

YOU BE THE JUDGE

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THE LABRADOR RETRIEVER

Compare the type merits of these five relatively sound Labrador Retrievers. Two represent different forms of typical, two illustrate current departures from typical, and one illustrates a number of very undesirable departures. Depending primarily on which part of the world you reside, one of the two representations of typical could have more appeal. Decide which type you prefer and award first and second place, then decide on third and fourth place.

HEAD, TAIL AND COAT

THE Labrador's three most distinguishing characteristics are his clean cut head with broad skull and defined stop featuring kind eyes expressing intelligence and good temperament; his 'otter' tail, thick at the base, tapering to the tip and reaching to the hock; and his short, dense, weather resistant coat, free from feather.

HEADS

The planes of a good Labrador head are parallel (allowing for a slightly pronounced brow), the muzzle nearly the same length as the broad skull. The head is clean cut and free from fleshy cheeks. The nose is wide and the nostrils are well developed (black on black or yellow dogs, brown on chocolates). Lack of pigment (not snownose) is a fault.

Teeth are strong and regular with a required scissors bite (a pincer bite is acceptable in North America but not desirable). Undershot or overshot misalignment of teeth are serious faults. The ears – not large or heavy – are rather short, hanging moderately close to head, set somewhat far back, even or slightly above eye level. The kind, dark brown eyes are of medium size, more almond shaped than round, set wide apart, and neither full nor deep. Eye colour should be brown in black and yellow Labs, brown in chocolates.

A large number of head virtues and faults are demonstrated in this male class. Two examples have good heads; a third has a short muzzle and ears too far forward; a fourth has a weak pointed muzzle and too much stop; and the fifth has a two-angled head (planes), a Roman finish to the nose, flews that are too deep, and large, hound like ears.

TAILS

The distinctive Labrador tail is very thick at base, gradually tapering toward the tip, extending to the hock, free from feathering and clothed thickly around with dense hair, giving that particular rounded appearance which has been described as otter tail. The set on of the tail follows the natural line of the croup. It may be carried gaily, but should never curl over the back. One of these five examples has a tail that is not free from feathering, and a second example's tail lacks desired thickness.

COAT

The third distinctive feather, the Labrador's short, very dense coat, gives a fairly hard feeling to the hand. The coat is without wave or feathering. Some breeders advise that a slight wave down the back is permissible that that a straight coat is preferred. The Kennel Club standard advises that there is a weather resistant undercoat; Canadian and American standards neglect mention of undercoat.

PROPORTIONS

In Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, the ideal height for dogs is 22 to 22 ½ inches; bitches 21 ½ to 22 inches. In the United States, height for dogs is 23-24 inches; bitches 22-23 inches. In Canada, the height range is one half inch greater. The Kennel Club does not suggest ideal weight, but the Canadian and American clubs do: dogs 60-75 pounds; bitches 55-70 pounds.

The ratio of height to body length of my best two representations of typical is the same for both dogs: each is slightly longer than tall. The major difference between the best two is depth of body and accompanying substance. Which of the two do you prefer?

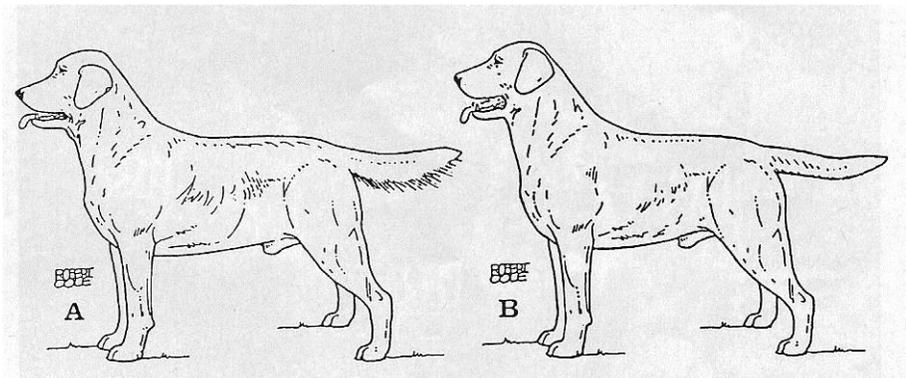
BODY

Mary Roslin-Williams in her book *All About the Labrador* advises that the important thing from the point of view of type is the shape of the rib cage. It differs from all other breeds of retriever, the secret being the way the rib leaves the backbone. The rib in a Labrador springs nearly horizontal from the backbone, continues to spring out, gradually curving down into the shape of a barrel hoop until it almost meets the breastbone underneath the body. It then becomes slightly keel shaped as the ribs meet, which gives the deep brisket typical of the Labrador Retriever.

Body length in ratio to height is easier to draw than describe. I have made the bodies of both representations of typical slightly longer than high, yet they still differ dramatically. They differ because one has a deeper, heavier body than the other. These two best examples have the same correct length of leg, the elbow half the distance from withers to ground (moderate length), but the heavier example's brisket extends perceptibly deeper than his elbow. This difference may influence your placement.

DOG A

This long bodied example (long in loin coupling) has four head faults. His muzzle lacks power and finish, he has too much stop, his ears are set forward rather than set somewhat far back, and he is throaty. On the other end, his feathered tail departs from typical.

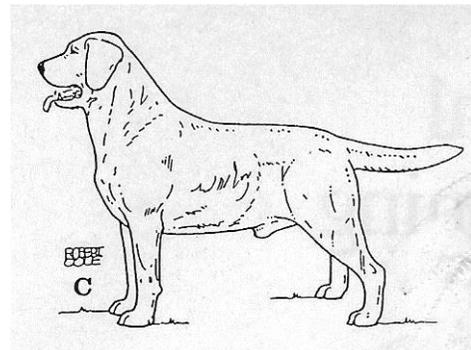


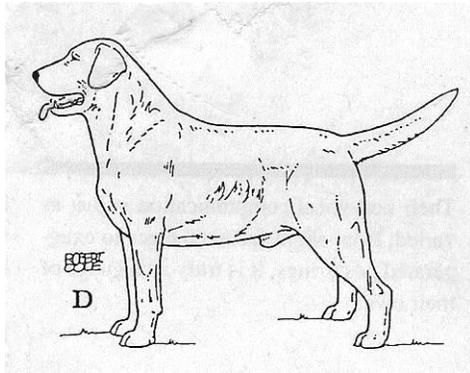
DOG B

One of the two examples representing typical, I prefer his degree of substance over his close but heavier competitor. I have given him what I consider well balanced Labrador gun dog conformation. The components of his anatomy are in proper correlation, enabling him to move in the show ring or run in the field with minimum effort. He possesses elegance without over refinement, and substance without lumber or cloddiness.

DOG C

He has a short muzzle and large, heavy ears. He has correct bone, substance, length of body and tail, but his legs are short. His elbow should position half the distance between withers and ground. Instead, his elbow positions half the distance between where the top of his tail joins his body and ground – the foreleg about 1 ½ inches short of ideal.





DOG D

This powerful example possesses many of the attributes of Dog B but is heavier, having a deeper body. You may prefer this dog over Dog B - that is your option. If Dog B had a poor head, lacked weather resistant coat or otter tail, I would - as I have done a number of times - go with this heavier type. He is sound, he is typey; what he lacks in agility he makes up in power.

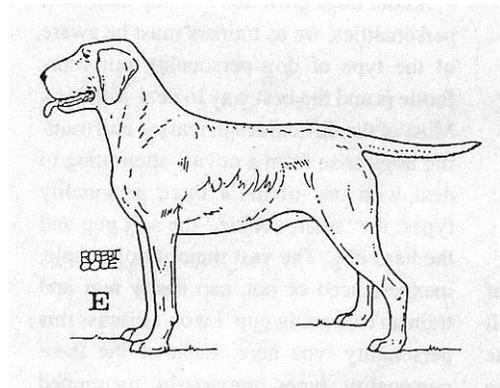
DOG E

This example is sound but not typical. This example's departures from type, by contrast, strengthen appreciation for what is desired. What is desired is a better head, more substance,

a shorter leg, less tuck up and a thicker tail.

It is vital for type that the muzzle and skull be parallel, allowing for a moderate stop and slightly pronounced brow. This example has a moderate stop, but the muzzle has a Roman finish and the flat skull is off on the same plane. His muzzle is too squared off and his flews are loose. His large, prominent ears disturb.

He is over refined. A mature Labrador should have little or no tuck up; this example has too much. His loin, although short, is not wide. Instead of thick at the base and clothed thickly all around with the Labrador's short, thick, dense coat, this example's thin tail is uncharacteristic. His feet are hare-shaped instead of cat-like, a current field and show concern.



PLACEMENTS

I gave first place to Dog B, second to heavier Dog D, third to short legged Dog C and fourth to long bodied Dog A.