



# BREED — PRIORITIES —

## Shiba Inu

By Nikki Riggsbee

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

**T**he Shiba Inu is the smallest of the native Japanese breeds. It shares many features with the Akita, also from Japan: triangular eyes, erect triangular ears that tilt forward following the arch of the neck, the high-set tail carried over the back, and clear and rich color. (Note: The Shiba is not and should not look like a little Akita.) The Shiba has distinct breed type characteristics. I was interested to see how strongly these were valued compared to more general features that make a good dog.

Twenty-five Shiba Inu experts were invited to complete a survey on their breed's priorities: breeder-judges, the parent club judges education committee, and the parent club breed mentors. Twenty agreed to participate. In the end, fifteen completed surveys were returned, a credible number that can produce valid results.

The experts averaged over twenty years in the breed, with about half involved since or before it was recognized by AKC in 1992. Those who judge have been doing so for nine years on average, and most have judged their national specialty.

## BREED PRIORITIES - SHIBA INU

### Virtues

The experts were asked to rank a list of positive characteristics from the breed standard. Below is the list in sequence by the average rank, from most important to the least important.

1. Eyes somewhat triangular, upward slanting
2. Height to length ratio 10 to 11 (males)
3. Ears triangular, firmly pricked, small, set well apart
4. Males masculine, females feminine
5. Topline straight, level
6. Muzzle firm, full, round with stronger lower jaw
7. Scissors bite, full complement of strong, substantial, evenly aligned teeth
8. Frame compact with well-developed muscles
9. Double-coated with outer coat stiff and straight
10. Tail carried over back, sickle or curled position
11. Expression good natured with strong, confident gaze
12. Moderate angulation
13. Color clear and intense
14. Movement nimble, light, elastic
15. Muzzle 40% head length
16. Forechest well-developed

While the Shiba's breed features are distinct, the experts' breed priorities were less so, with only three features having majority agreement. When determining "agreement," I count the experts' ranks on that virtue that are within four of each other: 1 – 4, 2 – 5, 3 – 6, and so on.

The greatest agreement was on "Scissors bite, full complement of strong, substantial, evenly aligned teeth" (7<sup>th</sup>), with ten of the group ranking it from 6 and 9 (to illustrate how "agreement" is determined). Next was last place "Forechest well-developed," with sixty percent ranking it at or near the bottom.

The only other virtue with majority agreement was "Males masculine, females feminine" (4<sup>th</sup>). While the small majority placed it in the top quartile, a third of the surveys put it near the bottom.

All the rest had pluralities at best. Seven of the experts agreed on "Eyes somewhat triangular, upward slanting" (1<sup>st</sup>), "Ears triangular, firmly pricked, small, set well apart" (3<sup>rd</sup>), "Topline straight, level" (5<sup>th</sup>), "Muzzle firm, full, round with stronger lower jaw" (6<sup>th</sup>), "Expression good natured with strong, confident gaze" (11<sup>th</sup>), "Movement nimble, light, elastic" (14<sup>th</sup>), and "Muzzle 40% head length" (15<sup>th</sup>).

Most of the others had only forty percent agreeing. "Double-coated with outer coat stiff and straight" (9<sup>th</sup>) was in the top quartile on forty percent of the surveys and in the bottom quartile on a similar number. "Color clear and intense" (13<sup>th</sup>) had a third put it near the bottom, but the rest ranked it all over.

None of the averages were a tenth of a point or less apart, and there were no two point or larger gaps between ranks. The less than normal agreement is illustrated by the average rank of 6.2 of the highest ranked virtue of "Eye shape."

### Faults

The survey also included a list of faults for the experts to prioritize. Below is that list, ranked from the most serious fault to the least serious.

1. Long or woolly coat
2. Five or more missing teeth
3. Any color or marking not specified
4. Shyness
5. Coat trimmed
6. Topline not level and firm (when gaiting)
7. Ears not tilted directly forward with back of ear following arch of neck
8. Hock joint turning in or out
9. Urajiro not in all required areas
10. Forward reach or rear extension not moderate or efficient
11. tie: Outer coat not stiff and straight
11. tie: Shoulder blade and upper arm are not approximately equal in length
13. tie: Feet not catlike
13. tie: Iris not dark brown
13. tie: Bone not moderate

Note that there are only fifteen faults listed because one was accidentally listed twice on the survey.

Twice as many faults as virtues had majority agreement. The greatest agreement was on "Long or woolly coat" (1<sup>st</sup>) followed by "Iris not dark brown" and "Bone not moderate" (both tied at 13<sup>th</sup>).

The smallest majority concurred on "Five or more missing teeth" (2<sup>nd</sup>), "Shyness" (4<sup>th</sup>), and "Shoulder blade and upper arm are not approximately equal in length" (tied at 11<sup>th</sup>).

Seven of the group similarly valued "Any color or marking not specified" (3<sup>rd</sup>), "Topline not level and firm (when gaiting)" (6<sup>th</sup>), "Ears not tilted directly forward with back of ear following arch of neck" (7<sup>th</sup>), "Hock joint turning in or out" (8<sup>th</sup>), "Urajiro not in all required areas" (9<sup>th</sup>), "Forward reach or rear extension not moderate or efficient" (10<sup>th</sup>), and "Feet not catlike" (tied at 11<sup>th</sup>).

Several faults had bi-polar or split opinions. "Hocks in/out" (8<sup>th</sup>) was in the second quartile by nearly half and towards the bottom by almost as many. "Urajiro not in all required areas" (9<sup>th</sup>) and "Outer coat not stiff and straight" (tied at 11<sup>th</sup>) had a large plurality put it towards the bottom, while about a third or more ranked it much higher. "Lacking reach/dive" (10<sup>th</sup>) was below average for a large plurality, but almost as many considered it much more important.

Additional input would change the relative rankings, especially breaking the ties at eleven and thirteen. "Topline" (6<sup>th</sup>) and "Ears" (7<sup>th</sup>) had average ranks less than a tenth of a point apart.

Over two points separated the two faults at eleven and the three at thirteen, emphasizing the lesser importance of the last three.

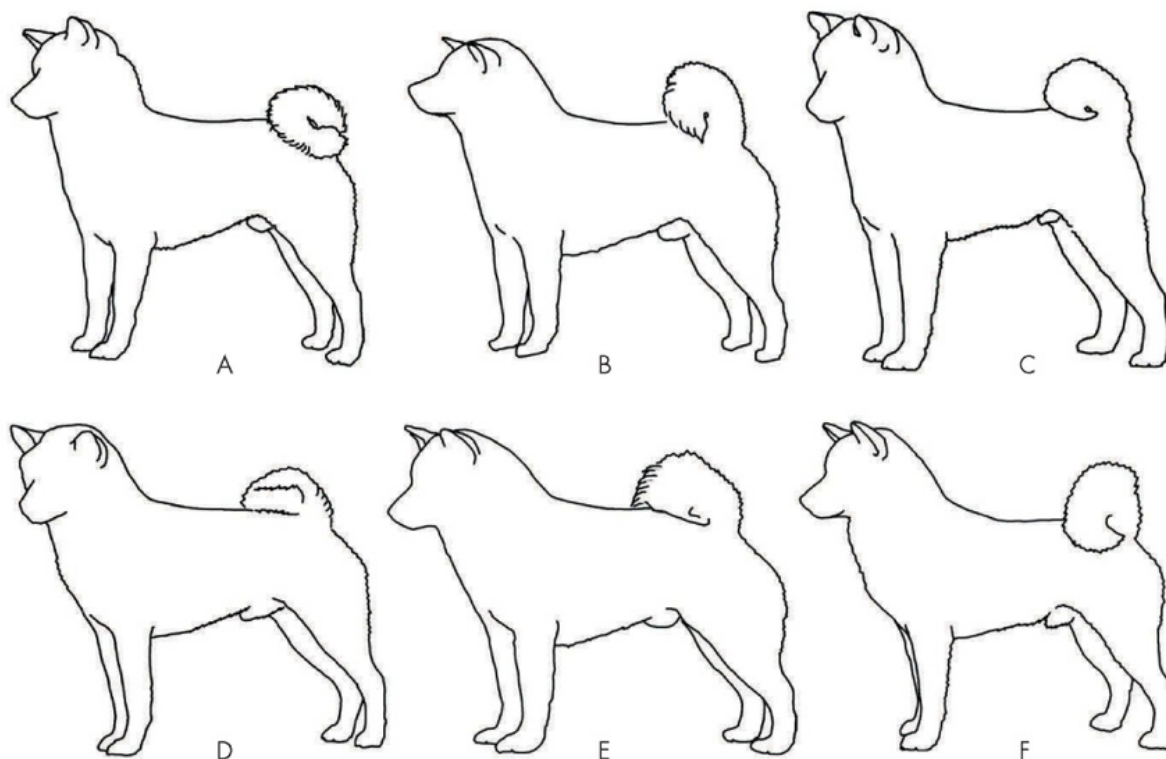
When comparing features on both the virtues and faults list, the experts varied in their opinions. The group agreed on topline, placing it fifth as a virtue and sixth as a fault. Coat was ninth as a virtue, eleventh as a fault. On the other hand, ears were third



## Shiba Inu Outlines

### DOGS

*Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex*



on the virtues list, but seventh among the faults. Complete dentition was seventh as a virtue, but much more serious if many teeth were missing. Color was thirteenth as a virtue, but third as a fault. Eye shape and angle was a top priority, but the incorrect eye color was not important as a fault.

### Outlines

The survey included outlines of six dogs and six bitches. The experts placed each group first through fourth, and then selected Best of Breed. The outlines were made from photos of actual dogs, so none is perfect or ideal. The challenge with Shibas was finding photos in stacked profile, since most photos have the dogs three-quarters with the head tilted toward the camera.

While the list items didn't have much agreement, the outline choices definitely did.

The male with the best average placement and the most first placements was Shiba "C." Those who placed him first commented "catches my eye," correct "neck carriage, ear placement, length of body," "very balanced with correct leg length," "nice topline, front and rear angulation, masculine without being coarse," "correct ears, body, muzzle, tail, depth of chest," "head

held high," "structure," and "best proportion and balance."

Next best dog average placement and number of first placements was Shiba "F." Those who put him first said "proper 10:11 proportion, up on leg, better tailset, better forequarters," "proper length of muzzle and slant of ears," "developed forechest, loose tail, correct ear set and placement, slightly longer body," and "nice length of neck, smooth transition from head to neck to topline."

Shiba "U" had the best average placement and most first placements among the girls. Experts who chose her said "very balanced, good muzzle, leg, and body length, ear set," "topline, balance, leg length, feminine," "structure, neck," "best all-around proportion despite lower tailset," and "body proportion, ears, front assembly, and muzzle length."

Second among the bitches was Shiba "X." Reasons for selecting her were "feminine, nice tail and ear set," "balanced," "feminine without being too refined," and "upstanding, nice topline."

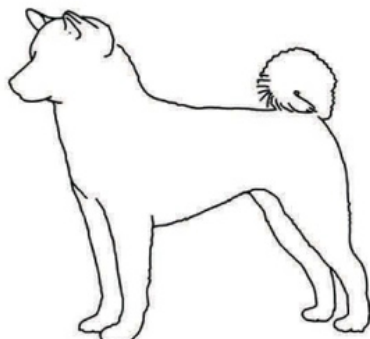
"U" and "X" were fairly close, which let the dog "C" get the most first placements and best average placement of all. He was also selected Best of Breed by seven of the group, more than any other.

All the outlines were placed first by at least one expert except for Shibas "B," "D," and "W." Most frequently out of the ribbons was Shiba "V," followed by "E" and "W." All of the outlines were

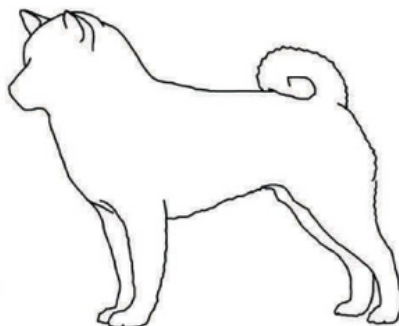
## Shiba Inu Outlines

*Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex*

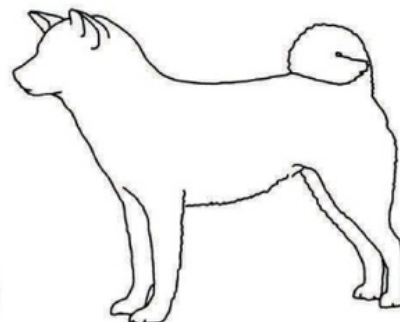
### BITCHES



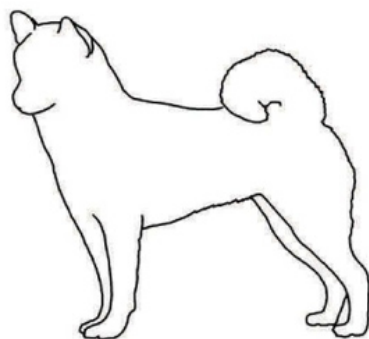
U



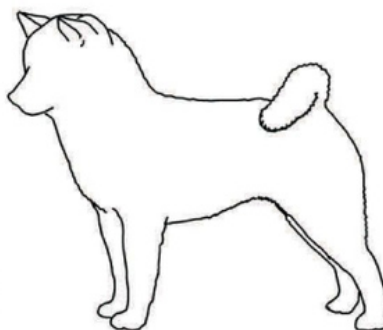
V



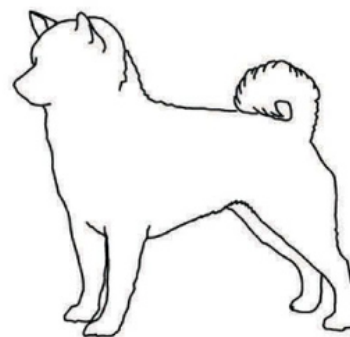
W



X



Y



Z

unplaced by at least one expert except for Shiba "C."

### Essential Characteristics

The experts were asked for four to six characteristics that a Shiba Inu must have to be a good one. Balance was named most often followed by ears (size, shape, and placement) and then eyes (shape, placement). Coat and then confident temperament were next most often listed. These were followed by moderation and correct color. The importance of these features is consistent with the lists above.

### Comments

The Shiba Inu experts offered the following comments to remember when evaluating their breed.

- Do not ignore aggression or shyness
- Check for missing teeth
- If a dog's size is questionable, use the wicket, even in puppy class.
- Most of the breed type comes from the head, coat, tail, and feet.
- So many have lost their cheeks which takes all type from the

head.

- If Urajiro missing, withhold, as it is required, even on blacks.
- It is equally faulty if Urajiro spreads from the sides of the muzzle to the top of the muzzle so that the face appears white; the open face is not correct.
- Omit "cute" from your thoughts. They are hunters.
- Colors should be bright and clear, not muddy or washed out.
- Shibas need to be athletic and bold; confidence is extremely important.
- It is moderately angulated, so it should not have tremendous reach and drive.
- Both moderation and balance are required for excellent type.
- Be businesslike with this breed on the table.
- Eyes and expression should look like they own the place.
- Coat should feel prickly, not soft.
- Stop putting up dirty brown dogs; learn correct Sesame color.

*Much appreciation to the Shiba Inu experts for sharing their breed knowledge.*