

JUDGING THE CHOW

In my last column, writing on this subject, I described the general appearance, head and body of the ideal Chow. In this column I will describe the legs and the gait that characterize the breed. In judging, the usual order is an over-all view of the dog, then a hand-on examination, and finally, scrutiny of the gait. I find that 80% of the time I know what the gait will be after examining the dog. The remaining 20% discrepancy is usually due to ligament or joint problems which are not evident in the physical examination or to a dog that has been trained to stand in an unnatural position to conceal a structural fault.

Forequarters

The shoulder, or scapula, varies widely in size and shape in different breeds and different individuals. The shoulders overlay the ribs from in front of the first pair of ribs to a point through the body of the fourth or fifth pair of ribs. There is no bony attachment of the shoulder to the skeleton; the attachment is entirely muscular and thus the position of the shoulder relative to the ribs may change. It is obvious that the shoulders cannot be wider apart than the width of the ribs because of their application to the chest wall, the exception being the grossly fat dog with a thick layer of fat over the ribs. The spine of the shoulder, if extended to the ground, should have an angle of 55 to 60 degrees with the ground. The shoulder and upper arm, or humerus, form an angle of approximately 110 degrees and the upper arm must be at least as long as the shoulder. The elbows should set well back along the chest wall and should turn neither in nor out. In addition to a narrow chest, too upright a shoulder and upper arm produce a narrow front. This is a common fault in our breed at present. Shoulders are seen that form a 70 degree or more angle with the ground. Upper arms are even worse, some falling almost

vertically from the shoulder joint to the elbow with the elbows placed in front of the chest wall. The forelegs are straight from elbow to foot and when viewed from the front are parallel from elbow to foot and widely spaced, commensurate with the broad chest. There should be no knuckling over at the wrists and the pasterns are rather short and upright. The feet, fore and aft, are round, compact, and catlike and the dog should stand well up on the thick toe-pads.

Hindquarters

The pelvic girdle must be broad, and viewed from the rear the legs are straight, parallel and widely spaced, commensurate with the broad pelvis. Viewed from the side the hindlegs are nearly straight, the stifle angulation is about 150 degrees and the hock joint appears almost straight. A vertical line dropped through the middle of the hip joint passes through the middle of the hock and the metatarsals. This is a unique characteristic of the breed. When this line is not seen, the Chow is either built incorrectly or has been incorrectly "set up" by its handler. The hindleg should be carefully felt as appearance can be deceiving due to the heavy coat. The stifle joint must be well-knit and stable and point straight forward, the bones of the joint feel clean and sharp. The minimal stifle angulation predisposes our breed to problems such as a slipping patella and cruciate ligament sprain or rupture. A coarse joint with thickened bones indicates problems and all breeders and judges should learn the feel of a normal joint. Bowing of the lower hip is hard to feel but will often be indicated by a stifle joint which does not point straight forward. The hock joint is well let down and almost straight. It must be strong, well knit and firm. Again, the almost straight joint predisposes our breed to problems such as a

hyperextended or bowed hock or a hock joint which knuckles over or breaks medially or laterally in motion. These hock defects are most easily seen when the dog is standing or, if moved in a tight circle the knuckled over joint will be seen to "pop" forward.

Gait

Movement is the true test of structure and will confirm structural faults already noted, and may reveal problems not found in examination. The gait is sound and straight moving, brief, quick and powerful. It is from the side that the unique stilted action is most easily seen and the knowledgeable will carefully evaluate this view of the Chow in action. The Chow can and usually does flex the stifle and hock joints in the first two or three steps at the trot but he then settles into the characteristic stilted movement. The rear leg moves up and forward from the hip in a straight, stilted, pendulum-like line, with a slight bounce in the hip due to the lifting action of the strong rump muscles. The hind foot has a strong thrust which transfers power, to propel the body forward, in an almost straight line, due to the minimal rear angulation. To understand the mechanics of this gait, stand on your toes and move forward without flexing your knee or ankle. Feel your rump muscles contract as they lift and extend the leg. You will also feel a "push" against the front of the ankle as the toes thrust the leg forward. It is for this reason the hock joint (ankle) must be well knit and firm in the Chow, so that none of the power of the forward thrust of the foot is lost to a bowing or breaking hock joint. The Chow's stride is short, quick, agile and powerful, never lumbering. Viewed from the rear, the line of bone from hip joint to pad remains straight as the dog moves, the line inclining toward the midline as the speed increases. Bowing of the leg or hitching in at the stifles is unsound, incorrect movement. Viewed from the front the line of bone from shoulder joint to pad

remains straight as the dog moves, the line inclining toward the midline as the speed increases. Weaving, paddling, pounding or padding is unsound, incorrect movement. Pounding is often seen at present due to a shortened stride produced by a lack of shoulder angulation. Parallel front or rear movement at a moderate trot is incorrect in the Chow, as it is associated with an inadequate breadth of chest or pelvis. A stilted gait is not desired in other breeds but it is a hallmark of the Chow. Somewhat lacking in speed, the sound Chow has excellent endurance, because the nearly straight rear leg provides direct, usable power efficiently.

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