

Contest Guidelines: How to Win the Canadian Blondes Photo Contest

The following is intended to help budding photographers understand why some photos win and others don't. These guidelines consist of a brief introduction into the judging criteria that will be used by the Canadian Blonde d'Aquitaine Contest Judge and are by no means comprehensive. They should give you a start in the right direction.

Our judging process calls upon the evaluations of a skilled photographer and judge. So many excellent entries are submitted to the contest, we have to be brutal. The voting process unfortunately eliminates many good images.

The winning photographs you see posted on the Association website feature a strong combination of the assets we seek in an image. These include: thoughtful attention to lighting, eye-catching color; balanced composition; sharpness; correct exposure; and a host of other elements. Here's some thoughts you can use as a guideline.

Know the Ropes

First and foremost, read the Photo Criteria. We don't ask for much, but these rules reveal much to the discerning contestant. For example, our brief and simple terms state that only five images can be entered into the contest each month. If you send more than five, we will only look at the top five, and we sure don't want to pass over any great images because the contestant had not read this part of the rules.

Look Sharp

We evaluate the image against traditional standards of sharpness. The picture, above all, needs to be in focus (or, if the picture features some blurriness, it has to be a clearly intentional, artistic use of blur by the photographer). Photos that suffer from camera shake or other focus mistakes are eliminated very early in the judging process.

We generally notice two levels of unsharpness in the images submitted:

- Some photos are obviously, and unintentionally, blurry. If the blurriness is detrimental to the photo, the image is usually eliminated early on.
- There are many other photos which are just slightly out of focus, or soft. When this appears to be unintentional and dissatisfying, the picture receives a lower score.

Picture Perfect Exposure

Images look different from one computer to another. What may be dark on a PC may appear extremely light on a Macintosh, for example. Therefore, judging exposure takes a back seat to judging sharpness. But it is still important.

Is it underexposed? Is the snow blue instead of white? Is the image faint and hard to see? Does it look like it may have been a nice image before it was poorly scanned? Does the photo show pleasing colours with clarity and correct exposure? Can you make out the details in the shadows? Clarity and resolution of the photo - being able to enjoy the details of an image - mean a lot.

Don't Distract the Viewer

If you have read this far, you deserve a reward. Here are two things most people don't know:

- Your judge has a general dislike to borders. Borders are all too often placed around mediocre photos in an attempt to "dress them up". It's important that your photo stand on its own.
- We support putting your own copyright symbol on your photos. However, if you are going to do this, try to keep the signature and copyright symbol from becoming too distracting. One trick is to colour your font so that it works harmoniously with the other colours in your photo.
- We do not support having a date and time on your photo. Please remove that option from your camera when taking your picture. Certainly date and time stamps can be creatively covered up for the web, but it is not quite as easy for print.

Study the Winners and Keep Your Chin Up

If you are still uncertain about what makes a winning contest photo, carefully review the winners again and again. Ask yourself, why was this photo selected? What are the top qualities about it?

So, grab your camera, get out there, and give it your best shot. If you think you are ready, enter today!