Oh those damn dew claws

You can't see them, you can barely find them. Sound familiar? Dew claws are a hallmark of the Briard and it is the responsibility of every judge to make the effort. Think of it as a bend and stretch exercise, part of a healthy heart regimen.

The AKC Standard for the Briard lists 8 disqualifications. We would like to draw your attention to a few that are sometimes overlooked during the course of a show. The most often overlooked, and the omission most easily noticed by handlers and spectators, is the dew claws. This omission brings us the most complaints.

While the standard requires two dew claws on each hind leg it is not unusual to find three dew claws on one or both legs, hence the wording, "less than two dew claws on each rear leg". When the dew claws are very low on the leg it may be advantageous to run the hand from the ground up rather than from the hock down to more easily find them.

An item that seems to be causing confusion is the admonition against a white spot on the chest exceeding one inch in diameter. All three colors black, tawny and grey may carry a small white mark on the chest. It is perfectly acceptable so long as the mark does not exceed one inch in diameter at the skin. The length of the white hair is not the criterion. In the tawny Briard the confusion seems to extend even further. Some tawny dogs, especially young ones, have cream-colored hair on the throat. Cream is not white. Think Westies, think Bichons. That's white.

With more gray and/or blue Briards being seen today the judge must be exceedingly careful in evaluating the color of the nose. The standard clearly disqualifies any color other than black. Though it's not necessary to distinguish between the blue and the gray by looking at the coat color, it is important to look at the color of the nose. The blue Briard carries the same dilution factor as the blue Dane or the blue Dobe. If the nose of the Briard is gray, however dark, it must be disqualified. When in doubt compare the nose color with a black or tawny dog.

Last but not least is the height disqualification. Occasionally in the puppy classes one sees a dog whose height is questionable. Briard puppies are cute and several go on to win the points. Others may be left at the end of the line because of the judge's indecision about the height of the dog. We understand your time constraints, but if you are in doubt you must call for the wicket. Disqualifying faults are the price we pay for seeking perfection in our breed. We breeders and exhibitors must live with them. You as judges have an obligation to abide by them. To do anything less does a disservice to us and to your reputation.