

JUDGING THE BASSET HOUND

Submitted by Maree McKenzie

It is of my opinion that if a breed standard has accomplished its purpose, the reader will have a pretty good picture of what a top class specimen of the breed looks like. That is the purpose of a standard. A good one not only tells you what the breed looks like but also what it was created to do or, at least what it eventually came to be used for.....this is a quote from a very famous dog person.....

If a judge is equipped with a good standard it permits him to recognise the best dog in the ring and he should be able to put up dogs which will be of value to the breed.

As a breeder and exhibitor I can assure you there is nothing more distressing than seeing a good dog passed over by incompetent judging. This holds true whether the best dog is one you are showing or not. It offends a good breeder to see a top class dog beaten unjustly no matter who the dog belongs to!!

The Basset Hound is an achondroplastic breed and should be "heavier in bone, size considered, than any other breed of dog." Because of their weight and build a Basset should never be asked to be tabled, if you cannot bend down to them, don't accept an appointment to judge them. They are a gentle, affectionate breed and should not be gone over in a rough manner, their expression is soft and sad, their ears are low set and hang like soft velvet the ends curling slightly inwards, so please, no squeakers, keys thrown or any other means of trying to get "expression" that calm, reposeful look is correct for this breed.....

When a class enters the ring and is moving around look for a dog that is rather long, low and set on heavy short legs. Look for long, low set ears, heavy bone, loose elastic skin and that soft, rather sad expression. See if all the points balance, and there should be no undue exaggeration of any point. You should be able to picture this dog working with his tail up and nose to the ground, his movement deliberate, and in no way clumsy.

When the hound is set up look for him to be balanced and full of quality, going over the head you look for a skull that is domed, of medium width at the brow and tapering slightly to the muzzle, you want to see that heavy top lip overhanging the lower, a moderate stop. There should be enough loose skin on the head to wrinkle considerably when the head is lowered. The elasticity and wrinkle on head and body are most important as they prevent punctures of the skin in rough undergrowth. His nose should be black except it may be brown or liver in light-coloured hounds, and it is large with well-opened nostrils for gathering in scents.

Eyes are lozenge shape with a calm and serious expression, dark in colour but once again may shade to mid-brown in lighter-coloured hounds. Some judges get hung-up on the red of the lower lid (haw), it must be there though not too excessively, but you do not want a tight eye. As mentioned before the ears are set on low, long and reaching beyond the end of the muzzle, curling inwards, fine and velvety. Really good ears are hard to find now days, and that is a pity as it is such a characteristic of the breed.

I won't go into the forequarters or fronts as I have already submitted an article on Bassets fronts,

But avoid flat chested dogs or those with narrow v shaped chests as well as overbroad chested dogs. Make sure you feel the sternum bone, it is easy to be fooled by fat or loose hanging skin that only appears to be a prominent sternum. Elbows should be in a vertical line with the withers, when the humerus is shorter than the radius and the shoulder the legs are automatically brought forward, causing the bulk of the body weight to be behind not between the legs. This causes the

knees to buckle forward, the elbows to come out and the pasterns to bend making a very deformed and incorrect front assembly. Bassets have wonderful feet.....the paw is massive, very heavy with tough heavy pads, they are well rounded with both feet inclined equally a trifle outward, this balances the width of the shoulders. The neck of the Basset should be strong, muscular and fairly long, it is an interesting point to note that the neck should be of sufficient length that the Hound can drop his nose to the ground without breaking his gait, to move true in this position takes a correct neck and a well balanced body.

The standard does not state how long the body is but look for a dog that is rectangular in shape, longer from sternum to buttocks than the height from withers to ground, a ratio of about 2-1. Look for a long rib structure, smooth and extending well back You want good spring of rib allowing room for heart and lungs, no flatsidedness or flanged ribs allowed.....without a long, well sprung rib cage the stamina of the Hound is threatened and the topline will sag.....The back is level and a slight rise over the loin is allowed, but you do not want the topline to rise sharply in the rear.

The hindquarters are dominated by what we breeders call an "apple arse", wonderfully strong, muscled and well rounded, from the rear the muscles on the thighs are firm and prominent, well bent stifles and very short hocks, and the pouch of loose skin on each hock finish the picture. The tail or stern is of sufficient length to provide good balance with the length of the Hound and carried well up and curving gently sabre fashion but not gay or curling over the back. Some breeders will argue that a Hound carrying its stern down should not be penalised, but for me personally the hound loses his jaunty look and normally a stern down reflects the Hounds temperament.

Movement in the Basset is so, so important he should move in a smooth, powerful and effortless manner, his gait is absolutely true with perfect co-ordination between front and hind legs, the hocks to remain parallel while the Hound is in motion and the feet to thrust back powerfully. We are seeing clumsy and laboured movement and stiff, stilted choppy movement.....toes being dragged (it's a dead giveaway on a concrete ring, you can hear the toes scraping on the floor) and something else which is being allowed that is called the "Basset Hound Stumble".....there is no excuse for a dog not being able to get around a show ring without tripping every few steps, also be wary as regards this racing around the ring which seems to be the fashion, slow them down and see if there is a reason for this high speed chase.....many good dogs will move out at a very brisk pace, which is okay if the dog is doing it himself not being forced into it by the handler.

In conclusion you are judging one of the more unique breeds in our dog world, a breed with many characteristics that do not occur in other breeds and in saying that breeders strive with every litter to keep our Hounds sound, not always an easy task when you look at the general make and shape of a Basset Hound. Also, because movement is so important in the breed, don't judge them on the stack like cardboard cut-outs.....a good handler can hide a multitude of sins, send them around the ring that final time and make your awards to the Hound who looks like he can perform the duties that he was bred for.....