

· BREED PRIORITIES ·

GREATER SWISS MOUNTAIN DOG

BY NIKKI RIGGSBEE

The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog is one of four breeds from Switzerland sharing a black base coat with white and red markings. The Bernese Mountain Dog, recognized by AKC in 1937, is the only one with a longer coat. The smaller Entlebucher Mountain Dog, the only one in the herding group, was recognized in 2011. The next larger Appenzeller Sennenhund has been in the AKC Foundation Stock Service since 2007. In FCI, all four breeds' names include the word "Sennenhund" (instead of Mountain Dog) which refers to people called Senn who were Swiss alpine herds-men and dairymen.

The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, who joined the AKC working group in 1995, is the largest of these four similarly colored dogs and is considered the oldest of the group. He was used as a multi-purpose farm dog, pulling carts, moving cattle, serving as a watch dog and family companion. The breed contributed to the early de-

velopment of the Rottweiler and St. Bernard.

We collected names and email addresses of about forty Swissie breeder-judges and breed experts to ask to participate in a survey on their breed's priorities. Thirty-two responded affirmatively, and we received nineteen completed surveys.

The experts have been in the breed for an average of twenty-two years, including some over thirty years. Those who judge have been doing so for more than eleven years on average. Several have judged regular classes or sweeps at their national specialties.

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Virtues

The survey included a list of sixteen characteristics taken from the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog standard. The experts ranked the items based on how comparatively important each is when

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

*Questions, Comments, or Concerns?
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'GUS'
GCH Derby's Toast With Gusto
The Top Winning
Greater Swiss Mountain Dog in Breed History
Owned by Sue & Rick Copeland

BREED PRIORITIES - GREATER SWISS MOUNTAIN DOG

evaluating an individual in conformation. The list below is in order by the average of the experts' rankings, with one being the most important.

1. Heavy bone, well muscled, sturdy appearance
2. Good reach in front, powerful drive in rear
3. Chest deep, broad, slightly protruding breastbone
4. Topline level from withers to croup
5. Shoulders long, sloping, strong, moderately laid back
6. Bold, faithful, willing worker; alert, vigilant
7. Length to height approximately 10 to 9 proportion
7. Thighs broad, strong, muscular
9. Body full, slight tuck-up
10. Backskull equal length to muzzle, slight stop
11. Backskull broad, twice the width of muzzle
12. Feet round, compact, with well-arched toes, turn neither in nor out
13. Tail thick, tapering, reaching hocks, carried down in repose
14. Eyes almond shaped, brown, medium sized
15. Ears medium sized, set high, rounded tip, hang close to head in repose
16. Scissors bite

The Swissie experts produced more majority agreement than any other breed we've surveyed. Fourteen of the sixteen virtues had majorities of the experts in agreement. All of the surveys had "Heavy bone, well muscled, sturdy appearance" (1st) in the top three placements, with fourteen ranking it first.

Fifteen of the group put "Ears medium sized, set high, rounded tip, hang close to head in repose" (15th) in the last quartile. Fourteen also put "Eyes almond shaped, brown, medium sized" (14th) and "Scissors bite" (16th) in the bottom quartile.

"Tail thick, tapering, reaching hocks, carried down in repose" (13th) was in the last quartile on twelve surveys. Twelve experts also agreed on "Body full, slight tuck up" (9th) and "Backskull equal length to muzzle, slight stop" (10th).

Eleven agreed on several virtues: "Good reach in front, powerful drive in rear" (2nd), "Chest deep, broad, slightly protruding breastbone" (3rd), "Topline level from withers to croup" (4th), "Shoulders long, sloping, strong, moderately laid back" (5th), "Thighs broad, strong, muscular" (tied at 7th), and "Feet round, compact, with well-arched toes, turn neither in nor out" (12th). The smallest majority concurred on "Backskull broad, twice the width of muzzle" (11th).

With the greater than normal agreement, there were fewer split opinions. "Movement" (2nd), which had a majority ranking it 2-4, had five rank it in the second quartile. "Length to height approximately 10 to 9 proportion" (tied at 7th) was in the top quartile for eight, but six put it in the third quartile. This is a bit unusual, since overall proportion is often considered more important.

But it was typical to have a bipolar opinion on "Bold, faithful, willing worker; alert, vigilant" (6th), which had eight value it in the top quartile and the rest below midpoint. Temperament often doesn't rank highly as a virtue, but moves to the top of the list when it is a problem.

"Heavy bone, well muscled, sturdy" (1st) had an average more than three points ahead of second place, confirming it as most important. More than two points separated the averages of "Body full, tuck up" (9th) and "Backskull = muzzle" (10th), confirming the

greater value of the top nine. Nearly three points between the averages of "Feet" (12th) and "Tail" (13th) put the bottom four securely at the end of the list.

Additional input would break the tie at seventh. The two "Backskull" features at tenth and eleventh had very close averages and could easily switch relative positions with more surveys. None of the other averages were so close to an adjacent one that the relative placements would easily change.

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Faults

The experts prioritized a list of sixteen faults taken from or derived from the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog standard based on how serious each issue is when evaluating dogs. The faults are listed below in sequence by the average of the experts' ranks, with 1 being the biggest problem.

1. Shy or aggressive
2. Not powerful
3. Depth of chest not half the height of dog
4. Back not level when moving
5. Stifles more or less than moderately bent
6. Pasterns weak
7. Total absence of undercoat
8. Muzzle pointed
9. Tail curls or tilts over back
10. Topcoat not dense
11. Expression not animated or gentle
12. Eyes deep set or protruding
13. Taller or shorter than specified height range (Dogs 25½ to 28½ inches. Bitches 23½ to 27 inches)
14. Bones of tail not straight
15. Nose leather not black in adults
16. Flews more than slightly developed

The faults produced majority agreement in twelve of the sixteen, not as many as with the virtues, but still a good number for confidence in the results. As mentioned above, temperament was more important when a problem. "Shy or aggressive" (1st) was first for fifteen and another had it second. Sixteen also put "Not powerful" (2nd) in the top quartile, with most of the surveys placing it second.

Fourteen experts agreed on "Eyes deep set or protruding" (12th). "Depth of chest not half the height of dog" (3rd) was 3-6 on thirteen surveys. "Back not level when moving" (4th) was in the same range for twelve.

Eleven of the group similarly valued "Stifles more or less than moderately bent" (5th), "Pasterns weak" (6th), "Bones of tail not straight" (14th), and "Nose leather not black in adults" (15th). While "Tail bones" and "Nose leather" had majorities in or near the bottom quartile, five other experts placed them higher.

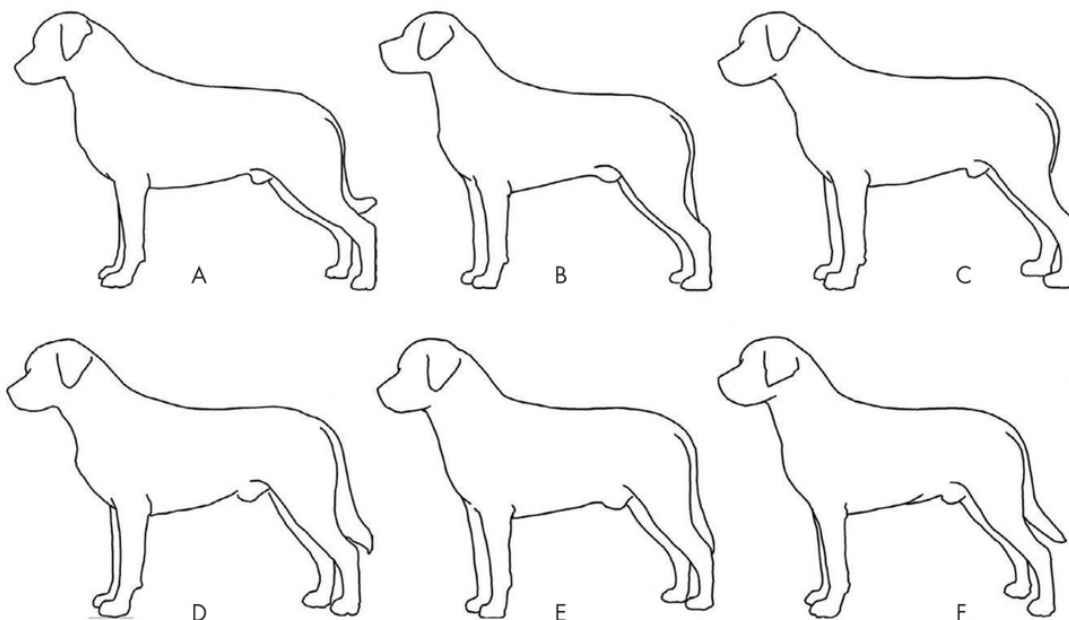
"Topcoat not dense" (10th) was around midpoint for ten, but another six ranked it fifteenth or sixteenth. Ten also put "Flews more than slightly developed" (16th) 12-15, with four others ranking it sixteenth. The smallest majority put "Taller or shorter than specified height range (Dogs 25½ to 28½ inches. Bitches 23½ to 27 inches)" (13th) in the bottom quartile, but four ranked it above average.

The faults had more split opinions than did the virtues. Eight experts had "Muzzle pointed" (8th) midpoint or below, while another

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



six ranked it 3–6. “Expression not animated or gentle” (11th) was also midpoint or below for eight, but the smaller group had it in the last quartile.

“Tail curls or tilts over back” (9th) was 6–9 for seven experts, but 11–14 for another seven. Seven surveys put “Total absence of undercoat” (7th) in the second quartile, while another five had it in or near the last quartile.

There was more than two points between the averages of “Not powerful” (2nd) and “Chest not half height” (3rd), confirming the greater seriousness of the top two faults. More than two points also separated “Muzzle pointed” (8th) and “Tail curl, over back” (9th). “Topcoat not dense” (10th) and “Bad expression” (11th) had very close averages and could swap relative ranks with more input.

Outlines

The survey included two sets of outlines, one of six Swissie dogs and another of six Swissie bitches, for the experts to place as they would a class at a dog show. The outlines are made from photos of very good to excellent real dogs, so none is perfect. The placements were made on outlines alone; the opinions might well change if the experts could have seen the dogs in person and watched them move.

The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog male with the best average among the dogs was outline “C.” Those who placed him first said “good sturdy look, not too heavy, not too light,” “balanced angles, level topline,” “more correct 10 to 9 body proportion, sufficient

bone,” “heavy bone, deep chest, full body, slight tuck-up, proper croup and tail set, good shoulder layback, slightly protruding breast bone, flat skull,” “long rib cage, balanced, tight paws, slight pastern give,” and “draft and drover appearance, 1:1 leg length to depth of body, nice return of upper arm, thick thigh, let down hock.”

The second-place dog with the next best placement average and the same number of first placements was dog “B.” Comments on him included “most balanced with appropriate rear angulation, proper proportions,” “good head proportions, flat skull, correct ear set, flews clean, level topline, slight tuck, stifles well-angulated, overall balanced,” “forechest, turn of stifle, tuck up, length of neck,” and “nice proportions, masculine but not overdone, pleasing head, nice shoulders, upper arm.”

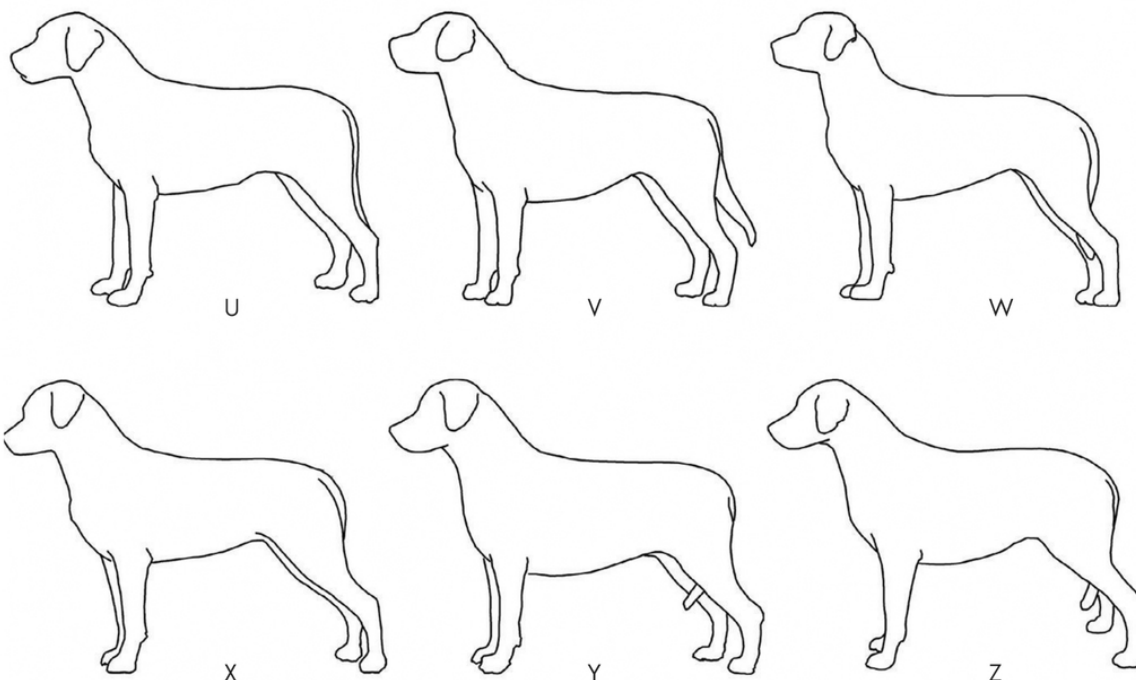
The Swissie female with the best placement average and most first placements was bitch “Y.” Those who liked her said “slight tuck up, not too much,” “full proportions, heavy bone, substance, balanced with a moderate rear, long neck to good shoulders and topline, good ear size,” “nice bone, depth of chest half height, level topline,” “substantial but feminine,” “flat croup, slightly long,” and “muzzle could be a little less pointed.”

The next best female was bitch “V.” Those who chose her said “well developed body, balanced, good topline and croup, moderate angles, pleasing head outline,” “best proportions, good angles front and rear,” “level topline,” and “nice head and body type, flat skull, slight stop, correct ear set, good depth of chest, correct croup and tail.”

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



Identifying Best of Breed wasn't easy. Bitch "Y" had the best average placement and more first placements (nine) of all twelve outlines. But she was placed Best of Breed on only one survey. Dog "B" (second place among the dogs) was named BOB five times, more than any other. Dog "C" was BOB on three surveys. Bitch "V" was BOB for two experts. So, I'm not sure which should be Best of Breed.

The only outline that was never placed first was bitch "U." The only outline never out of the ribbons was the second-place bitch "V." Dog "D" was unplaced more than any other dog. Bitch "Z" was unplaced more than any of the twelve outlines.

Essential Characteristics

The experts listed four to six essential characteristics that a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog must have to be a quality example of the breed.

Consistent with the lists and the descriptions of the best outlines, bone and substance was named most often, the experts want a large, sturdy, heavy boned dog. Movement was listed next most often: moving with power and purpose, not flying; clean, efficient, sound, with good reach and drive, but not exaggerated. Suitable temperament was also valued—one that is confident, bidable, gentle, and stable. Next most often mentioned were bal-

ance and strength and power.

Additional Notes

The survey provided space for the experts to offer additional comments for students of their breed.

- Symmetry of markings is important to value, or they will be lost.
- This is a draft breed that pulled carts and military gear through the Alps. Size with overall balance and stable temperament are necessary to do this.
- Think Clydesdale, not Thoroughbred; form follows function.
- Give bitches equal consideration.
- Keep the historical purpose of the breed in mind when judging.
- Look for sound purposeful movement, at a natural stance rather than a dog show stack.
- They need to have a low center of gravity to be efficient carting dogs.
- They are not elegant or light on their feet; their beauty is in their solid structure and nature.
- Color and markings may be "cosmetic," but they are still essential characteristics of Sennenhund breed type. When lost, they are hard to get back.
- The 10:9 length to height proportion – the length is measured from point of shoulder, not the prosternum.

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- The standard only calls for a scissors bite; no need to count teeth.
- There is much variety within this breed, which can make it difficult to judge. Focus first on bone and substance, then on balance and moderation.
- Do not get hung up on markings; cosmetic features are secondary compared to their ability to work.
- The standard says powerful (twice), muscular or well muscled (5 times), heavy boned (twice), and strong (5 times).
- Although head does not indicate working ability, it is important to breed type, so select for correct proportions and characteristics.
- Bigger is not necessarily better.
- The dog had to work outdoors, at high elevation and cold climate. Coat is important, including the undercoat and length of outer coat, to work in Switzerland. A correctly coated dog will have the base of the tail that is big, thick and strong.
- Never award a dog that displays any shyness or aggressiveness.
- Markings are a tie breaker.
- Complete lack of undercoat and shyness or aggressiveness should be severely penalized.
- Select 10:9 proportions, not longer, just slightly off square, with moderate angulation, sound body and mind, sturdy with heavy bone.

Thanks so much to the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog experts for contributing their knowledge to this project.