

LENGTH, SHAPE & TOPLINE IN THE DANDIE DINMONT TERRIER

BY SANDRA PRETARI HICKSON

Because length, shape, and topline are the most misunderstood areas of our Breed Standard and, consequently, of our breed, it is where I focus most when giving our breed's judges education presentation. I start there, I end there, and we revisit it over and over again throughout the presentation. The three are intertwined, and when judging "goes off" in our breed, this is invariably where it does; judges thinking that more is better or that any old curve in any old place or any topline at all will do. All, of course, are equally incorrect. If you do not understand length, shape, and most importantly, topline in our breed, you will be completely lost judging it.

The height of the Dandie is 8 to 11 inches at the top of the shoulder. Length from the TOP of the shoulder to the root of the tail is twice the height of the dog, less 1 to 2 inches, so a 10-inch Dandie should be 18 to 19 inches long. Let's use the Skye Terrier as a comparison. The Skye Terrier Standard calls for a Skye to be twice as long as it is tall; a 10-inch dog would be 20 inches long. However, that measurement is taken from the CHEST BONE, the PROSTERNUM, not from the TOP of the shoulder as is the Dandie. Using this as an example, the average Dandie should be as long as the average Skye, but generally is not. And while the Skye Terrier does not have a problem maintaining its length of body, the Dandie very much does. Length is very difficult to achieve and maintain in a Dandie, and consequently, must be coveted and rewarded.

When first looking at a class of Dandies, your immediate impression should be one of great length, and in the end, all things being equal, the longer of the two dogs must go up. I always get asked if a Dandie can be too long and the short answer is, "No, I've never seen it." Now, if you have a Dandie come into your ring

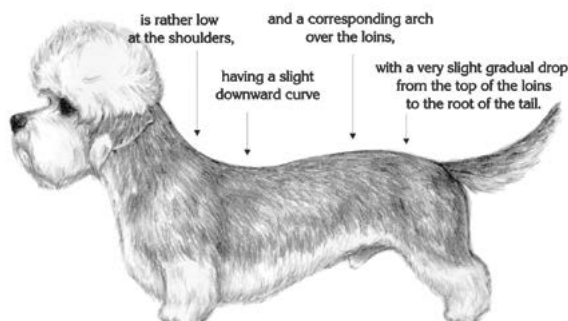
that is longer than the Standard calls for, that Dandie would be too long. However, as I have just said, I have never seen one and I have measured and examined hundreds of Dandies. Consequently, in a nutshell and to borrow the mantra from the Pembroke Welsh Corgi Judges' Education presentation, "long is good, short is bad!"

Our Standard is very clear about what the outline and topline of a Dandie should be, and it is as follows: "***The topline is rather low at the shoulder, having a SLIGHT downward curve and a corresponding arch over the loin, with a VERY SLIGHT gradual drop from the top of the loins to the root of the tail.***" [EMPHASIS added.] The downward curve is SLIGHT, ergo, the corresponding arch over the loin is also SLIGHT, with the VERY SLIGHT drop over the croup. In looking at the drawing below from our *Illustrated Standard*, you will see that the degree of arch over the loin very much mirrors the degree of downward curve at the shoulder, both are SLIGHT. No exaggerated curves, no camel backs, no roaches, no swamp backs—all are seen quite often being rewarded in the ring, along with the equally egregious ski slope/stern high topline. Additionally, the rise must be over the loin, with the apex of the rise being over the center of the loin and not drifting forward towards or in the middle of the back, both of which are quite common.

The above-described toplines are not only incorrect but almost always denote weakness, not only of the topline but in other areas as well. A Dandie with a roached and/or camel back is almost always short in body and straight in front, with little to no prosternum. A Dandie with a ski slope topline is almost always straight in the rear and, of course, would not have the required very slight drop from the top of the loin to the root of the tail. And so it goes.

The outline is a continuous flow
from the crest of the neck to the tip of the tail.

The topline



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The correct shape of the Dandie's body is key to correct type, and the key words used to describe it are "slight" and "curves." But another word I like to use to describe the Dandie is "weaselly." In every Breed Standard other than the AKC Standard, the word "weaselly" is used in the General Appearance section to describe the Dandie. Why it was omitted from ours I don't know, as it's such a beautifully descriptive word when referring to our Dandie. Why? Well, what is a weasel? It is a long, low, curvy, flexible, athletic, killing machine; everything a Dandie should be. You should see all of that when looking at a Dandie. It is the correct outline and topline that are not only critical to Dandie type but also what makes those toplines flexible, supple, well-muscled, and strong, with no weakness. Remember, "No Outline, No Dandie." Yes, we say this same thing about a number of breeds, but while there are other breeds with curvy outlines, the Dandie's outline is unique and like no other. It should never be a mystery as to what you're looking at when looking at a correct Dandie silhouette.

In 1951, the late Phyllis Salisbury of Salismore Dandies in the UK wrote, "The construction and mechanics of a well-made Dandie, with its short legs and long, arched and flexible body, must attain a high degree of perfection in order that the animal move with the balanced agility to carry out its work of vermin killing." Again, one would say, well that is true of any dog bred to do a job, and yes, it is. However, I put to you that because the construction and mechanics of the Dandie are so very distinctive and unique, it is even more so in our breed. The trickle-down effect of an incorrect outline and topline are very, very real. ■



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MBIS/NBIS Am. CH/Aust. GCH Hobergays Finneus Fogg
Top-Winning Dandie in Breed History