

The Road to Grand Champion

as told by Clearview Lily, a B-sized, Semi-Cactus, Dark Blend (B SC DB) Dahlia
to a reporter for the Mahoning Valley Dahlia Society's *Buds and Blooms*

After a spring and summer of being started in the greenhouse, moved to the garden, being watered and fertilized, topped, staked, disbranched, and disbudded the big day finally came. My handlers, Harriet Chandler and Jim Chuey, chose me to go the MVDS 2023 Dahlia Show! I was so excited and a bit nervous. Harriet told me to keep my chin up (at a 45-degree angle) and to stand up tall and straight. Harriet and Jim secured me for transport and off we went.

Upon arrival we found a beehive of activity and there were so many flowers! Now I really was nervous. I was placed in a vase and set on a table with other similar blooms. The next morning a group of three judges and someone with a paper and pencil (the clerk) came and started scrutinizing me. I learned that first I would compete with other B-sized Semi-Cactus blooms. First, these folks just stood back and stared at me. Then they checked the back of my bloom to look for damage.

Next, I heard them say they were checking my form and that it was 30% of my score. They verified that the face of my bloom presented a symmetrical, circular outline and that my petal depth (front to back) was full. They checked that my lower petals were not longer than the others, resulting in something called bearding. Of course, I don't have a beard! Then they checked that my bloom was centered on my stem and that the center of my bloom was round, closed (no pollen showing) but not too tight - showing that I had been opening for a while and was not some young whipper snapper.

They moved on to evaluating my color, another important attribute (20% of my score). They looked for uniform color distribution (no splotches, streaks, odd petals, etc.). They whispered that one color was not better than another and that the judges need to put aside their color preferences. Since I am a blend they checked that my colors merged in a pleasing manner.

They remarked that my stem was nice and straight and that my foliage was not too close to my bloom, was symmetrical, and showed a nice balance with my bloom.

They said I had good substance, meaning that my petals were fresh, clean, springy, and firm. At this time, they also checked for no fading, burning, bruising, mildew, insect damage, or spray deposits.

These guys didn't miss anything. Did I say I was nervous? Finally, I was chosen as the Best B-sized Semi-Cactus dahlia in the show. Wow! Did I win? Did I win?

No. I found out I had to do the whole process again, to be chosen as the Best B-sized Cactus. I competed (same criteria as the first round) with the straight cactus winner, the lacinated winner, and the incurved cactus winner. They were all beautiful, but I prevailed. This meant that I got placed on the Court, the table at the front of the room where the very best blooms are displayed. But there is more to come.

I stayed on the court for a while and then some of us (the winners in all the AA, A, and B classes) were moved to a smaller table and some really serious looking judges came and looked at us. They didn't say much but wrote their choice for Grand Champion on little pieces of paper.

When the votes were tallied it was me, it was me! I was named the Grand Champion! I was moved to a center location on the court and adorned with a rosette and a sign with my name and Harriet's and Jim's names. We were all so proud of our hard work! We were also proud to be part of such a wonderful show that was viewed by many. We thank all the many workers who made the show possible.

Look for one of my protégés next year!