

Where is TYPICAL MOVEMENT going? by Hans Lehtinen & Chris Lummelampi

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My friend Hans Erik Pedersen shared this article on his status and I find it so important that I am saving it as a note.

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When we look at dog shows in general and competition at group level in particular, we are often struck by an all too frequent trend towards a convergence of breed characteristics especially when it comes to movement.

The question is: are we looking for an all-round show dog, flashy and sound enough, but not exactly epitomizing its breed type?

Are we, as breeders and judges, tempted to ask for the same attributes on all show dogs, regardless of the breed?

Movement is a measure of a dog's conformation.

If we accept what might be today's barely perceptible changes in a dog's movement, we may gradually allow an alteration in the breed type.

We may, in fact, contribute to a situation where an Afghan Hound moves like a Poodle and a Poodle moves like an Afghan.

If this is the case, then we need a serious discussion on typical movement in today's show rings.

The original functions of many of our breeds have become obsolete as our societies have changed from agrarian into urban societies. Add to this the pressures to alter breed standards in order to breed "sounder" dogs -- as if the existing breed standards were an impediment to sound dogs -- and the emerging "green values" depreciating pure-bred dogs, and we may be distancing ourselves from true breed type.

When we look at the Poodle today, we hardly ever stop to think what the function of its long coat was as it performed its retrieving function in icy cold water: when the hair ends froze, the coat underneath formed an insulating layer keeping the dog warm; or that the Poodle clip with the hindquarters clipped short was part of maintaining the breed's ability to function just as a colourful ribbon was tied to the dog's topknot and tail to help the hunter see his dog out in the field. The Poodle's

movement also contributed to its usefulness as a retrieving dog: it was expected to move with the light, effortless gait which continues -- or should continue -- to be part of the Poodle's breed type today.

No one expects the Brussels Griffon or the Yorkshire Terrier to catch rats in today's urban environment, but surely this should not be a justification to change their original breed type. Neither do we expect the Shar Pei to function as a fighting dog, but this is no reason why it should not have enough fold of skin on its shoulders to enable it to turn, if gripped by an attacker.

In some breeds, function dictates movement. In others, there does not seem much logical explanation why a breed should move in a certain way -- except when the movement is part of the breed's heritage and deserves recognition. If the Fox Terrier heritage -- or its standard, as the American one does in the case of the Smooth Fox Terrier -- calls for the dog move its front legs like a pendulum of a clock, there is no reason why we should not appreciate this movement when we see it, however rare it might be today.

In the case of the "decorative" toy and utility breeds, the consideration of typical movement should not be any less important. We think of the Japanese Chin as a dainty dog who is expected to move with a graceful gait, lifting its feet high... or the Miniature Pinscher and Italian Greyhounds with their high-stepping Hackney gait, as required by the British and American standards. For Italian Greyhounds, the continental countries of the FCI used to have the same requirement, until the breed standard was abruptly changed by its country of origin to ask for "normal" movement. You are, of course, entitled to ask how this can be accomplished without changing the front assembly of the breed -- many of us do, especially as we wonder about some of the changes in the breed standards to accommodate the whims of the "country of origin."

Although some of the breed standards drawn up by countries where the breeding of pure-bred livestock has not been a long tradition may leave a lot to be desired, in some cases comparing the British, U.S. and FCI standards is a useful exercise. Take the Maltese standard. The British standard simply calls for free movement, whereas the original Italian standard describes what we have come to expect of a typical Maltese in motion: quick, short steps giving the impression of the dog sliding forward with its feet barely skimming the ground. Or compare the Poodle standards: the French one warns against the dog covering too much ground when it moves, but the American one calls for springy action -- just as the Afghan standard does, although the movement of the two breeds could not be more different, with the Poodle waltzing around the ring in true "Poodley" fashion and the Afghan moving as if it had springs under its feet.

Variations in breed type in different continents also seem to play a role in our expectations of how a typical example of a breed should move. We see Shih Tzus in some parts of the world who would be much more at home in the Lhasa Apso ring,

and vice versa. We hear a lot about the controversy surrounding their movement -- flick-up or no flick-up for Lhasa , showing full pads for Shih Tzu -- and lots of special expertise seem to be called for when assessing Lhasa's "jaunty movement" when, in fact, it is a very moderate, normally constructed dog who should move with light feet, effortlessly like a trotting horse. Not so the lower-to-the-ground, heavier bodied Shih Tzu whose conformation (if correct) alone dictates that it cannot move with the same style as the higher-legged and differently shaped Lhasa.

Ideal Dog

All too often, we seem to be using the same yardstick to measure the quality of a dog, and we are too easily impressed with flashy showmanship and clever presentation.

Someone once observed that, all too often, we believe a dog is a good mover if it covers the ground like a German Shepherd, comes and goes like a Beagle, and, to top it all, has the Setter topline, the animation of a Cocker Spaniel and the general attitude of a Poodle.

Never mind if it is a typical example of its breed, epitomizing its written and unwritten breed standard. Never mind if its attitude is that of a composite, outgoing, animated show dog of no particular breed type, as long as it meets the generally accepted criteria for soundness... It will, no doubt, keep the Council of Europe happy and avoid scare headlines of "unhealthy" or "unsound" breeds of dogs. But it should raise alarm bells among us who work to maintain true breed type and who are convinced that we do not need take the Council's at times misguided recommendations on "sound breeding principles" at face value -- and we certainly do not need to take precipitated action to change our breeds standards to the extreme where a Brussels Griffon might suddenly be transformed into a reddish rough-coated Border Terrier. (Isn't it rather that there is nothing much wrong with our breed standards from the soundness or health point of view -- but there could be something wrong with our interpretation of these breed standards if we err on the side of exaggeration?)

It might be useful to look at the Pekingese standard which states: "Slow, dignified rolling gait in front. Typical movement not to be confused with a roll caused by slackness of shoulders. Close action behind. Absolute soundness essential."

" A Basset Hound with a sound, crooked front will move soundly - for its breed. Straighten the front legs, and you will get an unsound dog with a heavy body hanging between the front legs instead of being wrapped by them.

A well-constructed but typical Chow Chow hindquarter, strong enough not to knuckle over, will allow the dog to move with its typical stilted gait, just as a typical, but sound construction will allow the Puli to move with a stride that is "not far-reaching. Gallop short. Typical movement short-stepping, very quick, in harmony with lively disposition. Movement

never heavy, lethargic or lumbering."

The gait requirements of quite a number of breeds do not conform to the general conception of "sound dogs", well angulated in front and rear, moving with a ground-covering gait. There is no reason why they should, unless our aim is the identikit show dog.

The Faster the Better

It does not seem to be enough that most of our dogs move, and are often expected to move, in the same manner. They are also expected to move with the same speed regardless of the breed.

Would a Rottweiler be a better, more invincible defender of its master and his property if it were to move with the same agility as an Australian Kelpie, a shepherd, running on the backs of the sheep in tight spots if needed to perform its function? Or would the St. Bernard be a better rescue dog in the Alps if it raced around the ring with the same effortlessness as a Saluki?

In fact, many of the so-called "rolling" breeds are moved around the ring so fast that they never have the opportunity to display their characteristic gait. Again, it might be useful to take a look at some of the breed standards. The Bulldog standard states: " Peculiarly heavy and constrained (gait), appearing to skim the ground, running with one or other shoulder rather advanced.

" Or the Clumber Spaniel: "Rolling gait attributable to long body and short legs.

" Or the Old English Sheepdog: "When walking, exhibits a bear-like roll from the rear..."

To mention a few more examples of typical gait:

take a look at Cocker Spaniels and ask how often they display the typical bustling movement, or at Irish Water Spaniels whose typical movement is often described as that of a drunken sailor.

Some Poodles and Spaniels are, it is alleged, moved so fast that their hind feet never touch the ground (not to mention that, nowadays, you hardly ever see the old-fashioned Cocker Spaniel movement...) In fairness, you could say that quite a few Terriers -- and others, for that matter -- are moved on such a tight lead that their front feet never touch the ground! "Hanging" dogs on tight leads may be appropriate when there is something wrong in the dog's front and you want to reduce the weight on it, hopefully improving movement. This practice may not cause any major harm since it will certainly draw the judge's attention to the problem. But it is unfortunate when dogs with excellent front movement are never allowed to show it to their advantage. It is also unfortunate that many breeds shown on tight leads show an unnatural or an untypical head carriage as handlers forget that the Deerhound or the Borzoi does not have the same outline in profile movement as the Afghan does.

Not all breeds of dogs were developed to be fast moving dogs. Note the American standard for the Alaskan Malamute which states: "In judging Malamutes, their function as a sledge dog for heavy freighting must be given consideration above all else... He isn't intended as a racing sled dog designed to compete in speed trials with the smaller Northern breeds." Contrast this with the Siberian Husky whose required gait is quick and light on its feet. The Basset Hound, for its part, was originally bred to be a slow hunting dog to enable the hunter to follow him on foot without difficulty; therefore, a Basset with its true and deliberate movement should not be expected to compete in speed with the Sighthounds in the same group whose original function and style of working are entirely different. Again, compare it with the smaller French hound, the Basset Fauve de Bretagne, whose movement differs from the heavier, low-to-the-ground Basset Hound because it was created to work on a different terrain, in the thick undercover in Brittany.

Conditioning

All show dogs need exercise and conditioning beyond the few rounds around the show ring to keep them in top form and peak condition, and to enable them to present their typical movement to advantage. But the right exercise and proper muscle tone will never mask basic structural weaknesses or shortcomings in breed type. They will only enhance good, typical movement.

With coated breeds we, as breeders, exhibitors and judges often struggle to balance the show ring requirements of keeping the coat in top condition with the requirement to maintaining the dog underneath in peak physical condition with proper exercise. Often we end up with a flabby dogs with flowing coats, or well-muscled dogs with broken coats when we, in fact, should be looking for a happy medium. (One of the ironies of life is that some of the coated dogs who are kept in wire crates and exercise pens, as they often do in America, have wonderful muscles -- could it be that they spend their days bouncing up and down in their crates?)

The same applies to other forms of technology which are being introduced into the world of show dogs. We need a happy medium between exercise machines, or treadmills, and other forms of exercise. Some blame poor front movement on the excessive use of treadmills, others tend to think that treadmill exercise, if used excessively, may constrict the dog's movement by shortening its stride, resulting in a peculiar gait behind.

Instead of condemning treadmills outright, it might be useful to see them as excellent aids in exercising dogs in adverse weather conditions when outside exercise is impossible, to be supplemented by other forms of exercise -- walking, bicycling or letting the dogs gallop in the fields. Not many of us can go as far as a famous Afghan Hound kennel in the U.S. where the dog runs include an L-shaped ring going up and down the hill, forcing the dogs to turn and stretch when they gallop. Nevertheless, versatility in exercise will ensure that the dog uses all its

muscles to the full and is in peak condition.

But, to return to the point of this article, a dog, however well muscled and however well moving, is not a typical example of its breed if it does not have typical movement. And if we accept small changes in the movement of a breed, we accept small changes in conformation, proportions and overall breed type until we end up with an identikit show dog. (And talking about proportions -- have you noticed how many of today's show dogs are losing the length of leg?)

Understanding sound movement is important, but understanding typical movement is essential if we are to preserve breed type. Learning to quote the breed standard may not be enough, because, to paraphrase the late Tom Horner, any child can learn to recite the Lord's Prayer, but understanding it will take years. Therefore, we should not be in too much a hurry.

About the authors:

Mr. Hans Lehtinen was an international all-breed judge who had been judging for more than 50 years. His assignments included all the prestigious shows in the world, with the exception of the Westminster Show, from Crufts in Britain to the Royal Shows in Australia and the FCI World Shows. He was a honorary member of the Finnish Kennel Club and served on several K.C. committees, including its show and judges' committee and breed standard committee. He continued being involved in judges' examinations for several breed clubs. He bred English Cocker Spaniels and was owned by Norwich Terriers before his passing.

Ms. Chris (Kirsti) Lummelampi judges Hound, Terrier, Nonsporting and Toy breeds and has had assignments in several European countries as well as the U.S. and Australia. She has been a contributor to several canine publications and mentions writing as one of her hobbies. She is a long-time member of the Finnish Kennel Club Council, its highest decision-making body. She is past President of the Finnish Basset Breeds Club and current President of the Finnish Toy Dog Association, and judges' education coordinator for both clubs. She has owned, exhibited and bred Basset Hounds, and, most recently, Lhasa Apsos.