

# Selecting a Show Dog

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You've studied pedigrees, parents, and possible breedings and made your choices. But how do you choose which puppy(ies) to keep, which others to sell as show prospects, and which ones to place as loving companions. Sometimes one or two puppies stand out as either sure-fire winners or fault magnets, and their futures are easy to predict. But more often the litter contains a range of quality with virtues and faults apparent throughout. As the saying goes, **"The perfect dog has not been bred."** While everyone has their own opinions on how to grade puppies, this article is written in an attempt to identify some key structural qualities that are crucial for a successful show dog.

Long before the breeding was done you need to have made some decisions on the characteristics your dogs must have, the minor faults you can tolerate if you have to, and the absolute no-nos you wouldn't give kibble. These priorities will help you define a line of dogs stamped with **"your look."** Hopefully these are priorities that mesh with the ideals described in the breed Standard. With that in mind, I'd like to suggest some of the virtues a successful show Siberian should have.



above, Seven Weeks Old below, Three Years Old



Seven to eight weeks of age seems to be the ideal time to evaluate most puppies. At that age they are closest to their adult proportions, have developed enough coordination for you to see movement, and are ready to venture out into their new homes.

The Standard says, **"In profile, the length of the body from the point of the shoulder to the rear point of the croup is slightly longer than the height of the body from the ground to the top of the withers."** And later it says, **"Length of the leg from elbow to ground is slightly more than the distance from the elbow to the top of withers."**

The key word here is **"slightly."** A Siberian should never be square, nor is it built like a Corgi.

When a judge takes his/her first look at the class as the dogs are stacked along one side of the ring, he/she is getting a first impression. **The**

**Siberian is a silhouette breed.** It should show daylight under the body, an arch to the neck, which flows in a slight curve into the level back,



which then flows in a slight curve to the croup and tail set. There should be a definite prosternum in the front, the front legs set well under the body, and the rear legs set slightly behind the rear of the body. The silhouette should clearly identify the dog's breed without regard to color or markings.

Puppies change immensely during their first few months. Before seven weeks they are all belly, short legged, and don't know how to use their legs. The position of some bones, like the shoulder/upper arm assembly, may change as ligaments lengthen or tighten. Puppies grow at their extremities first, so after nine weeks their ears are too tall, their feet too big, and their legs and tails too long to predict just what the final result will look like.

With both the breed Standard and the preferences of many judges in mind, I'd like to comment on some of the characteristics I've identified as being crucial for a successful show dog.

This dog, in my opinion, is an excellent example of those qualities. There is no doubt that he is a Siberian. But seemingly small changes in proportion can make an immense difference in the silhouette as well as in the dog's ability to move and function. The following three figures are different from each other only one increment (about 10%) in body length. Figure A shows the actual proportions of this dog and their ratio. (Our apologies for the contrast in colours, try as we might we could not overcome it)

The show ring often sees top winners whose body length is too long, more like Figure B. When gauging these dogs tend to have more extension from the side because there is more room underneath the body, and their front and rear feet do not interfere with each other. It is flashy, especially when the dog is moved very fast, but these dogs often develop weak toplines. The square dog (Figure C) will have trouble getting its front feet out of the way of its rear feet. To compensate, it may crab, sidewind, or overstep, and it will probably lack reach and drive.

Hair and grooming can be very deceiving when viewing leg length and body depth. Weight also makes the body look deeper. Most show

dogs are shown considerably fatter than those in running weight. Figure D shows our ideal dog with estimates as to where the actual body lays within the coat. He does, in fact have legs slightly longer than body depth.

Coat: The Standard says: **"The coat of the Siberian Husky is double and medium in length, giving a well furred appearance, but is never so long as to obscure the clean-cut outline of the dog. The undercoat is soft and dense and of sufficient length to support the outer coat. The guard hairs of the outer coat are straight and somewhat smooth lying, never harsh nor standing straight off from the body... Trimming of whiskers and fur between the toes and around the feet to present a neater appearance is permissible. Trimming the fur on any other part of the dog is not to be condoned and should be severely penalized"** (underlining mine). **Faults-Long, rough, or shaggy coat; texture too harsh or too silky; trimming of the coat, except as permitted above."**

The Siberian was originally developed in a very harsh Arctic environment where its ability to survive was dependent on its coat. The Chukchi people who bred these dogs lived along the coast where there are harsh winds blowing off the ocean ice. It was important the dogs remain dry as well as warm. A long, soft coat, while very warm, would get wet and fail to provide the needed protection. Compared to the other northern breeds, the Siberian's coat is generally shorter with a guard coat that covers and protects the softer undercoat. It should not be significantly longer than the undercoat, as in a Malamute or Samoyed. The outline of the body should be easy to see.

With the addition of powerful blowers and all kinds of conditioning products, grooming has become an art. The appearance of the dog can be drastically changed, making it look heavier boned and deeper bodied. A coat which can be fluffed up or **"bodified"** is prized in the show ring, but it may also be softer and a little longer and not have the waterproofing qualities of the shorter, denser coat. Trimming has also become popular with some exhibitors. Siberians do NOT naturally grow coats in which every hair is the same length as every other. Trimming is not necessary, and it should be penalized. A Siberian who needs to be trimmed does not have a correct coat.

I was personally appalled at the recent National when I saw the obvious trimming on many of our top winning Specials. One dog appeared to have no ruff but did have 2 white spots on the side of his neck where the colored hairs appeared to have been trimmed off.

**Front Angulation and Structure:** The Standard says: **"Shoulders - The shoulder blade is well laid back. The upper arm angles slightly backward from point of shoulder to elbow, and is never perpendicular to the ground. The muscles and ligaments holding the shoulder to the rib cage are firm and well developed. Faults-Straight shoulders; loose shoulders."**

Probably the most misunderstood part of the body is the front end. It is complex and dependent on many factors:

The shoulder blade and upper arm should be about the same length and set at the same angle to form a wide vee set on its side. The prosternum (protruding bone in the front of the chest) should be prominent enough for the muscles to attach and anchor strongly. Without enough layback to the shoulders, the neck will be short and lack the required arch. The dog's gait will not cover much ground. It will **"pitty-pat"** instead of striding out. The distance a dog can extend its forelegs leg out in front is determined by the angle of the shoulders. A steep angle will result in restricted front extension, and the withers will be up in the neck instead of slightly behind it.

Of equal importance is the length and placement of the upper arm. It should be the same length as the shoulder and form the lower side of the V at the same angle as the shoulder blade. A dog with a short upper arm will pound, and the front foot will drop slightly at the point where it meets the ground instead of landing smoothly,

An upperarm which is longer than the shoulder blade does give the dog a long, extending stride, but it also creates a sloping topline. This is the structure popular in many

sporting breeds, but it is not appropriate for a dog expected to pull a sled.

The best method of determining angulation is to actually place your hands on the dog's body. Stack the dog with the front legs perpendicular to the floor, as you would in the show ring. Lay your hand on the dog's shoulder blade with your thumb on the point of the prosternum and your first finger on the top of the blade. Measure the length. Do the same from the point of the prosternum to the back of the elbow. They should be about equal.

Rear angulation and structure: The Standard says **"When standing and viewed from the rear, the hind legs are moderately spaced and parallel. The upper thighs are well muscled and powerful, the stifles well bent, the hock joint well-defined and set low to the ground... Faults-Straight stifles."**

Rears are much easier to evaluate than fronts. The key idea is that the front and rear angulation are similar to create a balanced dog. Measure or feel from the end of the croup (sometimes called pin bone or sitz bone) to the bend of the knee and down to the foot. It is important the hocks be stacked parallel to the ground to get the correct angle.

Side Gait: The Standard says, **"His characteristic gait is smooth and seemingly effortless. He performs his original function in harness most capably, carrying a light load at a moderate speed over great distances. His body proportions and form reflect this basic balance of power, speed and endurance"**

The ideal side gait is one in which the dog is balanced front to rear, meaning it extends equally at both ends. The front foot lands under the dog's nose when its head is extended forward. The front and rear feet meet under the center of the dog with the rear foot landing just after the front foot lifts, landing in the same place. The rear leg extends behind the dog at the same angle as the front leg extends forward. This creates a smooth, fluid, powerful forward stride that covers a lot of ground without wasting energy or jarring the body. Dogs with a flat croup tend to have a higher kick in the rear. This looks flashy but is a waste of energy as pushing air does not propel the dog.

Breed Type is created by those qualities that differentiate one breed from another. Ear set, eye set and shape, tail carriage, coat length and texture, are described in detail in our Standard. Ear set, high and close; and tail carriage, sickle or saber and carried over the back, are generally pretty good in most of today's show dogs. But eyes are too often round and seldom obliquely set. They should be almond shaped and set at a slant. Eye shape is also important as a survival trait in the Arctic. A round eye is more prone to damage and freezing.

One of the most crucial requirements of the show ring is attitude. A dog who is not happy and outgoing will probably not win, regardless of how correct is its type or faultless its movement. This is a dog SHOW, after all,

There are many dogs who compete successfully that do not meet the ideals of the Standard. There are intangibles such as attitude, showmanship, training, coordination, handling, etc that contribute greatly to a dog's ability to perform successfully. But just think how much better he could accomplish his task if all the pieces were right too,

