

The Pointer Standard - a breeder's perspective of the differences between the standard of the breed in the USA and the UK Kennel Club.

Whilst the breed in both the USA and the UK can be traced back to very similar and essentially the same origins over time we have evolved to have two standards for the breed that offer considerable variation between the countries. Interestingly it is not uncommon in conversation with long established breeders from the USA to find that many seek to breed Pointers to reflect the UK standard in spite of the standards variations.

I do not intend to undertake an exercise of comparing the standards on a line by line basis but would simply like to focus my attention to four specific areas that seem to have taken a different course within the standards and qualities of the Pointer that I personally consider as defining within the breed. Like most who have been involved with this beautiful breed over an extended period I have spent a huge amount of time reading the breed's history and have been fortunate to have had access to most of the books on the breed that are considered to be the definitive reference materials. Again like most, I would imagine, I often refer back to these books and articles to re-acquaint myself with the breed qualities that are so eloquently detailed in these reference books.

If you take the time to study both of the standards you will find that the UK standard was last updated in March 1994, the AKC standard was adopted in 1975, some 19 years earlier although a 1999 revision was developed but not accepted by vote of the membership.

To move on to the key variances as I see them. Firstly let's deal with the Head and Skull. Both standards carry similar general descriptions in terms of length and breadth and general descriptions of the muzzle and stop there are however a couple of notable exceptions. The UK standard calls for a "muzzle somewhat concave" and a "slightly dish faced appearance". These are defining qualities of the Head within this standard and indeed are breed defining characteristics in the UK. In the USA however the standard calls for a "slight furrow between the eyes" and "parallel planes of the skull and muzzle are equally acceptable". The two variations clearly provide for very different interpretations and ultimately head type.

Secondly let's talk about the Gait/Movement. Both standards have descriptive phrases that attempt to define the breed's movement. The AKC standard calls for "smooth, frictionless with a powerful hindquarter drive" whilst the UK standard calls for "smooth, covering plenty of ground. Driving hind action" both standards have considerably more descriptions but in my opinion use varying words to essentially convey the same purpose. Where we get to see a considerable variance is when the respective standards begin to describe tail action and carriage. I have included this under gait/movement as the AKC standard combines tail movement within Gait. Under the AKC standard the observer is required to seek out a tail that is "moving from side to side rhythmically with pace" within the UK standard the observer is counselled to seek a tail that "should lash from side to side".

In any interpretation these two descriptions clearly call for a very different type of tail action. It is interesting to note that most of the writings on the breed by authors who have had breed associations within the last 40 years, from UK based backgrounds or countries that have adopted the UK standard, collectively write about the lack of this essential breed quality or the thrill that is gained when seeing a Pointer move with this quality present. Interestingly I have also found articles by USA authors who also regard the lashing tail as essential.

The third clear point of difference is also focussed upon the tail. This breed feature has long been seen as the essential hallmark of breed quality and is invariably seen and described as where the “true blue blood” can be found. In addition to the tail movement both standards describe the carriage, shape and length. Here again we see notable difference between these two standards. Both standards are quite specific about the tail shape and length and both standards are clear that carriage of the tail should show no “upward curl” or be “without curl”. Where they differ is that the UK standards behoves us to seek out a tail that is “carried on a level with the back” whilst the AKC standard requires carriage that is “no more than 20 degrees above the line of the back”. Again the respective standards permit considerably differing outcomes of a feature we all consider to be breed defining.

And finally let us move on to size. This fourth significant variation is intriguing. There is an inch height difference between the standards from the respective countries. The interesting point is that in males the AKC standard permits an additional inch in height, 28 inches as opposed to 27 inches with a minimum height in both standards of 25 inches however in females the height variation is completely the opposite to the males. The AKC female Pointer can be as small as 23 inches whilst the UK standard allows bitches to be only a minimum of 24 inches with both having a maximum height of 25 inches. This variation therefore allows a 3 inch spread between males and females equally within the AKC standard whilst the UK standard provides only a 2 inch spread.

The essence of this article is to simply make readers aware that if you are breeding to YOUR standard then quite simply the breed within the USA and countries that observe or follow the UK standard are going to be at variance to each other in areas that are of significance within our respective standards. Regardless of these differences our Pointers are clearly and unmistakably Pointers. The debate about the relevance of the standard variations and breed specific requirements will continue. We should not therefore be surprised when we see our breed in each others countries and realise that there are subtle but defining differences. We must therefore appreciate that what we see is simply the dedicated breeders in these countries staying within their respective standards.

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