

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE POINTER STANDARD

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The current breed standard for the Pointer is a clear and concise description of an Aristocratic gundog. But if it's so clear and concise, why is there such a type variance in the breed? The answer is simple: as is true with any standard, there is room for interpretation by the reader. The standard is merely a guide that serves to help us form a visualization of the breed it describes. It should be used in conjunction with living and moving examples, artwork and sculpture depicting the breed, and studies of the Pointer at work in the field. All of this takes time to assimilate in the student's mind. It is an ongoing process that, in the best of students, will continue for a lifetime. The mind may never grant us a perfect picture, with time and study, the focus of the picture will continually sharpen.

The following is an interpretation of the standard. It is a functional interpretation in that it describes a hunter, and it is a comparative interpretation in that it addresses the section of the standard that describes the undesirability of hound and terrier traits. The reason the standard mentions the undesirability of hound and terrier traits are simple: Pointers with hound and terrier traits not only look like hounds and terriers, but more importantly, they hunt like hounds and terriers. Anyone who quickly dismisses the particular mention in the standard may want to spend a hungry day hunting quail with a Foxhound or Airedale. Overall though, this interpretation is meant to expand the words of our standard as an attempt to help the reader form that every important mental picture of the Pointer.

The Head

The head of the Pointer is the hallmark of the breed. It is one of the most important distinguishing elements that sets the Pointer apart from its other breed cousins. But more importantly, as you will see in the description that follows, there is a much more functional value in their head as there is aesthetic value.

The house all of it many parts, the Pointer head has extensive chiseling. For a sculptor to create the Pointer head, he would be with a brick of clay and add an almost infinite number of smoothly blended surfaces to create the intense look of a worker. The skull planes (that is, the top plane of the backskull and the top plane of the muzzle when viewed from the side) are parallel or dished. Many examples of the classic dished faces can be seen in sporting art. A true dished face is not simply a turned up nose. It is an effect caused by the muzzle being lower at the stop than at the tip of the nose. This is not a simple case of aesthetics: the raised nose lets the dog work upland scents while keeping his eyes focused straight up field. A down-faced Pointer would be looking at the clouds if he were to use his nose up into the wind; more likely though, a down-faced Pointer would possess other hound characteristics and would hunt like a hound with his nose and eyes cast to the ground. Parallel skull planes are also permissible according to the breed standard. When accompanied by enough stop, the deep furrow between the eyes, the proper ears, nose, and eyes, this configuration also portrays the look of a sporting Pointer.

Just as it is important that the Pointer's body pieces flow together smoothly, the same is true with the Pointer head. The head is a relatively small area filled with many important functional pieces: The nose, eyes, ears, teeth and brains all need a place to exist. The head is best described in two blended and proportional sections: the muzzle, or foreface, and the backskull. The length of the muzzle should dictate the total length of the head.

Tail

A tail that is carried curled over the back, is again an indication of an overabundance of outcrossed blood; it is interesting to note that a Pointer without a bee sting tail will usually not exhibit the desirable side to side action on

the move. Conversely, those with bee sting tails will exhibit such action. Tail action is an integral part of Pointer balance and rhythm in movement.

The Neck

From the tip of the Pointer's nose, the neck is a continuance of the graceful series of curves that forms the Pointer's outline. The neck not only serves to support the head, it is also the junction of the shoulders and is connected a part of the vertebrae that ends in a tapered top of the tail. It must be long enough to allow the dog to pick up birds from the ground without contorting his front legs like a giraffe drinking from a stream. While this may seem to support the opinion that a Pointer's neck can never be too long it most importantly must be in proportion with the rest of the vertebrae. A short-necked, long-backed dog is as unbalanced as a long-necked, short-backed dog; both combinations will show an imbalance while the Pointer is reviewed in outline or side-gait.

The important arch of the neck allows the Pointer to bend to retrieve birds and is essential for the correct high head carriage when moving. This arch and carriage keeps the Pointer working quickly upland into the wind rather than working extended and flat-necked.

The Shoulders

The Pointer's shoulders are instrumental for efficient locomotion and endurance. When viewed from the top they are smooth and oblique; that is, they curve with the shape of the body without interrupting the transition from the neck into the body. If they are too close together on top, the dog will be narrow in chest and too narrow in rib. If they meet too far apart, they are often lumpy, do not blend properly into the body, and may result in a wide but shallow chest.

From the side, the shoulder blade and lower arm are the same length and form an ideal angle of 90 degrees. If either is shorter than the other improper movement results. The 90 degree angle allows the dog to reach properly with its front assembly while in motion. Straight terrier-like shoulders deny the extension and reach a bird dog needs to cover ground. Similarly, a show lower arm results in hackneyed gait and waste motion.

The Body

The body of the Pointer houses the heart and lungs, the collective engine of this noble hunter. Its basic skeletal elements are the vertebrae and the rib cage; as elemental as it may seem they are the pieces that give the Pointer its basic outline and shape. The topline of the Pointer is shaped by the spine. It is not perfectly flat or straight because it is an extension of the string of vertebrae that starts at the neck and ends at the top of the tail. The topline should be mostly level though, never exaggerated or overly sloped. It starts smoothly as the arched neck curves back over the shoulders, is fairly flat over the body cavity that supports the ribs, arches slightly to give strength over the loins, then falls off slightly at the croup into the tail.

The strongest topline has the most subtle curves from head to tail. Any exaggeration, such as a sag over the body cavity, too much arch over the loin, or a short, steep croup, destroy the outline and weaken the balance and efficiency of this hard working hunter. While a steeply sloped topline may seem pleasing to the eyes, it is a sign of imbalance caused by straight shoulders, overturned stifle, or a short steep croup. Short steep croups prevent proper extension of the Pointer's hindquarters and destroy the portrayal of strength in the outline.

In visualizing the rib shape of the Pointer consider their function as a cavity for lungs. They must provide enough space in which the lungs can properly expand and contract without being so wide as to diminish efficiency and speed. While depth of brisket is important for speed, as is exhibited by the deep briskets in sighthounds, an exaggeratedly deep and narrow brisket in a Pointer may sacrifice endurance for speed. Another important element

of the rib assembly is length of the last ribs, that is, the ribs closest to the loins. If the back ribs are too long the body will have a straight underline, If they are too short, the underline will be exaggerated and the lung area will be lessened.

The underline is another of the body's indicators for Pointer type. The proper underline with sufficient tuckup sums up the graceful series of curves that describes the Pointer. It is not uncommon to find associated sighthound traits on exhibits with straight underlines. (These exhibits may also have a 'skirt' or excess of skin in the area where the tuckup should be.) Conversely, exhibits with an exaggerated tuckup often have a narrow fronts and exaggerated sighthound toplines. While the tuckup must be apparent, it must also be in proportion to the dog as a whole.

Feet and Legs

The legs and feet of the Pointer support the athletic body of a hunter. The bone is oval, never rounded, and is of a dimension in proportion to the overall substance of the dog. Bone that is too fine is too fragile for endurance. Bone that is too thick is too heavy for speed and agility. As with many of the other parts of the Pointer, the shape of the legs and feet are indicators of heritage. Large round bone with large round feet and thick pads, or thin bone and exaggerated hare feet, are indicative of a preponderance of questionable heritage.

The Pointer's front legs are straight, not tuned in or out and have sloping resilient pasterns. Proper pasterns cushion the impact transmitted from the foot into the legs when running. Short straight terrier-like pasterns carry the shock into the leg causing a weakened action and increasing the possibility of injury. Pasterns with too much slope cause a broken-down action that creates an inordinate redistribution of stress. The Pointer's rear legs are parallel when viewed from the rear and have short straight hocks to anchor the power of well-made hindquarters.

Front

When viewed head-on, the breadth of a Pointer's front falls somewhere between a substantial sighthound and a streamlined sighthound; to hunt upland game, they need to be faster than a sighthound but more thorough than a sighthound. When viewed from the side, the forechest should reach just to the point of the elbow. A chest deeper than this, or an exaggerated forechest, is an encumbrance to a sporting dog. A shallow chest, or an inverted or pinched front, also leaves locomotion and lung capacity at a weakened disadvantage.

Hindquarters

The hindquarters propel the Pointer through terrain ranging from open grasses to heavy underbrush. Without a powerful push, the lungs and heart are as useless as a speed boat without a motor. Part of the power from hindquarters comes from its balance with the rest of the dog. In perfect examples, the angulation behind matches a perfect 90 degree shoulder. But in cases where the shoulder is not a perfect 90 degrees, it is better for the rear angles to match than to not match' sporting dogs derive a great deal of strength from balance and harmony of parts.

But it is not only proper turn of stifle that makes a good rear quarters. The hocks are show, strong, and parallel and there must be ample muscle in the thigh when viewed from both rear and side. The entire assembly must be hung from a strong croup and not stuck under the dog's body. A tucked-under hindquarter is only advantageous to racers (sighthounds) which have more arch over the loin to support such a configuration. But a Pointer runs with its nose to the wind and tail cracking; this requires, among other things, an extended rear assembly.

Movement

Movement is the best test of basic construction and conformation. Only a properly made Pointer with a correct arch of neck, shoulder assembly, body shape and running gear can have the proportion and balance to move like a Pointer with reach and drive, a slashing tail, and head held high to scent. A poorly made dog will move restricted like bad terrier, hackneyed like a gaited horse, or weakly and flailing; these are easily observable examples of poor movement. But a poorly made dog can fool the casual observer with sound action accompanied by the undesirable hung or extended neck a motionless tail. This kind of movement is reserved for scenthounds.

A Pointer that moves true coming and going, a Pointer that never puts a foot down wrong, a Pointer that is never cow hocked bowlegged, still has poor movement if he moves like a sound Fox Terrier, Bloodhound, Whippet, or any breed other than a Pointer. As is true in any sporting dog, the importance of sound and typical movement in a Pointer should never be underestimated; it is as important an element of Pointer type as the Pointer head and tail.

Coat and Color

As with all pieces of the Pointer puzzle, the coat is yet another breed indicator in offering protection from the specific elements of upland bird hunting. A coat that is too thick and coarse exhibits scenthound qualities. A coat that is too thin and too sleek exhibits Grayhound qualities. Both of these extremes would leave a Pointer with improper protection. There should be no sign of feathering on any part of the Pointer and the tail should never show any sign of bushiness as would be seen in a Foxhound.

Pointers come in four basic colors; liver and white, black and white, orange and white and lemon and white. Solids in each of these colors and solid white are allowable. Occasionally, a tri-colored Pointer may also be seen. The shade of color, amount of patches and ticking and placement of markings vary tremendously and bring no bearing to the quality of a Pointer. Since markings and color can be deceiving, it is best to imagine each dog as if it were painted solid gray.

While black and liver marked Pointers are easily defined, there is occasionally confusion regarding the differences between orange and lemon marked Pointers. The script of the AKC breed video resolves this issue by saying that most breeders use nose color (black nose for orange and liver nose for lemon) and not the shade of orange or lemon patches as the determining factor; the reason for this concurrence is that the nose color on Pointers with these coat shades (and NOT the coat shade) genetically determines what colors these dogs can and cannot reproduce. To further confuse the issue, some orange and whites will get winter nose where the nose pigment lightens to a liver color in cold weather, a true orange, however, will always show black pigment on the skin of the body when wet or in thin coat.

General

While the terms staying power and dash may not be among those we often use today, they are certainly indicative of what our forefathers had in mind when developing the Pointer. Both refer not only to the physical design of the Pointer but also to the essence of the breed. This is foremost a specialist what can hunt eagerly all day long. Their intensity on point is unparalleled. This is an explosive athlete with clean outline and a clever character that makes them easily discernable from any other breed.