

CHIHUAHUAS FROM HEAD-2-TOE

A BREED THAT IS WAY MORE THAN JUST
AN APPLE-ROUNDED FATED HEAD

by Joao Machado

I have been honored to be invited to judge many Chihuahuas in specialties as well as in all-breed shows around the world in the past years as a breed specialist. These specialty shows, as well as all-breed shows, took place in Australia, Japan, South America, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and in the US. It's undeniable, the privilege and opportunity to study and evaluate the breeding stock as well as the development of the breed in these different regions. Likewise, as with any other breed that becomes popular, breed type and quality can be compromised, and Chihuahuas faced their fate of popularity worldwide in many ways.

For many breeders, exhibitors, and judges, our Chihuahuas should be evaluated, bred by, and prized as a head breed only. However, this breed is way more than just its head. Those ignoring the amazing quality features of this breed such as temperament and the physical conformation that allows them to be a swiftly moving little dog, for example, are missing the point and might be putting the preservation of this breed at risk. Fortunately, I was able to see and judge great examples of the breed, which shows to me breeders are working really hard



to produce top-quality specimens, improving important characteristics of the breed related to health, structure, expression, and temperament. During my learning process of this breed, I noticed that the lack of criteria in selecting the right combinations is still the main reason behind both conformation and temperament

issues. Having said that, I had been asked if it is difficult to judge Chihuahuas. My answer to this question was: Yes, it is. The breed is definitely not easy to judge. Taking into account one characteristic only (to the detriment of others, equally important to the breed) may be a common mistake in the evaluation.

Therefore, if I could list a point system for the Chihuahuas, six equal parts should be included:

1. The Head—including the teeth, eyes, and ears;
2. The Body—including the tail;
3. The Coat—for both coats;
4. The Legs;
5. The Temperament—Terrier-like qualities of temperament;
6. General Appearance and Action or Movement.

There is no doubt that the Chihuahua head is the trademark of the breed. It is expected to combine all the important elements to create the desired “saucy” expression. What are these important features then? Certainly, it does not refer to having a well-rounded “apple dome” skull only. In fact, that is important too, but it is part of a combination; it comes together with full, rounded, luminous eyes (round luminous eyes are going away and this has to be brought back to the breeding programs), correct well-set, large ears (in harmony with the head), flaring ears (in the case of the long-coated variety), a muzzle moderately short, slightly pointed, and cheeks and jaws lean. These features will create the desired expression of the Chihuahua. My purpose here is not to divide the breed into types, but to bring to attention and list the important characteristics that deviate from the standard concerning expression.

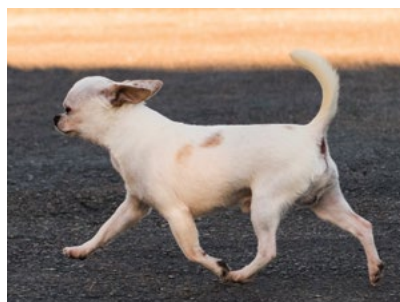


This picture shows us a beautiful saucy expression of the breed. Notice the well-rounded “apple dome” skull, full, rounded, luminous eyes, correct well-set, large ears (in harmony with the head), flaring ears, muzzle mod-

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erately short, slightly pointed, and cheeks and jaws lean.

The Chihuahua is exhibited in two varieties; Smooth Coat and Long Coat. The two varieties are based solely on coat, everything else is identical, i.e., the same breed under their coats. Chihuahuas should be well-balanced, without exaggeration, not to exceed six lbs., off-square (slightly longer than tall). All these characteristics together should create a beautiful, swift movement, firm and sturdy, good reach and equal drive, head carried high, firm topline (level), with all movement comparable to that of many Working breeds.



*Smooth Coat Chihuahua
Photo: Schmidt Photography*

This picture shows beautifully what good reach and equal drive should look like in a Chihuahua’s movement. It is extremely desirable and should be one of the top priorities both when judging or selecting breeding stock. Remember: When this breed was in the wild, they needed to move fast to avoid being captured by predators. Therefore, movement as described in the standard is as important as the head. That’s the reason why I would like to encourage my audience to look at the whole dog and not on one single feature only.

Breed character counts! Chihuahuas should show Terrier-like qualities of temperament, i.e., brave, mischievous, energetic, active, fearless, independent, playful, and cheerful. It is expected from Chihuahuas to show this special personality in the ring, and both judges and breeders should invest on this, prizing them in the rings as well as selecting the right temperament when studying the breeding combinations. Fearful, timid, and aggressive dogs should be penalized.

I can’t stress enough that collaboration is key for any breed development, and Chihuahua breeders should pursue this goal. If we think about the most significant change in our sport, we can certainly say it is the immediacy of those new entrants in the hope of quick results, ignoring and/or not listening to or hearing the wise voices from the past, with their extensive experience, examples, and wisdom. They still have so much to contribute to us... to the sport! We need to go back to the beginning of everything, where collaboration with serious mentors, the original preservation breeders, can help us to get back to the basics and those important breed characteristics that have gone away fast due to all the “fad” breeding to accommodate a temporary “market” tendency or something else. AKC trends are of the highest importance worldwide and they are leading to promote more and more preservation breeders who breed with purpose and passion for generations to come. When good breeders work together, much more can be accomplished.



*Judging Chihuahuas
Judge: Joao Machado evaluating two SC
Chihuahuas on the table.
Photo: Sandi Olkkola Photography*

When I judge Chihuahuas, or when I have opportunities to share information with new judges or applicants, I always like to emphasize the following:

Do not place extreme emphasis on the head. Judge the whole dog!

Although one of the distinctive features of the Chihuahua is its small size, the importance of that feature is in comparison with other breeds, not in relation to other Chihuahuas. Size does not indicate weight; some little dogs weigh heavy, some large ones, very light. Although the condition of the dogs is a consideration, if they are six pounds and under, no preference should be given to size, no matter how large or small.

When judging the Chihuahua, except for disqualifications and serious faults, one fault is no worse than another; a better approach is to add up the good qualities and discern which dog is closest to the ideal. If instead, the judge focuses on faults, the dog that wins may have fewer faults, but it may not have the most desirable qualities, and it may not be the best dog in the ring.

I have loved for years what Mr. Richard Beauchamp once said: "It can be just as serious a mistake for a judge to reward a dog for a lone virtue as it is for him to dismiss a dog for a single fault. While that virtue may be important to an individual breeding program, it is the judges' responsibility to reward the dog that possesses the most of the best. Qualities—like their opposites, faults—must be viewed in the context

of the entire dog—how much good is there here?" We can definitely learn a lot from this statement, because it has such a huge impact, especially with Toy breeds where qualities have to be looked at first. It is so hard to breed these little ones that the expectations to promote important breed qualities is a must.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Joao Machado and I was born in Vitoria/ES-Brazil, graduated in both English & Portuguese Languages with a Master's Degree in Business Administration. In the 1990s, I started to become familiar with dogs, when I got from my father a German Shepherd puppy. Since then, I have been involved with many other breeds, and most recently—in 2015—I started with Chihuahuas. As far as I can remember, I have always been an animal lover. My interest has always been drawn to Toy and Terrier breeds. My affix

is called HYLAND and it is a small, private, home kennel located in Houston, Texas. The kennel was formed in 1999 in Brazil, when I got my first pedigree/show dog. Breeding is, for me, a form of art, an endless pursuit of excellence and beauty. The passion for blending bloodlines and trying to produce an animal that will take my breath away is a "fire" that will burn inside of me for the rest of my life, for sure. Hyland Kennel, since its beginning, has strived to breed sound dogs of exceptional temperament with an emphasis on breed type. All of our dogs are home-raised and are pets first, but have also enjoyed an abundance of success in the show rings.

Currently, I am the President of Houston Chihuahua Club for the second year in a row. Throughout the years as an active member, I have held many other positions such as President of the Santos Kennel Club and Vice President of the Kennel Club Capixaba, both important local all-breed clubs in Brazil.

I have been involved with showing dogs, attending both specialties and all-breed dog shows, in Brazil, Austria, France, Germany, and the US.

I was admitted into the FCI judging board since 2009, and as an approved Toy Judge, I have judged in several states in Brazil, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Japan, Australia, and the US. I am currently approved for the Toy, Terrier, and Herding Groups, half of the Non-Sporting Group, and two Working breeds.

I have had the honor and pleasure of judging Chihuahuas since 2009 when I got my first approved breeds under the FCI system. In reality, a very interesting fact is that the first dog I ever judged was a Smooth Coat Chihuahua, in my first judging assignment in the city of Joinville, SC/Brazil. I couldn't have imagined that destiny would draw me to this amazing breed many years later.

In 2018, I got voted by the membership to judge the Chihuahua Club of America Regional Specialty. That was, for sure, one of the greatest, prestigious honors I have had as a judge, i.e., judging in the most important worldwide show of my breed!

I am currently an active member of the following breed clubs:

- Chihuahua Club of America—AKC Delegate, Judges Ed. Chair, and Approved Seminar Presenter;
- Houston Chihuahua Club—President;
- Toy Club of Greater Houston—Vice-President;
- Houston Kennel Club—Member.