

EXAMINING AND JUDGING THE SIBERIAN HUSKY

By: Donna Beckman

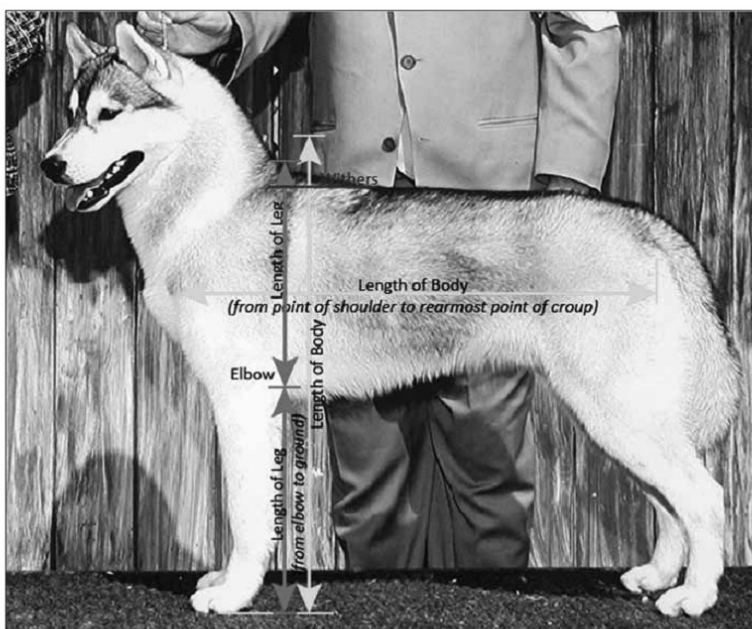
When judging the Siberian Husky always remember his purpose and origin. This is a long distance, endurance sled dog. The Standard was written to describe the original imports and their offspring—the dogs that created our stud book—and these were working dogs.

The Chukchi Peninsula in the north easternmost corner of Siberia is sub-zero, permafrost tundra with a harsh landscape, very few scrub plants grow there, and food is scarce. The Chukchi natives needed a dog to help them scour the region for food, while they ran trap lines, fished, and hunted game.

The native dogs—forebears of our current Siberian Huskies—provided that help for thousands of years, surviving with little food, in very inhospitable conditions, and running long distances day-after-day.

Our Standard reminds you of this as it describes the Siberian, “His characteristic gait is smooth and seemingly effortless. He performs his original function in harness most capably, carrying a light load at a moderate speed over

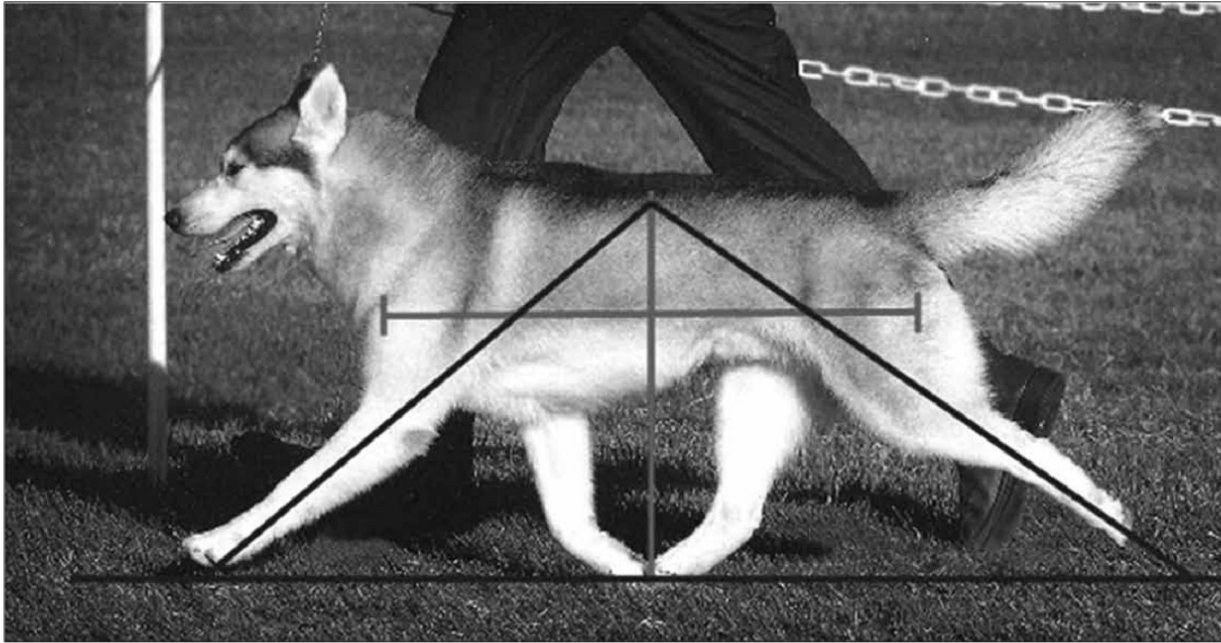
great distances. His body proportions and form reflect this basic balance of power, speed and endurance.” Keep this image of a long distance runner in mind as you judge the Siberian.



This picture illustrates the proportion called for in the Standard: slightly longer than tall with slightly longer legs than depth of body.

When viewing the Siberian in profile from the center of the ring, look for several things. Look for the proportion called for in the Standard; the body of the Siberian (measured from the point of shoulder to the rear of the pelvis) is slightly longer than the height of the dog at the withers. This makes the Siberian slightly rectangular. But this proportion must be

accompanied by the longer leg called for in the Standard: “the distance from elbow to ground is slightly more than the distance from elbow to top of withers.” This is very important for the Siberian’s ability to do his job. Many other Working breeds call for a 50/50 ratio; but the Siberian does not. And this slightly longer leg should be visible with more “daylight” under the dog. Look for a well laid-back shoulder, which should be accompanied by a scapula and humerus of approximately equal lengths



The Siberian's movement should be controlled and balanced: legs meet under the center of the dog, head is carried slightly forward, in extension the foreleg meets the ground approximately under the nose, front and rear legs meet the ground at complementary angles.

(although not specifically mentioned in the Standard). A correct shoulder assembly should be obvious when the foreleg falls on a plumb line descending from the withers. The rear angulation should also be good, balancing the shoulder assembly. His head should have a moderate stop, a muzzle of equal length to the skull, and be of appropriate size to the body, and flow to the body through a medium well arched neck. The topline should be straight and LEVEL, and the tail should be set on below the level of the topline with a slightly sloping croup. The Siberian should have a moderate tuck-up, showing that he is in good weight (in proportion to height) and condition. If any of these key points is not readily apparent in the visual examination, those are areas to pay close attention to during the physical exam.

When approaching the Siberian, his temperament should be quite apparent. Please remember that this Breed will usually not stand statue still during the exam. But, a Siberian should allow you to examine him visually and physically. A Siberian may completely ignore you, dive for his bait, give you a kiss, or show any number of other silly

behaviors, much to the dismay of his handler. However, he should never show shyness or aggression. Of course, a young dog in the ring for the first time may be unsure of himself, but that is not the same as being shy. Although Siberian temperaments are usually very good, once beginning the physical exam, it is always a good idea to keep one hand on the dog the physical exam is finished.

When viewing the head from the front, look for those characteristics that are hallmarks of the Breed: almond-shaped, obliquely set eyes (which may be any number of colors and combinations of colors), medium-sized, triangular, well-furred, high set ears, a gradually tapering muzzle as long as the skull. Remember, also, that the varying facial markings on the Siberian may cause optical illusions. Please try to ignore them, and feel for the correct measurements. If the head components—eye shape and set, muzzle length, stop, and ears are all correct—the characteristic mischievous look will be obvious. And remember that the only thing called for in the Standard concerning teeth is that the preferred bite is scissors.

The head flows into a well arched medium length neck. You should be able to feel the prosternum (although it is not mentioned in the Standard), and the distance between the front legs should be a hand's width. Although the Siberian's coat should never obscure the outline of the dog, you may need to use your hands to feel the shoulder layback and measure the length of the scapula and humerus. The first few ribs should be fairly flat to allow for freedom of movement, and use your hand to feel the depth of the chest—not falling below the elbow. Remember that a correct front assembly is imperative for a working sled dog

The topline should be firm and level, and you should be able to see this both while standing and gaiting. You can check the slope of the croup and the set of the tail, by running one hand down the back to where the tail is set on while gently lifting the tail. While checking testicles on a male or at the end of the physical exam, check the muscling of the thighs. If you have any question about the feet, pick up a foot to see its size (medium) shape (oval), and characteristics (compact, tough pads, well cushioned, well furred). A correct Siberian foot is essential in his "job."

During the physical exam, you have ample opportunity to feel for the length, double characteristics, and texture of the coat. Although Siberians are prone to shedding once to twice a year which will affect the overall density of the coat, the expectation is to find a good double coat with a softer, dense undercoat that is sufficient to support the outer coat comprised of guard hairs that are straight and smooth lying. Beware of an overly long, soft, silky, or harsh coat. The coat, while dense, does not obscure the overall outline of the dog, and is never trimmed (other than the whiskers and feet, if desired). There is only one item in our Standard that should be "severely penalized," and that is trimming. The correct Siberian coat requires no altering at all, and in fact, if a Siberian's coat is trimmed, the coat will lose its insulating ability, which could be deadly. This is why the Siberian Husky Club of America, Inc., is adamantly opposed to trimming a Siberian's coat. Remember that correct Siberian

coat may be of a variety of colors and markings, from black to pure white, and including shades of red and brown. All are equally acceptable. However, we are seeing something distressing in the breed. Some "merle" dogs are being sold as "Siberians." It is the belief of the Siberian Husky Club of America, Inc., that the merle patterning gene does not exist in the purebred Siberian, and these "merles" indicate impure breeding. SHCA has been working with the American Kennel Club on this problem. So far we have not seen these "merles" in the conformation ring.

The three important things about the Siberian tail are: the set (just below the level of the topline with its slightly sloping croup), the fur (like a fox brush, with hairs approximately equal all around), and shape (in a graceful sickle curve when up, not curling to either side or snapped to back). When in the ring, a Siberian can do many things with his tail, and ANY and ALL are correct as long as the tail meets the above-mentioned characteristics. There is no requirement for tail length, so you need not measure his tail. You never have to see his tail over his back in the ring. When moving his tail may be carried over his back, trailing, wagging, or low—all are correct. Pay attention to the set, furring, and shape; please don't be overly concerned with where he holds his tail.

It is in the gait of the Siberian where you see the result of your visual and physical examinations. A correctly proportioned Siberian in good condition with good angles and sound conformation will seem to float around the ring. He will cover the ground with minimal effort, there will be no rolling over the withers, no bouncing of the topline, no excessive lifting in the front, no high kicking in the rear. He will single track when seen from the front and the rear, and this will also be evident in his foot timing and the placement of his feet under his body when moving in profile. He should move within himself, and do so smoothly, with no wasted effort.

Please remember that the only disqualification in the Siberian Standard is for being too tall—dogs over 23.5" and bitches over 22" at the withers. Although there are many mentions of

medium and moderate within our Standard; the height range therein describes such a medium and moderate dog. Do not think that a dog that measures in the middle of the Standard is preferable to one at the top or at the bottom of the Standard. No preference should be given to the top, middle, or bottom of the Standard's stated range for height, and weight should always be in proportion to height. Therefore, if in doubt as to whether a dog is within that range, we ask that you please measure. You might well be surprised at how far under the top of Standard a seemingly "tall" dog is, which may change your opinion of the other dogs in the ring. Although we do not have a disqualification for a dog being under Standard, it is a fault.

Finally, as you make your final decisions, here are a few things to remember. A Siberian Husky should NEVER be husky in his build, "Any appearance of excessive bone or weight should be penalized." Ask yourself if the dogs you are selecting are athletic, seemingly capable of running 100-200 miles a day, every day. Reward those that could.

About the Author

Donna Beckman has been an owner/exhibitor/breeder of Siberian Huskies for 40 years. She has served the Siberian Husky Club of America, Inc., in many elected and appointed capacities, including two terms as President, Recording Secretary, three terms as Treasurer, Show Chairman, Show Secretary, DWAA-winning **Newsletter** Editor, and eight years as SHCA's Delegate to the American Kennel Club. Currently she is SHCA Judges' Education Committee Chairman, as well as being a member of the Illustrated Standard Committee. In 2012, she was honored by SHCA as the recipient of the Peggy Grant Award for lifetime service to the Club and the Breed, and in 2014 she was named a Life Member of SHCA. She is the co-breeder of scores Champions in the USA and in foreign countries, and of co-breeder and/or co-owner of multiple Best in Show, Group-winning, Group-placing, and highly ranked Siberian Huskies in the US and several foreign countries, including a 32-time US Best-in-Show winner, SHCA Top-20 winner, Awards of Merit winners, and Winners Dog at National Specialties. She is the author of a book on the Siberian. She is approved by the AKC to judge a number of Working breeds. She has judged and educated fanciers and judges in the US and other countries, including having judged the SHCA National Specialty.