Dykes Medal Iris at the Case Estates

The highest award an iris can receive in the United States is the Dykes Medal sponsored by the American Iris Society. Usually the long climb upward to this honor begins when the iris receives the High Commendation (H.C.) award as an unintro-
duced seedling. Once it has been introduced it can be consid-
ered for the Honorable Mention (H.M.) award. After this award is given, two years must elapse before it is eligible for the Award of Merit (A.M.); a maximum of twelve iris may receive this award in a single year. Again, two years must pass after winning the A.M. before a plant is eligible for the Dykes Medal; only one medal is allowed each year.

More than 500 named cultivars of iris are introduced into commerce annually, so one can understand how small the chance is that an iris will eventually win the Dykes Medal. When dealers list an iris as having recently won this coveted award, one can be reasonably sure that it is excellent from almost all standpoints. A gardener should feel confident when buying such an iris that it is an aristocrat.

The American Iris Society has registered more than 600 au-
thorized judges in the United States, many of whom have wide leanings regarding their likes and dislikes in iris. If, when the votes are finally tabulated for the Dykes Medal, no variety receives at least 15 percent of all the votes, the award is not given that year. This situation occurred in 1946, 1960 and 1969.

Formerly, the Arnold Arboretum attempted to maintain a collection of all the Dykes Medal winners from 1927 to the present in the display area of the Case Estates in Weston, Massachusetts. This was not only difficult but of questionable value to the average gardener. Some of the older cultivars like 'San Francisco', which won the award in 1927, were bred in California and were either trying or impossible to grow in our New England climate. Other older varieties had little appeal except from a historical standpoint. If a gardener took a liking to one of these, chances were it would have been unavailable in the trade for a long time; even award winners going back much beyond 15 years are not readily obtained.
Iris 'Winter Olympics'. Photo: G. Pride.
A new bed of Dykes Medal iris has been established at the Case Estates in the area near the daffodil collection. Starting with 1957, an arbitrarily selected year, the line up is as follows:

1958: 'Blue Sapphire', a heavy substanced light blue.
1959: 'Swan Ballet', a ruffled white self.
1960: no award
1962: 'Whole Cloth', a new pattern in white and medium blue.
1965: 'Pacific Panorama', a large, ruffled sea-blue.
1966: 'Rippling Waters', an outstanding blue-orchid and cream blend.
1967: 'Winter Olympics', an intensely ruffled, large white self.
1968: 'Stepping Out', an excellent snow-white with blue-violet markings.
1969: no award
1970: 'Skywatch', a very large, ruffled lavender self.
1971: 'Debby Rairdon', a beautiful white and soft yellow.
1972: 'Babbling Brook', a ruffled blue.
1973: 'New Moon', a large ruffled, light yellow self.

It takes so long for an iris to receive a Dykes Medal that usually ample stock is available in the trade by then, and the price is reasonable considering the high quality of the cultivar.

We were fortunate to have all these varieties donated by members of the "Friends of the Arnold Arboretum" so that no expense was involved in obtaining the rhizomes.

The tall bearded iris generally are in full flower during the first week in June; an excellent time to view this small but potentially effective display.

George H. Pride