

# JUDGING THE AZAWAKH

by Dr.Cristian VANTU (*INSOLENS Azawakhs*) - FCI judge

I write this breed description around the very good breed standard (highlighted in red) and I write it more like a letter from an Azawakh breeder and judge to his colleagues. I write it thinking to the future of this breed but also to those judges who are willing to understand what exactly is the Azawakh and how should we judge this uncommon beauty to preserve its uniqueness. I don't think necessary to write many words about obvious aspects, but to accentuate those important things what make the difference between a good judge and a great judge.

If you want to judge Azawakhs, first of all try to forget all other breeds, shapes and proportions what you are used with, try to forget also the classic dog temperament and behaviour and be prepared to accept something different.

As judges we like to use a kind of general model, in which all the dogs should fit, but in this situation the model is not available. One should spend some time and broaden his esthetical perspective to perceive the right type of Azawakh.

I remember I was walking in the city with one of my dogs when a very young girl told her mother « mammy, look a small horse » I understood then that without the preconceptions of our mind, this is what the eye sees : a small horse. The resemblance between Azawakh and the Arabian horse, especially in movement is evident.



*Picture 1a/ 1b : resemblance between the arabian horse and the Azawakh*

Please remember the previous comparison and think that the nature creates diversity and *canis lupus familiaris* is one of the best examples. We are not here to change this. We should better try to understand that the modern man reasons to love this breed are his elegance and proudness, and not unconditional fidelity and obedience. Azawakh is not a slave but can be a lovely partner. We need to look for the qualities what makes it great for his owners not for anyone who wants to touch it, not even for us, the judges.

**BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY** : It is an African sighthound of afro-asian type which appeared in Europe towards 1970 and comes from the Nigerian middle basin, among others from the valley of the Azawakh. For hundreds of years he has been the companion of the nomads of the South-Sahara.

First dog imported in Europe was Gao, a male brought from Mali by a diplomat in Belgrade, Serbia (Yugoslavia in that time). Other dogs were imported later in France and even today people are still importing dogs of more or less quality from Mali, Niger, Algeria and Burkina Faso. There are a lot of contradictions between breeders and clubs because of the recent imports which brought with them not just

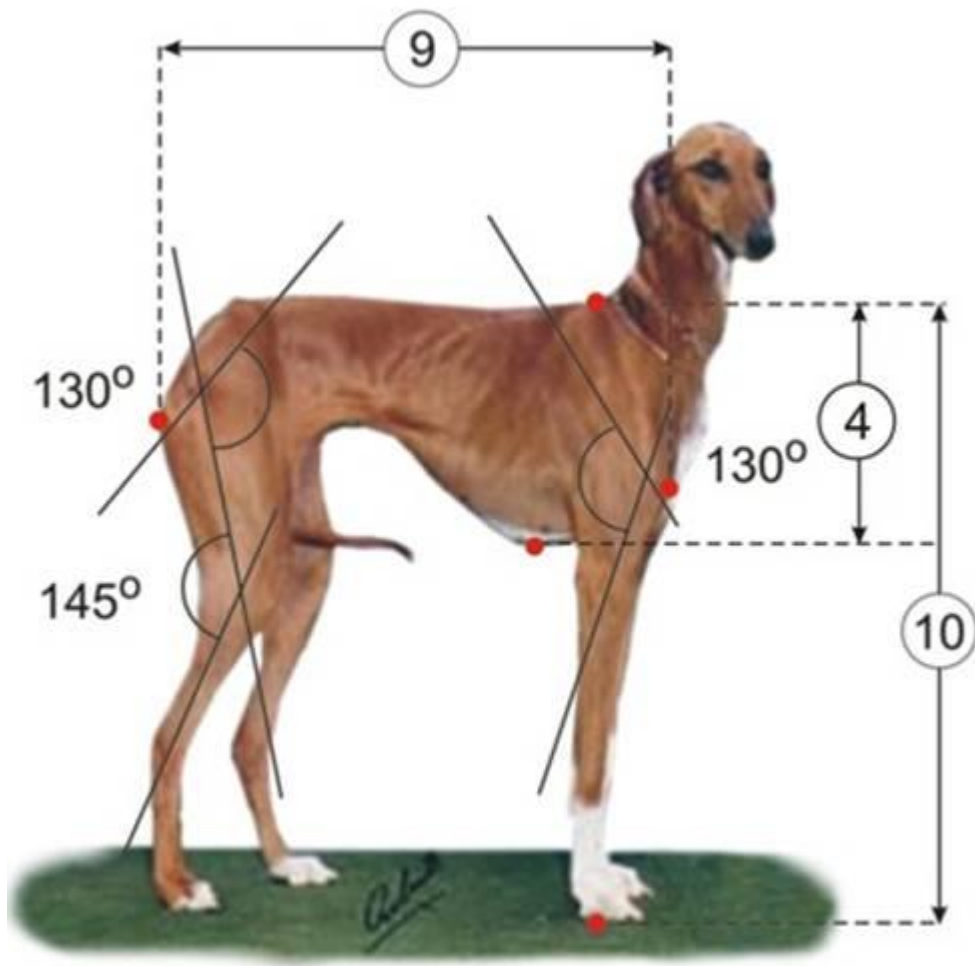
new genes, beneficial for the genetic health of the breed, helping the european breeders to pass the inbreeding crisis, but also new colours, not yet accepted by the standard. As judges we cannot have more than personal opinions in this matter. The Franch Kennel Club is the only allowed to change the breed standard. Some of the dogs imported in the last years are of excelent quality but not all of them. In a rush of using new genes, dogs of less quality were used for breeding and the result can be seen in shows : overangulated hidquarters, tail set to high, short tail, long coat, too wide head, atypical expressions, atypical movement, and the worst : wrong type.

**GENERAL APPEARANCE** : Particularly high in the leg and elegant, the Azawakh sighthound gives a general impression of great fineness. His bone structure and musculature are transparent beneath fine and lean tissues (skin). This sighthound presents itself as a racy dog whose body fits into a rectangle with its longer sides in vertical position.

### **IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS :**

- Length of body/height at the withers = 9 : 10. This ratio may be slightly superior in the bitches.
- Depth of chest/height at the withers = about 4 : 10.
- Length of muzzle/length of head = 1 : 2.
- Width of skull/length of head = 4 : 10.

This is a short, a very short, the shortest dog and the proportions of the body are a very important point of the standard, distinctive for this breed. It is high on legs, dry, architectural beauty, with gothic lines. Please note that the bone structure and superficial musculature must be visible. An Azawakh in show condition must have almost zero fat tissue. Azawakh must be elegant. There is no other word what can describe it better than « elegance »



Picture 2 : proportions and angles

**BEHAVIOUR / TEMPERAMENT** : Quick, attentive, distant, reserved with strangers and may even be unapproachable, but he can be gentle and affectionate with those he is willing to accept.

Azawakh is closer to the proud « domestic wolf » than to the fully obedient dog. One must have strong personality to be accepted as a master. Hard to believe for those who never had an Azawakh, but he can be very affectionate with his owner in his environment, when no « possible enemy » is around. Is true, this dog is extremely suspicious, but personally I love this characteristic. Takes probably days to use with a new person and more to accept it in his environment. He will decide to approach and never vice-versa. This is the reason is not good to touch them when we are judging them, especilay not the young dogs, beocuse this will stress them more and makes them hate the dog shows. Becouse of this suspicion, they need more time to use with new environments and big crowds. If the dog can manage to behave himself in this uncomfortable environment why to stress him more, touching him, anyway we can see everything, so we don ;t need to touch them. Even as a judge one cannot understand how or why somebody can accept this kind of behaviour in a dog, that is just because he never had such a dog. Personaly I cannot imagine a totaly and unconditional obedient or too friendly Azawakh. I like this temperament and this is one of the reasons I love this breed. Nobody like to see fallen beauties but we all like the mistique and the dignity of the natural, even wild beauties. Let's keep them pure.



*Picture 3 : the same dog which here obey to a very young girl, never accept to be touched by strangers. As long as he is an excelent partener for every member of his family, and he can be well handled in the show ring his scepticism cannot be considered a fault but ...a quality.*

**HEAD** : Long, fine, lean and chiselled, rather narrow, without excess.

CRANIAL REGION :

**Skull** : It is almost flat, rather elongated. The width of the skull must definitely be inferior to half the length of the head. The directions of the axes of the skull and the muzzle are often slightly divergent towards the front. The superciliary arches and the frontal furrow are slightly marked. On the other hand, the occipital crest is clearly protruding and the occipital protuberance marked.

**Stop** : Very slightly marked.

FACIAL REGION :

**Nose** : Nostrils well opened. The nose is either black or brown.

**Muzzle** : Long, straight, fine towards the front without exaggeration.

**Jaws/Teeth** : Jaws long and strong. Scissor bite.

**Cheeks** : Flat.

**Eyes** : Almond shaped, quite large. Their colour is dark or amber. Eyelids pigmented.

**Ears** : Set quite high. They are fine, always drooping and flat, quite wide at the base, close to the skull, never a « rose ear ». Their shape is that of a triangle with a slightly rounded tip. Their base raises when the hound is attentive.

**NECK** : Good reach of neck which is long, fine and muscular, slightly arched. The skin is fine and does not form a dewlap.

As everything in this dog, his expression is unique and is hard to be described. The best exercise is to look at the pictures attached to this material and to use with the expression of the head.



*Picture 4,5,6: corect head profiles and expresions*

The Azawakh have a long and arched neck, with the head carried high, impasive and proud.

Even the breed standard doesn't mention any penalty for the missing teeth and in my oppinion the absence of PM1 or PM2 cannot be a disqualifying fault, doesn ;t means that this dog should have no teeth at all. The judge should consider the importance of the absent teeth for the well being of the dog and the breed and penalize it in accordnace with this. Scissor bite is the corect bite mentioned in the standard, upper and lower prognatism are eliminating foults and level bite is accepted as long as it is not mentioned as a fault.



*Picture 7 : overcurled tail set too high, bad topline and croup / Picture.8 : well set and caried tail, corect croup*

## **BODY :**

Topline : Nearly straight, horizontal or slightly rising towards the hips.

Withers : Quite prominent.

Loin : Short, lean and often slightly arched.

Hip bones : Distinctly protruding and always placed at an equal or superior height to the height of the withers.

Croup : Oblique without accentuated slant.

Forechest : Not very wide.

Chest : Well developed in length, deep but without reaching elbow level. It is not very wide but must have enough space for the heart, so, the sternal region of the chest must not abruptly become narrow.

Ribs : Long, visible, slightly and evenly curved down to the sternum.

Underline : The sternal arch is accentuated and joined without abruptness to the belly which is tucked up very high below the lumbar arch.

Withers are prominent as well as the hip bones which must be at the same level or higher than the withers. Hip bones placed lower than the withers must be considered a serious fault.

In dogs with less subcutaneous tissue the loins are sometimes more arched than usually but this should not be penalised as long as in movement the dog have a good, straight topline.

Croup doesn't have an accentuated slant but is definitely oblique and more often the fault is a too horizontal croup than a too accentuated slant.

**TAIL** : Set low, long, thin, lean and tapered. Is covered with the same type of hair as that of the body and has a white brush at its extremity. Is carried hanging with the tip slightly raised, but when the dog is excited, it can be carried above the horizontal.



*Picture 9: too closed angulation/ picture 10: good angulation/ picture 11: too open angulation*

## **LIMBS**

## FOREQUARTERS :

Seen as a whole : Long, fine, almost entirely vertical; legs perfectly well-set.

Shoulders : Long, lean and muscular and only slightly slanting seen in profile. The scapulo-humeral angle is very open (about 130°).

Forefeet : Rounded shape, with fine and tightly closed toes; the pads are pigmented.

## HINDQUARTERS :

Seen as a whole : Long and lean; legs perfectly vertical.

Thighs : Long with prominent and lean muscles. The coxo-femoral angle is very open (about 130°).

Stifle : The femoro-tibial angle is very open (about 145°).

Hock : Hock joint and hock are straight and lean, without dewclaws.

Hind feet : Round shaped. Pads are pigmented.

Azawakh have open angles in front as well as on the hindquarters but never straight hock joints neither too closed angles. Metatarsals should be vertical but in dogs with a bit longer second thigh the angle formed by the metatarsal bones with the second thigh is smaller than 145 and obvious that metatarsals are no more vertical, this is not to be considered a major fault if doesn't affect the general appearance and the gait, but totally straight hocks or very angulated hocks which affect the distinctive type and movement are not desired and must be penalised.

Front feet should be perfectly straight but more often are turned outward around 5-10 degrees what should not be considered a serious fault. Hind feet are perfectly stright.

**GAIT / MOVEMENT** : Always very supple (lissom) and with particularly high action at the trot and the walk. The galop is bouncy. The Azawakh gives a great impression of lightness, even elasticity. The movement is an essential point of the breed.



*Picture: 12,13,14,15*

The Azawakh have very open angles what makes impossible big extensions of the limbs, but this is compensated by the long legs what allows him to cover the ground well. An overangulated dog, even can have a spectacular but not the characteristic movement is not to be promoted. As is written in the standard, the movement, the type of the movement is essential in this breed. Looking at the front legs in movement (at trot ) they have a high action and the feet are moving a little outwards but the high action is due to the extension of the humerus (upper arm) and not due to an extreme flexion of the Radius what is « hackney action » and must be penalised. This is a very common judging fault in Azawakh. A dog which shows all the characteristics of the standard but have a heavy troat or hackney action cannot be considered for championship certificate.

At walk, on a harsh ground some Azawakhs are flexing more their elbows and lift their feet too high, like a hackney action but the same dog can have a good troat if the proportions and angles are good. This a strong reason for us to judge their movement at trot, where all the movement faults are obvious.

**SKIN** : Fine, tight over the whole of the body.

## **COAT**

**HAIR** : Short, fine, down to none on the belly.

**COLOUR** : Fawn with flecking limited to the extremities. All shades are admitted from light sable to dark fawn. The head may or may not have a black mask and the blaze is very inconstant. The coat has a white bib and a white brush at the tip of the tail. Each of the four limbs must have compulsorily a white « stocking », at least in shape of a trace on the feet. The black brindling is admitted.

This pigmentation is determined by the « s i » (The Self alel line, second gene « self irish » ) and this gives less than 20 % white. If the dog has white on the chest and/or neck, and 2 or 3 limbs, most of the time the

white is present on the other limbs too but not in the same amount. If you check it well you will find probably just a few white hair between the toes or pads. This is not to be considered a fault.

## **SIZE AND WEIGHT :**

Height at the withers :

Dogs : between 64 and 74 cm. Bitches : between 60 and 70 cm.

Weight : Dogs : about 20 - 25 kg. Bitches : about 15 - 20 kg.

**FAULTS** : Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.

- General appearance : heavy.
- Skull too wide.
- Accentuated stop.
- Body too long.
- Hip bones placed distinctly lower than the withers.
- Distinct depigmentation of the nose.

## **ELIMINATING FAULTS :**

- Lack of type (in particular when showing a recent crossing with another breed).
- Strong non-accidental anatomical deformation.
- Disabling anomaly - not acquired.
- All obvious redhibitory vices.
- Upper or lower prognathism.
- Light eye : i.e. bird of prey eyes.
- Ribs curving in at the base of the chest which thus takes on the look of « violin box ».
- Coat not conforming to the standard.
- Harsh or semi-long coat. .
- Absence of any white marking at the extremity of one or more limbs.
- Size out by more than 3 cm from the standard measures.
- Timid character, panicky or aggressive with attack.

When you are judging the Azawakh, before to take the decision of disqualifying it for this point, please remember what is written in the BEHAVIOUR / TEMPERAMENT part of the standard : « ... **distant, reserved with strangers and may even be unapproachable.** » If the dog is aggressive

or attack without a reason, you should disqualify it but do not try to touch him if you see he is not willing this. This is available for many sighthounds but for Azawakh is almost a rule. When you are judging young dogs which are not yet used with the crowds around our show rings, please remember that this breed is used with big areas and less people and our shows are not like his natural habit, so it is not his fault he tries to keep his breed characteristics and dignity. Just give them time to use with our way of life. Also please consider the handling mistakes. Sometimes, probably most of the time, this is the major problem and for this reason the dog « cannot be judged » and not be disqualified for a behaviour fault.

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*Picture 3,5,6,12 : Vantu & Sipos / Insolens - Romania*

Picture 1/b, 13 : Susannah Thyni / ZounAdu - Sweden

Picture 14,15 : Corine Lundqvist / de Garde-Epee - France

Picture 2 : A. u. U. Hochgesand / Aulad al Sahra's - Germany

Picture 4 : David Moore (Daoud Abdullah Abdullah) / Idiiyat-es-Sahel - USA