

## · BREED PRIORITIES ·

# BASSET HOUND

BY NIKKI RIGGSBEE

**B**red to hunt hare, the Basset Hound is heavier boned than any other breed of dog considering its size. Its large nose (second only to the Bloodhound in scenting ability), loose skin, and long ears contribute to its skill and success at trailing. The breed originated in France that has several breeds with "basset" as part of their names, from the French "bas" which means low to the ground.

We found 58 Basset Hound breeder-judges with email addresses to invite to take the survey on their breed's priorities, although not all of the emails were good. Forty responded and agreed to participate. Twenty-one completed surveys were returned in time for the deadline.

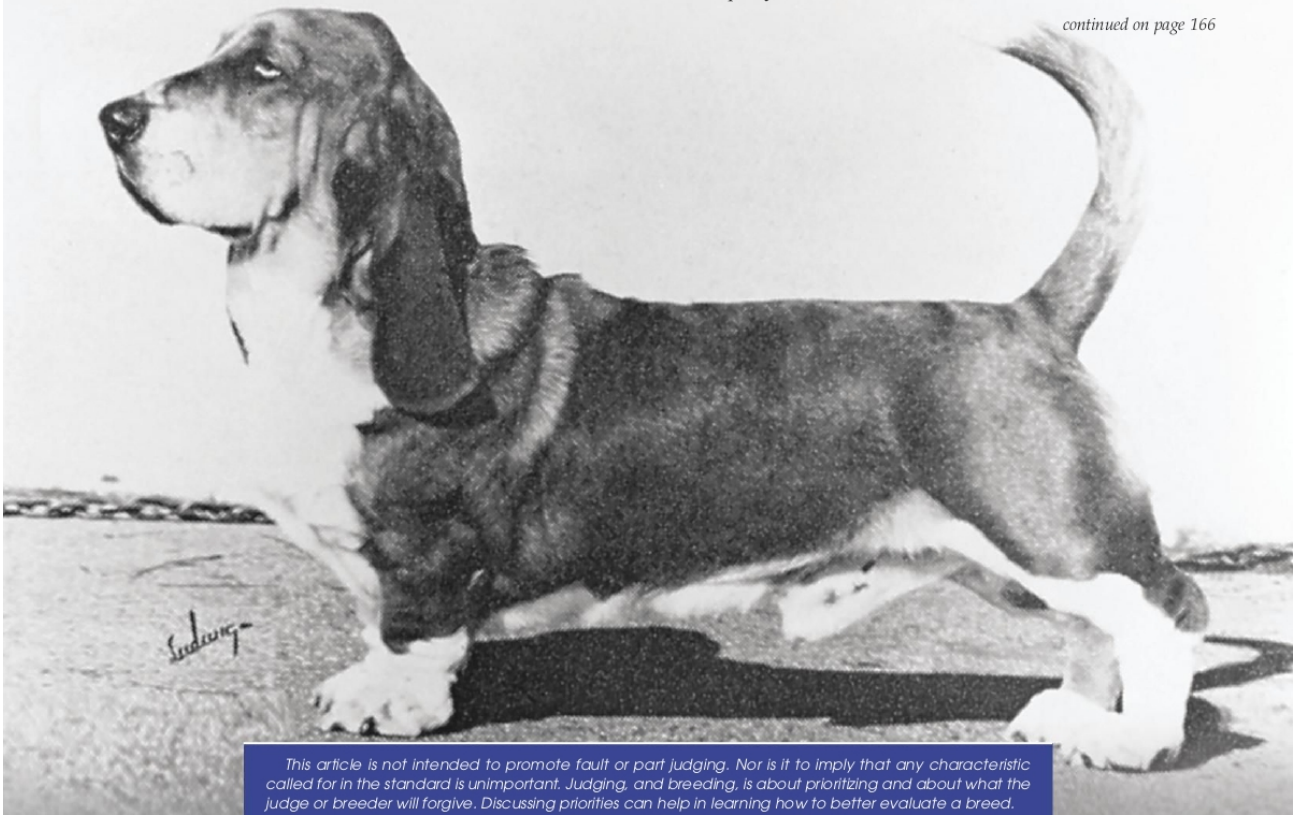
The breeder-judges average nearly 32 years in the breed (several over 40 years) and almost 16 years (several more than 30 years) judging them. All have judged Basset Hound specialties, and almost half have judged their national.

### Basset Hound Virtues

The survey asked the breeder-judges to prioritize a list of virtues taken directly from their standard. Below is the list in sequence from most important to least, based on the average ranks provided by the breeder-judges.

1. Shoulders well laid back
2. Move in a smooth, powerful, effortless manner
3. Topline straight, level
4. Rib structure long, smooth, extends well back
5. Prominent prosternum
6. Neck powerful, of good length, well arched
7. Well-let-down stifle, no tendency toward crouching
8. Heavier in bone, size considered
9. Paws massive, very heavy, well rounded, both inclined equally a trifle outward

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*This article is not intended to promote fault or part judging. Nor is it to imply that any characteristic called for in the standard is unimportant. Judging, and breeding, is about prioritizing and about what the judge or breeder will forgive. Discussing priorities can help in learning how to better evaluate a breed.*

10. Forelegs short, powerful, heavy bone, with wrinkled skin
11. Tail set in continuation of the spine, carried gaily
12. Skull well domed, pronounced occipital protuberance
13. Ears extremely long, low set, hanging in folds
14. Eyes soft, sad, slightly sunken
15. Length from nose to stop approximately the length from stop to occiput
16. Dewlap very pronounced

Seventy-five percent of these items garnered majority agreement, more than on many other breed surveys. The greatest agreement (eighteen) was on "Shoulders well laid back" (1<sup>st</sup>). Just one fewer put "Dewlap very pronounced" (16<sup>th</sup>) in the bottom three positions. Fifteen ranked "Move in a smooth, powerful, effortless manner" (2<sup>nd</sup>) in the top quartile.

Thirteen of the group had "Topline straight, level" (3<sup>rd</sup>) ranked from 2 to 5, "Skull well domed, pronounced occipital protuberance" (12<sup>th</sup>) from 10 to 13, "Ears extremely long, low set, hanging in folds" (13<sup>th</sup>) from 10 to 13, and "Eyes soft, sad, slightly sunken" (14<sup>th</sup>) from 11 to 14. Five others put "Ears" in the bottom three lowering its overall average. It is such a distinctive feature that I thought it would have ranked higher.

"Rib structure long, smooth, extends well back" (4<sup>th</sup>) was 3 to 6 on twelve surveys. The same number had "Well-let-down stifle, no tendency toward crouching" (7<sup>th</sup>) fourth to seventh and "Paws massive, very heavy, well rounded, both inclined equally a trifle outward" (9<sup>th</sup>) clustered around midpoint. The smallest majorities agreed on "Neck powerful, of good length, well arched" (6<sup>th</sup>), and "Length from nose to stop approximately the length from stop to occiput" (15<sup>th</sup>).

A few virtues had bi-polar opinions. A plurality of eight ranked "Prominent prosternum" (5<sup>th</sup>) fairly high, while another eight put it in the middle. Eight surveys had "Forelegs short, heavy" (10<sup>th</sup>) in the second quartile, while nine placed it at or near the bottom quartile. Eight put "Tail set, carried gaily" (11<sup>th</sup>) in the middle, while another like number put it in the last quarter. "Heavier in bone" (8<sup>th</sup>) was placed all over the spectrum.

#### Basset Hound Faults

The breeder-judges also ranked a list of faults directly or derived from the breed standard. The faults listed below are in the order based on their average ranks, beginning with the most serious.

1. Steepness in shoulder, fiddle fronts, and elbows out
2. Steep, poorly angulated hindquarters
3. Topline with tendency to sag or roach
4. Cowhocks or bowed legs
5. Sharp or timid (temperament)
6. Chest not deep and full

7. Flat sidedness and flanged ribs
8. Bite either overshot or undershot
9. Deepest point of chest to ground more than one-third of height in adult
10. Dry head and tight skin
11. High set or flat ear
12. Broad flat skull
13. Very light or protruding eyes
14. Hindquarters not approximately equal to width of shoulder
15. Lacking parallel planes (top lines of muzzle and skull in profile)
16. Lacking prominent haw

Twelve virtues had majority agreement, and thirteen faults had majorities as well. All of the breeder-judges put "Lacking prominent haw" (16<sup>th</sup>) in the last quartile. Eighteen put "Sternness in shoulder, fiddle fronts, and elbows out" (1<sup>st</sup>) in the top quartile.

"Broad flat skull" (12<sup>th</sup>) and "Lacking parallel planes (top lines of muzzle and skull in profile)" (15<sup>th</sup>) were similarly valued by more than seventy percent of the group. Thirteen surveys concurred

on "Steep, poorly angulated hindquarters" (2<sup>nd</sup>), "Topline with tendency to sag or roach" (3<sup>rd</sup>), and "Very light or protruding eyes" (13<sup>th</sup>).

Twelve of the group agreed on the seriousness of these faults: "Cowhocks or bowed legs" (4<sup>th</sup>), "Bite either overshot or undershot" (8<sup>th</sup>), "Dry head and tight skin" (10<sup>th</sup>), and "High set or flat ear" (11<sup>th</sup>). Another third, though, put "Dry head" twelfth through fourteenth. The smallest majority similarly valued "Chest not deep and full" (6<sup>th</sup>) and "Flat sidedness and flanged ribs" (7<sup>th</sup>).

"Sharp or timid (temperament)" (5<sup>th</sup>) was in the top quartile for ten, the second quartile for six, and at or near bottom for four. Ten breeder-judges had "Hindquarters not approximately equal to width of shoulder" (14<sup>th</sup>) in the second quartile, but eight in the last quartile lowered its average. Nine ranked "Deepest point of chest to ground more than one-third of height in adult" between third and sixth, another seven had it in the third quartile; it was considered all over from first to last.

The averages of the faults were not as evenly separated as were those of the virtues. There were more than two points separating first place "Steep shoulders, fiddle fronts, elbows out" and second place "Steep hindquarters," emphasizing the importance of the front. There was another two-point separation between "Chest depth" (9<sup>th</sup>) and "Dry head, tight skin" (10<sup>th</sup>), indicating the top nine are definitely more serious than the last seven. Two points again were between "Hindquarter width" (14<sup>th</sup>) and "Lacking parallel planes" (15<sup>th</sup>), reinforcing the lower importance of the last two faults.

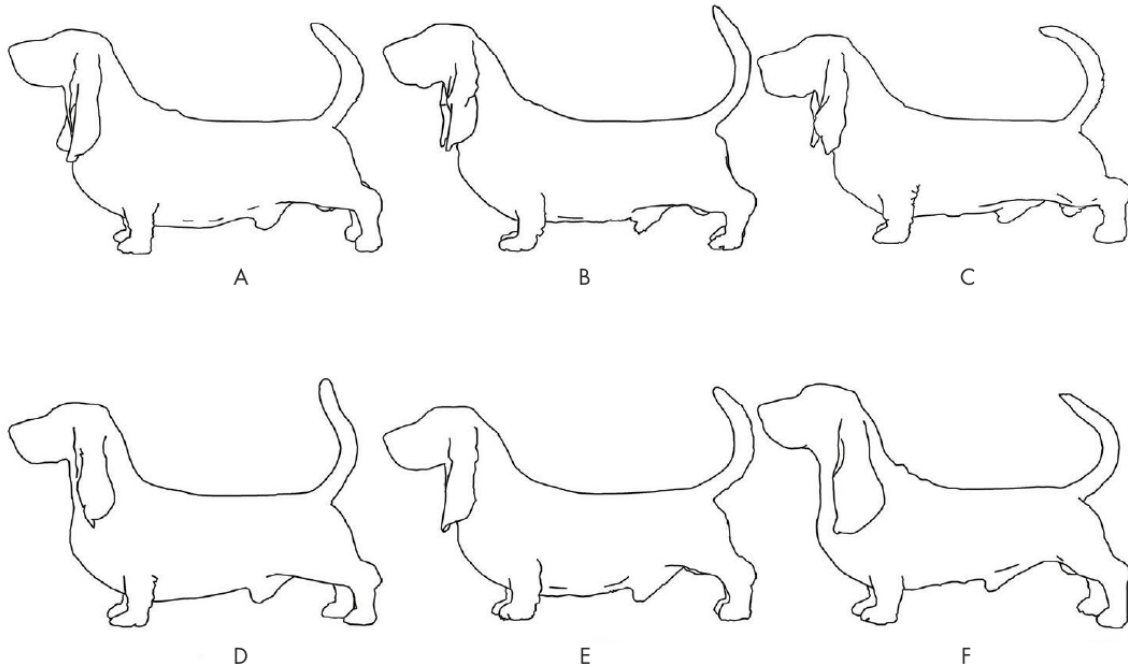
Very close in averages were "Over/undershot" (8<sup>th</sup>) and "Chest depth" (9<sup>th</sup>), less than one-tenth of a point apart. "Very light/protruding eyes" (13<sup>th</sup>) and "Hindquarter width" (14<sup>th</sup>) had



## Basset Hound Outlines

*Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex*

### DOGS



similarly close averages. Additional input could easily change their places in the sequence.

### Defining Characteristics

The breeder-judges were asked what were the essential characteristics they look for when judging Basset Hounds. Most often named was movement, followed closely by correct front-end assembly. Next, they listed level topline and head, including head properties. Temperament was also important.

The next characteristics were named equally often: balance and proportion, rear angulation, breed type, long rib cage, and bone.

### Outlines

The breeder-judges were asked to place outlines of six Basset Hound dogs and six Basset Hound bitches as two classes, first through fourth, respectively. The outlines were made from photographs of very good to excellent Bassets, but because they are of real dogs, none is perfect. The placements here were made on outline only. They could easily change if the experts saw the dogs and bitches in person, had their hands on them, and saw

them move.

The Basset dog with the best average placement was outline "D." Those who selected him said he "was the best balanced," "smoother over shoulders, rear more let down," "proper angulation, nice arch and length of neck, correct tail set," "level topline," "nice deep chest and prominent prosternum, good layback," "nice earset, good parallel planes," "best outline," and "good length of body."

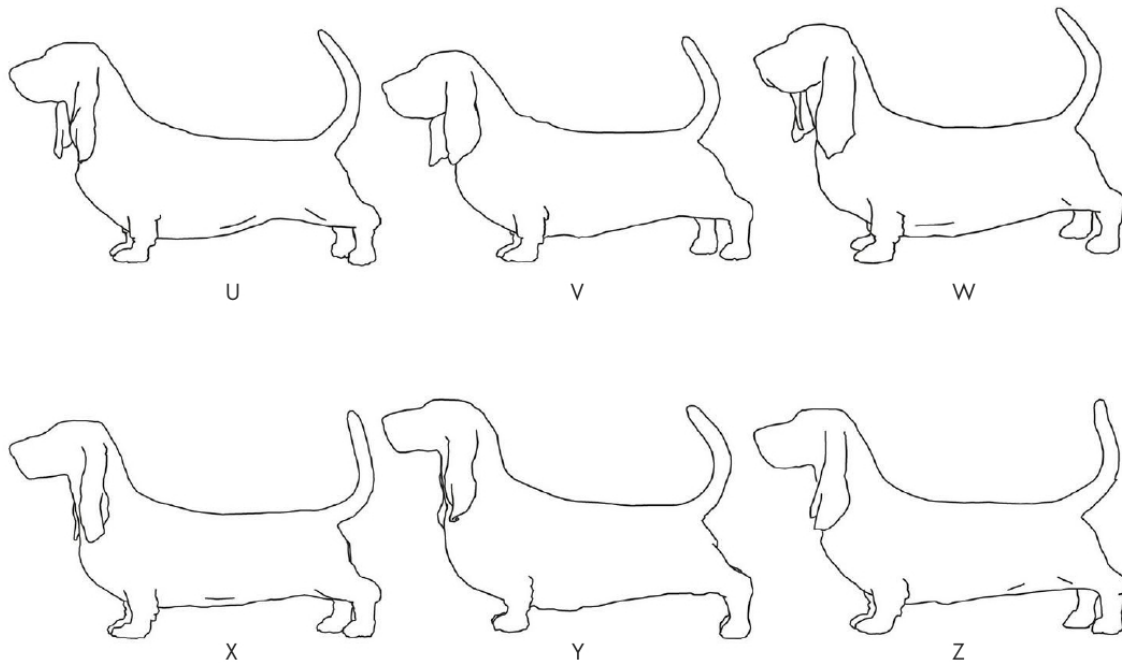
There was a tie for second place dog between Basset "A" and Basset "C". Those who chose "A" said "correct proportions, angles, upper arm, flows as one piece," "good solid Basset, good topline, profile, and head," and "greater length of body and neck." The judges who liked "C" said "well balanced," "almost twice as long as tall, best balanced front to rear, arch of neck and transition of neck to shoulder, longer second thigh and better rear angle," "great neck and topline," and "forelegs placed exactly where they should be, prominent prosternum, short hocks, nice undercarriage."

The favorite bitch was Basset "Z" based on average placement score. The breeder-judges who placed her first said they liked her "length of neck, squareness of muzzle, sternum," "great length of body, great topline," "well-balanced and proportioned body, good front and rear angulation, nice tail carriage, nice head piece, looks in excellent condition," "bone, sternum, neck, and topline,"

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### BITCHES



“beautiful balance and type,” “what sets her apart is her ‘skirt’ and head planes.”

Bitch “U” had the next best bitch placement average. She was chosen by the experts who commented that she “has the best balance of front and rear angulation, beautiful transition of neck into well angled shoulders,” “correct proportions, well let down stifle, short hocks,” and “nice outline, good topline and tail set.”

The group selected dog “D” most often as Best of Breed. He also had the best overall placement average, had more first placements than any other Basset, and was the only one of the twelve never out of the ribbons. Every outline except dog “F” was placed first by at least one judge. Dogs “B” and “F” among the dogs and “V” and “W” among the bitches were out of the ribbons more than the others.

### Additional Notes

The Basset Hound breeder-judges added the following comments to help those evaluating their breed.

- No couch potatoes; dogs must have good musculature.
- A doggy looking bitch does not bother me.
- Not until movement is observed should actual placements be

considered.

- Our breed standard should be used and interpreted in conjunction with our illustrated standard and our judges education CD.
- Most breeders agree that good movement and angulation is far more important than (for instance) ear set.
- When evaluating dogs, my thoughts are always on type, balance, soundness (healthy), and movement.
- The Basset is an all-day hunter over any terrain; it’s a low, heavy-boned, long-ribbed dog; it must be built for endurance.
- Some dogs with wonderful movement don’t have sufficient length of leg to cross a cornfield without tearing up their undersides and using much more energy than would a properly proportioned Basset.
- The stack is basically just for checking bite, testicles, and smoothness of ribs. Watching the dog on the move lets all the secrets out of the bag.
- Don’t move Bassets too fast. Don’t ask for a free stack.
- I look for how a dog stands around naturally. Is he comfortable and firm on his feet, or does he look wobbly? Does his topline hold?
- Breeders worked on fronts for so long. Please don’t forget rears. They aren’t as good as they used to be.

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## BREED PRIORITIES - BASSET HOUND

- A hound weak in pasterns cannot last the day in the field; it is a serious fault.
- The very serious faults are those that impair movement and endurance while in the field.

Thanks to the Basset breeder-judges for participating and sharing their expertise.