


BREED JUDGING

WEST HIGHLAND WHITE TERRIER

How to Evaluate a West Highland White Terrier



BY DR. GERRY G. MEISELS AUGUST 12, 2021

 Facebook

 Twitter

 Pinterest



0

Shares



00:00

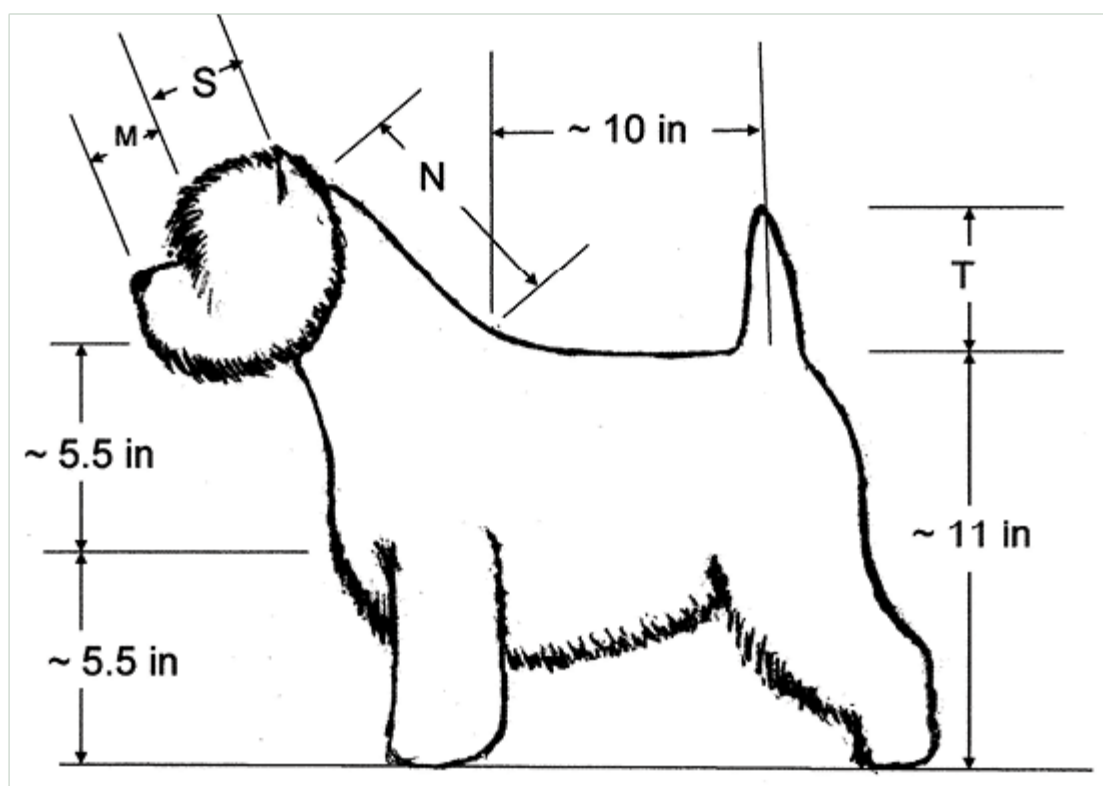
00:00

1

powered by Play.ht

West Highland White Terrier Judging Guide: Conformation judges hold the long-term future of the breeds they judge in their hands. Half a century ago, a few knowledgeable judges such as Alva Rosenberg and Billy Kendrick could influence the development of a breed because there were fewer shows and fewer judges. Today, there are thousands of shows; and nearly six hundred judges are approved for West Highland White Terrier's. These judges now collectively share the responsibility to help guide our breed's development. To meet this responsibility, they must evaluate not only those characteristics that are common to many breeds, such as movement, they must also understand type and use it in their decision-making. The following discussion assumes that you, the reader, have thorough knowledge of the standard and of canine anatomy and movement.

Judging requires the ability to see and evaluate type, structure, and movement, and especially, a clear understanding of what is important in the breed. This understanding underlies the ability to judge the whole dog rather than a single feature, such as shoulder layback or front movement. Seeing and judging the whole dog is essential to good judging.



Examination of West Highland White Terrier's follows a process that parallels the approach most judges use for all breeds. However, at each step, the evaluation must pay special attention to those aspects of conformation that help to define Westie type. Not all judges do this in exactly the same way, so the following description is only that of a typical approach.

The evaluation begins at the moment when the class first enters the ring and the handlers set up their dogs. The outline or silhouette alone should immediately say, "This is a Westie." You should see a level topline, and proper balance or proportions of the parts. The standard is clear about some aspects that can be translated into the drawing below, based on an 11-inch male. For a 12-inch dog, these measurements would, of course, be proportionally longer; for a 10-inch dog or bitch, proportionally shorter.

The proportions of Skull S, Muzzle M, Neck N, and Tail T cannot be derived quantitatively in the same way. The standard calls for the head and neck to be in proportion to the body or to the remainder of the dog. Judgment of the proper proportion is informed by knowing the working function of the West Highland White Terrier. To do his job, the Westie's neck has to be both strong and supple. Too long a neck will produce a "mop at the end of a broomstick" and will not provide the strength to dispatch quarry underground. Too short a neck reduces flexibility and the ability to respond to the quarry's quick movements. The size of the head also has to be balanced between the power to hold and dispatch the quarry and the ability to get through tight spaces in the narrow and contorted cairns of his homeland. The muzzle should be slightly shorter than the skull. When muzzles become a great deal shorter, there is a tendency for bites to become undershot; when muzzles are too long and narrow, the appearance becomes that of a snipey, foxy face. The tail should not extend above the skull, and should be carrot-shaped and carried vertically. Curved tails carried over the back and pointing forward are incorrect and interfere with outline and overall balance. Before the judges move on, they should reflect on what they have seen and make mental notes about what they may want to examine in more detail later, especially when the dog is on the table.

EXPRESSION IS MUCH IN THE EYES, AND TEMPERAMENT REFLECTS ITSELF IN THE DOG'S RESPONSIVENESS TO THE JUDGE AND THE HANDLER

It is now time to walk down the lineup and look at each dog's head and expression. This provides another piece of information on the head, and the first look at the front. Suspicions of excessively turned-out feet, long or narrow muzzles, and other questionable characteristics may surface now and can be noted for further examination on the table later. Most importantly, this is the time to start looking at expression and temperament. Expression is much in the eyes, and temperament reflects itself in the dog's responsiveness to the judge and the handler. Again, take a moment to organize your thoughts, and then ask the class to go around the ring with the first dog to be put on the table. As you watch them gait, pay special attention to topline, reach and drive, balance between front and rear movement, and tail carriage.

When the dog is on the table, it is time to "see with your hands" as well as with your eyes. This is especially important in West Highland White Terrier's because, with only a superficial look at a dog, a good groomer can hide many faults. Take a moment to re-examine the outline and re-evaluate balance, then move to the front of the dog. Are the eyes widely set apart and deeply set, dark brown, intelligent, and of the correct almond shape? Eyes are important because they are key to expression. Is the stop that helps protect the eyes well-defined? Is the nose large and all black, are the eye rims black, and is there sufficient pigment on the inside of the ears? Place your hands on the head to feel for length and breadth of skull and muzzle, and fill beneath the eyes. Try not to crunch the tease too much by using your fingers like calipers. The examination of the bite follows; it should be scissors or level with large teeth, and all incisors should be there. Pre-molars should be visible, but it's okay for one to be missing.

Then go down the front to check shoulder angles and chest overhang. Is bone substantial and are legs straight with elbows close to the body? Putting a hand under the chest displays whether the chest reaches at least to the elbows and whether the elbow-to-ground distance is the same as the withers-to-elbow distance. You can feel the width of the ribcage and its desired heart shape by moving your hands down behind the front legs; a round or barrel chest is incorrect. Sliding the hand down the side from front to back locates the end of the rib cage, so you can now compare the length of the rib cage with the coupling, from its end to the thigh, which should be as short as is compatible with free rear movement. Now check the tail set, which should be high enough so that the spine does not slope down to it. Then run your hands down the hind legs. Lack of rear angulation is common and is often disguised by expert grooming. Are hocks well let down? There should be "dog behind the tail," but this is not often seen. Finally, examine the coat, looking for the ample harsh and wiry outer coat and the softer undercoat. The coat should

be white as the breed's name requires, but wheaten tipping is allowed if the coat is very harsh. Look for evidence of bleaching that can sometimes lead to brittle coat texture and a grey hue.

Evaluation of movement comes next. We will not dwell on this because good movement is similar in many breeds. Making dogs move away and back or in a triangle is typical, and so is checking for the dog's reaction on the return in order to get a sense of the dog's alertness and responsiveness—which are important parts of temperament. Then, the individual examination is finished by taking the dog around the ring and carefully looking again at the side gait for evidence of crabbing, interfering, unmatched front and rear movement, etc. Most importantly, look for reach and drive, and for the topline to remain level.

When all dogs have been examined individually, you must decide whether to spar the dogs. If you have some doubt on how the class should be placed, then don't spar. (Your worst conformation dog may be the one that is most animated and you will be in a quandary and tempted to wrongly put showmanship above essential conformation qualities.) To spar correctly, pull out two or three dogs at a time (never do it by turning dogs on each other in line), and keep them at some distance from each other. You want to see tails and ears come up, and the dogs focused on each other as shown in the accompanying illustration. The standard calls for penalizing excessive timidity AND pugnacity. A dog should be heavily penalized for shying away, and equally so for growling, threateningly lunging, and attacking—because that is NOT correct temperament in a breed that was developed to hunt in packs. There is some debate among longtime, well-respected West Highland White Terrier judges as to the merits and usefulness of sparring, especially as far as bitches are concerned. Many judges do not spar bitches at all because bitches have a softer personality and rarely spar well. Personally, I almost never spar bitches except when the class is of uniformly high quality and I have trouble choosing between the best of them!

All along, the judge collects mental notes on each of the dogs. In smaller and weak classes, the judge may well have decided on placements along the way. In larger and strong classes, it is best to have a strategy on how to make the final selections. The chief consideration should be given to the main characteristics that define Westie type. The standard lists many characteristics, but gives little guidance on which ones are most important.

Fortunately, many well-respected judges agree on the most important criteria for evaluating West Highland White Terrier's. Some years ago, I asked a number of respected Westie judges what the five most important characteristics were on which they based their judgment. Most of the judges listed balance/proportion, head, movement, coat, and temperament, not necessarily all in the same order. A survey by Nikki Riggsbee, published in **Dogs in Review**, found a very similar consensus. All of these characteristics, except movement, are essential expressions of type!! This is not a choice between type and structure. Like Winnie the Pooh, when confronted with a choice of sugar or honey for his tea, here too the right answer is "both, please." Each dog should be rewarded in proportion to the degree to which it approaches the ideal in type and anatomy, with type weighted more heavily. Judges should be guided by what I was told more than four decades ago by Westminster BIS winning Terrier handler, and later AKC Executive Field Representative, Jimmy Butler: "You can find soundness in any pound, it is type that sets the breed apart."



Dr. Gerry G. Meisels

Dr. Gerry Meisels and his wife, Sylvia, have owned, bred, and shown Westies since 1959. Their love of Westies began with a daughter of Westminster BIS winner Ch. Elfinbrook Simon. Gerry's job took the couple from Pittsburgh to Ramsey, New Jersey, Houston, Texas, Lincoln, Nebraska, and Tampa, Florida. They have lived in the Tampa area since 1988. They are primarily breeder/owner-handlers who have finished 68 home-bred Westies, and have repeatedly received parent club recognition for BBE success and top-producing bitches. Their GCHG White Oaks Invincible Snowplow was the No. 1 Westie in 2014. Their daughter, Laura, still holds the record as the youngest handler (at 8 years of age) to ever go BIS at an all-breed show, and she currently shows three young dogs from their last litter. Gerry has judged Westies since 1972 and all Terriers since 1982. In 1976, Gerry and his family spent three months in Great Britain, visiting kennels and dog shows every weekend, and acquiring six Westies. Gerry has been AKC Delegate, Officer, and President of several all-breed clubs. He was founding President of the Westie specialty clubs in Houston and Tampa, and was on the Board of the WHWTCA. Gerry was born and raised in Vienna, Austria. He came to the US in 1951 as a Fulbright pre-doctoral fellow in Chemistry at the University of Notre Dame, receiving the Ph.D. in 1956. After 26 years of research and teaching, he became Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska, and later, Provost and Vice President at the University of South Florida. He retired in 2021, a few days after his 90th birthday.