

# *Judging the Collie*

*CEA Judges Education Committee 2003*

To develop a clear mental picture of correct Collie type an in-depth study of the Standard, attendance at breed-specific seminars, and observation of judging in quality entries [such as the National Specialty] definitely provide a sound beginning. Interaction with qualified, articulate mentors will bring you closer to establishing a clear mental image of ideal type and an appreciation of the virtues that are treasured by those breeders with long experience in our breed.

Type is what makes a particular animal look like a Collie. Correct Collie type should be apparent as the dogs enter the ring. Your first impression will be in silhouette from across the ring as the dogs are “showing” for their handlers. Which ones immediately grab your attention as having correct Collie proportions? The Collie is not square, but slightly longer than tall. From this first glimpse you can also find the ones who appear elegant, lithe, responsive, and active. Paramount in this initial evaluation should be two elements that the Collie Standard breathes in each paragraph - balance and harmony.

- Is the first impression one of a proud, impressive dog carrying no useless timber?
- Does the head profile show lightness and cleanness with parallel planes, without hint of depth?
- Is the neck fairly long with a slight arch at the nape, contributing to the proud, upstanding appearance?
- Does the topline of the body appear level with a slight rise over the loin?
- Are the elbows set well under the body with the head well forward of the withers and well above the level of the back?
- Does the chest extend to the elbow?
- Do the hindquarters place the rear feet just behind an imaginary line dropped from the pin bone to the ground, and does the dog exhibit well-bent stifles and well-let-down rear pasterns?
- Is the croup well-rounded and does it continue the graceful curves of the outline?
- Is the tail of a pleasing length to complete the picture?

- In Smooths, does the coat appear short, hard, and flat, allowing a clear view of the natural outline?
- In Roughs, does the coat, which is the crowning glory, appear abundant, straight, and harsh and is it well-fitted, enhancing the beauty of the overall picture?

A walk down the line is now in order as you assess the qualities of expression. Expression is the most distinctive feature of the Collie and perhaps the most difficult to describe. Key words are sweet, bright, alert, intelligent, and quizzical. Once you have seen correct and beautiful expression, you will never forget it, and those dogs who come closest to the best optical illustration will certainly stand out from the others.

- Are the eyes set obliquely into a well-chiseled fore-face?
- Is the eye dark, almond shaped, and of medium size, not round, light, and prominent or small, hard, and beady?
- Are the ears drawn well up on the skull with a fourth tipping forward when the dog is alert?
- Does the combination of these characteristics along with a well-rounded muzzle, a clean, flat skull, and correct ears create a clear, bright appearance and an expression of “intelligent inquisitiveness”?

If all of this is pleasing, the Collie on first impression is “typical” and can be considered to be within the guidelines set by the Standard. And now - how does this Collie move around the ring? Side gait is the true test of the balance and fit of its individual parts.

- Does the Collie move as a unit, not dissolving in a mass of unrelated pieces?
- As it covers ground, does the Collie do so in an effortless manner, showing speed and endurance?
- Does the topline remain steady, the tail carried confidently but not curled over the back?
- Do the four legs move in correct tempo, carrying the Collie over the ground with grace and efficiency?
- Do the front legs extend freely with no extra lift or laboring action?

- Do the rear legs exhibit a propelling stride that provides powerful drive?

Hopefully, the dog has been taught to move on a loose lead at a moderate speed to display his herding heritage at its best. Key words here are smooth, efficient, effortless, and ground-covering. It is possible to have soundness without type, but you cannot have type without soundness. An untypical Collie that is sound is useless while a typical Collie that is sound is priceless.

By now you will have begun to assess temperament as well as physical qualities. Which dogs show the proud picture of true balance, displaying no signs of timidity, frailness, lack of animation, or a cumbersome appearance? The dog who projects naturally elegant carriage is highly desirable in a Collie.

The individual exam should begin with the head. When viewed from both front and side, your first impression should be a long, lean, well-blunted wedge. You can't really judge a Collie without putting your hands on its head, and that means more than a "good dog" pat as you pass from the bite to the body. As you lay your hands lightly on the head, keep in mind the importance the Collie Standard places on head qualities.

- Is the muzzle smooth and round and are the cheekbones flat to the touch without flaring?
- Is the underjaw well-finished and do the teeth meet in a scissors bite?
- Are the muzzle and skull equal in length?
- Are the planes parallel? Be sure to check for excessive depth from brow to the throatline.
- Is the stop very slight but perceptible?
- Is the center of the stop at the inner corner of the eye?

- Is the backskull as flat to the touch as it appears from a distance? Hair can play funny tricks and ears drawn at attention can disguise a skull that recedes to the back or side.

- Is the eye placed obliquely and chiseled into the forehead to give it a forward outlook?

- Is the eye dark, almond shaped, and of medium size?

After completing a thorough examination of the body you next consider the coming and going soundness. Send the dogs down and back, seeking those whose legs converge and single track as speed increases. The Collie should be evaluated standing naturally after coming to a stop. Ask the handler to take a step forward if you have a question about the dog's static balance or stance. Now send the dog around again to remind yourself of his side movement.

By this point you will have made mental note of the dogs who possess the best type and soundness. Now it is a matter of sorting through this final cut to find the best of the best, always keeping in mind the Collie Standard's emphasis on correct head and expression. Don't hesitate to have your final contenders face you to compare expression, which is often a key deciding factor in top competition.

In summary, what we really value is an overall picture of a balanced, elegant, confident dog who is put together correctly, who can move effortlessly, and who possesses the essential beauty of breed type. What distinguishes the Collie from any other breed are his head properties, especially the eye, ear, and the typical expression. Without these qualities you have just an ordinary dog and with them you have one of the most majestic breeds imaginable.

## COLLIE CLUB OF AMERICA JUDGES EDUCATION SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALL ABOUT COLLIES Patricia Starkweather, 1980, Craftsman Printing, Birmingham, Ala.

AMERICAN COLLIE CHAMPIONS Vol. 1-5, Collie Club of America, Inc.

THE COLLIE Dr. O.P. Bennett (various editions), Washington, Ill.

COLLIE CONCEPT Mrs. George (Bobbee) Roos, Alpine Publications, 1988

THE DOG IN ACTION McDowell Lyon, Howell Book House, 1988

EVOLUTION OF THE COLLIE Trudy B. Mangels, 1971

THE MAGNIFICENT COLLIE Patricia Starkweather with John Buddie, Doral Publishing Co., 1997

THE NEW COLLIE Collie Club of America, Howell Book House, 1996

THE NEW DOGSTEPS Rachel Page Elliott, Howell Book House 1983

YEARBOOKS Collie Club of America (various years)