

Something to Think About

BY HELENE NIETSCH, BANSTOCK BULLMASTIFFS

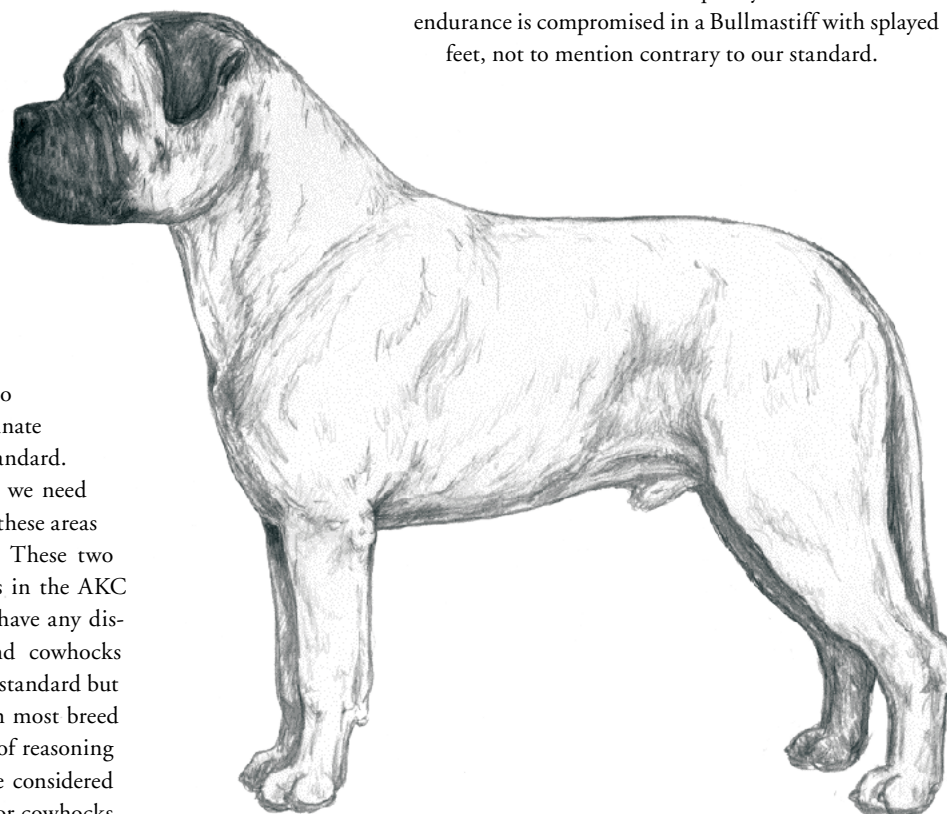
It is fair to say that if nature bred Bullmastiffs they would eventually deviate more toward looking like a big mutt. In order to maintain a Bullmastiff's nearly-square appearance, square head and muzzle with its punishing mouth, its size, substance and bone, and the need for structural soundness, breeders and judges alike must be meticulous in selecting correct type, size, structure, temperament, and health so that they both look like a Bullmastiff and can perform like a Bullmastiff.

Over the past 30 years the overall conformation of the Bullmastiff has made great strides. This has not happened by chance and came about through the conscientious efforts of breeders using selective breeding to optimize quality traits and eliminate faults as outlined in the breed standard.

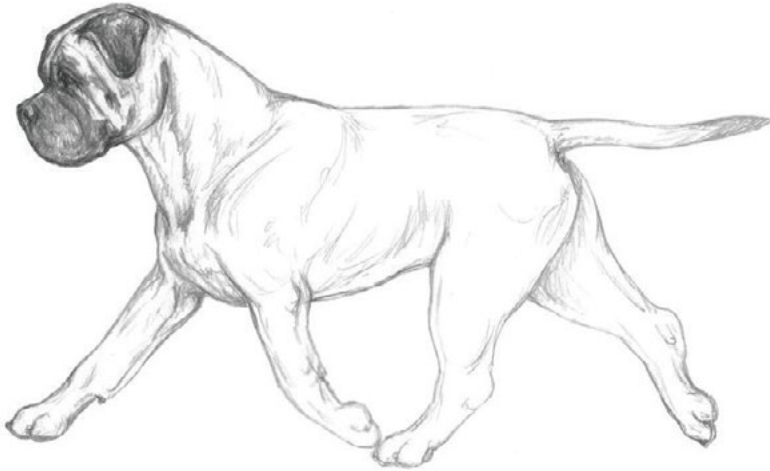
There are a few areas where we need to focus more attention. Two of these areas are splayed feet and cowhocks. These two faults are the only serious faults in the AKC Bullmastiff Standard (we don't have any disqualifications). Splayed feet and cowhocks are not only faulted in the AKC standard but are also basic structural faults in most breed standards. There is a great deal of reasoning behind why these two faults are considered "serious." Neither splayed feet nor cowhocks

can exist as simple fault characteristics. In other words, both of these problems affect other characteristics within the breed standard and cannot stand alone as simple faults. Bullmastiffs must possess the strength and endurance referred to in our breed standard. When feet are splayed, the fleshy part of the foot is exposed, unprotected, and easily traumatized. Splay-footed animals usually have longer toes as well, and are sometimes down in the pastern which makes them more susceptible to fractures. Our standard calls for "*pasterns straight, feet of medium size, with round toes, well arched*"—essentially a cat foot.

Therefore, one can see how the quality of soundness and endurance is compromised in a Bullmastiff with splayed feet, not to mention contrary to our standard.



BULLMASTIFF: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT



Cowhocks affect strength and proper movement, and the dog's ability to track properly and utilize the power in their hindquarters. As a Bullmastiff moves and accelerates to the point of breaking stride and running, the feet should converge under the body and be in-line, attempting to converge below the dog. In mild-to-moderately cowhocked animals, this is extremely difficult. In severely cowhocked animals it is impossible, as the hocks would actually collide. The amount of power that is possible from a cowhocked rear is also limited. The limitation in both of these serious faults completely hinders the dog's ability to do its historic work and makes him virtually useless to the gamekeeper.

To reiterate, there are only two "serious faults" in the Bullmastiff breed standard. Breeders, exhibitors, and judges, please take them seriously.

There are two other areas that I believe require further consideration: Toplines and tailsets. "Topline: Straight and level between withers and loin." Straight and level, not sloping, nearly square, and back short are key words to describe a Bullmastiff's outline. A one-piece dog, with a smooth outline, is very desirable. Some Bullmastiffs, however, have an excess of skin along their topline, particularly on their shoulders. Although not always pleasing to the eye, if the outline remains correct and there is not wrinkle from tip of nose to tip of tail, a small amount of wrinkle over the shoulder should not be heavily faulted. If you feel the difference between the thickness of the skin on a Bullmastiff and a Rhodesian Ridgeback, you could understand this feature. A Bullmastiff [traditionally] worked in often harsh weather, and it is a thick-skinned dog to protect against weather, the heavy brush, and ultimately, the dagger of the poacher.



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BULLMASTIFF: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

“Tail: Set on high, strong at the root and tapering to the hocks. It may be carried straight or curved, but never carried hound fashion.”

There is no need for a Bullmastiff's tail to be carried up, it is not waving at the hunter (gamekeeper) to locate the dog or the game (poacher). In fact, it would be a deterrent to warn the poacher of its presence. We see far too many tails carried too high, some over their back. It takes away the seriousness of the look of a Bullmastiff, throws off the look of balance in the silhouette, and (in my opinion) is just plain unattractive!

Some faults are, of course, more serious than others, depending on the breed; lack of breed type being the most serious of all faults. Should a light eye be more heavily faulted than a lack of balance or an unsound rear assembly? Is a poor tail set a more significant flaw than a weak front or sagging topline? Are not the goals of the judge the same as the breeder? Both have the responsibility to this sport to select the best dogs to make the next generation better than the previous. Both have the opportunity to improve the breed, and this article points out only a few features to pay attention to and think about.

It is the judge or breeder with a true eye for quality who can sort through the minor imperfections to find that special and rare thing we call true quality. Dog breeding is about protecting a breed, not about one great win or winner. Seasoned ethical breeders don't settle for just good enough, but strive for the very best for future generations. Let's hope that, someday, we can produce consistency in litters that are bred for correct breed type and that they are evaluated and judged with a keen, educated eye... the eye of an esteemed judge, the wisdom of a master breeder. ■

