

· BREED PRIORITIES · FINNISH SPITZ

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Suomen-pystykorva—the national dog of Finland, also called Finsk Spets—translates as Finnish prick-eared dog. In AKC, it is called the Finnish Spitz. Developed in Finland from Spitz-type dogs for thousands of years, it was used to hunt all types of game. His skill at barking and pointing game in trees led to his specialization in hunting birds.

By the late 1800s in Finland, with other Spitz dogs being around and bred with the Finnish Spitz, it was becoming rare as a unique breed. Hugo Roos was determined to preserve and revive the breed and did so over several decades. His results are the ancestors of today's Finnish Spitz.

Finnish Spitz were first imported to the United States in 1959, and the first breeding pair arrived in 1966. They entered AKC's Miscellaneous class in 1983, and joined the AKC Non-Sporting group in 1988. As of 2021, it ranked 191st among AKC recog-

nized breeds.

We found names of twenty-eight Finnish Spitz experts, twenty-five of whom had contact information to which we sent invitations to take a survey on their breed. Fifteen agreed to do so, and eleven surveys have been returned. Those who contributed have been in the breed for twenty-seven-and-one-half years on average. Those who are approved to judge have been doing so for twenty-and-one-half years.

Finnish Spitz Virtues

The Finnish Spitz experts ranked a list of virtues taken from their AKC standard from most to least important. The list below is in sequence by the average of the experts' placements, with one being the most important.

1. Gait: quick and light, steps out briskly, with lively grace, tends to single-track
2. Square
3. Hindquarters angulation in balance with forequarters
4. Red-gold coat
5. Layback of shoulders thirty degrees to the vertical
6. Topline - level and strong from withers to croup
7. Ratio of chest depth to distance from withers to ground is 4:9
8. Temperament: Active and friendly, lively, eager, faithful; brave, but cautious
9. Eyes almond-shaped, black rims, obliquely set, dark color, keen alert expression
10. Skull to muzzle ratio 4:3
11. Presents fox-like picture
12. Tail set on just below level of topline, forming single curl falling over loin, tip pointing towards thigh
12. Ears set on high... small erect, sharply pointed, very mobile
14. Feet rounded, compact foot with well-arched toes
15. Scissors bite
16. Bone strong



BREED PRIORITIES - FINNISH SPITZ

Nine of the eleven Finnish Spitz experts agreed on "Gait: quick and light, steps out briskly, with lively grace, tends to single-track" (1st) and "Tail set on just below level of topline, forming single curl falling over loin, tip pointing towards thigh" (tied at 12th). Interestingly, the nine agreeing on "Gait" (1st) ranked it 2-5; no one placed it first. "Square" (2nd) was ranked in the top quartile by seven, with six first placements. But three outliers produced an average for "Square" that placed it behind "Gait."

Eight of the experts concurred on the last three ranked virtues. Most placed "Feet rounded, compact foot with well-arched toes" (14th) between 9-12, but three ranked it fourteenth. "Scissors bite" (15th) and "Bone strong" (16th) were both in the bottom quartile for the majority. "Red-gold coat" (4th) was ranked 3-6 on seven surveys.

The smallest majority of six similarly valued "Hindquarters angulation in balance with forequarters" (3rd), "Layback of shoulders thirty degrees to the vertical" (5th), "Eyes almond-shaped, black rims, obliquely set, dark color, keen alert expression" (9th), "Presents fox-like picture" (11th), and "Ears set on high... small erect, sharply pointed, very mobile" (tied at 12th). Most had "Hindquarters" (3rd) 2-5, but four placed it 7-10. "Eyes" (9th) were 8-11 for the majority, but four had it 4-6. "Fox like" (11th) was 12-15 for six, but three ranked it 1-3.

Those without majorities also had bipolar opinions. Five had "Skull to muzzle ratio 4:3" (10th) 7-10, with four others 11-14. "Topline - level and strong from withers to croup" (6th) was 2-5 on four surveys and 8-10 on another four. Four experts also put "Ratio of chest depth to distance from withers to ground is 4:9" (7th) 2-5 and another three 6-7. The description of this virtue is an interesting and precise way of saying legs should be longer than half the height of the dog.

As usual, temperament produced mixed opinions. "Temperament: Active and friendly, lively, eager, faithful; brave, but cautious" (8th) was ranked 8-11 by four experts, 1-2 by three experts, and 13-15 by another three.

Additional input would break the tie at twelve. "Temperament" (8th) and "Eyes" (9th) had averages less than one-tenth of a point apart as did "Scissors bite" (15th) and "Strong bone" (16th), so they might change relative ranks with more surveys.

Finnish Spitz Faults

The survey also presented a list of sixteen faults taken from or derived from the Finnish Spitz AKC standard for the experts to prioritize based on how serious each is perceived. Below are the faults in sequence by the average of the experts' priorities, with 1 being the biggest problem.

1. Lacking sound movement
2. Nose not black
3. Tendency to unprovoked aggression
4. Not square
5. Muddy or unclear color or any white except as specified
6. Coarse head or long or narrow head
7. Males not decidedly masculine or bitches not decidedly feminine

8. Low or high set tail
9. Height under 17½" or over 20" for dogs, or under 15½" or over 18" for bitches
10. Fine or heavy bone
11. Light eyes
12. Lacking liveliness
13. Ears set too high, too low, or too close together
14. Any trimming of coat
15. Shyness
16. Ribs not well-sprung

The greatest agreement on either list was on "Ribs not well sprung" (16th) with all but one ranking it 11-14. Note that those aren't bottom of the list rankings, but its average was the worst which put it at the bottom. Other faults had many lower rankings, but also had enough varied expert opinions to affect their averages.

Eight experts concurred on "Lacking sound movement" (1st) putting it in the top quartile. Seven of the group agreed on "Nose not black" (2nd), "Tendency to unprovoked aggression" (3rd), and "Fine or heavy bone" (10th). "Aggression" (3rd), a temperament issue, was 1-3 for seven, but 8-10 for three. "Fine/heavy bone" (10th) had seven place it 7-10 and three at 13-14.

The smallest majority of six experts similarly valued "Muddy or unclear color or any white except as specified" (5th), "Coarse head or long or narrow head" (6th), "Low or high set tail" (8th), "Ears set too high, too low, or too close together" (13th), and "Shyness" (15th). "Bad ear set" (13th) was in the third quartile for six and the bottom quartile for three. "Shy" (15th) was 15-16 for the majority, but 8-11 for another three.

Six faults didn't manage majorities. "Not square" (4th) was ranked 5-6 on five surveys, first on three, and 12-14 on another three. Five experts had "Lacking liveliness" (12th) in the bottom quartile, with another three 5-7. "Any trimming of coat" (14th) was 15-16 for five experts, but in the third quartile for four.

Four experts had "Males not decidedly masculine or bitches not decidedly feminine" (7th) ranked 4-6, while another four had it 9-12. "Height under 17½ inches or over 20 inches for dogs, or under 15½ inches or over 18 inches for bitches" (9th) was 8-9 on four surveys, bottom quartile on another four, but 3-5 for three. Four experts placed "Light eyes" (11th) 7-8, with another four 12-15.

The group was fairly consistent in features that were represented on both lists: gait, square, color, tail set/carriage, eye, and ears.

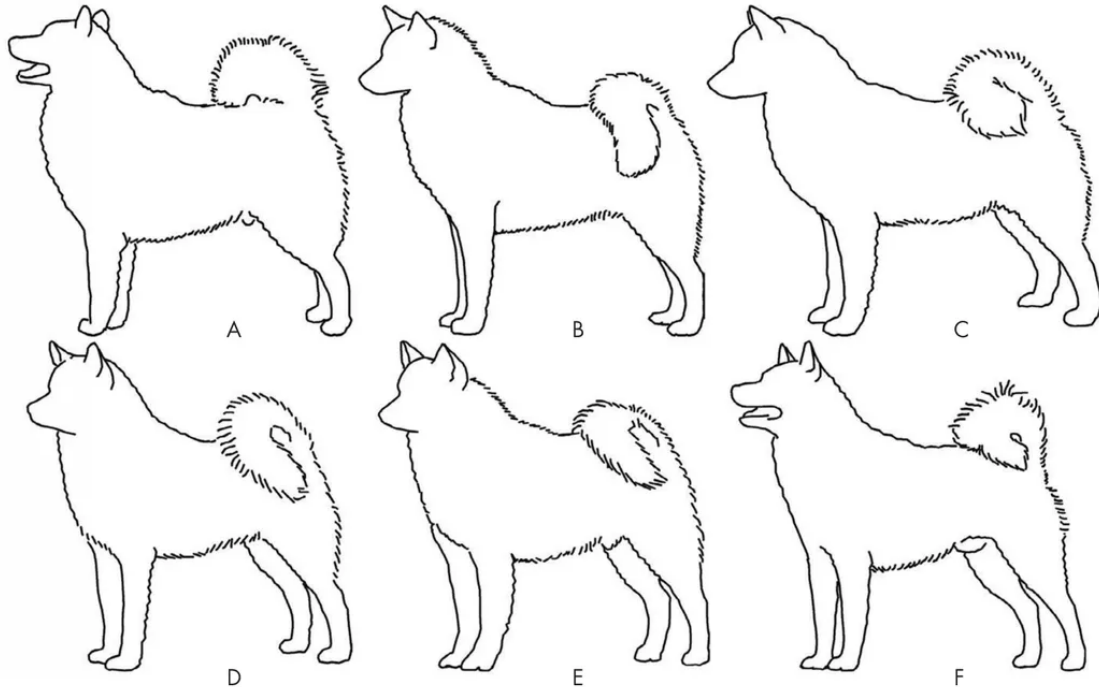
Outlines

The experts evaluated two sets of outlines—six Finnish Spitz dogs and six Finnish Spitz bitches—as they would classes at a dog show, except based on outline alone. All of the outlines were made from photos of actual, good quality Finnish Spitz. The experts couldn't see the coat or color, face or expression, do a hands-on exam, or watch them move. So, the placements might well change if the experts could see these exhibits in person.

Finnish Spitz Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



The dog with the best placement average and most first placements was Finnish Spitz "D." Those who placed him first commented "closer to square," "good topline, beautiful tail set and carriage," "balanced angulation, masculine," "alert, good bone," "great proportions, long tail," and "most balanced, erect ears, nice tuck up, good feet and pasterns."

The dog with the next best placement average was Finnish Spitz "E." Comments on him included "well balanced, good length of leg to length of body," "moderate angulation, good tail placement," and "square."

The bitch with the best average placement but the second most first placements among the girls was Finnish Spitz "Y." Those who chose her noted "well balanced, nice tail, good length of leg to body," "square, good topline and tuck up, good proportions," and "very nice forechest, nice neck arch, front legs under withers."

The bitch with the most first placements and next best placement average was Finnish Spitz "W." Reasons she was selected included "square, balanced, leg proportions," "nearly square, moderate angulation, nice head proportions and ear set," and

"alert, tail set."

Dog "D" was easily Best of Breed with nine of the eleven experts naming him BOB. "Y" was the only bitch named BOB, so with the next most first placements, she could be Best of Opposite Sex.

Dogs "B" and "E" were the only other dogs placed first by any expert. Dog "A" was unplaced on ten surveys; dog "C" was unplaced on seven. All bitches were placed first on at least one survey except bitch "V." Bitch "U" was out of the ribbons most often among the girls, followed by bitch "V."

Essential Characteristics

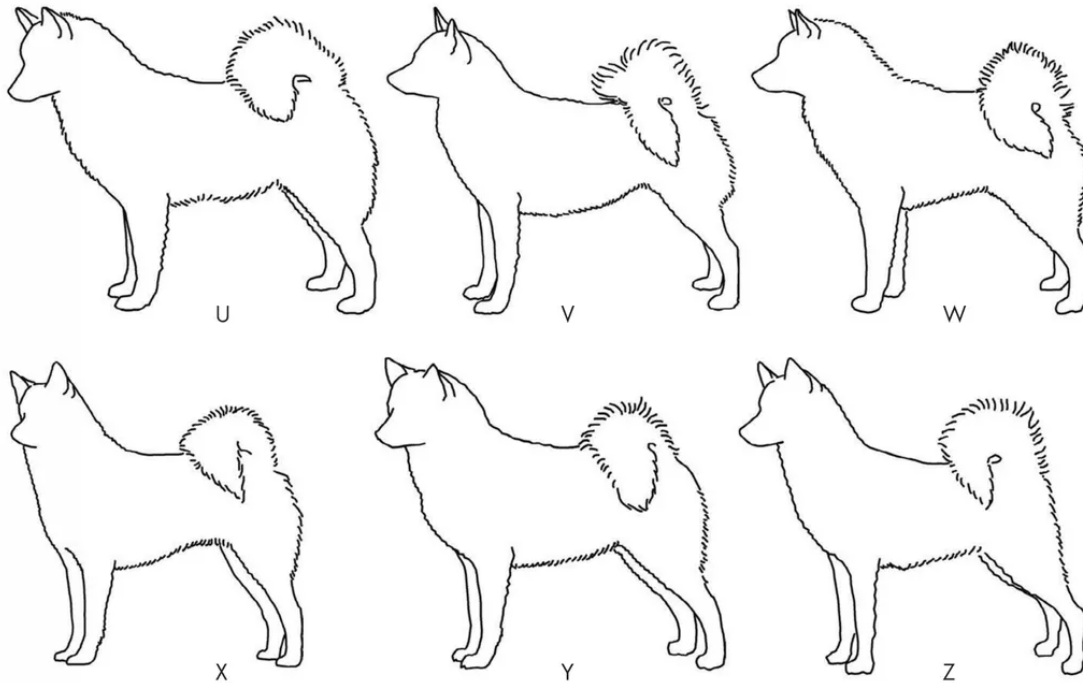
The experts named four to six characteristics that a Finnish Spitz must have to be a good one. Named most often was brisk movement, with reach and drive, clean coming and going, and tendency to single track. Square and well-balanced were most often named next followed by a red-gold coat.

Most important to face and expression were dark almond eyes, oblique but not so much so as to resemble a Shiba Inu. The ex-

Finnish Spitz Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



pression should be alert, lively, and curious, not hard.

They felt that too often judges put up dogs that were not square or were too big or too heavy boned. They want good movement to be rewarded.

Additional Notes

The Finnish Spitz experts offered the following suggestions for students of their breed.

- Don't expect the dogs to bark; they bark when they have treed the prey, not all the time. There is no requirement that they bark in the show ring.
- Don't penalize the correct tail and set that falls to the side away from the judge.
- The breed is lighter than the Norwegian Elkhound and Norwegian Buhund, with less bone.
- Square is of prime importance.
- Reward correct leg length; size is important.
- Focus on overall structure, balance, moderation, and move-

ment, not on single features.

- Finnish Spitz have structural features that most other breeds do not. Their necks should be flexible enough that they may look ewe necked, but aren't. They squat and may look up in preparation to spring up at a treed bird which can make their rear look weak or cow-hocked when it isn't.
- They should have a foxy appearance: pointed muzzle, prick ears, red-gold double coat, curled tail.
- Head should have proper ratios, narrow muzzle but not snipey, obliquely set eyes with a slight upward tilt on the outer corner, with tips of ears in line with the corner of the eye.
- It is a sensitive breed so inexperienced dogs can be unsure.
- They should be light on their feet, heads up, moving at a moderate speed with no sign of strain, fluid and no hackney.
- Scissors bite, but checking full dentition isn't required.

Thanks to the Finnish Spitz experts who shared their knowledge with this survey.