asked for suggestions for ways to entice people back into the ring. The answers mirrored the main points from the earlier responses and were very strong on the issue of judging.

This survey is only a start on compiling useful evidence about the decline in dog show entries, but the messages it contains are so strong that it would be foolish to ignore them. Hopefully it will move the matter forward. It would be interesting to know if any of these results would be echoed in other breeds.

Appendix 1 – SBT Show Entires Survey – Graphs

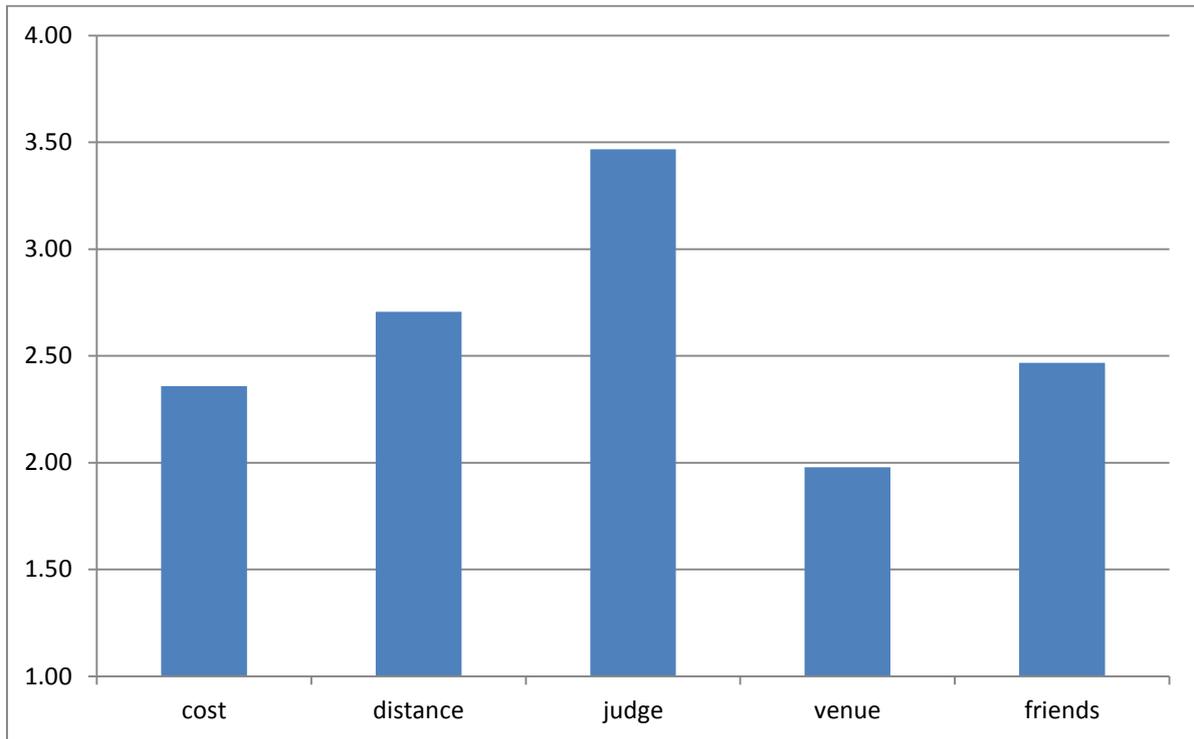


Fig. 1 Breed Club Championship Shows

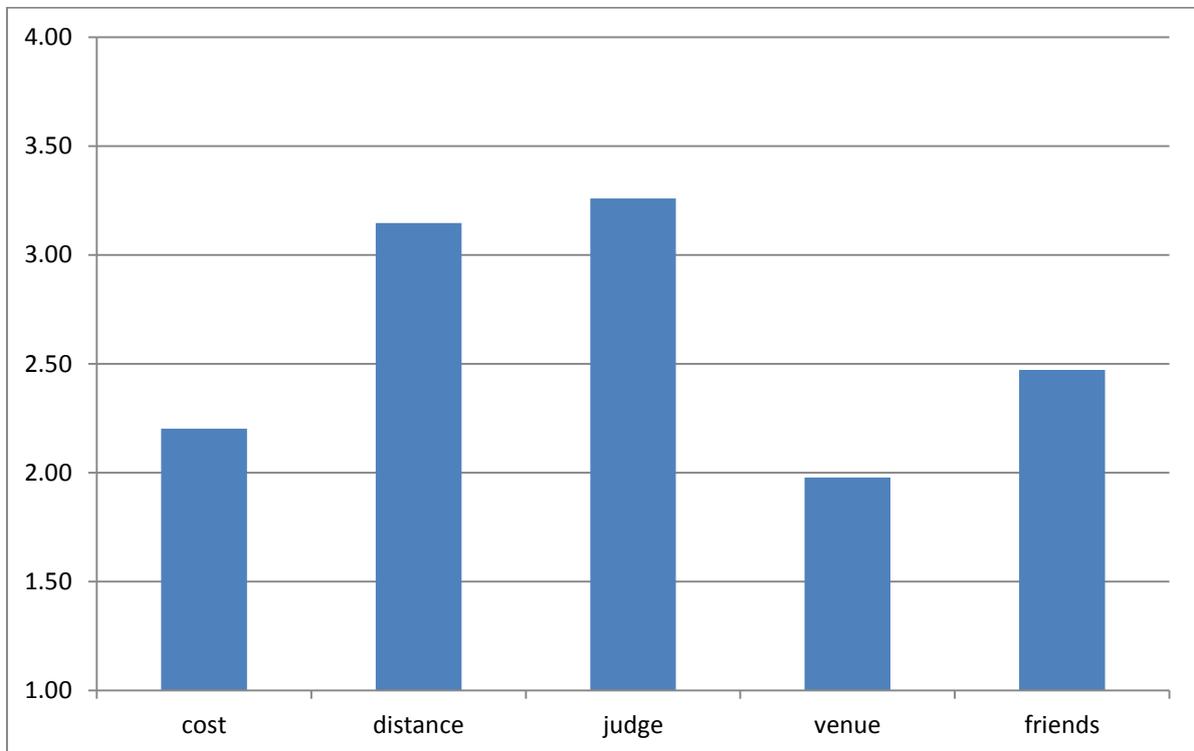


Fig. 2 Breed Club Open & Limited Shows

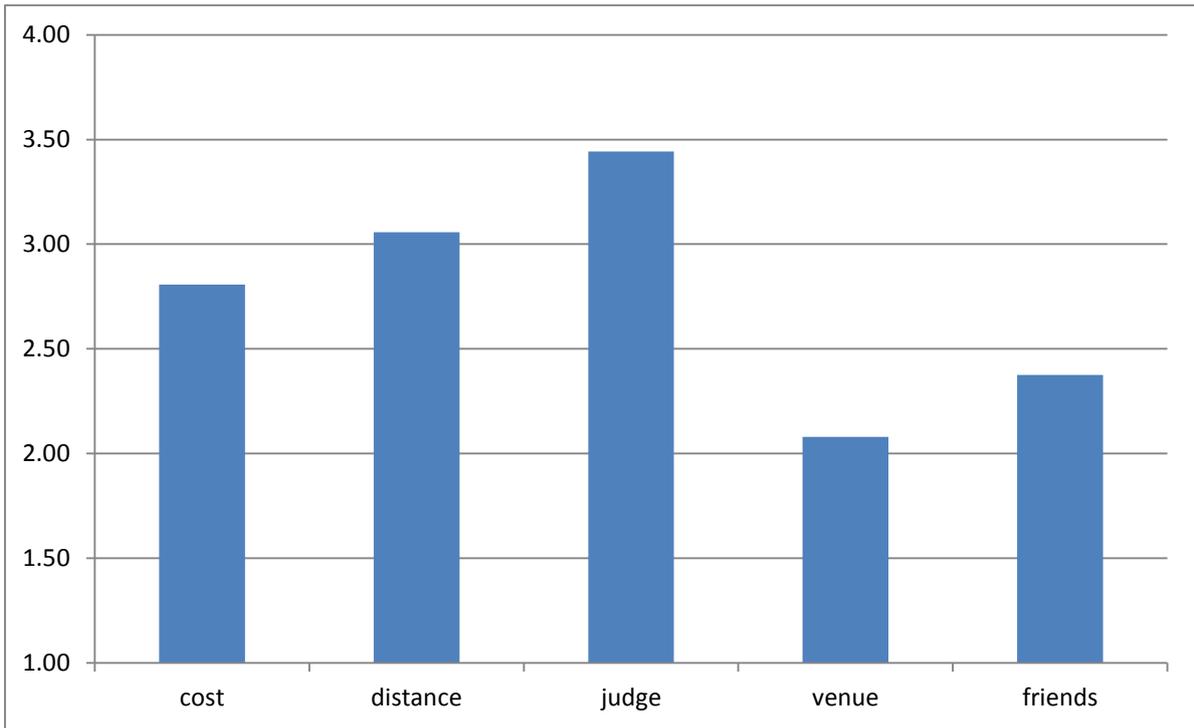


Fig. 3 General & Group Championship Shows

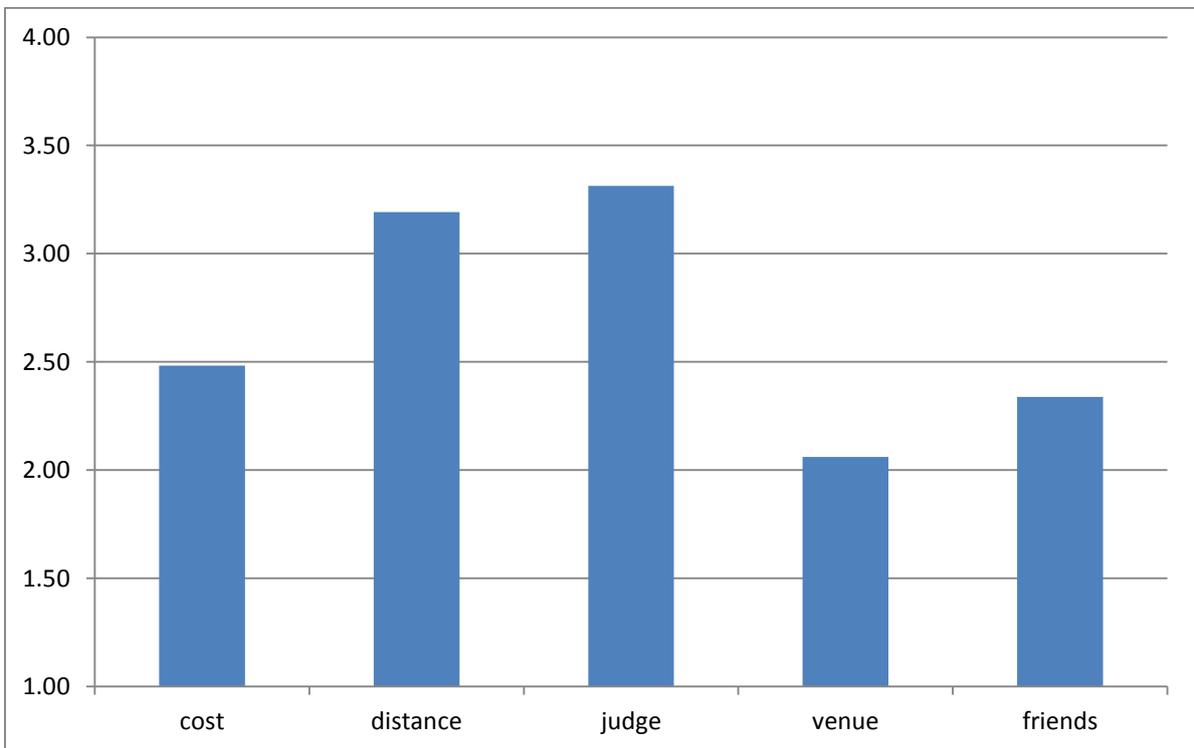


Fig. 4 General & Group Open Shows

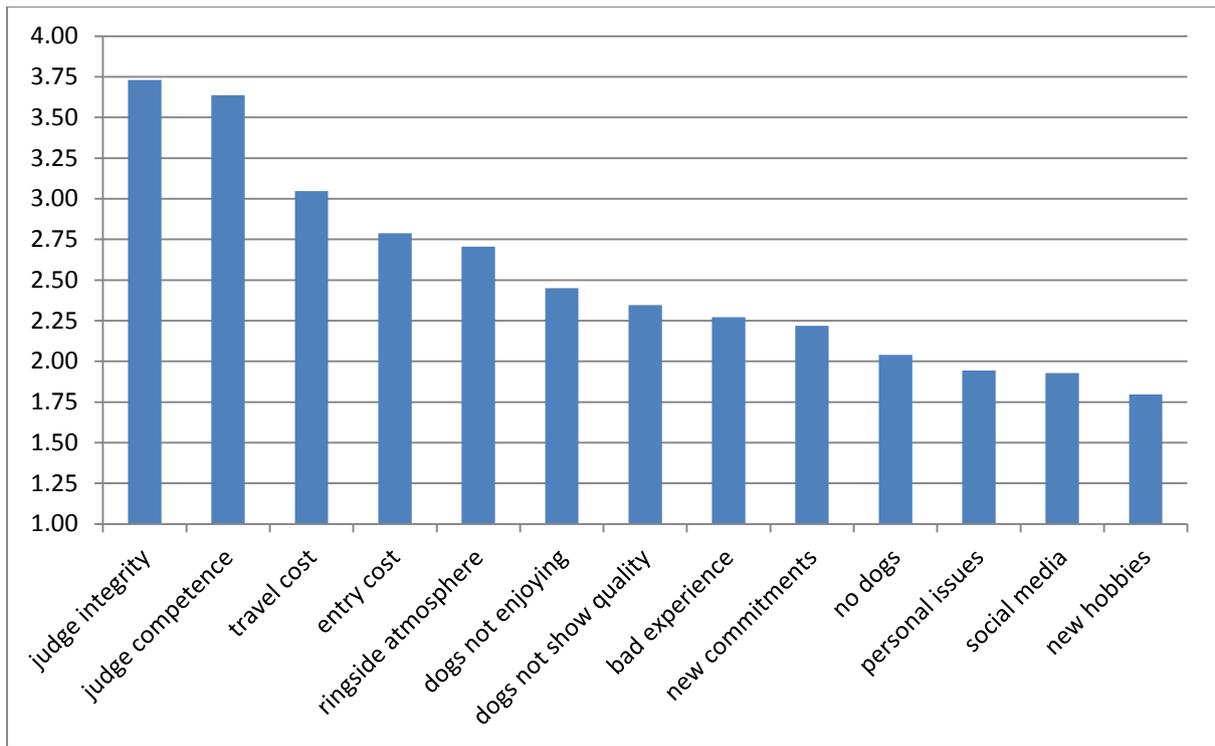


Fig. 5 Ranking of factors affecting respondents' reduced entries to championship shows.

Appendix 2 Individual comments

I have copied the comments, many use informal language and punctuation or were sent from smartphones and include typographical errors, I did not think it was appropriate to edit them in any way.

Q1 Rank the importance of the following when deciding whether or not to enter a Breed Club Championship Show.

as new to showinG it can be very interesting and fun I have being to only a few shows just to observe and I have met some really lovely supportive people that are egar to share their knowledge and skills. but like all new things it can sometimes feel like you are back at school and can be a very scary place their appears to be a higharkery system in showing but over all a wonderful and enjoyable sport

dont want entire day taken up at show, I like being out with my dogs instead.

sorry but, Facey , political matters/ judging

if ive been under them before

clubs should not employ FCI judges for breed shows. unfortunately this is the case on occassions in ireland. for e.g. the irish staffordshire fanciers this coming October has a FCI all-rounder doing our breed as the breed show is being combined with an all-breed show on the same day, back to back...

Cost

being part of a great stafford community

fair judging of dogs & NOT FACES !!

Work commitments, as judge as been facey, friend or colour bias at previous shows.

Work commitments

Cost of fuel, whether my dogs are in good condition at the time, personal health.

Judges integrity

Reduced entry for additional dogs or free veteran class determines number of dogs entered

Cost of fuel - major factor

Date of show - my need time off work, other show that day etc

Q2 Rank the importance of the following when deciding whether or not to enter a Breed Club Open or Limited Show.

Cost

Open show more important for gaining JW points, bringing on pups and gaining handling experience, After JW time has past open shows do not have same value to acheive awards.

Work commitments, as judge as been facey, friend or colour bias at previous shows.

Seen as more of a social event

Date of the show - My need time off work and other shows on that day

Q3 Rank the importance of the following when deciding whether or not to enter a General or Group Championship Show.

choice of judge

What preference the judge has(as to colour and size etc)

Work commitments, as judge as been facey, friend or colour bias at previous shows.

on which day of the week it it's held

The cost of general champ shows is too costly for NFC so there is no choice but to leave old pet dogs home alone.

Cost of entry and distance may be overridden by the judge

Q4 Rank the importance of the following when deciding whether or not to enter a General or Group Open Show.

Judges preference as to colour and type

Open show more important for gaining JW points, bringing on pups and gaining handling experience, After JW time has past open shows do not have same value to acheive awards.

Find them depressing so don't go

Q6 If you are entering fewer or even no shows these days, please rate the importance of the following in that decision.

Not had much to show !!!!

personal right now unsure if I want to go ahead or not due to online bullying withness which has being reported

prefer watching my dogs look wonderful enjoying themselves in the hills

was absent from show scene for few years due to poor health. and in that time i downsized my quantity of dogs and now im returning i need a quality dog to compete as the quality of dog has become more important due to the cost of entries and also the judging has become worse, i.e. more dodgy judging seems more apparent.

Just into showing 2 years now.

cost of health testing has added to overall figure and sometimes it has to take priority over a show entry :-/

Would be different reply if dog was of better quality

Q7 If you are entering fewer or even no shows these days, what might entice you back into the ring?

Nothing

Fair and unbiased judges who judge on breed standard not who's on the other end of the lead
decent judges with competency and integrity

Honest judging. When you look at the line up and dogs are considerably different types,even though there is other dogs of similar type that have done decent winning, but the "faces" are holding the lead of the right ones it is disheartening

more judges understanding of first time or novice handlers and dogs

A more respectful atmosphere

A radical change in how things are ran and weeding out of corrupt bulllys and witch hunters

Judges wot arnt bent

Judges

Once again fairer, unbiased judging and show atmosphere

Better judges that judge the dog not whos holding the lead

New judges . Especially Champ show judges ...they should only be allowed to judge once every 3-5 yrssame old same old the past few yrs .

now that my health is under better control and improving, i am hoping to return more frequently but this is tied in with the need to get a quality dog...

Not a lot

Better judging look at the dog

Honest judges.

Lower costs general champ shows(lot of money for a piece of card or nothing) and better integrity

More all round judges

Honest Judging.

Better behaviour at shows and outside of them by supposed lovers of the breed. Less corrupt decisions

fair judging

Consistently good judges

Stop champ show judges scratching each others backs .

Judges that judge the dog and not whos on the end of the lead. In open shows I will only go under an all rounder As quite often seen the judge turn up with their beat of breed

good honest judges that don't pick faces

More Champ shows with judges from outside the Stafford circuit. . Our judges like to mention that they have judged in different countries so why should we so against giving other judges a chance.

Cheaper entries

Better judging more to do with the dog then the handler.

Judge

nothing specific, enjoy catching up with old friends.

A reasonable answer to question 9 for a start.

competent judges

Q8 Which of these best describes your situation in the SBT world?

Enthusiast of the dog

Have been involved on and off for 30 years but had a long break of 25 years.

ive been breeding for 7 years +bt not every year abt every 3-4 years

Depends on what you class as new and old lol

after a break of eight years. coming back into the hobby

not sure whther i am a long standing breeder owner , 20 years

New to showing

not a breeder i have my 2nd Stafford

Consistently and continuously active in the breed both inside and outside the ring

Q9 Do you have any other comments?

General shows should stop ripping people off. Corrupt judges should stop ripping people off

Yes I love the breed and have met some really people but equally have met some very rude arrogant people that think because they are long est in showing that gives them a right to bully others online just my view

For me the biggest problems and the people and how they conduct themselves especially Online away from the shows.

Sort these judges out giving tickets to fellow faces

I am in Australia!

None that will make any difference

thank you Ed for taking the time and showing the integrity and love of the breed to compile this survey...

I have gone to some shows in the past but shown dogs because not good not had the time definitely seems to be less attending same I would go further afield but it can be costly and not always able to get time off work so stop over is a no no

I'm afraid it appears to be important which clique you belong to, this influences how well your dog does in the ring. The hobby is just that, NOT A Business, we have too many influential people who use our HOBBY as their business. So they influence judges decisions far to much,(God know how they manage this) They clearly don't love our breed that much, more the love of lining their pockets and being in the spotlight. Dishonesty! Is what is driving the majority of people away!!

I think a lot comes down to cost for us and of course the judge. Gone are the days where you could just enter all shows on your doorstep. You have to make choices now.

Need braver judges that will choose the right end of the lead ! Once a judge becomes predictable the entries will drop off (no point bothering syndrome)

I can only see a decline in the shows mainly due to increasing fees and petrol prices.

None

Why is it that so many young very successful dog/bitches win many classes (Championship level) all the way up to limit and open then nothing at all, yet done well against dogs winning these limit and open classes? seems that when it comes to the CC/RCC you have to be a Champ show judge or well established breeder or have an animal from afore mentioned type people/faces

Showing is like politics corrupt

Dog showing started as a hobby, until we bred a dog that won a lot. Then it turned into a chore, people are so jealous and cant stand anyone else winning. People you thought were friends turned out to be the worst

Football season ticket

To new people to the show world it can appear very cliquey.