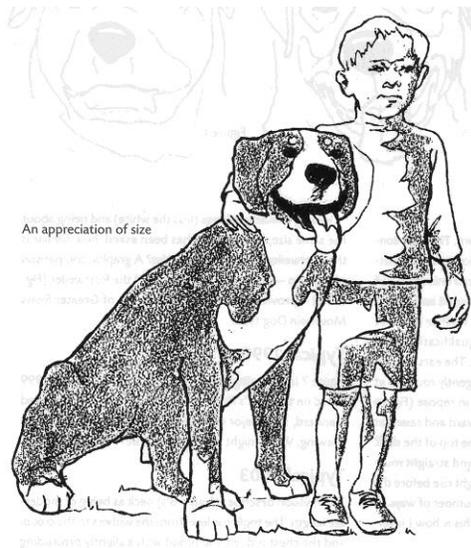


YOU BE THE JUDGE

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THE GREATER SWISS MOUNTAIN DOG



Changes to the standard

A proposed revised standard for the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, submitted to the AKC by the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America (GSMDCA), was approved in April 2003. Much of the revision is cosmetic; however, there are deletions, additions and serious revisions that those responsible for breeding or judging this breed should be aware of. Reviewing the changes is a good learning tool and provides an insight into the thinking and current concerns in the breed.

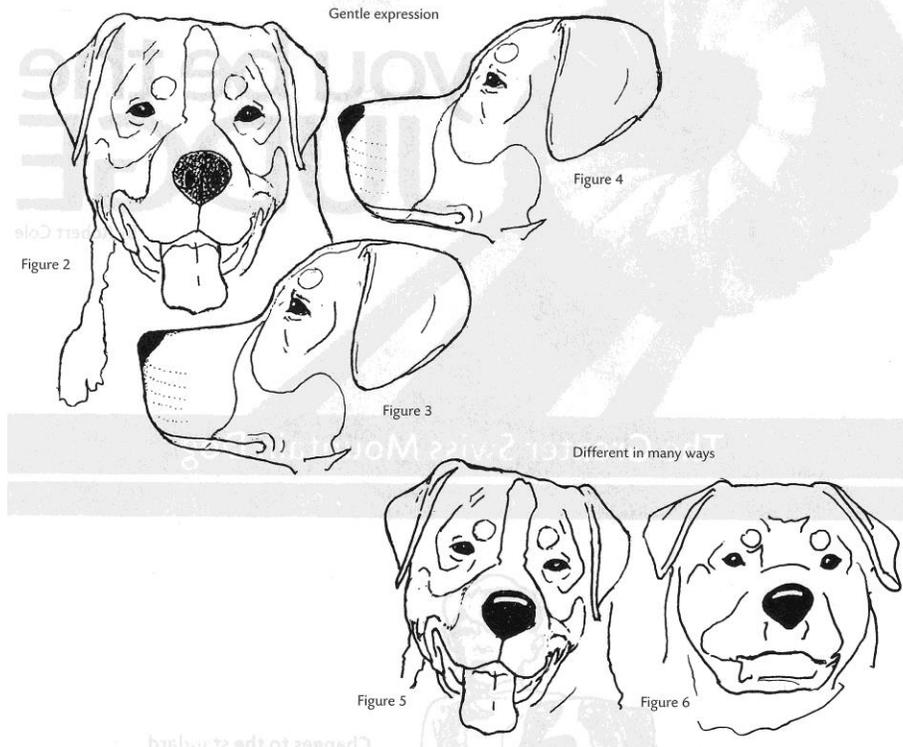
The GSMD background as a draft breed is expanded in the revision to include the structure necessary to also be a drover breed – a breed that drove cattle over long distances prior to the coming of railroads. In addition, the description “It is a heavy boned and well-muscled dog which, in spite of size and weight, is agile enough to perform the all-purpose farm duties of the mountainous region of its origin” has been added. Body length to height continues to be a 10-to-nine proportion.

A good head

Correct head type for the Swissy is important. There’s a concern within the breed that there is a digression toward a Rottweiler kind of head. The Swissy expression is animated and gentle (Figure 2). The eyes are almond-shaped and brown (dark brown preferred), medium in size, neither deep set nor protruding. Blue eye or eyes is a disqualification. Eyelids are close fitting and eye rims are black. The ears are medium in size, set high, triangular in shape, gently rounded at the tip and hang close to the head when in repose (Figure 3). When alert, the ears are brought forward and raised at the base. The top of the ear is level with the top of the skull.

The words describing the large, blunt and straight muzzle now include “and most often with a slight rise before the end”. These words can be interpreted a number of ways. In graphic form (Figure 4), right or wrong, this is how I interpret “slight rise before the end”.

Having similar markings (less the white) and being about the same size, the question has been asked: how similar is the Rottweiler to the Greater Swiss? A graphic comparison of the two – the Swissy (Figure 5) and the Rottweiler (Figure 6) – provides a further appreciation of the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog type.

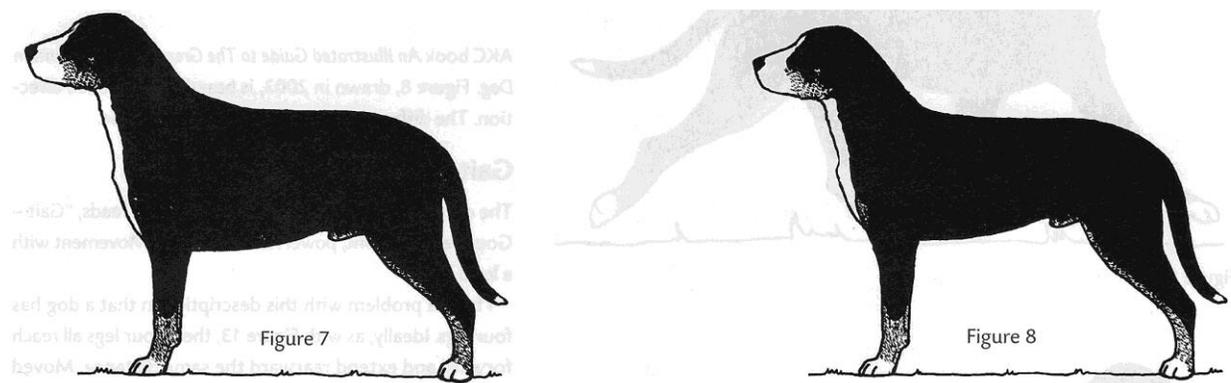


Typical 1999

Figure 7 is a drawing representing typical that I did in 1999 based on the AKC's illustrated guide. Because of the revised standard, two major changes will have to be made to the drawing. What might those changes be?

Typical 2003

The revision describes (Figure 8's) neck as being of moderate length. The topline is level from the withers to the croup, and the chest is deep and broad with a slightly protruding breastbone. The two new changes involve body proportions and appearance. They are: depth of body, length of foreleg and height at the withers.

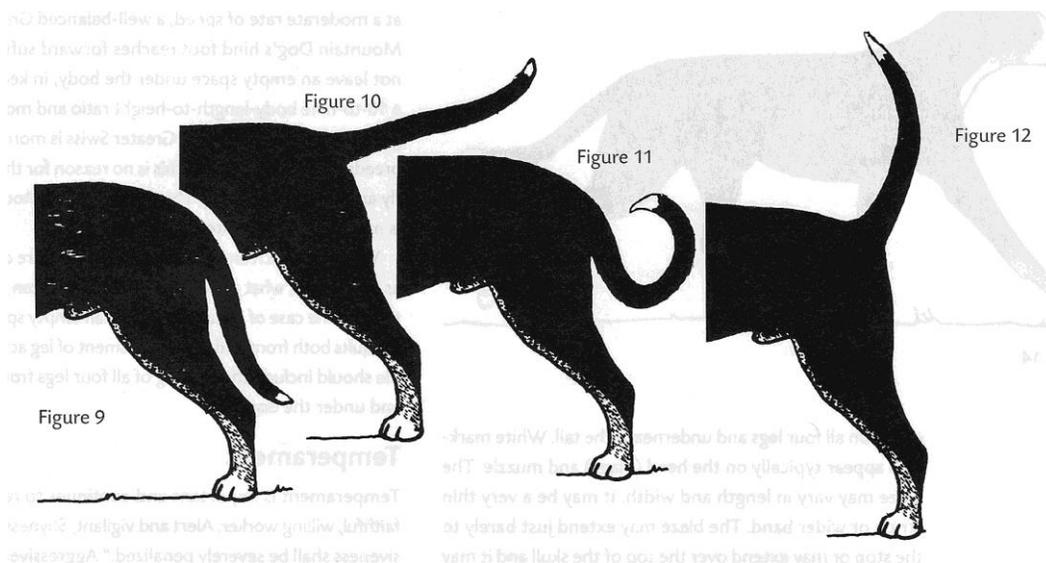


Tail

The tail is now “thick from root to tip” (Figure 9) and “When alert and in movement the tail may be carried higher and slightly curved upwards (Figure 10). But should not curl (Figure 11) or tilt over the back” (Figure 12). A kink in the tail, a good-luck sign in some breeds and a concerned departure in others, is brought to the attention of the reader with the direction, “The bones of the tail should feel straight.” The inclusion of

the word “feel” ensures that the tail is given a hands-on check by judges, keeping in mind that it “should” be straight, not “must”.

The stated requirement for round feet with well-arched toes that “turn neither in nor out” suggests a concern. In the revised standard, the rear dewclaws “should” be removed. Front dewclaws “may or may not be present”.



Coat and colour

The dense topcoat is to be long, 1 ¼ to two inches rather than one to 1 ¾ inches. The remaining changes under coat and colour are sufficiently numerous that I've reprinted the entire wording.

“Undercoat must be present and may be thick and sometimes showing, almost always present at neck but may be present throughout. Color of undercoat ranges from the preferred dark gray to light gray to tawny. Total absence of undercoat is undesirable and should be penalized. The topcoat is black. The markings are rich rust and white. Symmetry of markings is desired. On the head, rust typically appears over each eye, on each cheek and on the underside of the ears. On the body, rust appears on both sides of the forechest, on all four legs and underneath the tail. White markings appear typically on the head (blaze) and muzzle. The blaze may vary in length and width. It may be a very thin stripe or wider band. The blaze may extend just barely to the stop or may extend over the top of the skull and it may meet with white patch or collar on the neck. Typically, white appears on the chest, running unbroken from the throat to the chest, as well as on all four feet and on the tip of the tail. White patches or collar on the neck is acceptable. Any other color than the ‘Black, Red and White’ tri-colored dog described above, such as ‘Blue/Charcoal, Red and White’ or ‘Red and White’ is considered a disqualification. When evaluating the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, markings and other cosmetic factors should be considered of lesser importance than other aspects of type which directly affect working ability.”

The two major changes?

The first major change in the revision is a change in body depth and leg length: “Depth of chest is approximately one half the total height of the dog at the withers.” Figure 7 was drawn in 1999 and is based on the computer image in the AKC book *An Illustrated Guide to the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog*. Figure 8, drawn in 2003, is based on the above direction. The difference in balance is quite dramatic.

Gait

The description of gait hasn't changed. It still reads, "Gait – Good reach in front, powerful drive in rear. Movement with a level back."

I have a problem with this description in that a dog has four legs. Ideally, as with Figure 13, these four legs all reach forward and extend rearward the same distance. Moved at a moderate rate of speed, a well-balanced Greater Swiss Mountain Dog's hind foot reaches forward sufficiently to not leave an empty space under the body, in keeping with a 10-to-nine body length-to-height ratio and moderate angulation front and rear. The Greater Swiss is more agile than breeds of a similar size, but this is no reason for this breed to fly around the show ring. The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog is moved at a moderate speed.

When the reach and drive of only two legs are considered, as in Figure 14, what goes on under the body often goes unnoticed. In the case of figure 14, there's an empty space caused by faults both front and rear. Assessment of leg action in profile should include the viewing of all four legs front and rear and under the dog.

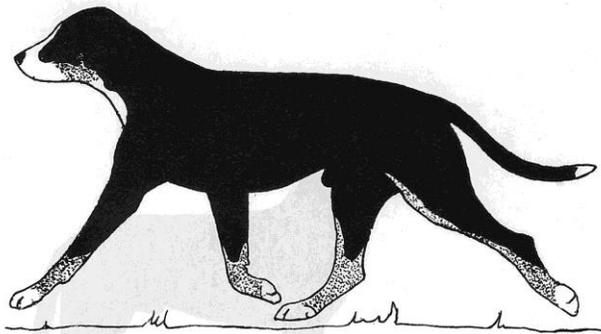


Figure 13



Figure 14

Temperament

Temperament is important and continues to read, "Bold, faithful, willing worker. Alert and vigilant, shyness or aggressiveness shall be severely penalized". Aggressiveness, in my opinion, is toward other dogs. Viciousness is toward people.

Summary

A great deal of thought went into the new description of the ideal Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. It reads, "The foregoing is the description of the ideal Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. Defects of both structure and temperament are to be judged more severely than mere lack of elegance because they reduce the animal's capacity to work. Any fault that detracts from the above described working dog should be penalized to the extent of the deviation."