
Breed Priorities – Brussels Griffon



By Nikki Riggsbee

The Brussels Griffon was developed from Affenpinscher-like dogs in their native Belgium crossed with some other breeds such as Pugs and English Toy Spaniels. The results produced the Brussels Griffon, with two coat types, short faces with up-tilted noses, big heads, large eyes, and a strong, broad, up-swept jaw. Which features are most important in defining this breed?

Sixteen breed experts were found to invite to participate in a survey to identify the priorities in evaluating the breed. Fifteen folks responded that they would contribute. In the end, ten surveys were received, which was a lower than normal percentage of participation, but still enough to produce valid results.

The group has been in Griffons more than thirty-six years on average, although for some it was not their first breed, so several others have been in the breed fifty years and more. The experts average nearly twenty years in judging the breed. More than half have judged their national specialties and other Griffon specialties as well.

BRUSSELS GRIFFONS VIRTUES

Here is a list of breed features called for in the Brussels Griffon standard, in order by the average of the rankings on the surveys, from most important to least important.

1. Nose extremely short, tip set back between eyes to form lay-back

2. Square
3. Skull large, round, with domed forehead
4. Lower jaw prominent, broad, with upward sweep
5. Thickset, short body
6. Eyes set well apart, very large, black, prominent,
well open
7. Undershot
8. Back level
9. Tail set and held high
10. Neck medium length, gracefully arched
11. Full of self-importance
12. Purposeful trot, showing moderate reach and drive
13. Correct coat color, especially in Black and Tan
14. Almost human expression
15. Ears small, set rather high
16. Feet round, small, compact

The greatest majority concurred on "Purposeful trot, showing moderate reach and drive" (12th) and "Feet, round, small, compact" (16th). The next biggest agreement was on "Nose extremely short, tip set back between eyes to form lay-back" (1st) and "Back level" (8th). It is unusual to have larger majorities on mid-ranked virtues or faults, in this case on "Movement" and "Topline."

Seventy percent of the experts concurred on "Square" (2nd), "Tail set and held high" (9th), "Neck medium length, gracefully arched" (10th), and "Ears small, set rather high" (15th). Again, a more than typical consensus in some middle ranked items.

Simple majorities agreed on "Skull large, round, with domed forehead" (3rd), "Lower jaw prominent, broad, with upward sweep" (4th), "Eyes set well apart, very large, black, prominent, well open" and "Undershot" (both tied at 6th), and "Almost human expression" (14th).

Most experts put "Undershot" in the top quartile, but the rest put it in the last quartile which lowered the rank. More than half of the group put "Almost human expression" at fifteenth or sixteenth, but others put it higher, keeping it off the bottom of the list.

"Full of self-importance" (11th) had half put it in the last quartile, with almost as many thinking it closer to average in rank. "Correct coat color" (13th) was placed mid-point by half the group while the other half put it in the fourth quartile. "Thickset, short body" (5th) was ranked all over.

Some items were ranked closely, including the tie at sixth place by "Eyes" and "Undershot," so that additional input would change the relative positions. The first four virtues ("Nose," "Square," "Skull," and "Lower jaw") were close to each other, with less than one point between first and fourth. Three of the first four were head features, emphasizing the importance of the head.

The biggest gap in rank was between “Back level” (8th) and “Tail set” (9th) which were nearly four points apart, indicating the greater importance of the first eight virtues. “Neck” (10th) and “Self-importance” (11th) placed close to each other as did “Movement” (12th) and “Coat color” (13th). Less than 1 point separated the last three: “Human expression” (14th), “Ears” (15th), and “Feet” (16th).

BRUSSELS GRIFFON FAULTS

The experts were also asked to rank Brussels Griffon faults. Below is the list in order by the experts’ ranks, from 1 (most serious) to 16 (least serious). Some standards don’t explicitly list each fault, so some are represented as the absence of a virtue.

1. Wry mouth
2. Teeth or tongue show when mouth closed
3. Stop not deep, nose not set back deeply
4. Nostrils not large
5. Not well-boned
6. Rough coat that looks or feels wooly or with some silky hair
7. Not maintaining a steady topline (when gaiting)
8. Stifles not bent
9. Coats prepared with scissors and/or clippers
10. Forelegs not straight in bone
11. Lips pendulous
12. Feet turned in or out
13. Hocks turning in or out
14. Tail not docked
15. Exceeding 12 pounds
16. Lacking almost human expression

“Wry mouth” (1st) had complete agreement, with every survey placing it first or second in importance, a very unusual occurrence indeed. Eighty percent of the group ranked “Stop not deep, nose not set back deeply” (3rd) highly.

The following faults had seventy percent of the experts in agreement: “Teeth or tongue show when mouth closed” (2nd), “Nostrils not large” (4th), “Not maintaining a steady topline (when gaiting)” (7th), and “Stifles not bent” (8th).

A simple majority concurred on the relative seriousness of these faults: “Not well-boned” (5th), “Hocks turning in or out” (13th), “Tail not docked” (14th), “Exceeding 12 pounds” (15th), and “Lacking almost human expression” (16th).

“Rough coat wooly/silky” (6th) had a bi-polar distribution with half putting it at around the fourth quartile, but almost as many ranked it between the first and second quartile. “Scissored/clipped” (9th) had greater disagreement, with half putting it towards the bottom and almost as many placing it towards the very serious. Also bi-polar were “Forelegs not straight” (10th) and “Tail not docked” (14th).

“Lips pendulous” (11th) was ranked all over as was “Feet turned in or out” (12th).

More than two points separated “Wry” (1st) and “Teeth/tongue showing” (2nd), further validating the first place item. Another almost two points separated third place “Stop not deep/nose not set back” and fourth place “Nostrils not large” and another two-and-a-half points separated fourth from fifth place “Not well-boned.”

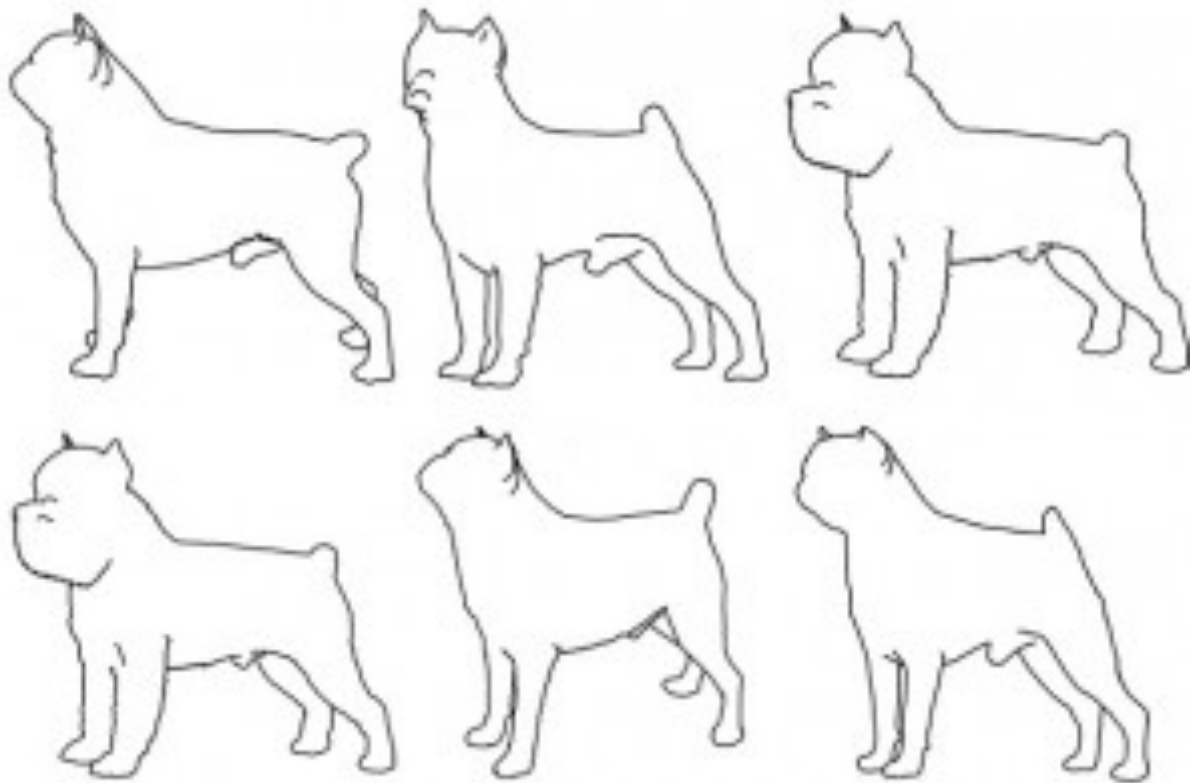
Several faults had average ranks fairly close to each other and could be considered approximately similar in seriousness. “Scissored/clipped” (9th) and “Forelegs not straight” (10th) were about one-tenth of a point apart as were “Lips pendulous” (11th) and “Feet turned in/out” (12th).

The group was consistent in valuing head virtues highly, especially nose, skull, lower jaw, eyes, and undershot, and head faults as serious, such as wry mouth, teeth/tongue showing, stop, and nostrils.

Brussels Griffon Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

The experts listed four to six of the most important characteristics that good Brussels Griffon must have. As with the ranked lists, head features predominated. Most often named was good nose layback followed by large dark eye and a correct head piece overall. Other head features required were large nose pad, open nostrils, and underjaw. In addition to head characteristics, the experts wanted a thickset body and a correct topline.

OUTLINES

The experts were asked to judge two sets of Brussels Griffon outlines, six dogs and six bitches, and place each set as a dog show class, putting the outlines first through fourth. Then they selected one as Best of Breed.

The outlines are made from photographs of real dogs, so none is ideal. We tried to use only Griffons of excellent quality and breed type. The placements are based on the outlines only and might change if the experts could see the dogs in person, put their hands on them, and see them move.

The Brussels Griffon that was placed first most often and had the best average placement among the dogs was dog "B." Those who liked him said he had "a great topline, with the neck blending smoothly into the body, and a correct tail set," "short back, good shoulder layback, front and rear placed well," "larger head had 'B' win over 'E,'" and "square, thickset body, good angles with some forechest and butt behind."

Dogs "E" and "F" tied for second based on average placement. Comments on "E" were "short, thickset body, wonderful hard coat," and "good bone, good topline." Those who liked "F" said "beautiful balance, correct make and shape, deep chest, excellent tailset" and "thick, short coupled body, good bone."

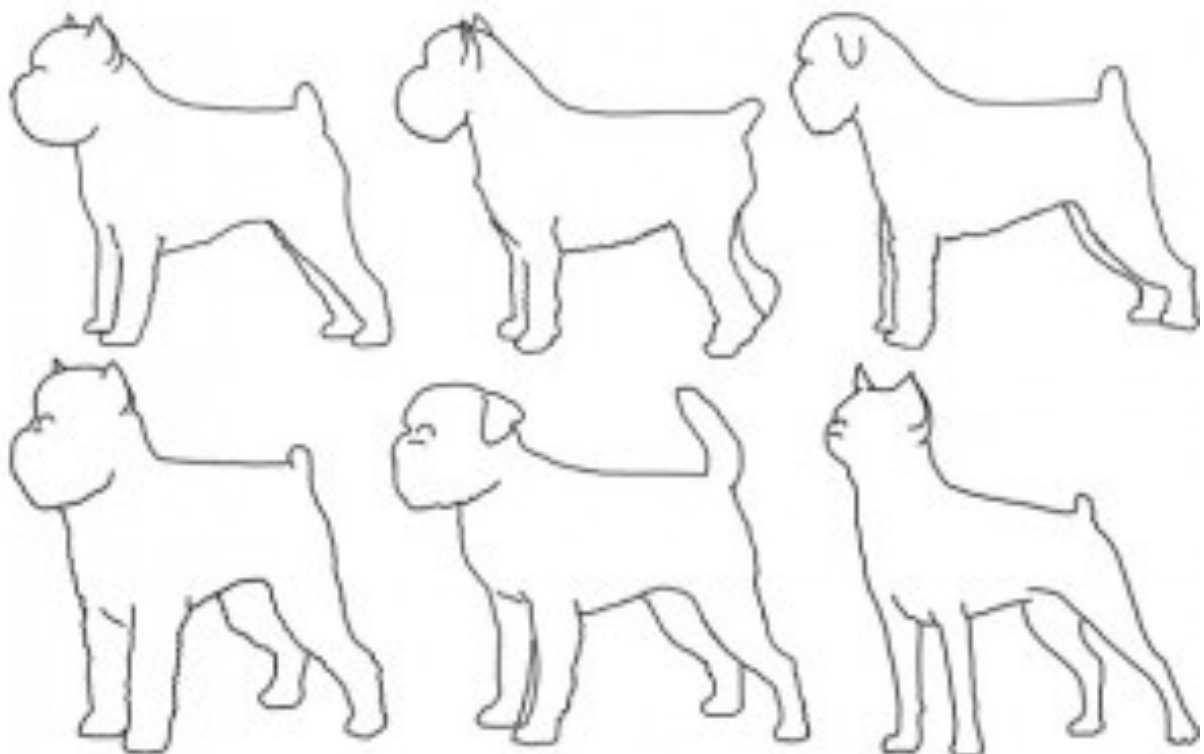
Griffon bitch "U" had the best placement rank of all twelve outlines. Those who picked her said "best overall picture of the breed," "excellent make and shape, well-balanced," "good shoulder, great topline and tailset," "good bone, small feet, short pasterns," and "well let down hocks."

The bitch with the next best average placement was Griffon "X." Some comments on her included "better stifle and good topline with good breed type," "nice balance," and "short, deep body, square, good rear."

Brussels Griffon Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



Bitch "U" was selected Best of Breed more often than the other outlines. She also had the best average placement of all twelve, the most first placements, and was never out of the ribbons.

Bitch "U" was the only outline never out of the ribbons; all others were left unplaced by at least one expert. Dog "C" and bitches "W," "Y," and "Z" were never placed first on any survey.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Here are some additional comments from the Brussels Griffon experts.

- A Griffon is more than just a head. Do not accept weedy bodies or roached toplines.
- A Griffon must always be happy and have its tail up.
- Evaluate the whole dog with emphasis on the head.
- Check skull and cheeks on roughs to make sure they have the proper fill.
- It can be hard to judge Griffons when one can have in the ring four different colors, two coat types, cropped or uncropped ears, docked or undocked tails, and various sizes, from four to twelve pounds.
- This is a head breed; without a good head, it could be mistaken for another breed.
- A good Griff will not be mistaken for an Affenpinscher.
- The wide prominent underjaw should form a "pout." The top of the nose should be on a plane no lower than the bottom of the eyes, and ideally higher. Eyes large, round, dark. Enough bone to be heavier than they appear to be.
- Without the undershot, you will lose the head.
- With a long, weedy body, you lose the Brussels Griffon.

Thanks to these Griffon experts for sharing their knowledge and opinions.

This article 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 choices – prioritizing and about what the judge or breeder will forgive. Discussing priorities can help in learning how to better evaluate a breed.