

The British Beekeepers' Association

Examinations Board



A GUIDE FOR JUDGES

AND EXHIBITORS

OF HONEY AND BEE PRODUCE

FOREWORD

The Examination Board hopes that this Guide will be useful to all those involved with the management of Honey Shows. The points discussed should be brought to the notice of Honey Show Judges, Exhibitors and all those engaged in the management of Honey Shows in order to obtain smooth working and uniform decisions throughout the Country.

This Guide cannot provide for every contingency. Readers are expected to interpret it reasonably and intelligently. Any matters of doubt or difficulty should be referred to the Board Secretary.

Schedules

The Show Secretary should send the show schedule to the Judges at least one month before the show, so that they know what to expect at the show. The Judges should study the schedule, rules and regulations of the Honey Show beforehand and make a note of any ambiguities, loose phrases, or any other point which experience tells them may later lead to a dispute or an objection. Before judging begins Judges should meet the Honey Show Secretary or other responsible official of the show committee, to discuss and clear up all doubtful points. For example, get details of last minute alterations, or special instructions, number of prize and non-prize cards to be awarded, locate Stewards and obtain judging books or cards.

The Show Secretary should see that a supply of water and washing facilities are available for the Judges and Stewards.

If the Show Schedule specifies that wax or other classes shall fall between particular weights then the Show Secretary shall make available a suitable set of scales for the Judge's use.

In any class where the exhibit is to be removed from its case or box, two labels shall be provided for the exhibit and its case.

At all times the Judges must be guided by the show schedule, particularly with reference to the type of jar, weights, sizes, numbers, area of the exhibits and ensure that there is no identification of the exhibitor in all, except commercial classes. Recipes should be given for Cake and Confectionery classes. Any scheduled specifications must be rigidly adhered to. In the event of the schedule not providing the information, the BBKA Show Rules (Advisory leaflet No.22) shall apply.

The Show Secretary should also consider the arrangements for an Observation Hive class. It is recommended that bees should be able to fly and this is essential for a show of more than one day duration. However, Observation Hives should not be accepted if the bees are showing distress through overcrowding.

Multiple Entries

At some honey shows exhibitors may enter more than one exhibit in any one class. When this is acceptable it must be stated in the show rules that they may only win one prize in that class. Before the Judges commence to judge the classes where multiple entries are permitted, the Show Secretary must provide sufficient information to enable identification of the duplicate entries, or request additional reserve awards be made to cover this eventuality.

Judge's Equipment

The Judges shall provide themselves with the following equipment:-

- a set of standard grading glasses;
- a hand towel (linen);
- a section template or graduated rule;
- a tape measure at least 2 metres long, for measuring the size of the base of displays;
- six tulip glasses for sampling mead, a spittoon for expelling sampled mead;
- a thin section stainless steel knife for cutting cakes;
- a magnifying glass;
- a note book, pencil and ball pen;
- an electric torch (with spare bulb and batteries);
- a minimum of six honey tasting rods and two honey jars or tumblers;
(plastic disposable spatulas are also acceptable);
- a white coat and white hat;
- a corkscrew;
- a penknife;
- scissors;
- a box of matches for lighting candles;
- a damp cloth in a plastic bag for wiping sticky hands;
- an apple, dry biscuit or other suitable means of refreshing the palate;
- tissues;
- the show schedule;
- a gauge or rule for measuring the height of the weight marking on the honey jar labels. e.g. 4mm for 454g honey jars.

Judges shall be prepared to use a Refractometer and Honey Hydrometer if deemed necessary

Smokers

The BBKA strongly recommends that Judges should be non smokers since experience has shown that despite claims to the contrary, smoking impairs the senses of taste and smell.

Award of Challenge Cups and Trophies

At many shows a perpetual challenge cup or other trophy is awarded to the exhibitor who gains the highest number of points in the whole show or in certain specified classes. It occasionally happens that two or more exhibitors tie, receiving the same number of points, and that the show rules do not provide for such a contingency. If the Judges are asked to make a final decision, it is suggested that they recommend that the exhibitor with the highest number of first class awards in the classes concerned is the winner. If there is no exhibitor with a first class award or the candidates have an equal number of first class awards then those with second class awards should be considered. If there is no exhibitor with a second class award or the candidates have an equal number of second class awards then those with third class awards should be considered. Should a tie still result, it is recommended that the winners should each hold the trophy for equal periods during the twelve month period from one show to the next.

Judges Stewards

Stewards should wear a white coat and hat and advise the Judge if they are aspiring Judges. If they are smokers, they shall not smoke whilst attending the Judge. The Judge should brief them of their duties including not making any comments whilst judging is in progress. They should not remove caps from honey jars but merely loosen them at the Judge's request. If the Steward is also an exhibitor he/she must inform the Judge.

The BBKA Examinations Board requires that any candidate for the Show Judge Assessment must have acted as a Judge's Steward to at least six BBKA Senior Show Judges. It would be advantageous if aspiring Judges, who had gained the requisite showing experience, were to declare their interest as "aspiring Judges", they should then be given an opportunity for Stewarding by Show Managers and an apprenticeship with experienced Judges, who could guide them to obtaining experience at minor shows. The Show Judge Assessment requires the candidate to act as a Judge's steward for a further four different BBKA Senior Show Judges at County or National honey shows.

The BBKA has configured the Show Judge assessment so that training/demonstration by judges may take place if the candidate does not have a sound systematic judging technique that ensures classes are judged in a reasonable timescale. At present the most frequent reason for Candidates failing the supervised judging part of the Show Judge Assessment is the lack of a clear method of judging. This may be due to a lack of confidence leading to indecision. Many judges already give candidates a great deal of help and the BBKA Examinations Board hopes this will continue.

Procedure

All tasting rods are first put into the tumbler of clean water. The Judge's Steward shall remove them, wipe them dry on a clean linen towel and place them in the empty tumbler. When a tasting rod is required, it is withdrawn, used in the usual way and then returned to the tumbler of water. The Steward shall clean, dry then on the linen towel and return them to the empty tumbler for use again. The water shall be changed frequently. A linen towel is used to reduce the risk of introducing fluffy particles into the honey under examination.

Each Judge may have his/her own system of working but remember that Judges are at the show to adjudicate. In all but exceptional circumstances they should avoid giving joint awards. Awards should not be given to exhibits that do not merit them. Stewards should not be allowed to influence decisions. Stewards are there to help and assist the Judge, as the Judge requires, whatever they do should be under the Judge's direction.

Liquid Honey

The judging of classes should generally be based on the comparative system, the Judges eliminating those exhibits at each stage which do not come up to the required standard. It is usually preferred to judge composite classes, that is where two or more different honeys are in the class, using a points system.

Whether a comparative or a points system of judging is used, it is recommended that Judges will view with great disfavour any lack of cleanliness of caps or jars. The wetting in transit of an otherwise clean cap is excusable. The presence of foreign particles in the honey should lead to disqualification.

The aroma and flavour of honey is most important and honey which is in the slightest way offensive should be disqualified, no matter how well it is presented. A bright highly viscous honey is an impressive looking product, but Judges should examine such honey with special care and satisfy themselves that, in the preparation of the honey, its aroma and flavour have not been sacrificed. The Judges should not hesitate to prefer a new but less viscous honey of good aroma and flavour to a more viscous honey which lacks these qualities.

The palate may be refreshed from time to time by eating a slice of raw apple, a dry biscuit such as a cream cracker, or unsweetened tea without milk.

The following points should be checked as the examinations proceed:-

- (a) Correct colour of the honey in each exhibit
- (b) Uniformity of colour of honey in each exhibit
- (c) Absence of foreign material, i.e. wax particles, specks of dirt, hairs, parts of bees, etc. disqualifying if there is any gross contamination
- (d) Brightness, (dull, muddy looking samples are suspect. The honey may be starting to granulate or ferment. Disqualify as appropriate)
- (e) Only gently ease lids before testing for aroma
- (f) Look carefully for the presence of scum, bubbles or froth on the surface of the honey
- (g) Examine lids and check the jars and lids are clean and from the same manufacturer.

After the Judge has completed all the above examination stages the remaining samples, after those that have failed the tests have been eliminated, will be examined for the following:-

- (h) Viscosity
- (i) Aroma.
- (j) Flavour

Awards should be made largely on these three aspects, assuming that a good standard has already been obtained in relation to the points (a) to (g). One jar from each exhibit, when the exhibits are examined on a comparative system, should be placed in order of merit as it passes each test. The second jar should be compared with the first jar to ensure they are identical.

Colour Grading

Exhibitors are responsible for entering liquid honey in the correct class. Show secretaries may hold grading glasses to assist exhibitors in entering the correct liquid honey class.

Naturally Crystallised (Granulated) Honey

Look for firm granulation of smooth, fine texture, good uniform colour, cream to white, and the absence of coarse granules. The honey should be free from streakiness or solid air scum. Reject if specks in honey showing on the sides or bottom of the jar. There should be a clean dry surface with no signs of scum or fermentation and no undue shrinkage from the sides of the jar or heavy frosting. It should have a good aroma and taste.

A minimum of honey should be taken from the edge of one jar by the Judge for testing the flavour and texture of the honey, so as not to spoil the exhibit.

Soft Set Honey

The honey should have a "butter" texture with no movement in the jar. There must be uniformity of colour, cream to white, with no air spaces or bubbles at the sides of the jars. There should be a clean dry surface with no signs of scum or fermentation and no undue shrinkage from the sides of the jar or heavy frosting. The honey should have a good aroma and taste.

A minimum of honey should be taken from the edge of one jar by the Judge for testing the flavour and texture of the honey, so as not to spoil the exhibit.

Combs Suitable for Extracting

Schedules usually state "Comb suitable for extracting". The Judges should note the suitability for uncapping, evenly drawn out on both sides and the evenness and cleanliness of the comb surface. The use of new foundation is preferred to the use of old foundation and the comb should be attached to the frame all round on both sides. If wired, the frame should be properly wired. Cells should be well sealed with few empty or uncapped cells. The judge should test for aroma and sample honey from a cell. The judge should examine the comb against a strong light to confirm the honey is uniform in colour with no granulation, fermentation, pollen, propolis or evidence of sugar syrup feeding.

The Judge should take account of the cleanliness of the frame woodwork any weeping of honey or any brace or burr comb. The show case should be glazed on both sides, neat, tidy, bee proof, clean, free from propolis and any extraneous aroma. Two labels should be provided and affixed as required by the schedule.

Cut Comb Honey

In general the points are the same as for combs suitable for extracting. Cut comb honey is usually exhibited in standard containers, purchased from beekeeping equipment suppliers. The cut comb to have a gross weight between 227g (8oz) and 340g (12oz) well drained and must not contain honey that has granulated or fermented nor has any additional material in it such as pieces of wire foreign bodies, braula, varroa, pollen, propolis or any evidence of wax moth. The honey is to be judged for aroma and flavour. Light honey is to be preferred to dark honey. New thin worker foundation is also preferred to drone foundation. The foundation must not be wired. Two labels should be provided, one for the container and one for the lid.

Travel stains will downgrade the exhibit. The cut comb should be removed from the container to enable checks to be made on the lower surface and for evidence of wire, packing, granulation, fermentation, thickness and position of the midrib, aroma and flavour. Sometimes there are two classes at large honey shows for cut comb honey, one honey free from ling heather and the other for ling heather only.

Sections

Square sections of approximately one pound in weight should be enclosed in white section show cases with not less than 3¼ inches square of comb visible on each side of the case. Lacing if used should be white. Section show cases can be made either either from wood or cardboard and must be clean. Worker cells are more attractive than drone cells. Round sections of approximately 8oz in weight should be closed with transparent covers on both sides. The cells should be filled with honey with few empty cells. The comb should be well attached to the section wood for square and the plastic for round and there should be no pollen or propolis present. There should be no seeping or signs of braula, varroa or wax moth under the cappings. Signs of travel stains will lead to downgrading. The honey should be tested for quality and granulation. In the case of dull, dead cappings the feeding of sugar syrup should be suspected.

Show cases used For Sale commercially whose single window on one side that conforms closely to the above dimensions are acceptable only if allowed in the show schedule.

Heather Honey

This class should be clearly defined as ling heather. There are two kinds of heather honey, ling and bell. When the kind of honey is not specified in a show schedule, ling is implied. Bell heather honey should not be shown in a ling heather class. There is often some doubt concerning the class in which bell heather honey should be entered. It should be entered in the appropriate liquid honey class, either medium or dark. Occasionally a bell heather class may be specified. Ling heather honey has a bitter-sweet taste and is rich red to amber in colour. The aroma is reminiscent of a strong scent of ling flowers. It is gelatinous (thixotropic) in consistency, with a good even distribution of air bubbles. Absence of air bubbles or very small air bubbles or poor thixotropic condition suggests that the honey has recently been bottled (less than three weeks). A honey light in colour sometimes suggests that it is not good quality ling honey, usually it is mixed with other flower honey from the moors, such as rose bay willow herb, blackberry or gorse. However, care must be taken as there are some southern moors that yield a ling honey of amber colour. A dark honey suggests that it has been overheated to remove flower honey granulation, which must not be present.

A jar of ling heather honey should be turned on its side by the Judge and the honey should not run out of the jar. The Judge should scratch the top of the exhibit with a honey taster and see how long the groove in the honey takes to disappear. Bell heather honey is not gelatinous, the colour is of port wine with a rich brightness.

Mead

The type of mead and the bottle used, including the cork or stopper, must be in accordance with the show schedule. There are usually two classes for mead at honey shows, dry and sweet. Usually the bottle specified is clear, colourless, punted (shallow punts are acceptable, round section of approximately 26 fluid oz. capacity, with rounded non-sloping shoulders (Sauterne type) and without any lettering, fluting or ornamentation of any kind. Bottles to be corked with cork stoppers with white plastic flanges or as specified in the show schedule. No alcohol or flavouring, such as herbs or fruit is to be added, but additions such as acids and nutrients may be used. Colour may vary according to the honey used but the mead must be clear and bright, free from sediment. It must not leave an after-taste of yeast, mustiness or flatness. It should bear a pleasant bouquet and good flavour. At large shows there are often separate classes for Metheglin and Melomel.

In a dry class the Mead should be smooth with good alcoholic content with no trace of acetic acid. In a sweet class the Mead should have a mellow flavour and not be excessively sweet.

Beeswax

The weight and thickness should be according to the show schedule and the colour is between pale primrose and orange, preferably the former. Purity and uniformity of preparing the wax exhibit should be checked, no wavy or uneven surface should be evident. The exhibit should be translucent when light from a touch is shone through. There should be good plasticity and texture. Any signs of chemical adulteration or bleaching are to be heavily penalised. Each exhibit should be shown in a transparent cover to eliminate dust. It is recommended that plastic bags be used. Sometimes the aroma of the wooden cover with glass or plastic lid is transferred to the beeswax. The wax may be polished or unpolished.

Displays

Perhaps no class is less clearly defined in most schedules than those relating to displays. It is not uncommon for a Judge to be asked to decide between what might be termed the usual bee products and another garnished with flowers, some real and some made of wax, containing in addition to the bee products, a host of substances in which either honey or bee products are part. It will be agreed that it is difficult to make an accurate decision. Honey samples should be checked for cleanliness, flavour, aroma etc. as in the paragraph on Liquid Honey. Beeswax and mead should be checked as given in the section on beeswax and mead respectively.

Candles

Candles are usually exhibited in either pairs or threes. Candles must be made of pure beeswax. Moulded, dipped, poured or rolled may be specified. Weight or size may also be specified. Where there are two or more candles in a class they must all be matching in every respect. Surface flaws, bubbles, scratches and dirt embedded in the wax, especially at the tip of the candle should downgrade the candles. The show schedule must be read carefully to see if there are any special conditions. Usually a clean pale yellow to orange filtered wax is preferred. The wax should also have a pleasant scent. The wick must be of the correct size for the diameter of the candle, and the characteristics of the wax used. It should be waxed to make it easier to light. To check the correct size of wick the show schedule usually states that the Judge must light one candle and allow it to burn long enough for an assessment to be made by the Judge of the correctness of the size and type of the wick. (Square braided wick is usually preferable to flat braided wick when burning beeswax.) The candles should be mounted in suitable sized holders, made of metal, glass or ceramic material, or on a pin board and lit in a draught proof, but ventilated, room for about 20 minutes. Candles should be burnt at room temperature – approximately 22°c. There should be no smoke and the wicks should not bend over too far to form a ‘pig tail’ or develop a cauliflower of unburnt carbon at the tip of the wick, if they do the candles must be downgraded. The candle should be blown out and the wick should not smoulder or glow for longer than about 15 to 30 seconds (depending on the size of the wick). After 10 minutes the candle should be relit and the ease of relighting noted.

If the wick is too small the candle will burn with a small flame and produce too much molten wax which will eventually run down the side of the candle (gutter). If the wick is too big the candle will burn with a large flame with a small pool of wax in the tip of the candle. When extinguished for the first time, the wick will continue to smoulder and make relighting difficult, (and may produce a large pool of wax which will again overflow and run down the side of the candle). If the show schedule does not state that one candle should be lit by the Judge, then the Judge is advised to do so but only if the show management can confirm that it is safe to do so.

Observation Hives

Observation Hives are to be judged for educational value. Brood, eggs, larvae, sealed honey, and types of cells should be indicated on the glass or perspex panels by means of labels. The labels should be up-to-date, produced preferably on the day before the show. It is no use the labels being prepared several days before the show as labels marked 'eggs' may, at the time of the show, have larvae in the cells. The Queen and a few drones should be marked. There should be no dead or crushed bees, or undue excitement among the bees. No Notifiable Diseases should be present. The hive should be equipped with standard brood comb and may also have over a queen excluder shallow supers, and/or sections according to the make of the hive. Water should be provided, not honey or sugar syrup, as this could cause excitement. If possible the bees should be allowed to fly from the hive. This depends on the location of the hive and the wishes of the show committee, but the hive cannot function properly unless the bees can fly. For shows lasting more than one day the bees must be able to fly.

The wellbeing of the bees are paramount and if they show any signs of stress through overcrowding, for example, then the observation hive should be removed from the show.

Composite Classes

Each exhibit is to be tested as given in the previous classes. It is usual to judge this class using a points system. Judges will usually find it convenient to give a number of points out of ten for each type, adding up the number of points awarded at the end, and to judge all exhibits of the same type, say light honey, before moving on to the next type.

Honey Cakes and Honey Sweetmeats

All recipes, when given in the schedule, should state the amount of honey used, it is desirable that no sugar is used but in some cake types a little sugar is necessary. The weight of the cake and the size and shape of the cake tin should be in accordance with the recipe and the schedule. The centre of the cake should not sink, and the outside should be well baked but not burnt. The inside of the cake should be a soft, close even texture with no cavities. The honey and fruit (when used) should be well distributed and not at the bottom. The cake and sweets should be tasted for honey flavour and the aroma noted. A comparative system of judging is normally used but a points system covering such aspects as external view, internal view, fruit distribution, cooking, aroma, texture, flavour can be applied.

Other Classes

The Judging of exhibits in other classes usually met at honey shows, calls for little comment. The Judges should make certain that the exhibits are in accordance with the show schedule. It is recommended that judging should be a joint effort of two or more Judges in classes such as trade displays, useful gadgets, new ideas and other classes of a similar nature.

Legal Requirements

The Judge needs to keep up to date and be a source of information on the legal requirements of labelling honey. This is needed in the commercial or 'honey for sale' classes and some gift classes. Display classes may also come into the saleable category. The Judge should also keep up to date on the regulations for the preparation of honey for sale.

Notes on Viscosity, Density and Specific Gravity

The viscosity of a liquid has to do with its rate of flow and is not related to density. When a Judge touches the surface of honey with a glass tasting rod, or takes up a little honey on the end of the rod to see how it balls, he is not testing the density of the honey but making a rough estimate of its viscosity. All honeys are viscous to a greater or lesser degree, unripe honey is less viscous than ripe honey which has lower water content. Water is a liquid of low viscosity. It does not follow that two different honeys of equal viscosity have the same density.

The viscosity of honey decreases as the temperature is raised, but its density changes little and would not change at all, if honey did not expand on heating.

The terms Density and Specific Gravity are often used as if they were synonymous. This is not the case.

The density of a substance is defined as its mass per unit volume. Any units may be chosen, such as grams per cubic centimetre. The specific gravity of a substance is the weight of that substance when compared with an equal weight of water at standard temperature. This temperature is usually considered to be 60°F (15.5°C). The floating hydrometer, with which specific gravity is measured, is calibrated to give the correct reading at this temperature.

APPLICATION TO ENTER

Application to enter the Show Judge Assessment.

This should be made through the Local Examination Secretary of the County Beekeeping Association or directly to the BBKA Examination Secretary at the address given below.

Prospectus containing the Syllabus.

The Prospectus for the Show Judge Assessment is available on the BBKA website – Examinations Board section. The Prospectus sets out the entry conditions required in order to take the Assessment

Examination Fees.

The current fees for the Assessment may be obtained from the Local Examination Secretary or the BBKA website – Examinations Board section.

AUTHORITY

The above is issued by the BBKA Examination Board and all communications in respect of the Examinations should be addressed to:

The Secretary,
BBKA Examination Board,
The British Beekeepers' Association,
National Agricultural Centre,
Stoneleigh,
Kenilworth,
Warwickshire.
CV8 2LZ

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