



Breed Type

BY Melanie Sinclair

Breed Type – that most elusive concept that is yet so obvious when you see it! If you show your dog, or are involved in the world of dog breeding, you will often hear the phrase ‘typey’. You will read critiques telling you that a particular specimen has type in abundance. This topic generates hot debate and has been written about since people began crafting breed standards. I am sure I am not alone in having the desire to hear from those steeped in our own breed, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, all about their views on type.

Tony Lee agrees that it is a much debated topic, *“Type is a very difficult term to define – chapters in books have been devoted to the subject without a truly clear resolution.”* Richard Beauchamp, in his book, *Solving the Mysteries of Breed Type*, asserts that *“Knowing what was originally intended for our breeds is critical,”* and that *“If we pay respect to nothing else, it should at least be to what the creators of the breed intended.”* He argues that following this principle will help avoid exaggeration, stating that breeders, *“...seem in constant danger of believing that if a characteristic is called for at all, then the more of it a dog has the better!”*

When asked about this comment, Lesley McFadyen offered that *“The only characteristic I would want in excess in a Stafford, and continually get, is a big heart!”* So, what about temperament?

The original purpose of the SBT, as we all know, was as a fighting dog, but with that tenacity and stoic acceptance of hardship, a fierce loyalty to

its people. Lesley McFadyen describes a particular dog that for her exudes breed type as, *“A hard dog to handle in the ring with fire in his belly at the touch of a button, also a sweet dog with two leggeds, as it should be.”*

Many will air the view that the temperament of the breed has changed, they have less ‘fire in the belly’ as an apparent desire for a quieter and less feisty dog affects selection for breeding. Alan Hedges shares his concern that this aspect of the breed has changed for the worse. *“The times we live in means temperament is slowly being washed away and the breed is not what it was.”*

When asked how breed type had evolved during their time in the breed the majority felt that basic type had stayed the same.

Archie Bryden: *“To me breed type is that combination of factors that makes a dog recognizable as being of the particular breed without having to be analysed. Thus on that point I feel that basic type has stayed the same overall since I started in early 80s.”*

Alan Hedges: *“I don't think type changes ... A dog that had type the day I started would still have it now.”*





Breed Type

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CONTINUED

Lesley McFadyen: *"I'm not sure that type can 'evolve' – it is what defines a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. There will always be differing opinions on what people think of as good 'type', veering from the heavier, more bully type to the lesser, more terrier type ... For me what epitomises type is the when you see a dog from a distance and know almost instantly that it is a Stafford not only by its shape but by its manner."*

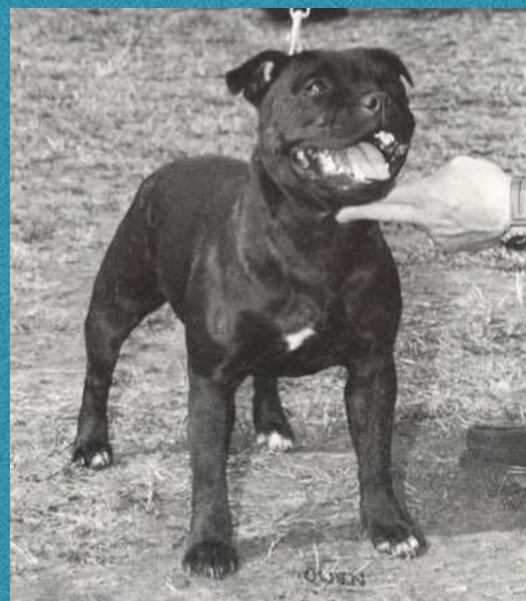
Julie Gray referred also to the distinction made by some between 'bully' and 'terrier' type, and was *"extremely worried a few years back about what appeared to be a split appearing in the breed with three types appearing terrier/athletic, bully, and the correct blend of bull and terrier i.e. Standard. I had several discussions with Clare Lee about how standard dogs appear 'plain' when aside more exaggerated versions. I was genuinely concerned that we may end up like the Akita or the German Shepherd with distinct differences in type."*

Tony Lee sums it up nicely, *"Staffords are the combination of 'bull' and 'terrier' types, but the golden egg is melding these two into the 'bull-terrier', the ideal of which differs from person to person."*

Personal preference obviously comes into breeding and judging dogs, and there will always be studs that are popular and dogs that do exceptionally well in the ring. It is possible to hear exhibitors and breeders commenting that a dog is of quality but not the type that are winning just now. Some express concern that

features are becoming exaggerated, in particular the head. Did our panel have any concern that fashion had eroded function?

Norman Berry believes that there *"may be a case for thinking so. We have tried in the last thirty years to rid the Stafford of its physical deficient properties and in doing so certain old aspects have disappeared along with it. One outstanding point being the rolling gait we used to associate the Stafford with is now a rarity. We now wish for a more straight boned front and by doing so we now find narrow front and more refined head being the order of the day which takes away the pugnacious look which was most common in the past. I wouldn't say that there has been too much erosion within the breed - this statement coming from a breeder who was in favour of what has now become the norm - but we now find type is more difficult to observe as a result, and, where it is found, type must be accepted and rewarded."*





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CONTINUED

Dean Cund agrees that fashion plays its part, *“Without doubt fashion has dictated the type of Stafford we now see in the ring today ... Breed type changes due to breeders losing site of what the breed’s original function was, instead they focus on certain points that they find desirable instead of what’s functional. Some breeders can’t see past a good head while losing sight of other aspects.”*

Dean believes that judges and breeders/exhibitors must share responsibility for this, and observes that while judges state they can only award what is brought before them it is a fact that exhibitors will show the style and type of dog that they believe the judge will put up. He states that breeders/exhibitors and judges, *“must share equal blame and strive to promote functional Staffords over what has become fashionable,”* and cautions that, *“Over the last forty or so years breeders have gravely insulted the careful work of evolution by breeding dogs with eyes that can’t see, legs that can’t run dogs that can’t breathe, or naturally reproduce.”*

Jack Coats’ observations over the years have seen breeders nowadays striving for that more balanced dog, *“When I started there were a good few very heavy set dogs with not a lot of light under them. In this respect, I feel the breed has improved for the better ... the construction of the dogs has in my opinion improved, with much more athleticism in their makeup. Nowadays I feel that the balance of Bull and Terrier is much better.”* However, with the recent

decline in numbers of Staffords Jack has noted a reduction in the depth of quality of bitches.

Tony Lee notes that *“In my fifty odd years in the breed, there have been some shifts in type. The dogs used to be much more variable with some horrendous (too wide) fronts and top-lines more like ski slopes, but they were much more macho. Today, some of these have been corrected and perhaps overdone it with the fronts, and backs have been levelled but bringing in sloping croups. Nowadays we don’t see as many of the snipey terrier types with poor stops and slitty eyes. The abundance of well-sprung ribs seems to belong to yesteryear. Overall, the breed has become more uniform, albeit refined, but many of the bitches are too refined and are what one could only describe as ‘delicate’. Nowhere does it say that that they should be a different shape to the dog. It should only be their weight. I believe that it is the strength of the bitches that govern the strength of the breed as a whole.”*

Lesley McFadyen also cautions against exaggeration, *“Serious breeders and exhibitors now appear to have more concern for overall conformation but must be aware that the best Staffords must not only be fit for function (and function in today’s world must mean the ability to live an active and healthy life as opposed to the breed’s original function) but must also conform to the Breed Standard, exude breed type and not follow fashion trends to extreme.”*



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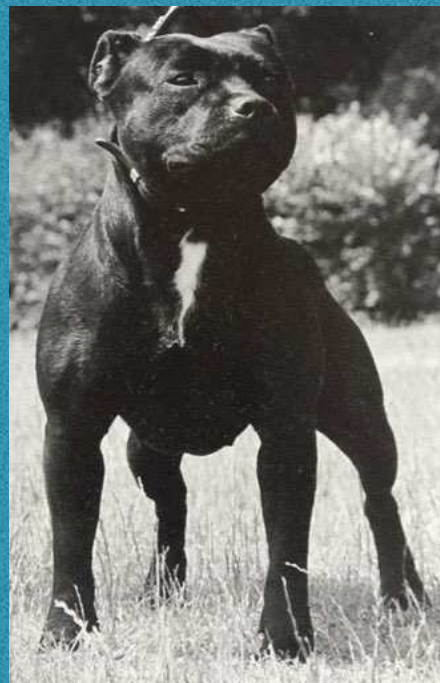
Archie Bryden acknowledges that fashion has an effect but believes it is limited, *“we do have swings of fashion but inevitably there is a swing back sooner or later, which normally happens if the ‘swing’ is leading to exaggeration. Some judges, including highly respected ones, have been called ‘head hunters’ over the years but most of those are looking for good strong heads but not coarse, overdone, possibly lippy, ones. We must remember that the head is the hallmark of type with virtually all breeds. The same goes for dogs of a lighter build or a slightly leggier type. Some may prefer this but again there may come the point when they become too light and most importantly lacking in bone that the inevitable reaction sets in. Thus despite fashion there will always be a reversion to what most will regard as good type without gross exaggeration.”*

So, a definite note of caution against exaggeration, a focus on fitness for the modern function of the breed and positivity about the balance of the dogs being bred and exhibited today. Breeders, of course, aim to surpass the previous generation, so what do our panel believe are the improvements over their time in the breed?

Archie Bryden notes an improvement in eye shape, *“Since the 80s when some with very oval or slitty eyes did pretty well despite the terrible expressions these produced. Again some, often with poor eye shape, had ‘ski slope’ stops or rather virtual non-existence of stop and these are rare today.”*

Alan Hedges observes that soundness has improved in the breed, and Jack Coats agrees, elaborating that, *“I think the construction of the dogs has improved a lot, fronts, and shoulder assembly especially are I feel much better than thirty years ago, and therefore with better construction the movement has improved along with it.”* Dean Cund agrees that fronts have improved, *“... we now see fronts that are straight along with much better feet which are much tighter and well-padded rarely now do we see the flat splayed feet which were once so evident in the breed.”* Lesley McFadyen highlights that breeders now pay more attention to conformation.

Julie Gray notes a, *“... greater awareness of health issues in the breed nowadays and on the whole the breed has embraced testing that is available.”*





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CONTINUED

One of my interviewees said that they find breed type hard to put into words but they know it when they see it. I thought that it would be interesting for the purposes of this article to ask contributors to name the three Staffords that they felt exhibited outstanding breed type, and to explain why. The dogs chosen represent the breed over decades, from the past to the present, some very well known and others not so. If you are an 'every day is a learning day' type of character you may wish to make your own notes on these dogs and consider who your personal top three would be, and how you would justify your choices.

Aus/Uk.Ch. Koendidda Umrumm.

Top pick dog, chosen by three interviewees for his strong fiery expression and bodily make up along with typical temperament, a good physical example of a male Stafford he also had tremendous presence and attitude, temperament.



Ch. Eastaff Noire Fille Top pick bitch, again chosen by three for her exceptional class, was a lovely bitch, displayed feminism with sufficient substance. Around in the late 1980's she would have easily competed favourably today.

Ch Jamarvans Femme Fatale of Vanoric came up twice, made up from junior back in 1996, she was all I was looking for.

Ch Valglo Casanova at Crossguns No dog can win 40CCs under so many judges without having breed type in abundance. I was one of that many and he was 'spot on' in all respects on the day. I first saw him casually outside the ring as a youngster and you could see at a glance he had that 'wow' factor even then.

CH Clairwell Lady in Red and CH Bellglen Braws Best.

Both were exceptional red bitches, strength and femininity, stunning heads and expression, I really liked their body proportions

CH Stormlodge Ann Bonny

She exuded Stafford with an impression of great strength, always in great nick condition wise, she was a shapely bitch with a strong backend she looked as though she had it together. I loved her head and expression and she had presence.



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CONTINUED

Ch. Taraiel Ciara

Oozing type and femininity.

Ch Bellerophen Bevin Boy

All you could wish for. Colour, structure, movement and of course - type.

Ch Sparstaff Dodgy Docker

The complete package on the day so no more to be said.

Ch. Aboriginal Warrior Queen



Lesley's third choice "no one will know, but I would have to say *my first Stafford, Pepper, KC name Lively Lass: a bitch that we brought in to our home in the mid 1970s when my family was young. We bought her from Fazakerley in Liverpool, with dogs in her pedigree from Betchgreen and Raparree lines, although that meant nothing to me at the time. Without even knowing it she taught me exactly what the breed is about, being the best possible family dog.... a wonderful friend to my growing family, not an aggressor but certainly capable with other dogs when the occasion arose she showed me what true Stafford temperament is and that is the essence of our breed as far as I see it.*"

Ch Dare To Dream



Ch Spirestaff Jimmy Jazz



Another of our panel says this - "All 3 above (side and below) dogs are outstanding examples of the breed in my opinion devoid of exaggeration every part just flowed displaying a great picture of balance and athleticism which for me is essential for our breed."

Ch Cragail's Black'een



I think this sums up something very important—how Staffords capture your heart and keep it for life! On this point judges, breeders, exhibitors and pet owners will always agree.