

How to judge a 'most difficult' breed

By W F (Bill) O'Hehir

The British Bulldog is universally accepted as one of the most difficult of all dogs to judge. He is a dog that is, without question, a connoisseur's breed, and therefore, requires a deeper understanding and appreciation of his various parts, more than most breeds. Too often he is either accepted or rejected by the show ring judge, purely on the quality of his underjaw, with little consideration being given to his many other attributes or required characteristics. Without discounting the importance of correct Bulldog underjaw, of equal importance is his body shape, top line, tail set, hindquarters, rib cage, front and feet, plus correct head properties – eyes, ears and stop.

The three words so often used in dog circles, type, balance and soundness, are of major importance when assessing the qualities of the British Bulldog. As the standard states, the first impression the dog as a whole makes on the eye of the judge is to be considered – does he measure up at a glance to your mental image of a quality British Bulldog, low in stature, compact and heavily built, short coupled and active? This is the type.

Do all parts fit together, making a complete and harmonious outline with no possibility of the exhibit distracting, by being either too large, too small, too high, too low or too long? – For this would distract from what is known as balance.

Is he sound of limb, allowing for the peculiarities required in the standard, such as the roach back, elevated hindquarters, undershot jaw and the peculiar, heavy and constrained gait, and is he sound of sight and hearing? All these come under the category of soundness. Without elaborating again in detail on the standard, I offer my interpretation of a quick guide as assessing the qualities of a well made British Bulldog.

First impressions are important, he must convey a picture of substantial substance. Viewed from the front, he should give the impression of vast strength, low stature, quality bone; shoulders tacked onto the outside, with the body slung between the forelegs; deep brisket forming a square inside the forelegs, with bowing on the outside of the legs; round compact feet, either straight ahead or turning slightly out to support the weight. Viewed through the front legs, one should see the hind feet, indicating narrower hindquarters than the front, confirming that we have a pear-shaped body.

The head should be massive, but of equal importance it must balance the whole dog, it must never be so large as to destroy the symmetry, nor too small. The overall head should be brick shaped and must have good length and depth – this applies in particular to the skull. The ears are small (rose shaped) and quite thin, and are situated at the extreme edges of a flat skull. In no way are the ears to be pricked, button, tulip, thick or heavy.

The skull should be completely flat, very large, and should measure in circumference (round in front of ears) at least the height of the dog at the shoulder. From side on, the head should appear very high and very short from its back to the point of the nose. The forehead is flat with loose wrinkles and a well-developed furrow, centrally placed and traceable from a very deep stop to the apex. The face should be as short as possible, measure from the front of the cheekbones to the nose, and the skin should be deeply and closely wrinkled.

The muzzle should be short, broad, turned upwards and very deep from the corner of the eye to the corner of the mouth. The nose should be large, broad and black, with large open nostrils, and the top of the nose deeply set back almost between the eyes. If you were to lay a pencil in the flat line of the face of a British Bulldog, the tip of the skull, the tip of the nose and the tip of the underjaw should be in a straight line – this is known as layback in the breed.

The flews (chops) should be thick, broad, pendant and deep, hanging completely over the lower jaw at the sides, not the front. This area appears to go unnoticed by today's judges, as we see far too many "frog faces" in our breed today – similar to what is required in the French Bulldog. The jaw should be broad, massive and square, and the lower jaw should project considerably in front of the upper, and turn up. The eyes should be situated low down in the skull, as far from the ears as possible. The eyes and the stop should be in the same straight line, be round, moderately sized and neither sunken nor prominent, and dark.

The lower jaw should be broad and square, and should be centrally placed under the upper jaw, to which it must be also parallel. If a centerline was drawn vertically through the head, each side should be a mirror of the other in its make and shape.

The neck is very thick and strong, of moderate length, and well arched to denote strength with dewlap. Beware of the neck which is too short or almost non-existent, giving the impression that the head is struck back on the body.

The body is short, with well-sprung barrel type ribs, good tuck up, and a reasonable amount of loose skin all over.

The top line is roached with elevated hindquarters, and a low set tail. Beware of the flat top line and the sway of camel backs that are too often seen. The hindquarters are higher than the front and lighter made than the heavier forepart; this giving the desired pear shape to the body when viewed from the top.

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picture of substantial substance.”**

This does not mean we want an exaggerated pear shape with too light hindquarters, for this would limit the strength required, plus result in lack of balance.

The tail of a British Bulldog, although described in detail in the standard, does however, come in all shapes and sizes, varying from a tight twisted curl, right through to the old fashioned pump handle type found on the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. I accept all types of tails, providing the setting on is low, a far more important feature, as it donates correct roach and the exhibit does not possess a dead straight top line.

Apart from the higher elevation, correct hindquarters should give the impression of being slightly cowed, with the stifles turned slightly out from the body, thus resulting in the hocks slightly facing each other, making the feet turn slightly out. Please not the word slightly.

Colour is of little importance, providing that you remember that black, black and tan, and Dudley are not acceptable.

The weight and size are wide open for discussion. In my 42-years of owning the breed. I have seen as many good big British Bulldogs as small ones. Balance and activity are more important, although with all things equal, as near as possible to 25kg (55lb) for a dog and 22.7kg (50lb) for a bitch is considered correct. But, please do not penalize an otherwise good specimen on size alone.

In conclusion, I draw your attention to the reference in the standard under general appearance, that due allowance be made for the bitch, which is not so grand or as well developed, as the dog. This, I feel, is too often overlooked by our modern day judges.