

· BREED PRIORITIES ·

Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen

by Nikki Riggsbee



This discussion 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 must have and what will be forgiven. Discussing priorities can help in learning how to better evaluate a breed.

Questions, Comments, or Concerns? Contact AKC Judge Ms. Nikki Riggsbee at Email: nriggsbee@aol.com

When the Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen joined the AKC hound group in 1991, they came in a variety of shapes, as I remember seeing them. Their casual appearance was emphasized, and sculpting of the coat forbidden. The outlines have become more uniform, and the casual appearance is still important, even with more grooming going on.

Mentors remind us that their dogs are “Petits” and should have Petit characteristics, differentiating themselves from their bigger cousins across the pond. Now that the Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen will enter regular AKC hound competition at the beginning of next year, recognizing the differences between the

two breeds becomes more important.

So I was especially curious to see what would be most important to PBGV experts. We found thirty-two experts to invite to join our survey project, fifteen breeder-judges and seventeen parent club breed mentors. Twenty-six agreed to participate, and seventeen surveys arrived by the deadline.

The experts have been in the breed almost twenty-seven years on average. Those who judge have been doing so for an average of almost fifteen years. Most of the breeder-judges have judged the national as well as other PBGV specialties, plus several of the mentors have judged sweepstakes at the national.

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PBGV Virtues

The experts were asked to prioritize a list of virtues from the breed. The list below has the characteristics in sequence by the average of the experts' ranks, with 1 being the most important.

1. Shoulders well laid back
2. Strong bone with substance in proportion to overall dog
3. Length from elbow to ground slightly more than half the height from withers to ground
4. Chest rather deep, with prominent sternum
5. Coat rough, long without exaggeration, harsh
6. Front action straight, reaching well forward
7. Bold and vivacious in character
8. Back visibly level from withers to croup
9. (tie) Hind legs parallel and have great drive
9. (tie) Hindquarters strong, muscular, with good bend of stifle
11. Casual, rather tousled appearance
12. Length of muzzle slightly shorter than length from stop to occiput
13. Strong, tapered tail, carried like a saber
14. Ears narrow, fine, set on low, reach almost to end of nose
15. Eyes large, dark, with good pigmentation, somewhat oval, showing no white
16. Scissor bite

There wasn't as much agreement on the most important characteristics as I had expected. Maybe they consider many features most important, and the experts arranged them in different orders. Eight virtues had majority opinions, but most were not large majorities.

The greatest agreement was on "Scissors bite" (16th); fifteen of the group put it in the last quartile. Bite seems to vary quite a bit in how important it is in different breeds. In some, the incorrect bite is a disqualification. With other breeds, it has a lower priority than other considerations.

Next greatest agreement was on "Eyes large, dark, with good pigmentation, somewhat oval, showing no white" (15th). Here is another feature that varies in value in different breeds. For some, dark eyes are very important as a part of expression.

Ten of the experts concurred on "Shoulders well laid back" (1st). Most breeds call for shoulders well laid back, but most surveys don't have it first. The average rank for this was 5.0, with the ten surveys placing it fourth through eighth.

Ten also agreed on "Ears narrow, fine, set on low, reach almost to end of nose" (14th). Most ranked it well below average. I thought it might place higher since it is one of the features differentiating the Petit from the Grand.

The smallest majority similarly valued these virtues: "Coat rough, long without exaggeration, harsh" (5th), "Back visibly level from withers to croup" (8th), "Hind legs parallel and have great drive" (tied for 9th), and "Length of muzzle slightly shorter than length from stop to occiput" (12th).

Nine put "Coat rough" in the top four, but seven had it below

midpoint, lowering its average. "Back level" was in the second quartile for nine, with its other ranks ranged from 2 to 16. "Hind legs" had a similar result. I had thought "Muzzle length" might place higher, and six did rank it above average. But the majority placed it well below midpoint.

Eight of the experts agreed on these virtues: "Strong bone with substance in proportion to overall dog" (2nd), "Hindquarters strong, muscular, with good bend of stifle" (tied for 9th), "Casual, rather tousled appearance" (11th), and "Strong, tapered tail, carried like a saber" (13th).

While eight had "Hindquarters" at or below average, seven others had it noticeably more important. I had expected "Casual, tousled appearance" to rank highly since the standard says that it is a distinguishing characteristic. But eight surveys, the biggest group with a similar opinion, put it in the bottom quartile, although six placed it first or second. "Saber tail" is also a distinguishing characteristic in the standard, so I had expected it to place higher than it did.

Some other virtues had split options. "Length from elbow to ground slightly more than half the height from withers to ground" (3rd) was in the top three for seven, but midpoint or below for six. "Front action straight, reaching well forward" (6th) was ranked between 3 to 6 by seven experts, but another seven had it below average.

Another breed characteristic in the standard – "Bold and vivacious in character" (7th) – was in the top three for seven experts, ranked 8th by three, and last for four. "Chest rather deep, with prominent sternum" (4th) was in the top quartile on seven surveys, but the others placed it all over.

Additional input would break the tie at nine. It could also affect the placement of "Bold character" (7th) and "Back level" (8th) which had averages less than a tenth of a point apart.

PBGV Faults

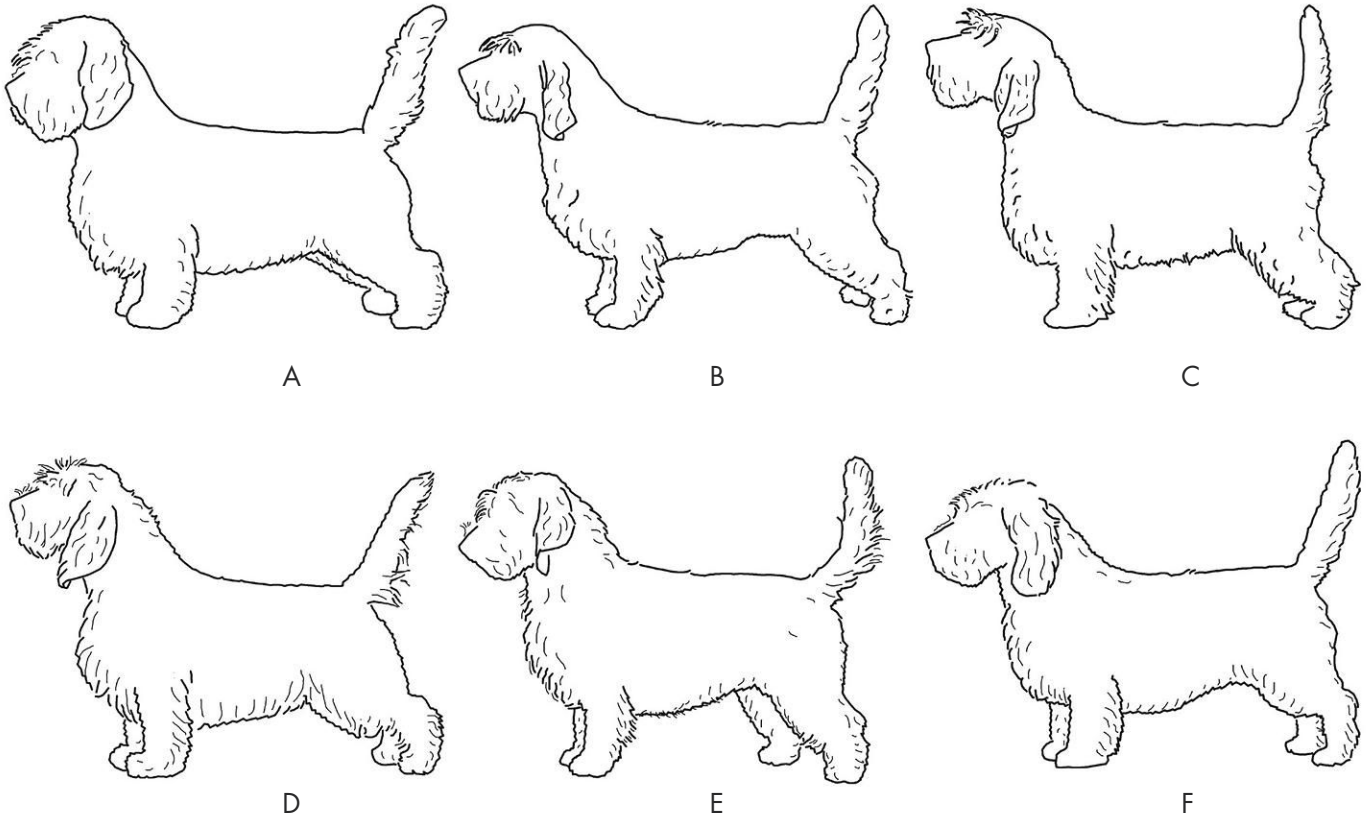
The experts also ranked a list of faults from most serious to least serious. The faults were taken either directly from the standard or derived from it – by adding "not" or "lacking" with a desired feature. Below are the faults in sequence by the average placement, with 1 being the most serious.

1. Body more than somewhat longer than tall
2. Tendency to knuckle over
3. Lacking strong bone
4. Lack of front angulation
5. Short upper arm
6. Neck short
7. Silky or wooly coat
8. Timid
9. Coarse or overly large head
10. Sculpting, clipping, scissoring, or shaping of coat
11. Overly long ear
12. Tail not of medium length, not set on high
13. Thighs not well muscled

PBGV Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



- 14. Tail lacking slight curve, not pointing at about two o'clock
- 15. Stop not clearly defined
- 16. Feet too long

As with the virtues, there were more differences of opinion on the faults than has been typical, especially with those at the top of the list. The greatest agreement, twelve of the seventeen, put "Feet too long" (16th) in the last quartile and "Overly long ear" (11th) in the third quartile.

Ten of the group agreed that "Neck short" (6th) was fairly serious. After that, the remaining majorities were small – just nine. They had similar opinions on the following: "Body more than somewhat longer than tall" (1st), "Lacking strong bone" (3rd), "Short upper arm" (5th), "Thighs not well muscled" (13th), and "Stop not clearly defined" (15th).

Of these, "Short upper arm" was very important for the majority, but five ranks well below average lowered its average. "Thighs not well muscled" was relatively less of an issue for the nine, but six had it above average. "Poor stop" was in the last quartile for the majority, but seven thought it somewhat

more of a problem.

"Tendency to knuckle over" ranked in the top four on eight surveys, with the others scattered all over. Eight had "Tail not of medium length, not set on high" (12th) in the last quartile, but seven had it above average in seriousness. The other tail fault "Tail lacking slight curve, not pointing at about two o'clock" (14th) had a similar split.

"Lack of front angulation" (4th) was very serious for seven, but six put it in the second quartile. Five placed "Silky or wooly coat" (7th) among the top three, but seven had it at midpoint or below. On coat grooming, six had "Sculpting, clipping, scissoring, or shaping of coat" (10th) as very important, while seven had it in the last quartile.

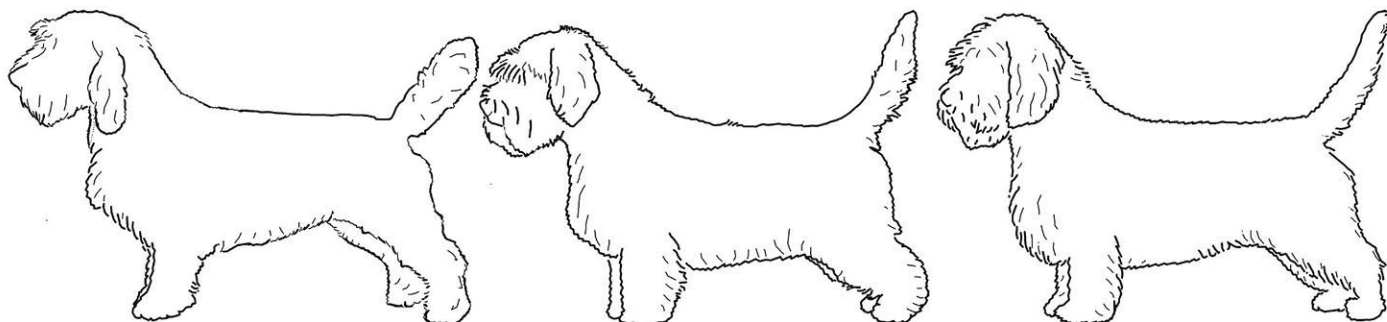
"Timid" (8th) was very important for seven; the rest placed it all over. Often, temperament faults place towards the top of the list, but not this time. The group ranked "Coarse or overly large head" (9th) all over, with no consensus at all

Additional input could change the relative placement of some faults. The average ranks of "Lacking strong bone" and "Lack of front angulation" were less than a tenth of a point

PBGV Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

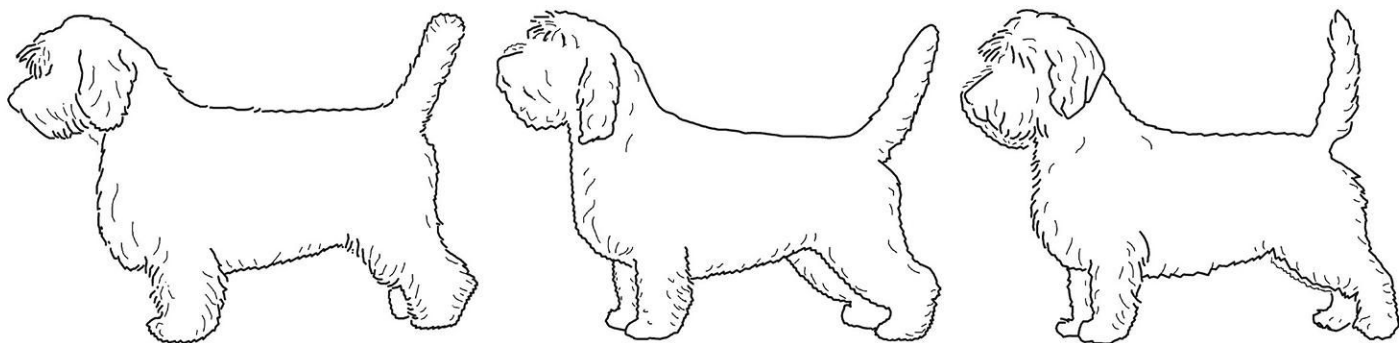
BITCHES



U

V

W



X

Y

Z

apart. "Short upper arm" and "Short neck" were similarly close as were "Thighs not well muscled" and "Incorrect tail shape and carriage."

There was some consistency between the two lists. "Bone" was second and third. "Temperament" was seven and eight. "Coat appearance" was eleventh and tenth. "Tail" was thirteenth, twelfth, and fourteenth.

Outlines

The experts were asked to place two sets of PBGV outlines, six dogs and six bitches, first through fourth in each set, and then select Best of Breed. The outlines were made from photographs of real dogs, so none was ideal. Since most were stacked photos, the handlers holding the tails affected the tail carriage. Also, collars in some stacked positions can also affect the ear set.

We try – in consultation with breed experts – to use only photographs of excellent quality dogs and bitches to make the outlines from, those who have had successful conformation careers, have won big and often, those whom the experts con-

sider superior breed type. Invariably, those taking the surveys lament about the poor quality outlines. Maybe the excellent dogs are not excellent in their outlines. Just as in real dog shows, the expert can withhold placements when evaluating the outlines. For this survey, three of the participants withheld one or two placements.

The PBGV dog with the best average placement and the most first placements was dog "D." Those who placed him first said "nice head, fan in front of eyes, ear set below or at the eye, and not too long," "immediate recognition of type," "compact and balanced, neck/shoulder layback and topline, good angulation," "good front assembly, good leg length," "long neck, rear angulation," "somewhat longer than tall, muzzle slightly shorter than length of skull, strong rear," "nice short hocks, good sternum, lovely ear placement," and "tail at 2 o'clock."

The second place dog on both average placement and number of first placements was PBGV "C." Comments on him included "overall shape, enough leg with angulation," "correct head ratios, best balance, good ear set, length, and fold, good tail set," "the curve of the 'saber tail,' good topline, good depth of chest,"

and “adequate bone and size, short hocks, head and tail levels.”

The bitch with the best average placement and most first placements was PBGV “Y.” Those who placed her first commented “good breed type,” balanced, good ear set, level topline, prominent chest,” “rear angulation very good,” “correct proportion, angulation, and length of neck,” “good tail set,” “a little short on leg, correct height to length, nice head with short muzzle,” and “shoulder angles, feminine.”

The distant second place based on average placement was bitch “Z.” Those who liked her said “level topline, more prosternum, arch of neck, shoulder layback,” “overall balance, good leg length, good head and tail carriage,” and “balance and breed type.” She had the third most first placements among the bitches. “X” was selected first one more time than “Z,” but her average placement wasn’t as good.

“D” was selected as Best of Breed seven times and was placed first by eleven experts, more than any of the others. “C” was BOB on four surveys; “Y” was BOB on two. No other outline was chosen BOB more than once.

Dogs “A,” “B,” and “E” and bitch “V” were not placed first by any expert. All others were placed first at least once. Every outline – including the best ones – was unplaced on at least one survey (just like real dog shows). PBGVs “A,” “F,” and “U” were out of the ribbons on ten or more surveys.

While the experts varied with their opinions on the lists, they agreed much more on the outlines, with majorities selecting the first place dog and bitch.

Essential Characteristics

The survey asked the experts to list four to six characteristics that a good PBGV must have, features they look for when they judge. Movement was named most often, with reach and drive and convergence, fluid and effortless. Next was the harsh coat texture—real texture, not product. Close behind was the casual appearance, unrefined outline, tousled, not sculpted or overgroomed. Correct head, in proportion and not coarse, was also listed. Finally, balance and proper proportion, slightly off square, not long and low, was named by many.

Comments

The PBGV experts were asked to provide suggestions that could help others evaluate their breed. They said:

- Envisage a rabbit-hunting dog that can keep moving for hours in a rough, harsh terrain and able to turn on a dime.
- They are tousled in appearance, not sculpted, shaved, stoned, or scissored like a terrier.
- They should have a proper sternum, good reach and drive, tight elbows, good angulation, and a moderately long harsh coat.
- A PBGV that hunts cannot have every hair in place and be stripped. Such dogs would be seriously injured pursuing a rabbit in the underbrush.

- Please look at overall movement, the PBGV is required to hunt all day.
- Get your hands on the dog so to not be fooled by grooming. Don’t penalize bad grooming – it isn’t the dog’s fault. Do penalize the sculpted dog.
- A PBGV has short loin, muzzle, ears, tail, and long protective ribs.
- A major fault is legs too short; some dogs are getting too small and toy-like.
- With the pending admission of the Grand Basset Griffon Vendeen, correct type is even more important. Some PBGVs carry Grand characteristics and vice versa.
- Think 13-15”, compact, easy movement, happy, pleasing head and expression, alert and active.
- Ear length is a salient feature that separates a Petit from a Grand.
- Avoid overly trimmed, but bear in mind they may be pulled down or between coats.
- A Grand’s lower limits are the Petit’s upper limits.
- They should be happy and confident; they hunt on their own with the hunter following behind, so they are independent.
- They are noisy. Barking is part of the hound characteristics.
- No coat pattern (head) resembling a terrier or leg hair posting like a Bichon. No Basset-like prosternum or chest.
- Reward proper proportions, including leg length greater than 50% of height.
- Never long or low, but not too tall – there are size DQs.
- Breed characteristics: tail carriage, ears set on low with supple leather that folds, large black nose and dark eyes.

Thanks so much to the PBGV experts for participating in this project and for sharing their knowledge and expertise.