





EVALUATING THE LHASA APSO



The Lhasa Apso

**Presented by the
American Lhasa Apso Club
Judges' Education Committee
and
Breed Standard Committee**





The Lhasa Apso History



The Lhasa Apso is a Tibetan breed of ancient origins, dating back to at least 800 AD when Buddhism first took root in the remote Himalayan country.

Over the centuries, the form and function of the Lhasa Apso have been shaped by Tibet's challenging environment and the unique culture of the Tibetan people.



The Lhasa Apso History

The Lhasa, gained favor among the Tibetan nobility and in Buddhist monasteries, particularly near Lhasa. As an interior watch dog and steadfast companion, they became the favorite pets of many Dalai Lamas and Tibetan nobility.

To this day, the Lhasa Apso remains a special companion and protector, a guardian by nature, especially in his own domain.





The Lhasa Apso

General Appearance

Reflecting his Tibetan heritage as an indoor sentinel on the Tibetan Plateau, north of the Himalayan Mountains, the Lhasa Apso is a small, sturdy, well-balanced rectangular dog of moderation possessing a level topline and a tail carried well over the back. There should be neither exaggeration of any body parts nor hint of massive bone or body. A distinguishing characteristic of the Lhasa Apso is its heavy, dense, double coat that is parted in the middle from head to tail. In addition, the Lhasa Apso has good headfall and well-feathered feet and legs as these features protected this small dog against extreme temperatures and the rough terrain of his native land.



The Lhasa Apso

Five important areas to consider when evaluating the breed:

- **Balance**
- **Head**
- **Structure and Movement**
- **Coat**
- **Temperament**





The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



The Lhasa Apso standard describes a moderate, small dog with no hint of coarseness nor massive bone.

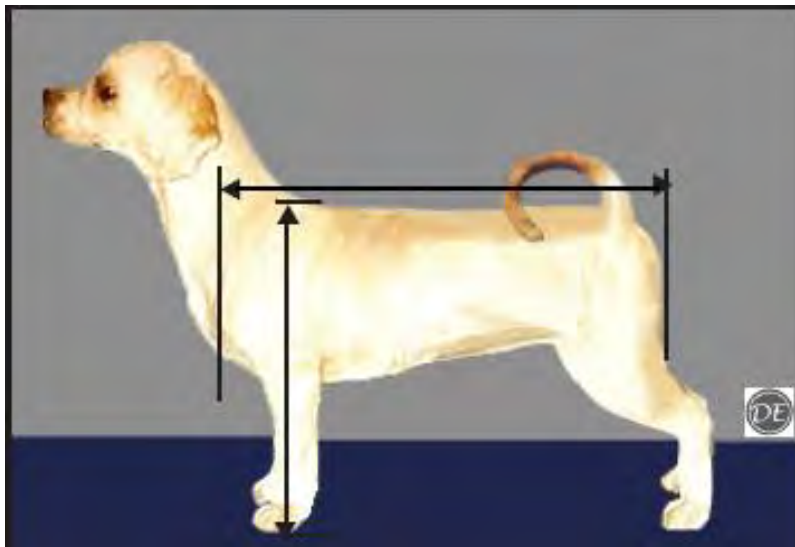
The height of the Lhasa Apso is variable, ideally between 10 and 11 inches at the shoulder. Bitches may or may not be slightly smaller but should possess feminine characteristics which easily distinguish males from females.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline

The Lhasa Apso silhouette is that of a well-balanced rectangular dog, possessing a level backline, without exaggeration of any body part.



Body length, measured from point of shoulder to point of buttock, should be roughly one-third longer than the height at the withers. This means the Lhasa Apso is neither excessively long nor noticeably short in body; he is rectangular, never square.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



The neck should be strong and well proportioned, moderate in length, rising smoothly from the shoulders and carrying the head with an air of assertiveness as befits a sure-footed mountain breed.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



Reflecting his mountain heritage, the Lhasa Apso is, above all, a dog of moderation. The word “moderate” precludes exaggeration of any one part over the other. Not only is height a factor but consideration must be given to weight and overall proportion.

Balance in the Lhasa Apso should reflect a harmony of body parts in a pleasing relationship to one another with no one part standing out. The relationship of length of leg to length of body, along with the placement, length, and carriage of neck and tail, all contribute to correct balance.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline

Think about balance again as you look at these two photos. These pictures are of the same dog, taken on the same day. One picture shows the dog on a hard surface and the other on grass.

As you can see, the surface on which you view a Lhasa can make a significant difference in your assessment of balance.

Judge balance while the Lhasa is on the table or another flat surface.





The Lhasa Apso

Head



One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Lhasa is his head. The typical expression, framed by the heavy head furnishings, has been likened to that of an "old soul."

Because of the Lhasa's head furnishings, a first glance can be deceptive. Careful examination is a must!



The Lhasa Apso

Skull

The skull should be narrow, falling away behind the eyes in a marked degree. It is neither domed nor apple-shaped, but not quite flat. Pendant ears set slightly above eye level complement the narrow skull. A higher ear placement can create a false impression that the skull itself is too broad.



To correctly understand the phrase "falling away behind the eyes to a marked degree," one must evaluate the narrowness of skull without the illusion of width created by the headfall. Gently push the hair toward the back of the skull. There should be no bulging or broadness behind the eyes. The zygomatic arch (or cheek bone) should be only slightly curved, not prominent.

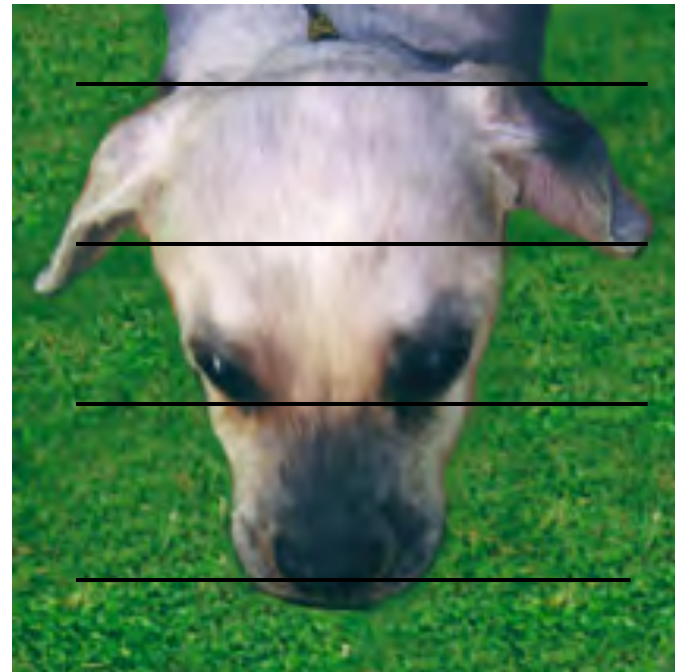


The Lhasa Apso

Skull

The length from tip of the nose to the back of the skull should be a ratio of $\frac{1}{3}$ muzzle to $\frac{2}{3}$ skull.

The Standard's call for the nose to be black eliminates any possibility that liver pigment is correct. Full depth of black pigment on the nose and eye rims and lips is essential to good expression.





The Lhasa Apso

Muzzle



At one-third of the total length of the head, the muzzle will be of medium length with a strong but not prominent lower jaw.

A snikey, weak look to the muzzle is undesirable.



The Lhasa Apso Muzzle



The foreface of the Lhasa is straight; not turned up nor down-faced. The muzzle meets the backskull to form a moderate stop.

The planes of the muzzle and the skull are parallel when viewed in profile.





The Lhasa Apso

Muzzle

"A Square Muzzle is Objectionable"



Shih Tzu



Lhasa Apso

The Shih Tzu standard calls for a square muzzle, while the Lhasa Apso standard describes a square muzzle as "objectionable."



The Lhasa Apso

Bite

The bite of the Lhasa Apso should not interfere with nor distract from correct expression.

The preferred bite is either level or slightly undershot. A reverse scissors bite with adequate width of lower jaw and a full complement of incisors is the ideal that breeders strive for.

A scissors bite is not preferred. An undershot bite where the teeth show when the mouth is closed is not desirable.

**“Level or
slightly
undershot”**



Level bite



Reverse scissor bite





The Lhasa Apso

Eyes

We think of the eyes as a mirror to the soul, and a Lhasa's eyes are indeed crucial to correct expression.

The correct Lhasa eye is frontally placed, dark brown, and almond shaped. Round, full eyes and very small sunken eyes are undesirable.



In order to achieve the desired softness of expression, the Lhasa eye must be medium size and dark. The iris should fill the eye with no white showing *when the dog looks straight ahead.*



The Lhasa Apso

Eyes

A round eye is incorrect. White showing around the eye when the dog is looking forward is incorrect.





The Lhasa Apso Expression

In summary, factors contributing to typical Lhasa expression include:



- **Balanced head of 1/3 muzzle to 2/3 skull**
- **Straight foreface**
- **Narrow skull**
- **Medium-sized, almond, dark brown eyes**
- **Deep black pigment promoting the desired softness of expression**
- **A correct bite**
- **A strong but not prominent lower jaw**
- **Heavy head furnishings**



The Lhasa Apso Structure

The Lhasa is a normally-structured dog with strengths and weaknesses in structure and movement as you would find in a majority of other breeds.

Keep in mind that the origin of the Lhasa is the mountainous country of Tibet. The Lhasa, in response to the demands of the environment, is a surprisingly sturdy dog with moderate bone, neither massive nor flimsy.



The Lhasa Apso Structure



The Lhasa

- is longer than tall
- is well-ribbed up
- possess a strong loin
- has level topline
- has good depth of chest
- has a well-developed prosternum

Longer than tall connotes a dog that is agile and athletic, not overdone, with the agility and strength one expects in a small mountain breed.

"Well ribbed up" means that the Lhasa possesses a long, moderately sprung rib cage. The term should never be confused with "barrel chested" in this breed. Rather, the expression describes a long ribcage that extends well back toward the loin allowing for increased lung capacity essential for survival in the Himalayas. The rib itself is long and slightly curved, resulting in a flatter side and a deeper brisket...again allowing for the sort of lung expansion needed at high altitudes.



The Lhasa Apso

Structure

The loin should be strong, of moderate length and very muscular, to provide the impulsion and agility needed to cover uneven terrain.

When viewed from the front, the ribcage is oval in shape. The brisket is level with or slightly below the elbow and there is a prominent prosternum.



Long rib cage

Strong
loin



Correct
Oval ribcage



Not slab sided

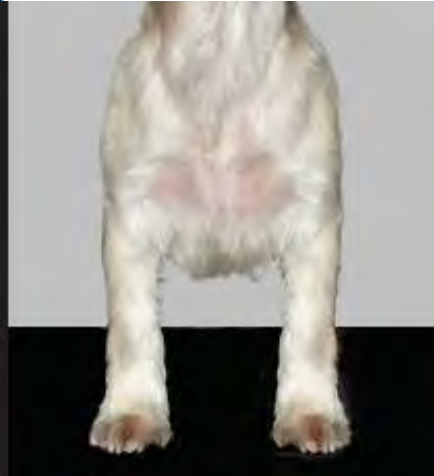


Not barrel-chested



The Lhasa Apso

Structure



**Forelegs
Straight**



**Very
bowed**

- Shoulders are well-laid back.
- Shoulder blade and upper arm are ideally equal in length.
- The elbows are close to the body.
- The outsides of the legs are straight from elbow to pastern. (A slight curve on the upper inside of the leg is not uncommon.)
- Pasterns are strong and perpendicular.



The Lhasa Apso Structure



Pasterns are strong and perpendicular. Foot is round and cat like with good pads.



Poor foot and pastern



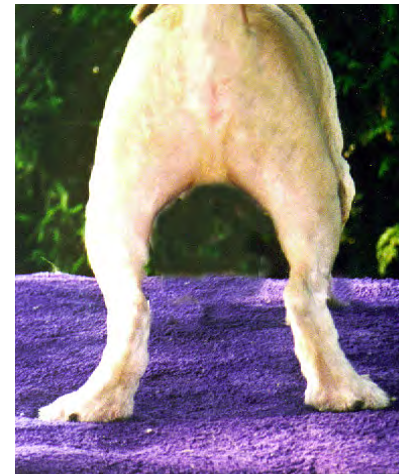
The Lhasa Apso

Structure

The rear construction of the Lhasa Apso defaults to normal canine structure with strong and well-developed muscling. Angulation of hindquarters should be in balance with forequarters. The hocks are well let down and perpendicular to the ground, set slightly behind the point of buttocks.



Well-Developed
Rear Quarters



Cow hocks
Poor muscle tone

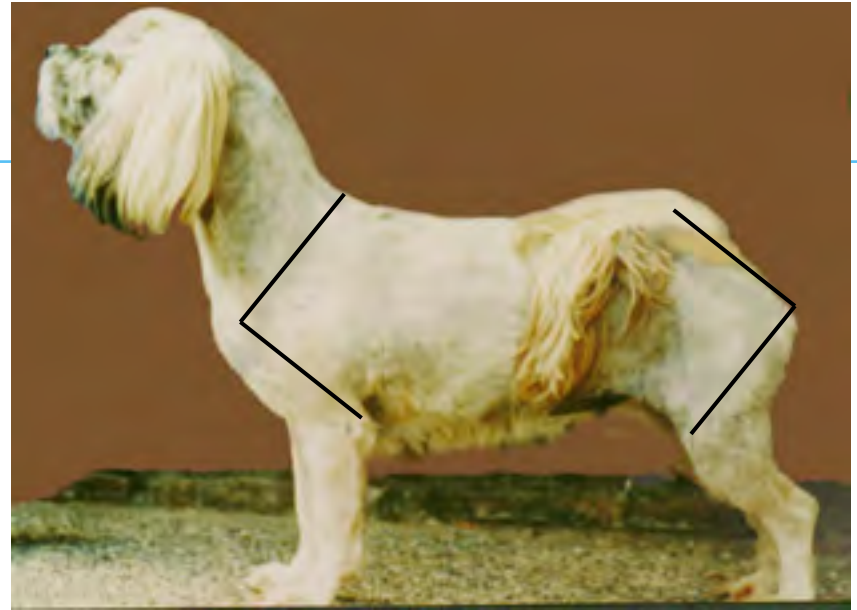


The Lhasa Apso

Structure

Proper shoulder placement is essential for good balance, with a smooth transition from neck to backline. The lengths from withers to point of shoulder and point of shoulder to elbow are equal.

Front and rear angulation should be about equal with balanced reach and drive.



The Lhasa in proper condition will be well muscled, of good hard flesh, and neither too fat nor too thin. The breed is slow to mature, however, and young Lhasas will frequently be on the lean side.



The Lhasa Apso

Structure-Tails

The Lhasa Apso tail is to be carried well over the back in a curl with the hair draping to the side. The tail is set sufficiently high to enable the dog to carry it well over the back. It should always be over the back when the dog is moving but may drop when the dog is standing still and relaxed. The tail may have a kink at the end.





The Lhasa Apso Structure

A Lhasa Apso is subject to the same requirement of soundness recommended for all breeds. Structural faults are undesirable, regardless of whether or not such faults are specifically mentioned in the standard. Any deviation from the ideal described in the standard should be penalized to the extent of the deviation.



The Lhasa Apso

Movement

At the trot, the Lhasa should be the picture of efficiency and grace, using a smooth free-flowing gait with no wasted action. The side gait should show good reach and drive. The topline is level and the tail is carried well over the back and may drape to the side.





The Lhasa Apso Movement



**The legs move parallel,
coming and going, with a
tendency to converge as
the dog increases speed.**



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



As the Lhasa Apso moves forward at the trot and increases speed, there is a tendency for the head to extend slightly toward the line of travel.



The Lhasa Apso Movement

The front foot contacts the ground well forward with no tendency toward hackney or exaggerated lift.





The Lhasa Apso Movement



Strong, well-developed quarters provide good drive. The rear legs should reach under the body and push out well behind, carrying the body forward in balance with the front. You should be able to see the pads of the rear feet as the dog goes away without exaggerated kick up.



The Lhasa Apso

Coat

The Lhasa's coat is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the breed. When the dog is shown, the coat is parted in the middle from head to tail.

The coat should look natural. Excessive trimming and sculpting is discouraged.



The ideal Lhasa coat is described in the Standard as "heavy, straight, hard, dense, not woolly or silky, of good length". Proper Lhasa hair is strong and resilient--not light, not fine, not flyaway.

"Dense" implies that the Lhasa should have a moderate amount of undercoat, in other words, a double coat.



The Lhasa Apso

Coat Texture



While length of coat is desirable for a mature, finished look in the adult Lhasa, coat texture is important. Lhasa hairs are hard, straight, and often described as “feeling like human hair.”

On close examination, individual hairs can be seen, and each strand can be individually felt when rubbed between your fingers.

The coat will be hard to the touch but it should not feel rough or wiry.

Please note that puppy coats will be softer.



The Lhasa Apso

Coat Texture and Maturity

Slow to mature, correct coat may take two to three years to reach the ground.

Characteristics of Proper Texture:

- **hard**
- **straight**
- **individual hairs can be seen**
- **each strand felt when rubbed between fingers**



To evaluate heaviness and density of the coat, lift it gently and release - on an adult Lhasa it should fall back and blend with the rest of the coat. Note that the earliest maturing part of the coat will be over the shoulder. The slowest maturing part of the coat will be in the middle of the back.



The Lhasa Apso

Coat Furnishings

The standard calls for:

- Heavy head furnishings
- Good fall over the eyes
- Good whiskers and beard
- Well feathered tail, legs and feet

These are all necessary to help the Lhasa survive the wind and cold and rugged terrain of Tibet.

The well feathered tail carried over the back adds protection against the intense sunlight of the Lhasa's native environment. Kinks at the end of the tail are present at birth. They are not to be faulted.

When the Lhasa is being shown, the long headfall over the eyes is often brushed to the side to let the dog see better. Bands or barrettes to hold the hair back are not allowed in the conformation ring.





The Lhasa Apso

Coat Color

All colors are equally acceptable. (But keep in mind that the Standard requires black pigment.)



Many Lhasas possess dark tips to the ears and beard; however, there is no preference given to those with dark tips.



The Lhasa Apso

Coat vs Structure

As lovely and as eye-catching as a Lhasa's beautiful flowing coat is, remember that what is most important is the structure under the coat.

A Lhasa should not win simply because he has the prettiest or longest coat in the ring.

Judge the structure and movement first, then add the coat.





The Lhasa Apso

Puppy Coat



Puppy coats will be softer in texture, but evidence of correct, straight, hard coat can usually be seen by six months of age, usually breaking at the withers.



Typical headfall on a young Lhasa. Headfall can create "blinders" and may limit the puppy's vision. Please consider this when you are judging.



Eight month old puppy. (Note his headfall and the new coat coming in over his withers.)



The Lhasa Apso Temperament



The Lhasa Apso's temperament is unique. The Standard says "gay and assertive but may be chary/aloof with strangers."

This temperament can be traced back to the Lhasa's Tibetan heritage and it is valued by today's breeders

The term "chary/aloof" implies a dog that is suspicious but never shy nor aggressive. Most Lhasas are comfortable being examined on the table but the approach should be confident and direct, never hasty. Remember their vision is limited by the heavy head furnishings over their eyes.



The Lhasa Apso

Temperament



Independent by nature, Lhasa Apsos are lively, charming, and fun-loving, while also being alert and sensitive to their environment.

They are watchful and intelligent. Above all, they are guardians, especially within their own domain.



The Lhasa Apso

Examination

When examining a Lhasa Apso, always approach the table head on. Do not approach from the side as the headfall prevents the dog from seeing where you are. Begin the exam by reaching under, not over, the head and then move your hands to either side of the skull. From there, gently push back the head fall to evaluate the head and expression. Part the lips to see the bite or ask for the exhibitor to show you the bite. Do not pull up on the whiskers to reveal the bite.



From the front, check the prosternum, shape of ribcage, and the forelegs. Shoulder angulation and front assembly can be evaluated from either the front or the side. Moving to the side of the dog, check the coat texture by rubbing a section of shoulder hair between your fingers, feeling for individual strands. On adult Lhasas with longer coats, lift a section of hair just behind the shoulder and drop it to evaluate "heavy." Still at the side, check the overall proportion of the dog and length of ribcage. Lift the tail to evaluate the backline and muscle in the loin. Replace the tail and complete the exam of the hindquarters.



The Lhasa Apso Examination



Once the table exam is complete, Lhasas often shake when they are put down on the floor. Exhibitors may take a moment to brush hair into place when this happens. Some also take a moment to brush the hair away from the eyes so the dog can see where he is going.

Because the breed is chary of strangers, do not expect dogs to make eye contact with the judge at the end of the down and back.

If additional examination is necessary, please do not re-examine a Lhasa on the floor but ask the exhibitor to return the dog to the table.



The Lhasa Apso

The Lhasa Apso...



...always REGAL when looking his best,



The Lhasa Apso

**Seldom a pet,
rather a companion**



Often a clown, but never a fool!



The Lhasa Apso



*Thanks for taking time
to learn more about
this special breed!*