



KATHARINA CAFOUREK

AN INTERVIEW WITH A JUDGE

Greetings from Switzerland

COULD YOU PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO OUR READERS?

I have been part of the Rhodesian Ridgeback scene since around 2011 - without my own Rhodesian Ridgeback until 2022, but still actively involved. I have been helping out at shows since 2013 and have been on the Executive Board of the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club Switzerland (RRCS) since 2016 (initially as Secretary, since 2018 responsible for shows and Vice President).

Finally in summer 2022 my own Rhodesian Ridgeback: Shumbazino Hatia Feleena, called "Tia", moved in.

Tia accompanies me to the office and is a great office dog. This year we have passed the breeding licence and all health evaluations are OK - so we can start planning for the 2025 litter

WHEN DID YOUR LOVE FOR DOGS BEGIN? CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE DOGS YOU'VE HAD, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT?

I have been in love with animals for as long as I can remember. Unfortunately, my parents didn't want to have pets. My cousin in the Czech Republic had dogs (Afghan hounds) and so every visit was a highlight.

As soon as I moved out I immediately had pets, of course. First rabbits, then cats and finally a dog in 2014.

In 2014, I finally had a job (web agency) where I could take a dog with me. It was almost clear that it would be a Rhodesian Ridgeback. But I didn't want a puppy at the time! Preferably an older dog. But never a young dog! And what did it turn out to be? A 10-month-old female pit bull from the shelter!

Why not a Rhodesian Ridgeback? Because at that time (luckily) there were hardly any adult Ridgebacks for sale in Switzerland. And even those from neighboring countries were no easy dogs.

As I also really liked pit bulls and had been following the animal welfare organization for a long time, I finally ended up with my "Lilo".

Taking in a young dog was a really tough task. Straight into puberty and heat. There were moments when I wanted to reconsider my decision.

Lilo was also a very good teacher in other ways. Absolutely great with (adult) people. She was everyone's favorite and also popular in the office. The absolutely perfect office dog.

She only found other dogs unnecessary and that was also one of the tasks that we had to deal with until the end.

Lilo was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer at the age of 6.5 (February 2020). After that, we only had three months together and I had to say goodbye to her at the beginning of May 2020.

It was always clear that a Rhodesian Ridgeback would move in after Lilo. But the thought was always "it will be in many years" - and suddenly the time had come and I was caught unprepared. It wasn't going to be just any Rhodesian Ridgeback, but exactly THE right one. So the search for a breeder began in spring 2020 and it soon became clear that it would be a puppy from the next litter from Kennel Shumbazino.

The litter was planned for summer 2021. So a year without a dog! At first I was looking forward to this freedom, but after just one month I got bored and "Terence" moved in.

Terence only came to me as a foster dog. This means he will stay with me until he finds a new home - or at



Lilo, 6.5 years, Photographer: Clasa Art, Switzerland

most until the puppy moves in! What can I say... Terence stayed with me for a whole four years.

He wasn't the easiest dog and had problems with other dogs. He moved out twice, but both times he was returned because he bit other dogs.

When "Tia" (Shumbazino Hatia Feleena) was due to move in in 2022, I couldn't bring myself to take Terence back to the shelter. And so he stayed with me as a foster dog and "big brother" to Tia. As incompatible as he could be with other dogs, Tia was allowed to do everything with him and he was always a wonderful big brother to her.

Unfortunately, Terence developed a mast cell tumor in the summer of 2024 and we had to say goodbye to him at the beginning of August.

HOW WHERE YOU INTRODUCED TO THE RHODESIAN RIDGEBACK BREED?

As a child, I discovered the Rhodesian Ridgeback while looking through a dog book. There was actually only a headshot and a short description, but it was clear to me: I was going to get a dog like that!

It was somewhere around 2011 when the wish became more concrete. Work didn't



Tia 7 month, Terence 5 years



CKRR Clubshow 2024, judging, Photographer Forbreeders



allow for it yet, but I informed myself about the breed and took part in Rhodesian Ridgeback walks.

I joined the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club Switzerland (RRCS) in 2013 through this walking group (at that time still completely dogless) and since 2016 I have been an executive board member of the RRCS.

WHEN DID YOU START YOUR CAREER AS A JUDGE, AND WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PURSUE JUDGING ? COULD YOU SHARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR JUDGING JOURNEY?

It was in 2013 when I helped at a dog show for the first time (Clubshow RRCS at the Euro Dog Show in Geneva). That was the start of my "show career". From then on, I regularly helped at RRCS shows and later also at SKG (Swiss Kennel Club) shows.

Through all the helping at the shows, I started to want to become a judge.

I was elected a candidate judge in 2019 and completed my training in 2022. I have been a national breed judge since 2022 and an international Rhodesian Ridgeback judge since 2024.

There are also some highlights in my relatively new career as a judge. One highlight is all the new friendships that have developed throughout the learning process. I have made very good friends across all breeds and formed a joint learning group. They are largely responsible for the fact that I got through the final exams well.

Another highlight was of course the first time judging, which was in the fall of 2022 in Geneva with 47 Rhodesian Ridgebacks.

This fall I had my first judging assignment abroad and was in the Czech Republic at the CKRR club show. I had around 80 Rhodesian Ridgebacks in the ring on each of the two days. A wonderful show which I will certainly remember for a long time.



CKRR Clubshow 2024, judging, Photographer Forbreeders

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR IN YOUR EARLY CAREER ? ARE YOU CURRENTLY MENTORING NEWCOMERS ?

To be honest, no, I didn't have a mentor. At the time when I started my training as a judge, we only had two Rhodesian Ridgeback specialist judges in Switzerland (Lisbeth Mach and Yvonne Schönholzer) and I didn't have any close contact with either of them. I organized my training largely on my own.

Because I am responsible for shows on the RRCS board, I was able to schedule my judging training assignments myself and complete many qualifications. I was always able to gain a lot from every single qualification, whether it was with a specialty judge or a allrounder.

Since I became a judge myself, I have been actively trying to motivate people to become judges. We currently have two trainee judges, one of whom will hopefully pass his judging exam next year and the second of whom has just started her training.

I don't see myself as a mentor for either of them. But I try to help them on their way as best I can, answer any questions and help with the organisation.

IS THERE ANYTHING ABOUT THE BREED THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE CHANGE OR IMPROVE?

At the shows I see many Ridgebacks that could have a better front (forechest, shoulder, upper arm). This

is not always easy to recognise and, in my opinion, is too often ignored in breeding. However, with a trained eye and with the help of your hands, you can easily recognise this.

I think it's a pity when the trend goes in the opposite direction and there are now also Rhodesian Ridgebacks with immense forechests. But even then the angulation and position of the shoulder and upper arm is somehow forgotten. Just because the dog has an insane forechest doesn't mean that his entire front is perfect.

And the 'perfect front' is something that I would most like to improve in the breed or focus on when judging. Partly because it is not clearly recognisable to everyone and is therefore often forgotten.

In addition to the overall conformation, the character of the dogs must not be forgotten. A very important aspect of breeding must be the character of the dogs.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, we no longer live in Africa and hunt lions. Our dogs have to deal with completely different challenges.

WHAT KEY POINT WOULD YOU ADVISE JUDGE TO FOCUS ON WHEN ASSESSING THIS BREED ?

I think it's important to focus on 'fit for function'. I consider purely visual details (coat colour, eye colour, the perfect Ridge, etc.) to be of secondary importance. Of course, these should correspond to the standard!



CKRR Clubshow 2024, judging, Photographer Forbreeders

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU MOST ADMIRE IN A JUDGE ?

A breed standard consists of hundreds of characteristics and each judge focuses on a different area. This is why the results are sometimes one way and sometimes another. I try not to judge a judge primarily on the basis of the results, but a pleasant interaction with the dog and exhibitor is much more important to me.

Not everyone can win. But I think it's nice when every participant feels that they are treated fairly and kindly.

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE AS A JUDGE ?

One thing I have yet to learn is that you have a few less "friends" after judging. Not everyone can handle defeat equally well.

I think it's "worst" at the first judging and with your own breed - you're still new and you know the people. I remember exactly how certain exhibitors stopped talking to me after my first judging.

I wish they had come to me directly with questions.

But I also had a lot of positive feedback, also with regard to my manner. So I couldn't have done that much wrong.

I don't want to see this as a negative experience, but as a neutral experience. Something you only really experience when you've stood in the ring as a judge.

Fortunately, the positive feedback outweighs the negative.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FACING THE BREED TODAY?

Pure-bred breeding in general is facing a challenge today. In our country and in some neighboring countries, the issue of "torture breeding" is becoming more and more prevalent - fortunately, the Rhodesian Ridgeback is mostly unaffected by this.

But I think it is important not to close our eyes to this issue and not to allow "breed blindness".

At shows, only the breed standard, i.e. the exterior, is judged. Perhaps a little bit of the dog's character or training level, but health cannot be judged in the ring.

When choosing a partner for breeding, it is important not only to look at championship titles, but also to get to know the potential partner outside of a show. A close look at the other relatives (of the male and female) is essential for good breeding.

What I would like to mention is that genetic testing is a very good option that we have today. I am absolutely in favour of keeping carrier dogs in breeding. They are a valuable part of genetic diversity. Of course, carriers should only be mated with free dogs!

I also think that the selection of future dog owners is not so easy in today's fast-paced world. This task is still ahead of me for my litter.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO YOUNG, DEDICATED BREEDERS ?

As I am still a young breeder myself (first litter in 2025), I can only pass on what I have decided to do myself.

For me, it's important to go your own way and have your own values. To be honest with yourself and with others. It doesn't benefit your own breeding or the breed in general if things are glossed over or hidden.

A litter cannot always be planned 100% in advance. It is still nature. The important thing is to act to the best of your knowledge and belief and choose the best possible partner.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY  FORBREEDERS.EU

CKRR Clubshow 2023, Tia 1.5 Year old, Photographer Forbreeders

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