

YOU BE THE JUDGE

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THE AIREDALE TERRIER

The Airedale Terrier is the largest of the terriers and the most versatile. It is believed that, in addition to crosses to the Old English Terrier, Irish and Welsh Terriers, the Bull Terrier was used to infuse gameness and the Otterhound was used to provide hard coat.

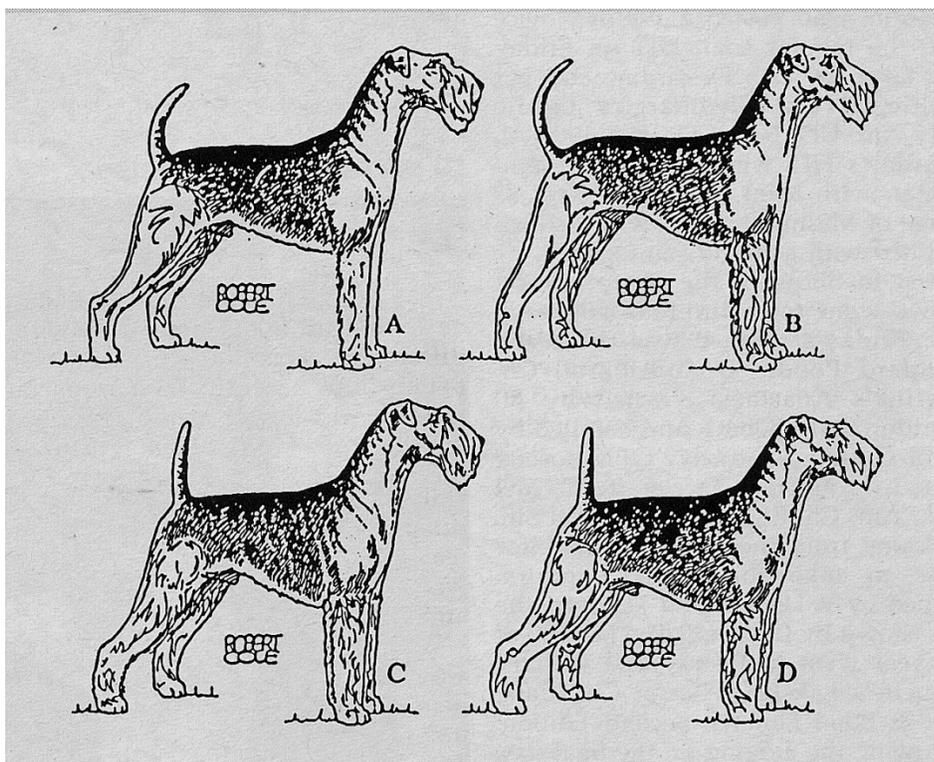
The versatile Airedale has been employed around the world to hunt large animals, work with police, herd sheep, retrieve ducks from water and as dispatch bearers during several wars. Large for an earth digger, the benefits of the Airedale's terrier front in these many roles is debatable, but no one can debate that the resulting up-on-the-toes impression this kind of front provides certainly enhances the Airedale's appearance, even though it reduces, to a degree, the reach and extension of the front leg.

None of these four Airedales is handicapped by faults considered serious in the breed, such as yellow eyes, hound ears, white feet, curly or soft coat, being much over or under 23-24 inches for dogs (bitches slightly less) or being undershot or overshot. Instead, focus is on more readily identifiable faults and important type characteristics, including a number that receive little or no direct mention in the Canadian standard.

NOT MENTIONED

The standard is silent in regard to: the shape of the eye, the desired planes of the skull and muzzle; the unusual position of the upper arm; the degree of forechest; the ideal ratio of body length to height; the length of leg; the slope to the front pastern; and whether or not a tail "of fair length" is docked.

In all probability, you have already decided which of these four Airedale examples comes closest to typical without having to consider the influence on type these unmentioned features contribute; however, these features must be taken into account when assessing the merits of the other three examples.



DOG A

As the standard does not inform that the ideal Airedale tends towards square, you could have given this rectangular dog first place. I gave it second. This otherwise sound dog is long in loin (it could have been long in ribcage). I have highlighted the last rib to indicate not only its position but also to remind that this rib slopes rearward, not straight up and down as sometimes happens when the Airedale's loin is too long.

The example's correct head is long and strong with the foreface the same length as the skull and on the same plane, the slight stop barely noticeable. Cheek muscles are well developed but flat, and the head is well filled up before the eyes, the round muzzle resembling a quonset hut. The dark eyes are oval, the nose black, the lips tight, the bite scissors (can be pincer).

The tail is drawn forward (can happen when excited) but is not curled over to the extent warned of in the standard. This tail, however, is not set on as high up on the croup as required. This slightly low-set tail could be an indication that the pelvis is steep, but such is not the case here. The sacrum (ideally horizontal on the Airedale) in this instance takes a slight downward curve.

Amount of furnishings receives no mention in the standard, but from a show point of view this dog's lack of ample furnishings unfortunately reduces appeal by making the dog's forelegs appear light of bone. On the credit side, its coat is hard, dense and wiry, lying straight and close. A curly coat is objectionable, a wavy coat acceptable.

DOG B

A weedy specimen, Airedale B has sufficient type to be in contention, but is unsound. He is steep in both front and rear – evidenced in the rear by low tail-set, pelvic slope and lack of angulation at stifle and hock. In the front, the steep shoulders create an abrupt break at the junction of low withers and neck and cause the shallow body to raise above the elbow. The front pasterns are weak.

The beauty of the head is marred by a dewlap and a round eye; the latter is round in actuality, not just appearance, due to very heavily pigmented eye rims.

The tail should be "of good strength, substance and of fair length." This tail lacks both strength and substance and is too long. The standard assumes that everyone knows an Airedale's tail should be docked and only advises that it should be of fair length. (This is the same advice given some undocked breeds.) Customarily, one third is removed.

DOG C

This typical example is my choice for first place. He stands 24 in. at the shoulder and weighs 60 lbs. His foreleg is about the same length as the body is deep, the elbow level with the bottom of the chest. The pasterns do not slope. The overall length of body from point of forechest to point of buttock is equal to height at shoulder – the dog is square in profile.

The shoulder blade is well laid back. The upper arm, in keeping with the classical terrier front, is positioned at a steeper, more open angle than found on, say, endurance trotting breeds where the body is slightly longer than the dog is tall. This square example has little or no forechest, the elbow positions forward, and the leg is straight from elbow to foot – and the dog appears to be up on its toes.

There is good spring of rib but the deep body is narrower than found on most hounds of equal height. This, in conjunction with the terrier front, produces action at the trot, coming where the feet travel straight forward and back the same distance apart as at the elbow. In profile, the front pastern only flex to about 60 degrees as they are lifted and carried forward close to ground.

The tail sets high on a long croup, the sacrum is level and the pelvis is correctly angled. The tail is carried gaily, is strong and is docked one third. In front of the high-set tail there is a slight arch to the strong, short loin.

DOG D

This is a sound but somewhat cloddy Airedale. He departs from the ideal degree of elegance by being too deep in the body and heavy of bone. If his foreleg was also short, these faults could not be so readily forgiven in favour of soundness. His head is heavy, but the skull and foreface are in correct equal proportions, the muzzle made to seem short by lack of beard.

Elegance is also reduced by the overly short, powerful neck. The front is sound and so is the rear. The straightness of the tail appears unnatural and its authenticity is doubtful, as there is nearly always a slight curve forward.

Sometimes, as here, the most interesting and more difficult decision is between third and fourth place. Weighing all the factors, I selected Airedale D for third place.