

# 'Vive la difference!'

An awareness of the original purpose of the Siberian Husky is essential for the appreciation of correct breed type. In the American Kennel Club standard appears the phrase: He performs his original function in harness most capably, carrying a light load at moderate speed over great distances. This sentence was dropped from the UK/Australian/New Zealand Standards, which is a pity, because it does indicate the qualities of speed and stamina.

In an article entitled Conformation in the Racing/Working Siberian Husky, written by Lau and Els van Leeuwen originally for the Swiss Club for Nordic Dogs (SKNH), are some indications of the difference to be found in the various breeds and types of sled dogs. They say:

"There are different sled dogs for different kinds of sled dog work. Therefore their conformation should be different. The Alaskan Malamute and Greenland Dog were meant for heavy freighting. For this work one needs a relatively heavily built dog, with not too extreme angulations in shoulder and rear and not too long a back. This will give the freighting dog greater leverage, its size will give it greater momentum.

"The Siberian Husky was originally imported from Siberia as a race dog. The people who originally acquired these dogs from various parts of Siberia did so because they were impressed by their speed and selected from the available dogs the ones that would be fastest, dogs that could win the 408-mile Alaskan Sweepstakes. They selected dogs that could maintain a relatively high speed over long distances. The people who, some 50 years ago, set the original standard for the breed, were sled dog racing people, with the racing Siberian in mind."

Sally Leich and Sandra Bayliss wrote a pamphlet for the Siberian Husky Club of Great Britain, entitled Some Guidelines to Soundness and Type. Although it is shortly to be updated, the following extracts, published with the Club's permission, draw attention to some major characteristics for the breed. Much of it is based on material written by Mr J Bragg, author of The Seppala Siberian, who wrote a series of articles interpreting and comparing the Canadian and American breed Standards.

The First Impression one should have of a Siberian Husky is of a medium sized dog with medium bone... There has been a tendency in the United States for judges to 'put up' rather heavy-boned, coarse dogs which tend to be too compact (almost cobby). The Canadian Standard was perhaps anticipating this possibility when it retained the description in the General Appearance section stating that Siberians 'range in build from moderately compact (but never cobby) to moderately rangy'. In the American Standard the provision allowing for the rangier type has been taken out. With the show ring tendency to prefer plump dogs, it is easy to see how people could come to ignore the description 'moderately' and put up the more compact animal. Siberians should be 10%-12% longer than they are high... they should not carry excess weight. The Canadian Standard also makes the important point that 'any ranginess is merely a matter of proportion not of actual height.'

Bragg points out the confusion that is invariably associated with the term 'coupling' Short coupled, for example, is not meant to imply, as it is often incorrectly taken to mean, short back, legs and everything else. The coupling refers to the distance from the last rib to the hip bones and this distance does not want to be either too long and slack or too short and rigid.

The appearance of the 'cobby type' of Siberian in the show ring in parts of America might be due in part to their emphasis on the 'level topline'. The Standard did not intend to imply by this a completely flat topline, but rather that the topline should be horizontal to the ground, in that it should not slope downwards to the rear.

Since the back is a vital connecting and co-ordinating link between front and rear assemblies it must be flexible as well as strong. The crucial part in the Siberian Husky is the lumbar area... it is important that the loin should be slightly arched (a point that used to be included in both the American and Canadian Standards but is now only retained in the Canadian one).

If the slight arch of the loin were to be eliminated this area would have to be greatly shortened to maintain structural strength... producing, in other words, a short backed cobby type of Siberian... A Siberian should have enough flexibility in its back to 'double-up' while running.

Siberians should also have some evidence of a 'tuck-up' beneath the flanks and the American and English Standard make an important point when they state that viewed from above, the loins should 'taut and lean', narrower than the ribcage... He should be shown in carking condition, ie, lean and hard.

What is wanted then is a medium length back and a Long body, the latter made so by a good length of ribcage and well angulated front and rear assemblies.

The American and English Standards are quite clear on the subject of movement. The Canadian Standard says very little about, merely including the following... 'His characteristic gait is free, tireless and almost effortless when free or on loose leash; but showing great strength when pulling, the trot is brisk and smooth and quite fast'. These points are all

made in our Standard... Siberian movement should be viewed at a moderately fast trot on a loose leash [exhibitors and judges please note!] and it should exhibit good reach and drive while being 'smooth and seemingly effortless'.

It has been said that a Siberian does not run with its head... but a Siberian with an untypical head does not truly represent the breed, however well he performs in harness... The Canadian Standard states that the skull and muzzle should be 'finely chiselled' and the English Standard... 'His head presents a finely chiselled fox-like appearance'. Bragg thinks that we should take this to indicate 'refinement and delicacy of structure with distinct facial planes'.

Up until 1972 the American Standard included the description 'the skull and muzzle are fine chiselled'. When the Standard was revised in 1971 this was taken out and 'too finely chiselled' was listed as a fault, without any indication that such refinement was desirable to a certain degree.

Similarly the American Standard used to include the term 'foxlike' in its description of the head... removed when the Standard was revised in 1963. The withdrawal of both these descriptions seems to be a great pity as Siberian heads in many areas of America are becoming increasingly coarse. Many of the Siberians that are doing really well in the show ring over there are becoming too like mini-Malamutes in the head.

Any facial marking is acceptable, including a solid or whole-coloured head in any colour (including the all white) and the markings need not be symmetrical. The stop should not be too deep, since it would make the planes of the head too angular or blocky.

... the British Standard calls for (ears) medium size and a triangular shape with

The famous occasion, Melbourne Royal Show 1985, when the Utility group was dominated by three relatively rare spitz breeds. Best in group, Mrs Harper's Siberian Husky, Ch Rossfort Nijinski, imp; opposite sex, Mr and Mrs Singer's Alaskan Malamute Aust/NZ Ch Eskimo Jane of the North, imp NZ; the puppy is an Akita Inu, Mrs Verco's Kyooma Imperial Samuir. The Siberian Husky went on to win best exhibit in show. The photograph graphically illustrates some visual differences (such as size, substance) between the two Arctic sled dog breeds.

