Judging the Pointer

By Marjorie Martorella

The Pointer is one of the first breeds exhibited in the United States. It is also a breed that has been depicted through the centuries by artists. Many of the dogs immortalized by the masters such as George Earl, his daughter Maud Earl, Thomas Blinks, Leon Danchin, Richard Fath and Marguerite Kirmse, just to name a few, are not very different from the modern day Pointer.

When you enter the ring, you will see a class of Pointers of different colors and coat patterns. This is the icing on the cake, for it is what lays underneath that makes a good Pointer – thus color and markings should have no bearing on your decision.

In the General Appearance section of the Pointer Standard, phrases such as “bred primarily for sport afield”, “impression of compact power and agile grace” and “hard-driving hunting dog” are used. In evaluating the Pointer, one must keep in mind the purpose of the breed. These dogs should have outgoing temperaments and be in excellent muscular condition so they can perform the duties for which they are bred.

For many years, the Pointer has been described as a head breed. There is no doubt that the correct Pointer head is the hallmark of the breed and distinguishes it from other breeds. I do feel that as a judge or a breeder, to put all of your emphasis on the head and neglect the traits that make our dogs capable of hunting all day is a disservice to the

Ch. Truewithem A Taste of Triumph was my foundation bitch – a Number One Pointer in 1976 and the dam of 29 Champions, as well as four BIS winners including the 1986 Westminster BIS winner, Ch. Marjetta National Acclaim.

Ch. Cookieland’s Life of Leisure bred by Cheryl LaDuc. “Daisy” was the winner of 21 All Breed Bests in Show and is also the dam of Ch. Cookieland Seasyde Hollyberry. Pictured here winning the group under me at the Lexington KC show handled by co-breeder Anthony Cantor. Breeders of Hollyberry: Cheryl LaDuc and A&A Cantor.

Ch. Marjetta Diamond Lil JH owned by Dave & Linda McCurley.
breed. That being said, the Pointer’s head is very well chiseled. The planes of the skull and muzzle can be either parallel or dished. The standard calls for the muzzle to give the impression of length. The nostrils are wide open to enable scenting ability. The eyes are of ample size, rounded and intense. An oval eye is incorrect in the Pointer and detracts from the expression. The eye color should be dark in contrast with the coat color. The ear leather is so fine that the veins are evident. They are also short and when relaxed reach just below the lower jaw. They should be pointed at the tip and never rounded as in a scent hound.

The outline of the Pointer is a series of gentle curves from the neck blending into smooth, laid back shoulders. The correct topline has subtle curves from the head to tail. There is a slight rise over the loin and a gently sloping croup. The underline is also an integral component of the outline, the tuck up being a gentle curve, not exaggerated or straight both of which would be hound characteristics. The Pointer’s silhouette should show a well-balanced dog devoid of exaggerations such as an extreme sloping topline or a very high tail carriage. The Pointer should also never appear low in leg. These do not present the correct outline for the Pointer.

The Pointer’s chest is deep rather than wide and the breastbone is bold, but not unduly prominent. The bone of the Pointer is oval in shape. It should neither be too refined or too heavy as both would hinder the agility and endurance of the breed. The feet are oval with well-arched toes and deep pads which are needed for speed and agility.

Our standard calls for muscular and powerful hindquarters. When one examines a Pointer, well-defined musculature should be apparent. It is the strong hindquarter that propels the Pointer in the field. Decided angulation is required in the breed standard.

The purists in the breed will tell you that the two most important physical characteristics of the Pointer are the head and the tail. The correct Pointer tail is thicker at the base and tapers to a fine point. Never docked, the tail should not reach below the hock in length. It should be carried straight without curl and lash from side to side when moving. The tail can be either carried straight off the back or as high as 20 degrees above the back. The Pointer should never carry its tail between its legs.

People in the breed often refer to the ideal Pointer tail as a “bee sting” tail. It is an extremely short tapered tail and is carried perfectly straight and lashes from side to side when the dog is in motion. One characteristic of the Pointer are the head and the tail. The correct Pointer tail is thicker at the base and tapers to a fine point. Never docked, the tail should not reach below the hock in length. It should be carried straight without curl and lash from side to side when moving. The tail can be either carried straight off the back or as high as 20 degrees above the back. The Pointer should never carry its tail between its legs.

A good Pointer’s gait is as much a part of breed type as his head and tail. The gait should be strong and powerful. The head is held proudly, the tail lashing from side to side. In this country a lot of emphasis is put on movement, looking for tremendous reach and drive. However, the dog should never lose his outline when moving. The Pointer should not get longer and lower when moving. The head should not be facing the ground. Wasted motion such as hackney gait and pounding movement are also faulty.

The Pointer may be black, lemon (flesh-colored nose), orange (black pigment) or
liver, either solid or in combination with white. The lemon Pointer will have a hazel eye as it is genetically impossible for them to have a darker eye. Unfortunately, this often confuses many judges as they look at the lighter eye of a lemon as a fault.

Our standard does not address the proportions of the breed as it is covered in other standards. It does however mention “compact power and loins of moderate length.” Therefore, most Pointer breeders agree that the Pointer is just off-square. The height of the body from the withers to the ground is equal to, or slightly less than, the length of the body from the front of the forechest to the rear proportion of the upper thigh.

I feel that if you keep these points in mind, you will be comfortable judging the Pointer and will be able to reward the dog that best exemplifies our standard – a Pointer that could go out and do a day’s work in the field and go into the show ring the next day.

Anyone wanting to see the American Pointer Club’s Illustrated Standard or our PowerPoint presentation as well as several informative.