
THE IFGA'S NOVICE CHAMPIONSHIP AWARD

By E.T. Mellor

The IFGA's Novice Championship Award is one of the best kept secrets in the guppy hobby, most likely because this award's purpose, scope and eligibility requirements are slightly different from most of the other accumulated point awards sponsored by the IFGA. In addition, each regional club places a different value on the Novice Championship so newer members are not always well informed about the potential pitfalls and helpful strategies related to this award, never mind those who do not have the luxury of belonging to a regional club.

Clearly, the purpose of the Novice Championship and the related novice classes at each show is to encourage newcomers to the hobby to show their fish. Ideally, this encouragement creates more serious guppy hobbyists as they gain both experience and success in the hobby and they will continue to fill the ranks of competitors in other classes at shows in future years.

Four novice classes are offered at every IFGA show: Novice Delta, Novice Tank, Novice Female and Novice Veil/Sword. Points won in any and all of these four classes are accumulated through the show season, and the exhibitor with the highest point total at the end of the season is the Novice Champion for that year. Novice exhibitors who place in Best of Show will receive points toward either Grand Overall Male Award or the Grand Overall Female Award, but these points do not count toward the Novice Championship. Neither do points received by beginners who place in any of the color classes count toward the Novice Championship. Only points won in novice classes count toward the Novice Championship.

Novice classes are a place for beginner guppy hobbyists to show against other beginners. The rules for the IFGA sponsored shows state that "the novice classes are open to anyone over 16 years of age who has never won an IFGA Annual Award (except the Junior Championship)." Annual Awards are bestowed on exhibitors who have placed first through fourth in the point standings in any class at the end of the show season, including novice. To be complete, it must be said that in Grand Overall Male and Female, annual awards are given to the top ten competitors. Anyone

placing in the top ten in these two classes would also be ineligible for novice in the next season. I commend the IFGA for creating the Novice Award and the related classes, they serve a good purpose. Prohibiting hobbyists who have won an Annual Award from showing in novice may seem overly restrictive to some. However, other than not being well known or well understood, these restrictions are appropriate. The creation of novice classes allows beginner hobbyists to "test the waters" with their fish and see how they measure up against other beginners, without having to endure the stiff competition present in the open classes where they could be competing against experienced breeders.

This same limitation, however, also creates one of the biggest problems associated with the Novice Championship, in that if you wish to win this award someday or continue to compete in novice classes, you must be careful not to lose your eligibility to show in novice. To a newcomer, it probably seems far-fetched that someone who isn't really trying to win an award might actually end up in fourth place or better in any class at the end of the year. However, your eligibility can be lost quite easily if you aren't paying attention to the details. There is one type of class most likely to negatively affect eligibility to show in novice classes. This is a class that through the season only has been entered by two or three different exhibitors. If this pattern continues for the whole season, all you will have to do to come in third or fourth at the end of the season is take one fourth place and you've won an Annual Award making you ineligible for novice classes.

Thus, it is incumbent on exhibitors who aspire to win the Novice Championship or even continue to enter novice classes to safeguard against the loss of their eligibility. To do this, make sure you have up-to-date standings and/or a complete set of show results for the season in question. Before you enter any class, ask yourself if you are at risk of winning enough points to propel you to the top four places in the standings. Loss of eligibility has happened to many exhibitors: if you are serious about winning the Novice Championship or even continuing to show in novice classes, don't let it happen to you.

From year to year, the level of competition for the Novice Championship Award varies quite a bit, ranging from three or four people competing heavily to no competitors at all. When no one seems intent on campaigning to win this award, an exhibitor who has done well in two local shows might suddenly start shipping to the last few shows, having realized that he or she is in first or second place and could with a little

effort, take the award, You never know in advance what kind of year it will be; thus, anyone really desiring to compete for this award should assume it will be a real battle and start accumulating as many points as possible,

You are best off sending four entries to every novice class your fish can compete in. Special emphasis should be placed on the Novice Tank class, which is worth twice the amount of points as each of the other three classes and often has less entries than Novice Delta or even Novice Female. Novice exhibitors who are just testing the waters and are not serious about the Novice Championship often do not enter the Tank class while there will always be quite a few local entries in both Delta and Female, some of them quite competitive. It is not common for a novice to show both deltas and veil and/or swords; however, those who do will put themselves at an obvious advantage. Ideally, having four entries in each of the four novice classes at every show, particularly during the first half of the show season, will give you the best chance for success. The beginning of the season is important because, if you can quickly establish a formidable lead, others aspiring to the award may hold off from showing concern that they will only come in third or fourth and lose their chance to ever win the Novice Championship.

Let's say you've decided to compete seriously for the Novice Championship; preparation should start even earlier than a year before the target season. Clearly you will want to start early on setting up a line that produces show quality females. Over the '98 season, many of the females that won the Novice Female class were 18 to 24 months old. Since a large proportion of points in judging females is based on size, begin growing some really large females, early. Many a Novice Championship has been decided by the quality of females the exhibitors have shown throughout the season.

Secondly, do you have both delta and veil or sword entries? Exhibitors who do can amass a large number of points at each show. Often beginners don't have limitless tank space, but it might make sense, if you do have enough space to set up a nice line of veils or swords to go along with your delta entries to the show.

The toughest question you may have to ask yourself is if the color of your fish is likely to show well against other colors. In a novice class, all colors compete against each other and are judged in much the same way as are entries in Best of Show competitions. Generally, some colors show better against other colors; one look at a season's worth of Best of Show results will reveal that reds, red albinos, half black AOCs, blues and half black pastels are almost always at the top, with half black purples, blues, half black blues, greens, purples and pastels also doing quite well. Of course, much of the fun of this hobby comes from raising fish that are pleasing you; however, if you are serious about the Novice Championship, you may want to assess realistically the competitive quality of your current color. The same is also true for females as reds, half black reds, half black AOCs and blacks consistently show well against other color females in best of show. Keep in mind that you can put pairs of veils or swords in the Novice Tank class, tank classes are not just for deltas.

Once you have selected and started growing the females, decided whether to show a line of veils or swords and chosen what color deltas you want to show, it's time to work hard with your fish and get them ready for the target season. Once you have some fish that are show ready, it will make a great deal of sense to test the waters by shipping and entering a few shows. Ideally, this will coincide with the second half of the previous season, so that you will have a good idea of the standings and points already won in each class. Get advice on shipping fish to shows if you haven't done it before. Keeping in mind the need to maintain your novice eligibility, enter one or two fish in a novice class, and enter one or two fish in their correct color class. If you place at all in the open class or if you place fairly well in the novice class, you can figure that your fish are of a quality to make a reasonably serious attempt at winning the Novice Championship.

Hopefully, this article will be of some help to aspiring novice competitors - that is certainly my intent. The issue of exhibitors losing their eligibility to show in a novice class is not meant to discourage people from showing, simply to explain the rules so people can make informed decisions. I know showing my fish has been a great deal of fun for me, and while I was competing for the Novice Championship, the advice of my fellow club members was invaluable. I trust this article will encourage and assist future novice competitors. ■

