

**JUDGING THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER –  
THE “KFC” DOG - “Kindly, Friendly and Confident”  
Sandra Patterson (Buffalo Kennels)**

*All Breeds Judge and Golden Retriever owner for 45 years.  
Approved “A1” List – Golden Retriever Club UK*

*The photos in this article are of Goldens that are either resident or have been resident in Australia. They illustrate good examples of the breed. My thanks to the owners for permission to use these pictures.*

I keep hearing how difficult many people find judging the Golden Retriever. Comments such as “*they are all so different*” - “*which one is right*” are commonplace?

A golden is “right” if it displays the characteristics correct for the breed, regardless of the kennel prefix and “style” or whether it is gold or cream in colour.

The Breed Standard is brief, with little detail, leaving so much open to personal interpretation. This year our Golden Retriever National Breed Council submitted a proposal to the Kennel Club (UK) to amend the Standard in the hope that important aspects of the breed are included and, therefore, highlighted to those learning about the breed. Quite a task from “Down under”, but it demonstrates the concern amongst breeders with the direction in which the breed is heading.



It really isn't hard to judge the golden retriever if you remember the basic principles to look for and to apply. I don't intend to go into great depth, but mainly wish to highlight the important breed aspects which are frequently overlooked in the show ring. I do hope that this article will be of assistance to judges in their assessment of the breed. It is important to keep in mind breed characteristics, the lack of which is frequently being excused in the quest for the flashy show dog.

There are just six things you need to look for when assessing the golden retriever.

1. BALANCE
2. CORRECT SHAPE
3. TEMPERAMENT
4. HEAD AND EXPRESSION
5. MOVEMENT
6. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THIS DOG WAS BRED.

**1. BALANCE:**

To begin with, you need an eye for BALANCE (if you don't have this naturally, then you will never make a good Golden Retriever judge). The word BALANCE is mentioned a number of times in the Standard. This is a breed which must be **balanced**, the general outline presenting a pleasing picture in every way. The head is not only balanced with the body, but is also balanced within itself. **Everything is balanced.**

**2. CORRECT SHAPE:**

The correct shape for the breed and body proportions are not mentioned in the breed standard. This is one area the Breed Council has addressed in its submission to the BKC.



1. Measured from the BREASTBONE to BUTT, (NOT withers to butt) the dog is slightly longer than height at withers. The ratio is 12:11. A dog 22" in height would be 24" in length, measured this way. A dog 24" in height would be 26" in length. This measurement does not include the coat.

2. The other important measurement is - the distance from withers to elbow and elbow to ground is **EQUAL**.

These two measurements illustrate the **balance** required for the correct golden retriever shape.

If the dog does not fit this picture in your eye, then it is either too long in body or too short in leg or perhaps both, as this fault can both be found on the one dog! The longer rectangular look is becoming very common and it can make up the majority of an entry. If this is all you have to judge, you have to assess what is in

front of you, but remember that a long dog with short legs is not correctly balanced for the breed and this should be a contributing factor as to just how far you send him up the ladder award wise.

### 3. HEAD and EXPRESSION

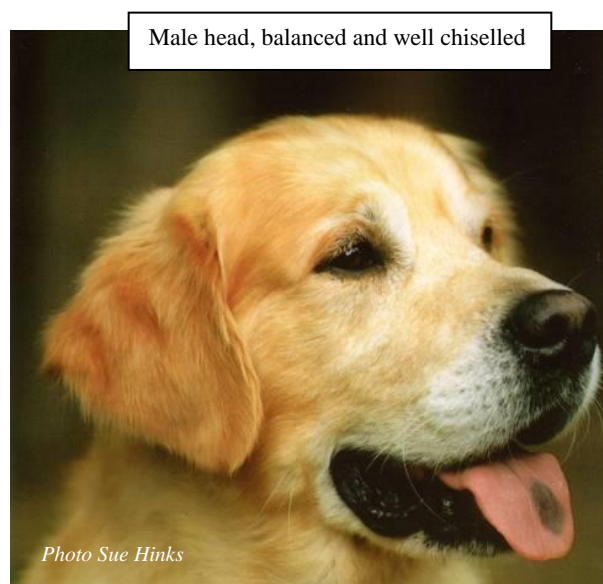
This is the soul of the dog. The head, once again, must be **balanced**. There should be chiseling or "work" in the head. Occiput to stop, stop to muzzle approximately equal (nothing should look out of proportion). It is generally accepted that the measurement of occiput to stop or stop to muzzle (remember is approximately equal) is about the same distance as the breadth of the skull ear to ear.

The skull is slightly rounded, not flat or domed and there is no doming over the forehead. There should be no wrinkle at rest or when alert. Too broad a skull usually accompanies a cheeky look, leading to a coarser, blockier appearance. There is a well defined stop, which should not be exaggerated and never give a dish faced appearance.

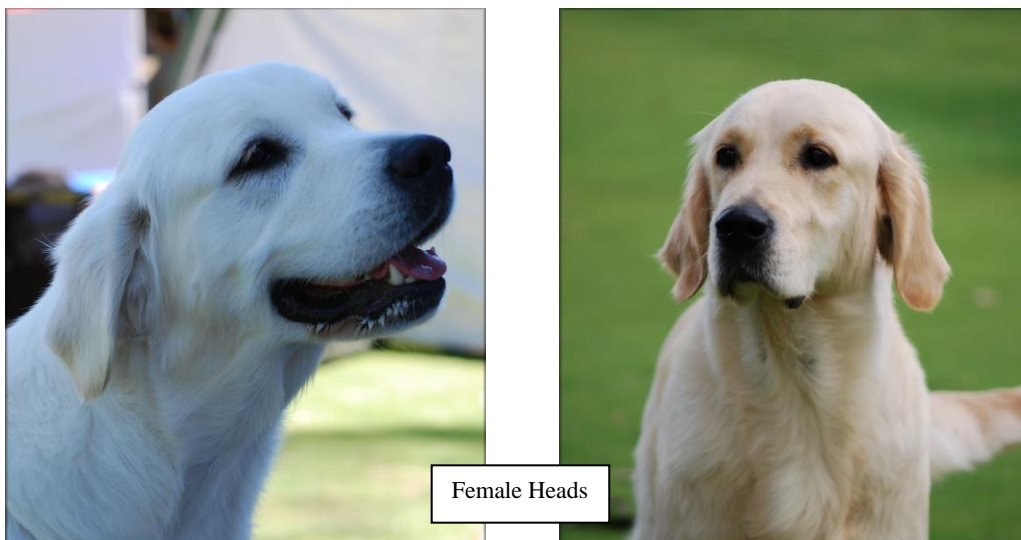
The MUZZLE is important as the golden retriever uses this to carry out his work – that of RETRIEVING. Therefore, it should be strong and powerful with a good, strong, wide under jaw and complete scissor bite. Once again **balanced** with the rest of the head.

There is nothing in the breed standard which says that the head of a dog should be any different in shape to that of a bitch. They both require the same **balance** and proportions – the dog should look masculine and the bitch, feminine. I tend to think that the "prettiness" should be with the females and males should be differentiated with strength or masculinity, without being coarse or "bucket headed".

Remember, no exaggeration anywhere - a picture of BALANCE.



*Photo Sue Hinks*



*Head shape and balance is similar in both sexes. Males should look Masculine and bitches Feminine*

### EXPRESSION

The Golden Retriever has DARK BROWN eyes. The standard does not allow for any other colour. That's right – not light brown, not hazel – incorrect colour just doesn't give the right expression. Light eyes will spoil the **KINDLY** expression that is required of this breed. This kindly expression implies the dog has a friendly temperament – another breed characteristic

The eyes are best described as “human” in shape and should not be oblique. The expression should be gentle and melting. This expression, along with the Golden's happy nature instantly gives you a warm feeling towards the dog. “*Oh aren't you lovely*” and you find yourself smiling. His happy disposition, wagging tail and melting “bedroom eyes”, just make you want to give him a big cuddle. If you get this feeling when judging this breed, you are on the right track.



### 4. TEMPERAMENT

In my opinion, temperament is the number one breed characteristic. Poor temperament, be it nervousness or aggression, is not acceptable in the golden retriever. Because of his renowned temperament, the golden is deserving of its popularity as a family dog and has also earned its place in society as a successful working companion. Temperament enables this versatility and the ability to fit into the world as it is today.

The Standard calls for the golden retriever to be “**Kindly, Friendly and Confident**” – and so the term the “KFC dog”. They are **CONFIDENT** and **HAPPY**. They should never show undue aggression, nor should they display lack of confidence in normal everyday situations. They are generally very accepting of the world and quite willing to just take it all in their stride, provided they are pleasing a human. A very “**biddable**” dog.

In the show ring, Goldens should display confidence when moving and standing. Signals that this may not be the case could be poor tail carriage, ears pinned back, a frightened look in their eyes and anxious demeanour. Aggression is the other end of the scale. Goldens generally should be very happy in the company of other dogs and people.



You should always be able to handle a golden in the ring and any golden that bites should be instantly dismissed. No golden should go out of its way to attack another dog and it is not normal for a dog to “grumble” its way around the ring.

## 5. MOVEMENT

The Golden is a **“level mover”** and should “glide” around the ring, not “thump” around it. The movement is SMOOTH AND FLUENT, with the dog giving you the impression it is effortless and could continue for some time. As speed increases, legs fore and aft converge slightly towards the centre. The side gait shows good reach, drive and ground coverage.



Do not expect a Golden to move at 100 miles per hour! The

Golden Retriever is NOT a fast, flashy, over the top kind of dog. He is gentle and biddable and the properly trained dog should always be under control with little effort from his handler. He is just happy to be out and about and to meet and greet.

## 6. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE DOG WAS BRED

One should remember that the Golden Retriever is a WORKING breed. To do this he is neither cloddy, clumsy nor too heavy and should be free of any exaggeration. He should convey the impression of a working gundog.

You don't need sweeping hindquarters with hocks way behind the tail. Imagine a vertical line dropped from the tailset which should fall just in front of the rear foot. The hocks should be perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other. Overdone prosternums or “pigeon fronts” are just as incorrect. The prosternum is visible and there should be chest to feel between the front legs. The rib cage is well sprung (not barrel) and the dog should be well ribbed back. The length of loin is about that of a man's hand. Too short a loin would be detrimental to the working ability of the dog. This is not a “slung” breed. The chest does not sit below the elbow.

This breed is required to carry game on land and in water, so a neck too long and thin is not functional. It looks very “flashy”, but it is not correct for a Golden Retriever. The neck should be strong and long enough to enable the dog to pick up game. Goldens are not setters; their outline should never resemble one. The Golden has “normal” angulation fore and aft.

Some more points to keep in mind:

### TOPLINE

The TOPLINE of the golden retriever is strong and level – STANDING AND MOVING. It should not roll from side to side. This is seen in young puppies, but by the time the dog is 12 months of age, the topline should be firm and stable. There should be no dip in the back or a “harbour bridge”/“coathanger” type topline. A rolling topline on a mature dog often implies incorrect shoulder assembly somewhere.

Goldens can sometimes grow a “cape” near their shoulders. This can spoil the appearance of the topline. Good grooming will correct this, but many exhibitors are not so skilful, so judges should feel to see if this is in fact coat or a faulty topline.

### TAIL

The tail should appear to be a continuation of the topline and ideally, is carried level with the back. Personally I don't find anything up to a 2 o'clock position to be objectionable. However, tail carriage vertical, over the back or down (indicating lack of confidence) is not correct. There should be no curl at the tip. Ideally it should reach the hock in length.

## COAT

Coat is important and a breed characteristic, as it sets the Golden apart from its retriever cousins. Once again, the standard is not very descriptive.

It is MEDIUM HARSH – NOT soft and silky and setter like. It can be flat or wavy. A wavy coat is not an “open coat”. There should be a dense water resistant undercoat. Remember this dog is a swimmer and he needs protection in the water and also in the countryside over which he is required to work. The coat should ENHANCE the shape of the dog and not hide the outline. It is QUALITY, not quantity that matters.

Sometimes judges may need to feel beneath the coat, as clever grooming can hide many faults. Likewise, too much coat can be a hindrance to the dog in his daily working activities. Some dogs are fortunate to have quantity and quality and they present a lovely picture.

There is a tendency to shave golden retriever necks, like a setter, to accentuate length and forechest. Personally I find this unnatural and whilst trimming around the neck, ears, feet and tail is usually done, it should never look obvious. Always feel for forechest beneath the coat. You may be surprised that what you see is not what you get!

Goldens lose their coat yearly, bitches more often, so they may not always be presented in full bloom. It is up to the judges to decide just how far up the award ladder they take an out of coat dog. Whilst coat is the icing on the cake and the dog should be fit for purpose, displaying the breed characteristics first and foremost, I do feel that for the very top award, a lack of coat should be taken into consideration.

## TO SUMMARISE

Apply these principles and judging this beautiful breed will be a lot easier. It is up to judges to recognise breed fashions before they become entrenched throughout the breed. I do ask judges to look for and reward the **characteristics** that are so important to keep our retriever, a GOLDEN RETRIEVER and not just a generic showdog.

*Sandra Patterson, Buffalo Kennels, Australia*