

The Top Line of the S.B.T.

When people refer to the top line they mean the vertebrae of the spinal column from the base of the neck to the beginning of the tail. When judge's critique's mention that a particular dog has a level top line, they don't, or at least shouldn't mean a perfectly level one as this would be an incorrect top line because the seven vertebrae of the withers slope down towards the rest of the top line.

"...SO THE SET OF THE TAIL IS DETERMINED BY THE SLOPE OF THE CROUP"

The part of the top line that should be level is the actual six vertebrae of the back and then the seven vertebrae over the loins should rise very slightly before the three vertebrae of the croup slope slightly towards the tail. The three vertebrae of the croup which are fused together should slope ideally at 30 degrees which then provides the correct angle for the tail to be set, allowing it to hang immediately downwards from the body without first rising at the beginning. So the set of the tail is determined by the slope of the croup. The tail, as a guide should ideally hang down in a pump handle fashion and reach approximately to the hock when being examined.

If there is a dip in the top line starting from, or close to the withers, then along the back before having a severe rise over the loins, it is what is known as a sway back.

If the dog has a rise starting soon after the withers and has a severe rise over the loins, it is commonly known as a roach back. Both of these of course are faults because it means that the five vertebrae of the actual back will not be level. If the spine slopes towards the front it will be taking up valuable space from the thorax cavity, which is needed by the lungs and heart.

Also when the spine slopes to the front, the neck will be set low on the body affecting the head carriage. The neck and head are used in ways of helping balance when moving and if a sudden stop is required the head is jerked backwards and has some affect in acting as a brake. So a neck that is set low on the body is not as anatomically sound as when the six vertebrae of the back are level.

When the top line is as level as it should be, the initial thrust that is generated from the rear legs is transmitted more easily and more powerfully up the sloping croup and along the vertebrae of the loins which also take the shock of the front feet as they hit the ground and the attached muscles generate the power to lift the front legs again to the normal level.

Sometimes a dog will have short front legs in comparison to the back legs which would make for the back end to be higher than the front and more so if the stifle is straight, not having sufficient angulation.

If the slope on the croup is too severe and the rear legs go somewhat further under the body than necessary the thrust would be more upwards causing lack of drive in the forwards direction.

The seven vertebrae of the withers have spires on them that angle towards the rear of the dog to support ligaments from the neck. The six vertebrae of the back have spires that point slightly towards the front to support the ligaments from the rear. Where the spires of the withers meet the spires of the back there is a little niche. This is where the ninth rib is and if it is followed down to the sternum (breast bone) which should be parallel with the ground up to this point, the length of the ribs start to decrease in length. If the ribs start to decrease in length before the ninth rib, the heart and lungs will be robbed of valuable space.

Tony Brindley - (Cabrinde)



Joe Dunn with the first champion Stafford - Ch Lady Eve