



Silhouette What You Need to Know

It is always interesting to see beginners jotting down the magic breeding formulas that will produce their first champions and of course that carrot that tempts us all — a Best in Show winner. Admirable goals indeed. There are some wonderful seminars being presented today on breeding techniques and how to select winners.

But for the beginner I can't help but think that their aspirations are a bit premature, not unlike someone attending a course on flying a 747 before they've taken their first flying lesson. There is a whole lot to learn about aeronautics before taking a solo flight on any plane and more before even *thinking* about a 740-anything. If you can't recognize what constitutes the ideal in a breed, you can put every breeding formula ever conceived into motion and it will all be for naught. Formulas don't produce quality — quality does. And if you can't tell what a top-class specimen is, the only way you will ever breed a really good one is by sheer accident.

In any endeavor it's about first achieving the basics, establishing a foundation, and this applies in purebred dogs to the beginner — and when I say beginner I'm talking about both the novice and the long-time dog person who is beginning in a new breed. The foundation lies in recognizing a breed's proper silhouette. In the new edition of my book, *Solving the Mysteries of Breed Type* (Kennel Club Books), I spend considerable time and space on this specific subject. It goes without saying that no breed can have dogs that are long-legged with short backs and short-legged with long backs and have both be correct. Even in breed standards that fail to address this balance, tradition along with purpose and function tell the tale. So, what is it that is critical for us to recognize, and why? I have a three-step process concerning a breed's silhouette that will help take us there.

The steps are: 1. What you see 2. What you will see 3. What is revealed in what you will see.

Step 1 — What you see

Familiarizing yourself with dogs that represent quality in a breed is the first step in this process. We begin with a photo of the outstanding Bull Terrier bitch, Can. Am. Ch. Magor Maggie Mae (Fig.1). It is not unusual to hear veterans in the sport say, "Show me a really good one so that I can burn that image into my mind." Maggie Mae does just that; she represents the many complex details that go into making a top Bull Terrier. What you can't see is her correct bite and soundness of movement. You can take my word that she succeeds well in both these respects.

Let me interject here that a long list of what is wrong about a given dog has some comparative value I guess, but personally speaking I want to consider what is *right*, and my ideal dog has a whole series of "rights." I've been to too many seminars that used dogs of mediocre quality that had only one outstanding quality. Perhaps others may feel differently but I don't like having to erase a lot of clutter from the picture I am trying to develop.

Step 2 — What you will see

Once outstanding specimens of the breed become recognizable, the second step of the process can begin. There is no better way than to employ the graphing technique I describe in the *Mysteries*



Fig. 1 — Can. Am. Ch. Magor Maggie Mae ROM, whose profile photograph serves as an example of what the Bull Terrier breed standard calls for. Courtesy Gordon and Norma Smith. All images from *Solving the Mysteries of Breed Type*.

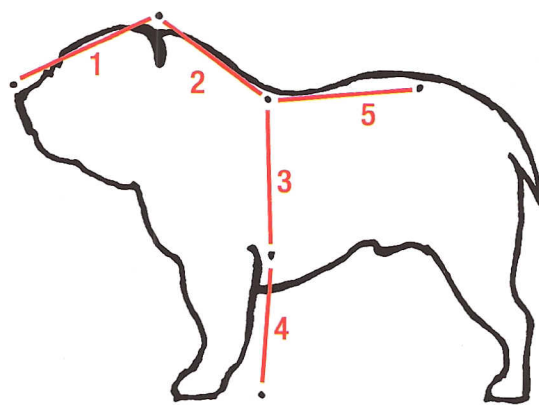


Fig. 3 — The Davey "Five Equal Parts" Bulldog silhouette illustrating the proportions that typified the generally accepted great Bulldogs for an entire century. Courtesy Betty Davey.

book. This is an easily obtained graph paper transparency that can be superimposed on photographs of the top-class dogs in a breed. To illustrate I have cho-

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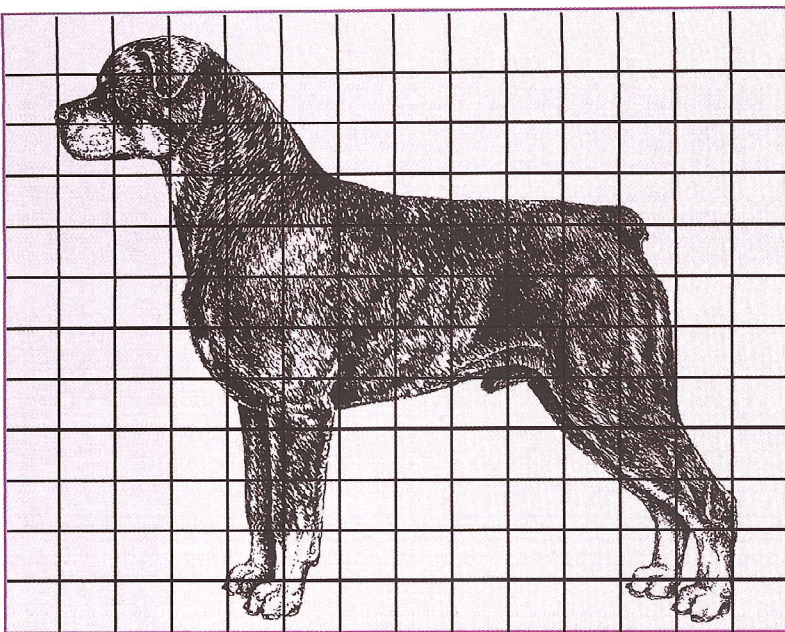


Fig. 2 — The graphing technique applied to the ideal Rottweiler silhouette. Courtesy The American Rottweiler Club.

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sen a profile of the Rottweiler as portrayed in the American Rottweiler Club's illustrated standard (Fig. 2). The graph overlay gives the viewer a clear opportunity to understand the balance and proportions that go into creating the ideal silhouette of the Rottweiler breed. A breed's silhouette *defines* the breed by drawing a line around everything required by the breed's standard. It serves as a prologue for all that must be understood about the breed's physical appearance. Absolute clarity on the correct silhouette provides the framework within which the breeder and judge will work: first the framework, then the general interior and then the specifics.

Prompted by criticism aimed at Bulldogs for their lack of consistency in type, Betty Davey, a highly respected Bulldog breeder, exhibitor, and artist, invested considerable time and research in determining the proportions (silhouette) that typified the unanimously agreed upon "great" Bulldogs of the past 100 years. Her research revealed that there were "five equal points" (proportions if you will) that typified the Bulldog greats, that if achieved, would produce the ideally balanced Bulldog silhouette (Fig. 3). These were: 1. Length of head from tip of lower jaw to tip of occiput, which equals 2. Length of neck from tip of occiput to the withers, which equals 3. Height from elbow to withers, which equals 4. Length of leg from elbow to ground, which equals 5. Length of back from withers to end of the loin. Davey deduced that, "the pages

of our national publications are filled with photos showing Bulldogs with comparatively extreme proportions... hence extreme variations in type. Many of them hold the title 'champion.' Sometimes we wonder, 'why?'" At the risk of being presumptuous I would answer Ms. Davey's question by saying that the reason is that the people breeding and judging Bulldogs do not have a clear picture of so much as the basic ideal of the breed.

This is not confined to Bulldogs. Pick up any periodical of the day and look at Dog "A" claiming top status in the ratings and compare it to Dog "B" of the same breed that also boasts high ranking. The same breed? Sometimes we wonder. So what does understanding the ideal silhouette of a breed tell us? This takes us to Step Number 3.

Step Number 3 — What is revealed

If in fact a breed's correct silhouette "defines the breed by drawing a line around everything required by the breed's standard," it goes without saying that this includes characteristics that are not observable with the naked eye — the breed's skeletal conformation (Fig. 4). If a dog's silhouette is correct it is only because the dog's skeletal arrangement is correct. There is no way possible that the Bull Terrier pictured could have the head shape, arch and length of neck, or front and rear angulation she has if her skeleton was not arranged in such a way that allowed this to be so. Nor could the Rottweiler portrayed have the perfect balance of height-to-length that is permitted by its skeletal structure. If ever there was doubt in your mind as to the importance of

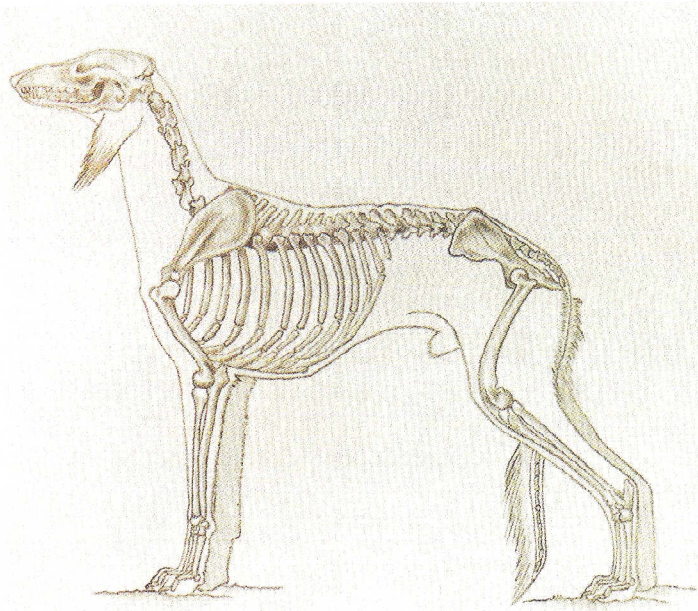


Fig. 4 — Complete familiarity with the correct silhouette of a breed permits understanding how all the correct parts fit into that picture. Courtesy Kim

correct breed silhouette, surely this alone should convince you of its consequence.

Postscript: This column was prompted by the many notes and conversations I've had with purebred dog enthusiasts who are concerned about the variance we find today in many of our breeds. Differing styles have always existed within correct breed type; however, with the rise of importance of "standings" in the modern sport of purebred dogs, we must be constantly on guard that show ring accomplishments, no matter how noteworthy, do not displace the intent of showing dogs in the first place — selecting breeding stock that will best improve the breed. DR

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