

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, November 1989

THE GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG

Three of these four Open class German Shepherd Dogs are in contention for first place. Finding first place has been made additionally difficult by giving each of these three GSDs the same head (although not the same size head), markings, strong, rich colour, and full double coats.

All four GSDs measure 26 in. at the top of the shoulder blade (24-26 in. for males, 22-24 in. for bitches), yet each presents a different balance. Which of the four holds the most appeal?

FUNCTIONAL TYPE

The German Shepherd Dog is a trotting dog; its conformation has been developed to meet the requirements of its herding work. The standard advises that your first impression should be of a strong, agile, well-muscled animal, alert and full of life. The GSD should appear well balanced front with rear, substantial, longer than tall and deep bodied. Without clumsiness, the Shepherd should be stamped with a look of quality.

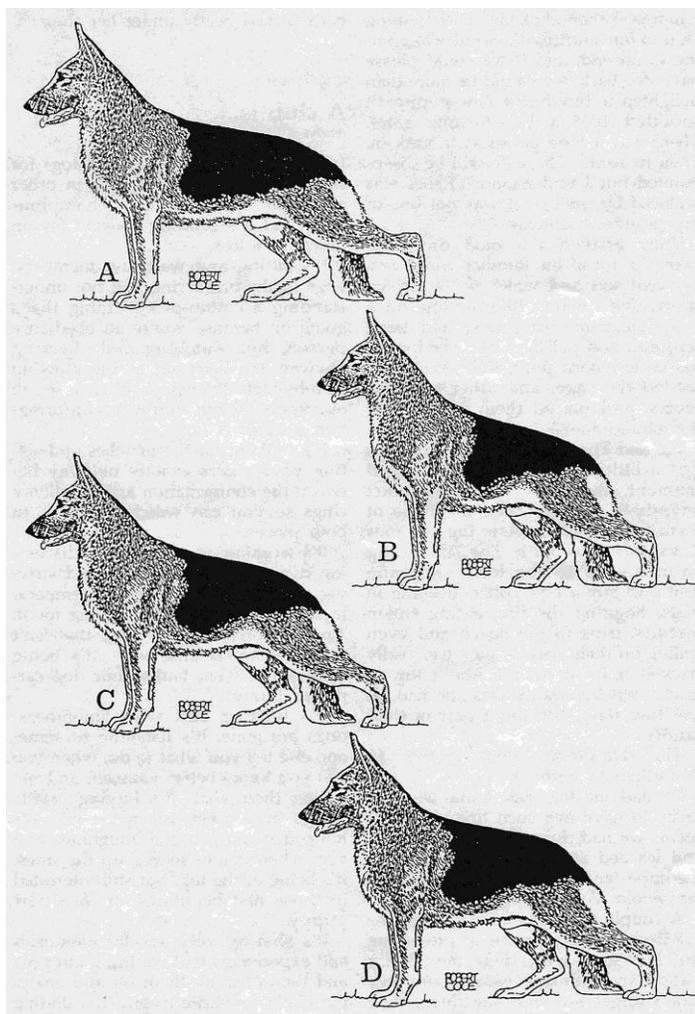
Two of these four examples possess all of these requirements. The third possesses most, but is not balanced front with rear. The fourth is clumsy, lacks agility and a degree of quality.

TYPICAL

The typical German Shepherd Dog's head is noble, cleanly chiseled, strong without coarseness and in proportion to body. The muzzle is long and strong with the lips firmly fitted. The topline of the muzzle is parallel with the top line of the skull and without abrupt stop.

Ears are moderately pointed, in proportion to the skull and open to the front. The eyes are medium size, almond shaped, set a little obliquely and not protruding. Eye colour is as dark as possible. The teeth meet in a complete regular scissors bite. An overshot or level bite is undesirable. Any missing teeth, other than the first premolars, is a serious fault. An undershot jaw must be disqualified.

The neck is strong and muscular, relatively long, proportionate in size to the head. Shoulder blades are long and well laid back at right angles to the upper arm. The forelegs are straight, the bone oval. The front pasterns slope to a greater degree than do most breeds. The feet are rounded, toes closed and arched. Pads are well cushioned and durable. Nails are short, strong and dark in colour.



The structure of the body gives an impression of depth and solidity without bulkiness. The withers are high and the long ribs extend down at least to the elbow. There is a good, well filled forechest showing ahead of the shoulder, in profile. The body continues down between the legs with no sense of hollowness. Ribs are neither barrel shaped nor too flat and are carried well back to a relatively short loin and a moderate tuck-up.

The topline is straight, very strongly developed without sag or roach. The croup slopes gradually. The bushy tail sets smoothly into the croup, low rather than high. A slight hook carried to one side is faulty only because it mars general appearance; however, a clumpy end due to ankylosis is a serious fault.

Both upper and lower thighs are broad and well-muscled, closely forming a right angle. The rear pastern is short and strong. Hindleg dewclaws have been removed.

A double coat of medium length is typical. The outer coat is dense, straight, harsh and less close to the body (a slightly wavy outer coat, often of wiry texture, is also permissible).

To avoid visual distraction, all four examples are tan with a black saddle. The GSD varies in colour and most colours are permissible; strong, rich colours are preferred. Pale, washed out colours are serious faults. A white dog is not desirable and must be disqualified if showing albino characteristics.

Cropped ears, hanging ears (as in a hound), docked tails, and male dogs having one or both testicles undescended are disqualified. The latter (monorchids or cryptorchids) are in most breeds excused; in the GSD they are disqualified.

FIRST PLACE

My choice for first place is Dog C. He has the most desirable 10 to 8 ½ proportion combined with maximum degree of angulation. His head is in balance with this proportion, his neck is long and he is balanced front with rear. He is difficult to fault. In my opinion, of the four, he most closely exemplifies typical.

SECOND PLACE

Dog B, my choice for second place, has a 'longer than tall' body length to height ratio of 10 to 9. This acceptable, shorter body length, in addition to less angulation front and rear, shorter second thigh, less front pastern slope and less forechest, produces a different but still pleasing balance.

Although Dog B has less angulation than Dog C, his angulation is balanced front with rear, which compliments his shorter body. He may not cover as much ground at the fast trot or look as impressive, but he will endure over distance and exhibit a good degree of firmness coming and going.

THIRD PLACE

Dog A is a strong, heavier headed (conforming to size of dog), and longer bodied example. Both sound and impressive, his body is long throughout (not just in loin). This body length is still acceptable, its extra length apparent when compared to Dog C's 10 to 8 ½ ratio.

On the debit side, Dog A's rear pasterns between hock and foot are too long. Not as noticeable, perhaps because of his long body, is his impressive but overly long second thigh (between stifle and hock). This form of front to rear imbalance often goes unnoticed. Without this hindquarter imbalance, he could be in contention for first or second place.

FOURTH PLACE

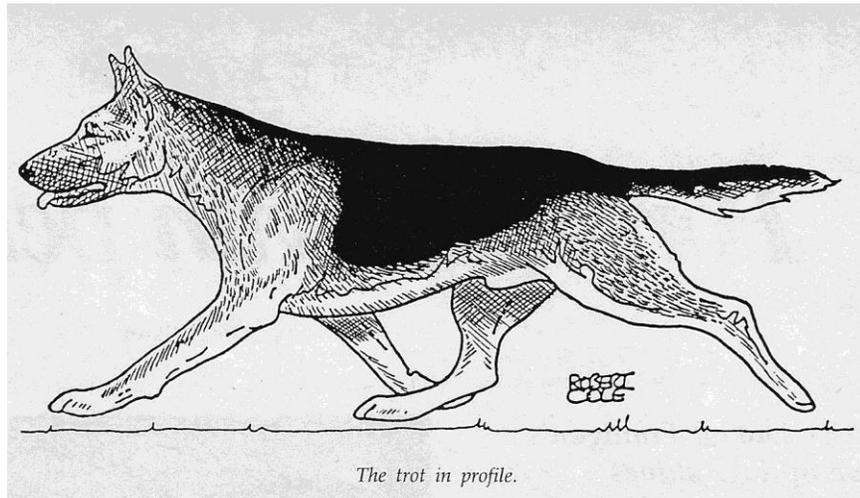
His large head is out of proportion to his body. Still, large is better than coarse, although a degree of coarseness of head, especially in males, is less of a fault than over-refinement. Dog D has five additional faults, all visible, all interesting.

The most obvious of the five faults is probably his heavy, bulky body. Second is his short, stuffy neck. Third is poor feet. His fourth is a steep croup, and fifth would be his short upper arm. This short upper arm causes the elbow to set forward on the body, disrupting static balance and reducing reach at the trot.

THE FLYING TROT

All normally constructed breeds are capable of a brief period of suspension at the trot, where all four feet are free of contact with the ground. The German Shepherd Dog, because of its angulation and structure,

covers a great deal of ground at the trot and the period of suspension is longer. Suspension is made longer by the GSD overreach.



Overreach in profile (see trot in profile sketch) occurs during the transition from one diagonal pair of supports to the other diagonal pair, all four feet free of contact with the ground. GSD overreach (correct for this breed but not for others) necessitates one hind foot passing outside, and the other hind foot passing on the inside of the forefeet.

GSD overreach action going away is not faulty unless the action is crabwise, with the dog's body sideways out of the normal straight line (see going away sketches). The amount of GSD overreach is dependent on 1) angulation, 2) length of body, 3) balance front with rear, 4) trotting speed.

All four of these examples are capable of overreach. Of the four, only Dog D crabs, caused more by imbalance front to rear than any other reason. Dog A doesn't crab but has wobbly hocks seen going away. Dog B exhibits the strongest hocks going away as his less hindquarter angulation would suggest. Dog C combines both clean overreach in profile and straight travel going and coming.

Forced to exhibit in a small ring, of the four Dog B would have an advantage coming, going and in a circle. Dog C would be at a disadvantage. Dog A, even overdone but for the sake of discussion correctly balanced front to rear, would be at an even greater disadvantage.

