



Canine Structure and Compensations

by E. Katie Gammill, AKC Judge, TheDogPlace.org Exhibition Editor

Words associated with structure sometimes need clarification for breeders and dog show judges. That's when what we thought we knew becomes NEW knowledge.

Thank you to those allowing the use of the images for this article. The dogs in this article were selected for their virtues in construction.



BALANCE: To “equalize” or “arrange” elements with each other resulting in more perfect harmony. When a judge rewards this “more pleasing arrangement” as correct, do two wrongs make a right? Why is it easier to win with a dog that is wrong at both ends than it is to win with an outstanding dog with a single fault.

FAULT JUDGING: Passing on an exceptional dog due to a single weakness and accepting something totally incorrect simply because it does nothing wrong. Balance is simply an “excuse”.

SYMMETRY IS BALANCE WITHOUT EXAGGERATION

Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Symmetry is “balanced proportions.” It brings something into a pleasing arrangement. Dog judges with an “eye” see the dog as a whole. “Filling the eye” means no one thing out of place. Therefore, when the eye is drawn to a particular part of any animal such as rear, coat, front, or head, it usually is incorrect because it is IN EXAGGERATION. Many judges

carry a template in their head and fit the dog into it. Having an “eye” means a judge recognizes symmetry. Dogs filling that “eye” have not been “jury-rigged” or rectified by nature due to incompatible faults.

COMPENSATIONS FOR FRONT INCORRECTNESS

Something of interest can be seen in the head proportions. Be it a “balanced” (there’s that word again) head piece or one with shorter muzzle than back skull, take note the length from nose tip to the occipital bone is often the same length as the occipital bone to the withers. If this occurs, the front legs will be beneath the body where they belong.

The bulldog standard depicts this beautifully. Draw a line through the withers. The head and neck will set” in front of “that line. Drop the line to fall on the front toes. If the head sits directly on the withers, you have a “straight front”. Dogs reach only as far as the shoulder lays back. A straight front places



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the legs further forward on the narrow part of the rib cage. Behind each elbow will be a “pocket”. Straight fronts cause the dog to reach from the elbow rather than reaching and opening the shoulder. This dog may pad, wing out, bow out, or “crab” to get out of the way of its driving rear. It’s nature’s adjustment that allows the dog to function. Head and neck proportions are visible as early as 12 weeks of age. If puppy doesn’t have a neck at this age, it won’t grow one!

COMPENSATIONS FOR REAR

OVERANGULATION

Over-angulation can be seen at 3 months. Lift the hock gently, raise it toward the ischium or BUTT bone. If it meets perfectly, the upper and lower thigh is of the same length. This balance creates the

perpendicular and parallel hock. If the hock passes the butt bone, the pup is overt angulated and won’t change. If it doesn’t reach the butt bone, the dog will stand under itself. Some stacked dog continually adjust their feet despite a handler’s efforts to smooth out the top line.

Over-angulated rears are usually cow-hocked. They bow in or out when moving. The entire hock may lie on the ground when trotting. In an effort to avoid running over the front, the hind toes may curl on the follow through to buy a few seconds of timing. Some dogs kick too high behind and some will have a “ping” or “hitch” every few steps to coordinate the rear drive with the restricted front movement. Again, nature solves a “timing issue”.

When the front is more correct than the rear, the dog will be “sickle or locked hocked”. The rear reach should equal the follow through motion. Due to a short front stride, this rear action CANNOT be completed and the result is obvious on side movement. Dogs “stacked” may appear more level, but many have a “carp back”. This “carp” accommodates the lack of balance and allows the lower assembly to propel the dog forward. (Re: Front action is lifting, bowing, padding) Shepherds in Germany and the US reflect both types and dogs are analyzed in the context of which they appear. The standard “higher at withers, sloping into a level back, without sag or roach” is pretty explicit.





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COMMONALITIES BETWEEN BREEDS

Breeds have commonalities, so view the skeletons. From the withers to the back of the ribs cage is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the back length. From the back of the ribs to the hip bones is $\frac{1}{3}$ of the length, thus making the whole. These proportions reflect a short back and long underline. This enables the dog to function efficiently. Different breeds describing proportions consider measuring different ways, but this works. Draw a line through the withers and it falls on the front leg. Draw a line from the ischium bone and it will drop slightly in front of the rear toe. This is a symmetrical dog!

Not being a vet, I don't speak in medical terms. I have lived with a savvy horseman over half a century and am a great observer of horses and dogs. Participating in judging contests and sitting a saddle makes one aware of structural faults. One might consider that different breeds of horses have evolved by the concentration of a particular fault or virtue to the extent it becomes a new breed such as the Tennessee Walker, Paso Fino, trotter, pacer, Saddle Bred and Arabian. Each breed is balanced and perfected for its intended function and type. However, some gaits are intensified by strenuous training techniques, weights, or consistent breeding of a physical trait.



Not all judges and breeders will understand this. Today's breeders have an opportunity to apply this information to their dogs. Sitting ringside watching conformation and competitive events of both horses and dogs is educational.

It also explains the joy of being a judge. It's the continuous search for the animal excelling in structure, movement, and breed type, one that "fills the eye" and makes the heart beat faster!

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