

BASIC STANDARD 'SET BY THE ESKIMOS'

A Breed Standard is not a means of instruction, it describes what is considered to be correct. It should be clear, concise and positive, with easy to grasp terminology. **The Standard states the ideal and judges/breeders studying it, determine the degree of deviation from that ideal.**

Some Standards have become descriptive of animals that could not function in the work for which they were initially bred. Fortunately, both the early Malamute breeders and the author of the Alaskan Malamute Breed Standard, incorporated an important statement which should be given consideration above all else."

We must also remember, the basic standard for the breed was set by the Eskimos (Inuits) who live in one of the harshest environments on earth. Here temperatures in winter fall to - 50 degrees Fahrenheit; with long hours of darkness, piercing winds and/or blizzards and an agonising scarcity of food.

In this forbidding environment, it is strictly survival of the fittest for both man and best. The Eskimos' dogs did not survive if they had a fault that interfered with their function. So, it was these Eskimos that dictated the bone standard for the Malamute. **These survival based features are the qualities breeders must retain, even when it is thought a lack of such qualities may be overlooked in a more temperate climate. It is these features that have created the breed.**

The Malamute is primarily a working sledge dog (the draught horse of the Arctic), designed to haul freight over long distances and able to withstand the harsh Arctic climate. He is built for strength and endurance. His coarse guard coat and thick, woolly undercoat must be correct to withstand the extreme temperature. **He is not a racing dog designed to compete in speed finals with smaller northern breeds.**

The correct temperament of the breed is linked with both survival and function. The Malamute, therefore, should be extroverted and friendly towards people. Any shyness, nervousness or aggression to people should be heavily penalised. **However, he is unlikely to exhibit shyness or nervousness towards other dogs, for in his natural environment where food was often scarce, the dog which chased off other dogs was the one which survived. Independence and stubbornness are two more of the survival characteristics. The dog who refused to cross unsafe ice, no matter how much he was beaten, is the one which lived.**

The broad skull, small low set ears, oblique slanted eyes and bulky muzzle are a distinctive feature of the breed. What appears as a stop is really the fatty pads above the eye. **The Malamute should have a puffy layer of fat both above and below the eye, for when working, the act of shaking the head, or even blinking the eyes, will break away the frost and snow around the eye by the jelly-like movement of this fat which protects body heat and maintains a stable temperature.** The eyelashes protect the eyes from flying particles.

A long narrow "Collie" muzzle with a flat surface from skull to nose is a serious fault, as too is a "Chow" look with an extremely short muzzle and dip between the eyes. Too much stop is a distinct fault. The more pronounced the stop, the rounder the eye.

The size, set and shape of the Malamute is related to function. The eyes should be almond shaped, moderate in size and set obliquely in the skull, the upper corner of the eye in line with the lower corner of the ear. **Thus, when the dog has his head down pulling a load, the angle formed between the ground the corner of the correct eye, will cause the eyelashes to act as a filter against the reflected glare of the snow.** A round or protruding eye is more susceptible to snow blindness and injury. The eyes of other Arctic animals are also almond shaped and deep set.



NZ & Aust Ch Hots Buran (imp USA)
Best Dog in Group 6 Sydney Royal 1979

A round eye is, therefore, wrong and gives the head an untypical appearance. Colour brown - the darker the better, giving a softer expression. However, what is "lighter" in other breeds is dark for a Malamute. The brown of a bright bay horse is dark for a Malamute. Blue eyes are definitely not acceptable.

The ears should be of medium size but small in proportion to the body. The upper halves of the ears are triangular in shape, slightly rounded at the tips, set wide apart on outside back edges of the skull with the lower part of the ear joining the skull on a line with the upper corner of the eye, giving the tips of the ears when erect the appearance of standing off from the skull. When erect, the ears point slightly forward, but when the dog is working the ears are sometimes folded against the skull. **The size of the ears is also a survival factor. These should be small in proportion to the size of the dog. This is to minimise loss of body heat.** The insides of the ears should also be heavily furred.

A perfect scissor bite increases the chance of survival. The dogs were often put on a diet of frozen fish and seal meat. Therefore to eat and obtain dominance in fighting, good strong canines were necessary. Close fitting lips also assist to prevent the formation of ice when working.

The neck must be balanced for the correct up and down movement when the dog is pulling a load, and must have good length. Not too long, for this indicated weakness, and not too short a neck for this is frequently accompanied by poor movement.

Shoulder angulation should be moderate, approximately forty-five degrees, in order to give the long reach the Malamute requires for covering distances effortlessly. Shoulders that are too straight create a short, stiff legged, choppy movement. Too much reach will cause a sloppy, somewhat "bouncy, hackney" reach.

A broad chest and well sprung ribcage should not be accompanied by any faults in the forequarters. The dog should not be out at the elbow. **The insistence on correct forequarter construction is to allow for economy of movement, and save energy.**

The freighting Malamute should be strong and powerfully built. The ribcage should be well rounded and deep, at least to the elbow joint when viewed from the side to give maximum heart and lung space. **The back should be straight and gently sloping to the croup to give maximum leverage and thrust and easy rhythmic movement.** A flat back often seen on a "cobby" dog indicates lack of endurance. The loin should be well muscled, not too short or too long and rangy.

Hindquarters: Hind legs must be broad and powerfully muscled through thighs; stifles moderately bent, hock joints board and strong, moderately bent and well let down. As viewed from behind, the hind legs should not appear bowed in bone but stand and move true in line with movement of the front legs, and not too close or too wide. The legs of the Malamute (front and hind), must indicate unusual strength and tremendous propelling power. Any indication of unsoundness in legs or feet, standing or moving, is to be considered a serious fault. Dewclaws on the hind legs are undesirable and should be removed shortly after pups are whelped.

Any departure from this description is a serious fault. **Any suggestion the dog is out at stifle, out at hock or cow hocked, indicates the correct economy of movement is unavailable.** A straight stifle will produce a vertical movement of the rear and inhibit drive. **When pulling a load the rear feet are set wider apart and are advanced only a short distance before this powerful drive pushes the dog forward, giving the necessary economy of movement.**

Because the Malamute is a big powerful dog the feet should be large and rounded. The foot looked for is cat-like, and **to support the dog in the snow the foot is of the snowshoe type, and can splay out when walking on soft snow.** The fur between the toes and thick pads help give some friction when the dog is walking on iced surfaces.

The tail is a survival feature. When the dog is curled up resting in the snow, the heavily furred tail covers the only unprotected exposed area, the nose leather. The tail then must not only be heavily furred, but long enough to do this.

As a guide it should reach at least to the hock joint. It should be moderately set following the line of the spine at the start, a waving plume moving from side to side as a rudder for balance as the dog moves. **A tightly curled tail cannot be so moved, cannot be swung over to the other side or even wagged.** A snap tail is most undesirable.

Gait in any working breed is of prime importance and in a sled dog it is crucial. **The Malamute should move with effortless, powerful impulsion tending to single track at the trot.** A correctly constructed dog will not over-reach. A dog that does so is too short in the back and will soon tire over distances. A correctly constructed dog will not toe in or out at front or rear. A short, stiff legged, choppy movement indicates shoulders that are too straight. A bouncy, somewhat hackneyed reach is also incorrect.

The dog with the thick, coarse, guard coat and dense, oily undercoat is ready to work and sleep in extreme temperatures.

The double coat is the most obvious survival characteristic of the breed. The thick, coarse, guard coat acts as a water repellent covering for the insulating undercoat, since loss of body heat is so



Aust Ch Meryton Atasuk Chimo
Puppy in Show Sydney Royal 1982

critical, the proper guarded coat is essential. Dogs with a long soft coat did not survive, for when working in city conditions, wet and sleet caused ice balls to form on the long hair, and when working the ice pulls the balls out, thus the covering would be torn right out. Also the moisture laden coat would freeze. The dog with the short guard coat does not tolerate the icy wind and severe cold, either. Fur wears off and sometimes sores develop from constantly curling up to escape the cold.

Correct symmetry of markings is a distinguishing feature of the breed and mismarked dogs are generally withheld from showing or breeding. Listed below are the colours generally accepted in the USA.



Newton's Aust Ch SnowEagle of Highnoons (imp UK)
Dog CC Melb Royal 82

However, in Australia, the colour "Alaskan seal" is not recognised and is usually described here as black and white, or grey and white. A pity really, for "Alaskan seal" is a true description of this rich colour. Colours are: **Black & white:** black guard hair with black and grey undercoat. **Alaskan seal & white:** Black or black tipped hair with white or cream undercoat. The dog appears black at a distance but is not a true black because of the light undercoat. **Wolf sable & white:** black or grey guard hairs with a reddish undercoat and red trimmings. Both black and red factors evident. **Wolf grey & white:** grey guard hairs with light grey, cream or white undercoat. Dog definitely appears grey even though there may be some black hairs on top line. No red factor evident. **Silver & white:** light grey guard coat and with white undercoat. **Red & white:** a definite shade of red either light or dark, with light points (lip line and nose), and eye colour. No black factor in evidence. **All white:** both guard hair and undercoat or white. Often evidence of a mask in cream colour. Only solid colour allowed.

Shadings of gold, cream buff, frown or reddish hues are permitted on the legs, ears, tails and face between white areas of the underbody and the dark colour above. **cont/ page 33**