

— BREED PRIORITIES —

BY NIKKI RIGGSBEE



This discussion is not intended to promote fault or part judging. One should always evaluate a whole dog as a package.

Based on their comments, this was done by the judges evaluating the outlines in this article. However, one develops and improves his picture of excellence by deciding what to emphasize for each breed. They say that evaluating dogs is a matter of what you will forgive. Having priorities can help with that process.

Bouvier des Flandres

A KC says the Bouvier des Flandres originated in the Flanders area in France. The parent club's (ABdFC) website reports that it was developed in Belgium. Wikipedia says Flanders is in Belgium. FCI lists the Country of Origin as both Belgium and France. European geography has changed over the years, so they are probably all right. The Bouvier is a farm dog used for herding and guarding livestock, pulling carts, and acting as a family companion.

We found twelve breeder-judges and eighteen other breed mentors to invite to take a survey on the breed priorities of Bouvier des Flandres. Eight of the judges and sixteen of the mentors who were not judges accepted. In the end, the judges returned seven surveys and the other mentors sent nine, for a total of sixteen.

All of the judges (plus a couple) have judged the national and other specialties. They have been in the breed over thirty-two years on average, and the breeder-judges have been approved to judge them for nearly twenty years on average.

Bouvier des Flandres Virtues

The experts were asked to prioritize a list of virtues taken from the Bouvier standard. The list of characteristics is below in sequence by the average of the ranks, with 1 being the most important.

1. Compact, short-coupled
2. Back short, broad, well-muscled, with a firm level topline
3. Powerfully built, strong boned, well-muscled
4. Free, bold, proud gait, reach in balance with driving power
5. Temperament equable, steady, resolute, fearless character
6. Shoulder blade and humerus form angle slightly greater than 90 degrees
7. Harsh double-coat
8. Hindquarters firm, well-muscled with large, powerful hams
9. Proportions of skull to muzzle 3 to 2
10. Chest broad, brisket extending to elbow
11. Moderate angulation at the stifle
12. Expression bold and alert
13. Toplines of muzzle and skull parallel
14. Scissors bite
15. Feet rounded, compact, toes close and well-arched
16. Beard and mustache

In my memory of the dozens of breed priority surveys that I have done, the Bouvier experts have shown a greater and unprecedented level of agreement than any other. I noticed that this was happening as I recorded the input as it arrived. It was confirmed when the data was analyzed. All but one virtue had majority agreement. But even there, "Chest broad, brisket extending to elbow" (10th) had half of the group with the same opinion.

The biggest majority was on the relative unimportance of "Beard and mustache" (16th) with all but one survey ranking it in the last quartile and seven putting it absolutely last. Nearly as many agreed on "Feet rounded, compact, toes close and well-arched" (15th), with five placing at the sixteenth place.

"Compact, short-coupled" (1st) was placed highly by seventy-five percent, including eight who ranked it first. Slightly more concurred on "Back short, broad, well-muscled, firm level topline" (2nd), with five ranking it second.

Eleven experts formed majorities for "Powerfully built, strong boned, well-muscled" (3rd), "Hindquarters firm, well-muscled with large, powerful hams" (8th), and "Proportions of skull to muzzle 3 to 2" (9th). "Powerful" whose average placed it third in the list was actually ranked third by seven experts. "Head proportions" (9th) had rankings of mostly tenth or eleventh.

"Free, bold, proud gait, reach in balance with driving power" (4th) was placed between the first and second quartile by over sixty percent, with six ranking it specifically fourth. The same number (ten) put "Temperament equable, steady, resolute, fearless character" (5th) in the top quartile, but other lower scores dropped it to fifth. "Temperament" is often valued like

that: not ranked highly as a virtue, but serious as a fault when there is a problem.

Not only was there majority agreement on fifteen of the traits, but several of them had a significant number of surveys (more than 4) giving them the exact rank that they ended up with on the list, as noted above.

The average ranks of "Temperament" (5th) and "Front angulation" (6th) were almost three points apart, emphasizing the greater priority of the first five virtues. A similar number separated the ranks of "Scissors bite" (14th) and "Feet" (15th) firmly putting the last two virtues at the bottom.

Bouvier des Flandres Faults

The survey also included a list of faults for the experts to rank from most serious to least serious. The faults were taken either directly from the standard or derived from it. Below is the list in sequence by the average placement, with 1 being the most serious.

1. Long-bodied
2. Color chocolate brown, white, or parti-color
3. Topline weakness
4. Sickie or cow-hocks
5. Steep shoulders
6. Deviating from minimum or maximum [size] limits
7. Undershot or overshot
8. Slabsidedness
9. Slanted croup
9. Skull not well-developed
11. Yellow or light eyes
12. Short, squatty neck
13. Upper thigh too straight or too sloping
14. Coat too long, too short, silky, or woolly
15. Snipey muzzle
16. Ears too low or closely set

While the faults didn't have the same level of agreement among the experts, half of the issues did have majorities ranking them similarly.

Fifteen experts put "Ears too low or closely set" (16th) in the last quartile, with five putting it in last place.

"Long-bodied" (1st) was ranked in the top quartile by seventy-five percent, with six placing it first. "Color chocolate brown, white, or parti-color" (2nd) had thirteen experts put it in the top quartile, again with six placing it first. But three ranked "Color" towards the bottom, which lowered its average rank to second.

Ten of the surveys similarly valued "Topline weakness" (3rd), "Sickie or cow-hocks" (4th), and "Slabsidedness" (8th). "Topline weakness" (3rd) might have ranked as more serious, but five had it below average as a problem. "Slabsidedness" (8th) had an odd distribution, with the majority at or above average, but many of the others putting it as much less serious, thereby lowering its average. A minimum majority agreed on "Steep shoulders" (5th) and "Short, squatty neck" (12th).

Half of the experts concurred on “Deviating from minimum or maximum [size] limits” (6th) in the top quartile, but six had it in the bottom quartile. Half also had “Slanted croup” (tied at 9th) as more serious than average, but seven thought it below average. Half also thought “Coat too long, too short, silky, or woolly” (14th) not serious, but the other surveys ranked this item all over. Again, half thought “Snipey muzzle” (15th) was not a problem, but seven others put it just below midpoint.

There were more bipolar opinions, in addition to those mentioned above. Six experts considered, “Undershot or overshot” (7th) a big problem, but another six considered it not important. “Yellow or light eyes” (11th) was well below average for seven, but five thought it quite serious. Six ranked “Upper thigh too straight or too sloping” (13th) as fairly unimportant, but five had it much higher. “Skull not well developed” (tied at 9th) had six value it similarly, but the rest were all over.

There was a tie at nine; additional input would resolve that. “Yellow or light eyes” (11th) was also very close, with less than a tenth of a point behind the tied items.

There was a two point gap between the average ranks of “Wrong color” (2nd) and “Weak topline” (3rd), confirming that the first two are the worst problems. Last place “Bad earset” averaged three points behind the fifteenth-ranked fault, confirming that this is not an issue for Bouviers.

There was some consistency in the opinions on the virtues and faults. Length of body placed first in both lists. Topline was second on one and third on the other. Front angulation was sixth and fifth. Rear angulation was eleventh and thirteenth. On the other hand, coat was seventh as a virtue, but fourteenth as a fault.

Outlines

The experts were asked to evaluate two sets of Bouvier outlines, six dogs and six bitches, place each set first through fourth, and select Best of Breed. Since the outlines were traced from photos of real dogs, none was perfect, and all were not in the exact same position.

This is always a bigger challenge with coated breeds. If the experts had a chance to put their hands on the dogs and under the coats and see the dogs move, their selections might change. *Select your favorites from the outlines on the following pages before you see what the experts selected.*

The Bouvier dog with the best placement average was dog “B.” Those who placed him first commented “Square, good shoulder, balanced rear, level topline; appears powerfully built with good tail set and length of neck,” “best as standard describes in style for type, nice slightly arched neck, good topline, correct tailset,” “overall pleasing type, good neck arch and head, overstretched so looks long in loin, tailset good, front/rear balance could be better,” and “most correct outline, short coupled, good layback, and correct angulation.”

Second place dog was Bouvier “D.” The reasons given by people who placed him first included “breed type outline, proportionate square body, length of leg to body, angulation,” “type, square and cobby, good length of neck, good angulation,”

“compact, moderate rear angulation, square,” “square cobby outline, head planes parallel, front under dog, proper tailset,” “short-coupled, square outline, powerful, moderate angles, balance of neck to body,” and “short backed, moderate angulation, well laid back shoulder, level topline.”

The Bouvier bitch with the best placement average was bitch “V.” Comments on her included “very typey, short back, nice slightly arched neck, balance a little off, tail set too high,” “overall proportion,” “type, square, cobby, good length of neck, rear angulation,” “compact with rear angulation,” “cobby with moderate angulation, good topline, front set too far forward, grooming on head suspicious,” and “good leg, short body, square outline, shoulder layback looks well placed.”

Runner-up bitch was Bouvier “W.” Those who liked her said “balance front to rear, good bone and substance, nice neck, topline, and tail set,” “square, good topline, good arch in neck,” “correct head proportions, good earset, nice length of neck, level short back, tailset that is the natural extension of the spine, appearance of dog behind the tail with correct rear angles blending into slightly angled hocks low to the ground, front legs under,” and “best front-rear balance, pleasing line, feminine, moderate angles, short hocks.”

Best of Breed is more of a challenge. Bitch “V” had the best average placement score of all twelve outlines. Dog “D” and bitches “V” and “W” were each placed first in their class by six experts, more than any other. But the one named BOB most often was dog “D,” who came in second among the dogs based on placement average; he was selected BOB six times compared to “B,” “E,” and “W” who were selected BOB twice each. Only one survey had bitch “V,” with the highest placement average and tied for the most first placements, BOB. Eleven of the outlines selected BOB were dogs.

All of the dogs except “C” and all of the bitches except “U” and “X” were placed first by at least one expert. Three were placed first six times, more than any others: “D,” “V,” and “W.”

All dogs and bitches were left out of the ribbons entirely by at least one expert. The dog unplaced most often of all twelve was dog “C;” dog “F” was the next most often unplaced among the dogs. Bitch “Z” was out of the ribbons on eleven surveys, and bitch “Y” on eight.

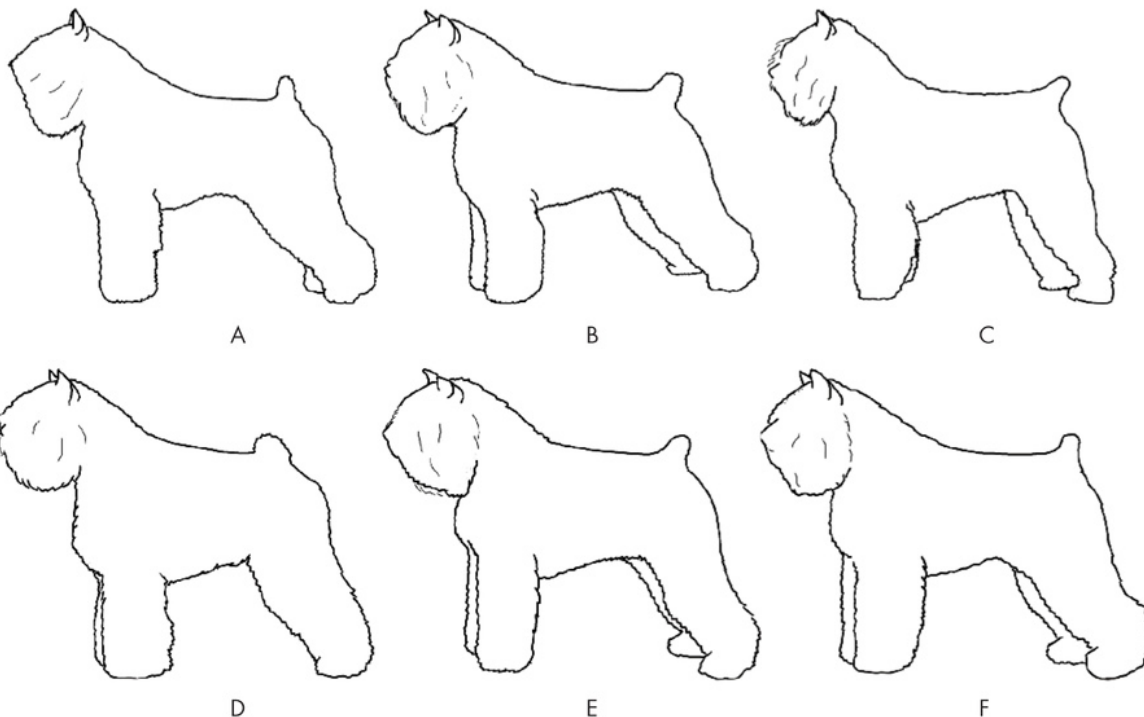
So while the Bouvier experts had unusual agreement in prioritizing the lists above, that same level of agreement didn’t continue to the outlines. This is a bit unusual, since in other breeds surveyed, the lists tend to have less agreement than the outline selections. This may be an issue of coat. Several said that this breed cannot be judged on outline, that one must get hands on the dogs.

One additional item that I’ve not seen before: Five experts selected both dog “D” and bitch “V” as first in their respective classes. Since there were five dogs placed first and four bitches at least once, that is twenty possible dog-bitch combinations, more than the number of surveys. Three of the five “D”-“V” surveys are from judges; one is from a non-judge with the most number of years in the breed. The fifth survey didn’t provide the years in the breed.

Bouvier des Flandres Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



Essential Characteristics

The survey asked the experts to name four to six characteristics that a quality Bouvier must have. Consistent with the list priorities and the comments on the outlines, square was named most often. Not focused on in other survey sections, the head with correct proportions and parallel planes was mentioned next most frequently. Also often listed were proper angulation, movement, coat, temperament, and level topline. Topline was important in the lists and was named with angulation in the outline comments. But coat wasn't a priority in other parts of the survey.

Movement

The survey asked what movement component they felt was most important and which movement fault was most serious.

Most important to good movement were balanced front and rear with reach and drive. Unbalanced angulation was the cause of most movement problems, including lack of reach and drive

and high rear kick.

Comments

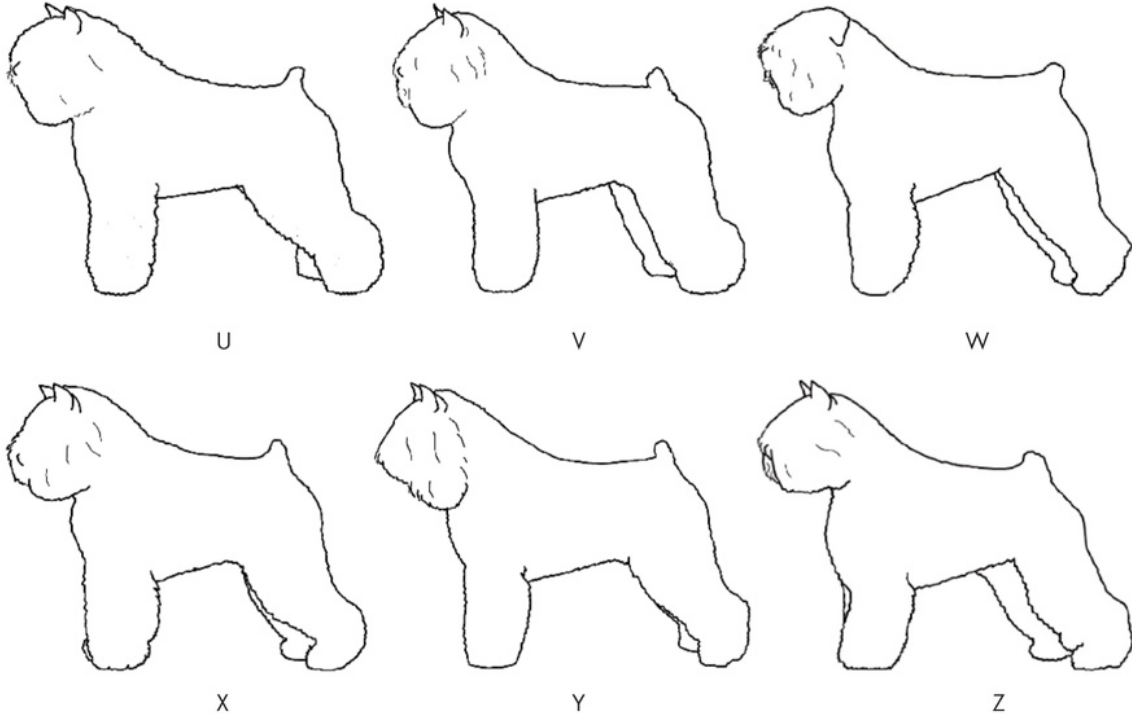
The Bouvier experts shared these additional comments for students of their breed.

- **The Bouvier is built like a quarter horse**, not a thoroughbred. Value a square dog with balance and easy motion without heaviness.
- **The dog must be agile** and have the stamina to work all day and the ability to move safely around large stock.
- **This is a SQUARE breed.** Coat is one of the last things to consider. This is an owner-handled breed, and some people are better at grooming than others.
- **The most common head fault is 50:50** and may come with bite problems. The correct head is a skull slightly longer than wide with a slightly tapering muzzle.
- **Don't confuse tailset with tail carriage.** That tail carried

Bouvier des Flandres Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



straight up while moving may be at a slight angle following a natural extension of the spine when standing, which is correct.

- **If the Bouvier has great reach and drive due to length in body,** it is wrong.
- **Find the dog with the power, bone, substance, tenacity, and agility** to hit a 1000-pound steer in a full-body block and turn him in a direction he doesn't want to go.
- **You must put your hands on the dog;** the outline of coat can be entirely man-made.
- **Movement is very important** to see both movement and balance, never heavy or labored.
- **Color is important.** A white star on the chest is allowed, but not a white dog or washed out colors.
- **Get past the grooming contest** that hides poor heads and planes.
- **Temperament is extremely important.**
- **Head should appear massive,** and the dog should appear to have great strength. It is not a head breed, but the head must be in balance.

- **Learn proper coat** which is harsh, dense, double, crisp without being made that way with product or dirt.
- **Approach positively** and examine with a slightly firm hand.
- **Bouvier often have dropped central lower incisors** while still having a scissors bite.
- **Bouvier are cattle movers;** they herd by throwing body blocks into the cattle.
- **Correct front and rear required are for good movement,** with reach and drive and where the feet should have little rise off the ground. Head carriage moving like a herding dog.
- **Essence of breed type:** square, balanced reach and drive, good coated, impressive head, no shyness.
- **The breed must be judged on the move** when faults are easier to spot.
- **This is an aloof breed** that makes noises but whose temperament should be totally reliable.

Many thanks to the Bouvier des Flandres judges and mentors for sharing their knowledge and expertise.