

— BREED PRIORITIES — BELGIAN MALINOIS

BY NIKKI RIGGSBEE

AKC recognizes the three Belgian herding dogs – Sheepdog, Tervuren, and Malinois – as three separate breeds. For AKC, the Belgian Laekenois is in Miscellaneous. FCI countries categorize the four breeds as varieties of one Belgian Sheepdog breed, including the Laekenois variety. In FCI countries, the AKC Belgian Sheepdog variety is known as Groenendael.

Thirty-three AKC breeder-judges of all three closely related breeds were invited to participate in the survey identifying their breed priorities. Twenty-seven agreed to participate. Eighteen surveys were returned. The breeder-judges averaged more than

thirty-four years in their breed, and almost thirteen years judging it. More than half have judged their national, and all have judged Belgian specialties.

PRIORITIZING VIRTUES

The survey asked the breeder-judges to prioritize a list of virtues from the Belgian Malinois standard. Their responses were averaged. Below are the virtues in sequence by the average ranks, with 1 being the most important.

1. Square dog
2. Confident, naturally protective, strong desire to work
3. Movement smooth, free and easy, seemingly never tiring
4. Expression: alert, ready for activity, intelligent and questioning
5. Elegant
6. Proud carriage of head and neck
7. Loin relatively short, broad and strong
8. Parallel planes of muzzle and top skull
9. Shoulder forming sharp angle with upper arm
10. Full dentition with scissors or level bite
11. Well muscled
12. Male more impressive, female distinctly feminine
13. Ears shaped as an equilateral triangle, stiff, erect, in proportion to head
14. Feet round, well-padded, toes curved close together
15. Black nose
16. Tail reaching hock, in action raised in a curve

The greatest agreement was on “Tail reaching hock, in action raised in a curve” (16th), with all but one putting it in the last quartile and seven placing it sixteenth. Almost as many concurred on “Square dog” (1st), which was more than one-and-a-half points ahead of second place. Thirteen agreed on “Movement smooth, free and easy, seemingly never tiring” (3rd).



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Two-thirds of the group similarly valued “Confident, naturally protective, strong desire to work” (2nd) and “Black nose” (15th). Almost as many agreed on the relative importance of “Expression: alert, ready for activity, intelligent and questioning” (4th), “Full dentition with scissors or level bite” (10th), and “Feet round, well-padded, toes curved close together” (14th). The majority had “Expression” (4th) in the top quartile, while six had it in the next quartile, so all but one had it in the top half. “Feet” (14th) was near the last quartile for the bigger number, while six had it closer to mid-point.

These virtues had ten experts concurring: “Elegant” (5th), “Male more impressive, female distinctly feminine” (12th), and “Ears shaped as an equilateral triangle, stiff, erect, in proportion to head” (13th). “Elegant” (5th) was near the top quartile for the majority, and another five ranked it a point or two lower. “Male/female” (12th) was near the bottom for the bigger group, while five had it at mid-point or higher. “Ears” (13th) was in the third quartile for the majority, but six ranked it toward the bottom.

Four virtues garnered the agreement of half the group: “Proud carriage of head and neck” (6th), “Parallel planes of muzzle and top skull” (8th), “Shoulder forming sharp angle with upper arm” (9th), and “Well muscled” (11th). “Head carriage” (6th) was middling for half, but eight had it much higher. Half thought “Head planes” (8th) fairly important, although six ranked it below average, lowering its placement. “Well muscled” (11th) ranked fairly low for nine, with six placing it mid-point and higher.

“Loin relatively short, broad and strong” (7th) was split. Eight had it well below average. Seven put it at mid-point or more important.

“Head/neck carriage” (6th) was nearly two points ahead of the “Short loin” (7th) as was the average of “Well muscled” (11th) over “Male/female distinction” (12th). Last placed “Tail” was more than two points lower than “Black nose.” Gaps in averages confirm the greater importance of the virtues above and the lesser of those below.

“Movement” (3rd) and “Expression” (4th) were less than one-tenth of a point apart so that additional input could change their relative ranks. “Full dentition/bite” (10th) and “Well muscled” (11th) were similarly close. Additional input could change their relative ranks.

Eleven of the sixteen virtues had majority agreement, which increases the confidence in the survey results.

RANKING FAULTS

The breeder-judges were somewhat less consistent when they ranked the following faults, in sequence by average rank, with 1 being the most serious.

1. Shy
2. Overly aggressive
3. Cumbersome and bulky
4. Hindquarter angulation not balanced with forequarters
5. Topline or back not level
6. tie: Heavy head
6. tie: Spindly or leggy
8. Protruding eyes

9. Body not giving the impression of power
10. Extreme rear angulation
11. Snipey muzzle
12. Broad chest
13. Not single tracking at fast gait
14. Pasterns too sloped
15. One or more missing teeth
16. Round bone (rather than oval)

Half the faults had majority agreement. All but one ranked “Shy” (1st) first or second. Just one less placed “Overly aggressive” (2nd) the same. These two had the biggest consensus.

“Spindly or leggy” (tied at 6th) was ranked around midpoint by thirteen experts. Twelve considered “Topline or back not level” (5th) fairly important.

The smallest majority agreed on the following: “Cumbersome and bulky” (3rd), “Hindquarter angulation not balanced with forequarters” (4th), “Protruding eyes” (8th), and “One or more missing teeth” (15th). Ten had “Cumbersome” (3rd) around the second quartile, while four had it near the top, and another four midpoint or lower. “Unbalanced angulation” (4th) was fairly high for ten, but five put it in the second quartile. The majority had “Protruding eyes” (8th) midpoint or lower, but four had it in the top quartile and three were near bottom. Ten experts put “Missing teeth” (15th) in the last quartile, four ranked it twelfth, but three put it near the top.

Half of the group concurred on “Heavy head” (tied at 6th), “Body not giving the impression of power” (9th), and “Round bone” (16th). “Heavy head” (tied at 6th) was fairly important for nine, but five had it around the last quartile. “Lacking power” (9th) was below average for nine, but four thought it around the top quartile. “Round bone” (16th) was in the last quartile for half the group, but another seven had it in the third quartile.

“Snipey muzzle” (11th) was unimportant for eight, but seven had it above midpoint. Eight had “Not single tracking at fast gait” (13th) fourteenth or fifteenth, five had it above average, and another five had it below. “Pasterns too sloped” (14th) was in the last quartile for eight, while another eight were in the third quartile.

The most agreement on “Extreme rear angulation” (10th) was seven in the second quartile and another seven in the last. “Broad chest” (12th) was near bottom for seven, around midpoint for six, and fairly high for four.

Over three points separated the second from third faults, emphasizing the importance of temperament. Other than the tie at six, none of the other faults averaged within one-tenth of a point with another.

The many split opinions on the faults is the likely reason why there were fewer and smaller majorities.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

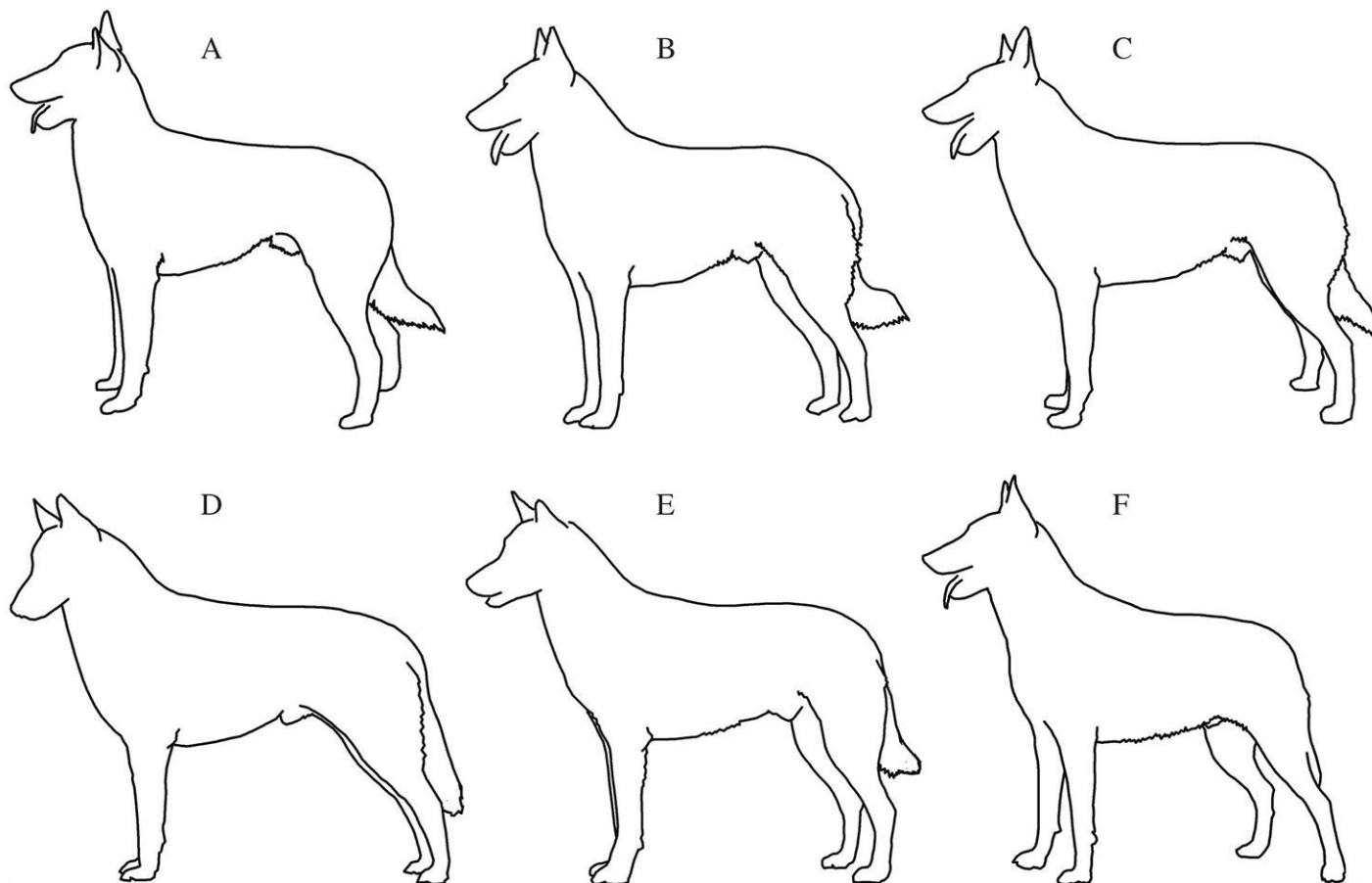
The breeder-judges listed four to six characteristics that a Belgian Malinois must have to be a “good one.” Good temperament was listed most often, followed closely by squareness and movement. These reflected the top of the lists above. Also named often were

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Belgian Malinois Outlines

DOGS

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex



elegance and expression, outline and good head type.

OUTLINES

The survey asked the breeder-judges to place the outlines of six Belgian Malinois dogs and six bitches based. The outlines were made from photos of real dogs, so none is ideal. The judges placed each group as a class, first through fourth. The placements were averaged to determine their collective selections. Some of the feet were in the grass and so were drawn, so don't focus on feet.

The top male was Malinois "B," who had the best average placement and the most first placements in either sex. Those who liked him said he had "square outline, proper neck length and placement, proper tuck up, tail to hock," "correct in all respects – square, short back, carriage/placement of head and neck, and overall proportions," "balance, head planes," "elegant, proud, masculine, looks like he could work," "most correct," and "good substance."

Next favored dog based on average placement and number of first placements among the dogs was Malinois "D." Those who liked him commented that he was "square, elegant, nice substance and neck carriage," "very typical recognizable Belgian Malinois

outline," "nice head type, small ears, balanced," "correct tuck up," and "better balance." Some said they went back and forth between "B" and "D."

Malinois bitch that have the best average and most first placements among the bitches was "V." Those who chose her said she had "nice head type, square, balance," "nice silhouette, good head planes," "may be too long in loin, but looks feminine with good head planes and carriage," and "good feet."

Second place among the girls was bitch "U." Those who selected her said she had "appropriate size," "nice balance, elegant, close to square," and "pretty, feminine Belgian outline, square, nice bone, nice feet, looks young."

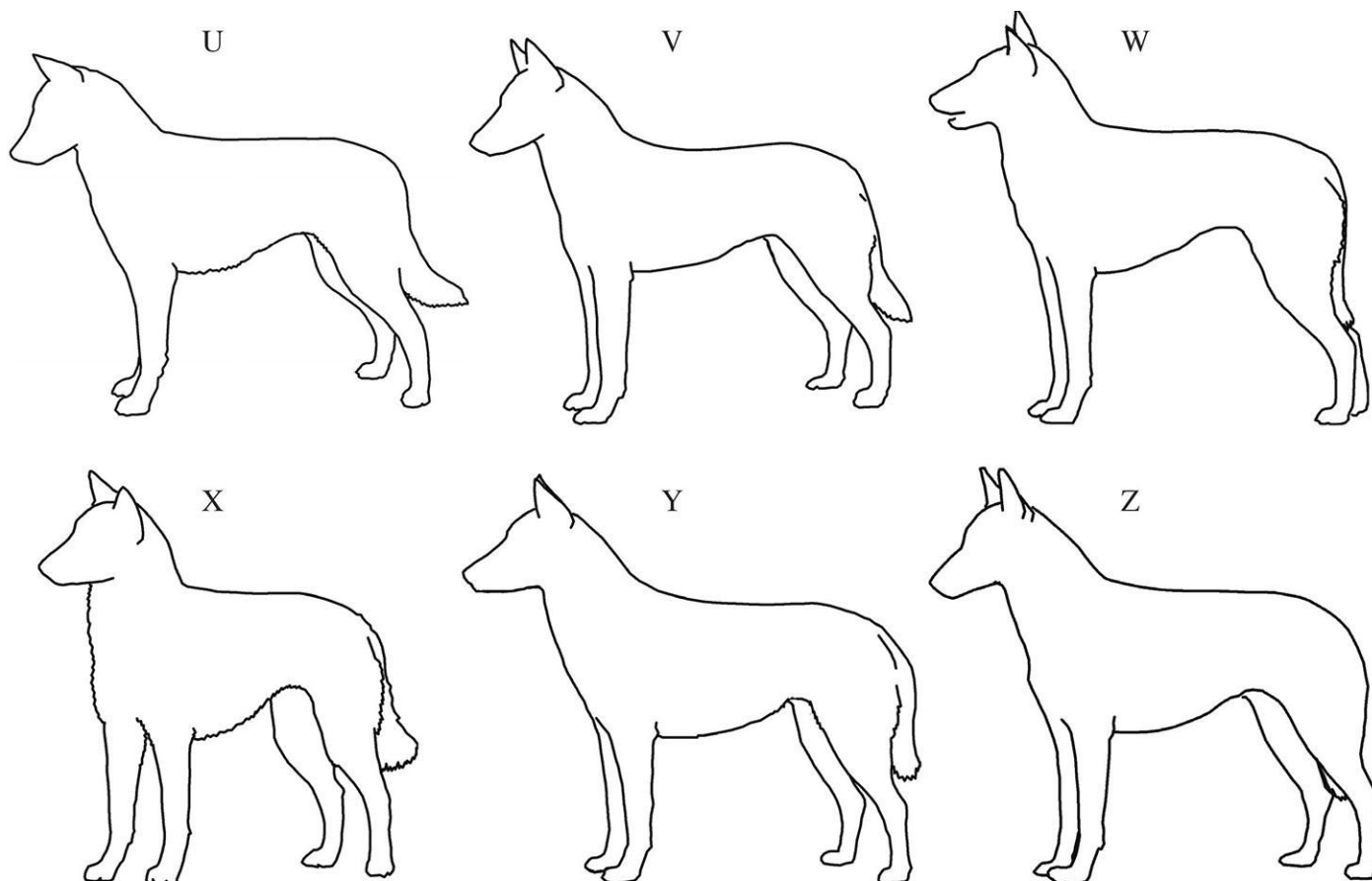
Best of Breed decidedly was dog "B." They said he had the best outline. Some said that if he had a bit more neck he would be "absolutely lovely." Another said that he had "the essence of the proud Malinois breed" and "definitely male." The dogs were preferred over the bitches as a group.

Among the dogs, only Malinois "A" and "C" were never placed first by any breeder-judge. Dog "B" was never out of the ribbons. Dog "E" was out of the ribbons on fourteen surveys. Only bitch Y received no first placements. All the bitches were left out of the

Belgian Malinois Outlines

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BITCHES



ribbons by at least two judges.

One commented about not liking the bitch outlines at all. Another said that placements were based on squareness, shortness of back, carriage and placement of head and neck, and overall proportions. One noted that bitch “V” had one of the best heads of the twelve.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Some of the comments offered by the Belgian breeder-judges for students of their breed were:

- Power without coarseness.
- Stability of character – they should “see” everything, but stand their ground.
- Outline defines type.
- First look for the most type with correct substance, then for soundness and movement.
- A dog should be elegant, upstanding, four-square, with substance without heaviness, showing an intelligent and questioning expression, prepared to stand his ground, and able to move with grace, ease, and efficiency.
- I judge dogs in motion, not standing still – profiles are just a

small part. When I’m judging and get stuck, I send the dogs around the ring again and just keep ‘em moving.

- Belgian Malinois should never be thought of as skinny German Shepherds. It is a moderate breed, proud, elegant, never overdone, always ready for action, free moving and graceful.
- Must have good muscle tone.
- If a dog has no breed type, he is not a good Belgian – that should be rated as a number one fault along with temperament.
- Temperament – temperament – temperament: confident, never aggressive or shy.
- The breed is elegant yet strong, always confident and intelligent.
- Most Belgians are owner-handled, many by novices
- The most important things are elegant and square. Outline is critical. Lots of neck, short back.
- Shy or aggressive dogs should be severely penalized.
- It is important to maintain a moderate size in both males and bitches with proper substance. Significant emphasis is placed on maintaining correct temperament and working ability; excellent condition is very important.

Thanks to all the Belgian breeder-judges who participated in the survey and shared their expertise.