

JUDGING THE AKITA

By Nancy Amburgery

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After walking the ring and deciding my pattern for the day, I bring in the first class. I like to bring them in and have a look at them all before moving. While most exhibitors are aware, keep in mind a little space between dogs is the norm. Looking down the line, it's my opportunity to get an idea of proportion, size and balance. I review some key words from the standard; alert, dignified, large and powerful. Then, I send them around together. As they go, I compare the side gaits of the group. Here I'm looking for powerful, brisk and a moderate stride. As they come around to the designated stopping point I am ready to go over my first dog.

INDIVIDUAL EXAMS

The dog has been set up and I stand back so I can look at his general proportions. The tail is curled over the back and will balance the head. The top line is level. Akitas are longer than tall. In dogs, as 10 is to 9. In bitches, as 11 is to 9.

I walk in front of the dog, stopping short of being straight in front. Here I'm within their vision and they know I'm approaching. As I approach I usually give a good morning with a smile to the handler but I'm actually addressing the dog. A confident glance of the head taking note of head shape, ears, eyes, nose and length of muzzle, not staring into his eyes, starts my examination. Then we go into the actual hands on.

His HEAD is massive but in balance with the body. It looks like a blunt triangle. It will be free of wrinkle when he is at ease. The skull is flat between the ears. I will fault a snipey or narrow head. The EARS are carried slightly forward. They are triangular, strong, thick and well furred, with slightly rounded tips. Our first DQ is here (#1); Drop or broken ears are to be disqualified. The EYES are triangular in shape, small tight, black rims and dark brown in color. The MUZZLE is broad and strong. The distance from his nose to his stop as to the distance from stop to occiput is 2 to 3. His NOSE is broad and black although we do allow a lighter nose with or without shading of black or gray on a white Akita. A dog with a partial or total lack of pigmentation is another of our Disqualifications. (DQ #2) At our JEC seminars, we like to say the head is a symphony of triangles.

Bite: I generally ask the handler to show me the bite. An Akita should have a scissors bite although a level bite is acceptable. We do have a disqualification for either over shot or undershot. (DQ #3) Since we don't have a disqualification for missing teeth and complete dentition is not mentioned in the standard I don't ask for more than a bite check.

I move on to the body. The shoulders are strong and powerful, with a moderate layback. The front legs are heavy boned and straight. The depth of the chest is 1/2 the height of the dog. I run my hand across his top line. It is level. Leaving my hand on the dog, I step on around to his rear, lifting his tail if it impedes my checking his



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top line and gently putting it back where I found it. Then I run my hands down his hips/thighs verifying muscle tone and slip one hand in to check testicles if it is required. His upper thighs are well developed, he will have a moderately bent stifle and well let down hocks. I step away, moving to the right behind the handler and around to the front. This puts me at the top of the down and back without walking up beside the dog from behind. This is what I do with all breeds.

An Akita's movement is similar with many working dogs. The rear legs move in line with the front. Although an Akita doesn't actually converge, he will have a tendency as he moves along to come in toward the middle line. From the side, he should have a moderate stride. Brisk and powerful but moderate. And here, I will discuss feet. The Akita's foot is a cat foot. Toes are knuckled up and short, pads are thick. You know, like a cat. Flat feet with

played toes and incorrect ears are my personal pet peeves. Not the only ones, but certainly worth mentioning here.

As I'm observing this dog, I remember other parts of the standard. His tail will be curled over and touching his back. It could be a tight curl; it could be a $\frac{3}{4}$ curl with the end dropping over his flank, but it must be touching his back. A tail that hangs straight down behind or is a sickle tail is a disqualification (DQ#4... and you thought I'd forgotten!) We all know, on really hot days we feel a little droopy or when we're young, we are perhaps timid and in Akita's case, their tail may just hang down. Normally, a go round the ring will pop the tail back up on the back where it belongs. That is a qualifying tail.

The Akita is a double coated breed. The under coat is soft and dense with a longer harsher guard hair. And, although everything is great about an Akita, one of the best is they come in all colors. We tell

judges and potential puppy buyers that color should not be a consideration BUT its still great they can be so many hued. Our standard allows any color including white (white Akitas have no mask), pinto (a pinto has a white background with large, evenly placed patches covering the head and more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the body) and brindle. The colors are brilliant and clear and markings are well balanced with or without a mask. And, the undercoat can be a different color than the top coat and quite frequently is!

Dogs are 26"-28" tall. Under 25" is a disqualification. Bitches are 24"-26" tall. Under 23" is a disqualification. (That's DQ #5 and our last one.) This INCLUDES puppies. If there is a question on height I measure and I'm asking you to do so. Our standard is very specific about size with under the minimum being a disqualification. The Akita is considered a large breed, let's keep it in the range specified.

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The Akita’s personality is what attracts many people to my breed. They can be fun loving and a jokester with their people one minute, alert and protective in the next. They walk down the street or through a show site like they own everything they can see inspiring awe. But take note, they can be intolerant of other dogs especially of the same sex. Please don’t pack several Akitas in a corner while you’re sorting out another group, neither the handlers or the dogs will appreciate it.

OK, I’m done with the class, it’s time to place them. I hope as you’ve read this article you’ve been able to derive the key points, the essence, of an Akita. They are large with heavy bone and substance, balance, correct heads, ears, tail and gives the overall impression of power and stature with a reserved temperament. A very wise man once told me, “When you go to dog shows, if you stay all day and watch other breeds; stay and watch the groups, you should be able to pick out a good dog. You may not know all the dis-

qualifications or nuances but you should be able to pick out a good dog.” That’s what I’m challenging you all to do. To learn more about the Akita or for that matter, any breed, go to shows. Watch all day. And then go one step farther. Talk to the exhibitors. Talk to other judges. Go to seminars.

Finally, remember the standard is what breeders are striving for. As judges we all need to choose our winners with that standard always forefront in our minds. And enjoy what you do, I do. ■

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BIO

Nancy Amburgay acquired her first Akita in 1988, and quickly become interested in AKC sports, exhibiting both in conformation and obedience. She has bred and handled many Champions including Top Twenty competitors, specialty winners, National Specialty BOS and AOM’s. She is approved to judge most of the working group and Junior Showmanship and is currently the ACA National’s Show Chair and member of the ACA Judges’ Education Committee. After living most of her life in Ohio, Nancy recently moved to Texas with her husband.