

# BREED TYPE IN THE BELGIAN SHEEPDOG A GUIDE FOR JUDGES



The Belgian Sheepdog Club of America, Inc.  
2017

# **Breed Type in the Belgian Sheepdog**

## **A Guide for Judges**

This booklet has been prepared as an aid to the better understanding of good Belgian Sheepdog breed type. The intent of this guide is to discuss and illustrate those points of the standard which deal with those qualities most unique to the breed, which are commonly referred to as “type”. It is directed to judges and aspiring judges of the breed in the United States who already have some knowledge of the AKC Belgian Sheepdog Standard, as well as understanding soundness in herding breeds.

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Text of the Official Written Standard is written in blue.

Commentary appears in black.

For more information on the Belgian Sheepdog and the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America, Inc., visit the website at <http://www.bsca.info>

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## **The Judges Responsibility**

The judge plays a vital role in the survival of the Belgian Sheepdog as a functional herding dog with correct breed type. Quality judging will insure that those dogs who most conform to the AKC standard will be selected in the show rings, and that those dogs who carry the prefix of Champion will do so with honor to the standard, to the breeders, and to the exhibitors.

It is important that a judge know the breed beyond its standard, as standards are not capable of answering every question that may arise when evaluating a particular animal. An understanding of the history and purpose of the breed, as well as an eye for good breed type, gives judges the confidence and courage to make correct selections in the ring.

This guide was prepared to help judges develop a better understanding of the Belgian Sheepdog.



## History and Purpose



The recorded history of the Belgian Sheepdog, known throughout most of the world as the Groenendael from its origins, can be traced to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Efforts were made to determine if there was a true shepherd dog representing only Belgium. They discovered a square, medium sized sheepdog, with well set triangular ears and dark brown eyes. Differing in coat colors, texture, and length, the original varieties of the Belgian shepherd dogs took their names from the towns and suburbs near Brussels. The wire-haired fawn is named the Laekenois, for the suburb of Laeken, where they were first

bred. The short-haired fawn is known as the Malinois, for the city of Malines. The long-haired fawn is the Tervuren for the village east of Brussels, where the first Tervuren were bred. The long-haired black was officially given the name Groenendael in 1910, for the village of Groenendael (pronounced Groan-en-dahl) where Nicolas Rose first bred them. It is from these black dogs that the present day Belgian Sheepdog originates.

Interest in the breed developed quickly, and it was apparent that although initially a shepherd or sheepdog, the Belgian Sheepdog was a versatile animal. With their keen intelligence and easy trainability, they were readily adaptable to a variety of functions. The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found Belgian Sheepdogs working for police forces throughout Belgium, Paris, and New York City. They were also employed by European border patrols, serving as watchdogs.

During the two World Wars, Belgian Sheepdogs distinguished themselves on the battlefields, serving as message carriers, Red Cross dogs, and defense dogs. Since WWII, interest in the breed has continued to grow. Today Belgian Sheepdogs show their talents in conformation, obedience, agility, tracking, herding and other performance events. They continue to prove themselves as a truly versatile breed while still exhibiting the devotion and beauty that first attracted notice in 19<sup>th</sup> century.





## History and Purpose

Belgians were registered and shown as one breed in the United States until issues arose over color and inter-variety breeding. In 1959, the AKC gave each variety separate status. The long haired black dogs kept the AKC breed name of Belgian Sheepdog.



The early Belgian Sheepdogs:



Duc de Groenendael standing  
Sire Piccard d'Uccle 1896

# Personality

## Discussion

Understanding the personality of the Belgian Sheepdog is of the utmost importance in appreciating the breed. The standard calls for a dog that has a proper balance of temperament, which allows the Belgian Sheepdog to be a devoted companion as well as a trained guardian of his family and property.

The Belgian Sheepdog should be a stable, intelligent dog. They should never appear listless or unintelligent. They should be attentive and aware, never shy, cowardly or fearful. Aggressiveness or viciousness should not be tolerated. The aloofness that is described in the standard should not be misinterpreted to condone shyness or nervousness, which are all undesirable qualities.

The strength of the Belgian Sheepdog's affection and loyalty to loved ones must be stressed. Combined with a sound, stable temperament and keen intelligence, the Belgian Sheepdog displays happy devotion when performing a task and makes for an easily trainable dog.



# General Appearance

## AKC Standard



The first impression of the Belgian Sheepdog is that of a well balanced, square dog, elegant in appearance, with an exceedingly proud carriage of the head and neck. He is a strong, agile, well muscled animal, alert and full of life. His whole conformation gives the impression of depth and solidity without bulkiness. The male dog is usually somewhat more impressive and grand than his female counterpart. The bitch should have a distinctly feminine look. Faults - Any deviation from these specifications is a fault. In determining whether a fault is minor, serious, or major, these two factors should be used as a guide: 1) The extent to which it

deviates from the standard. 2) The extent to which such deviation would actually affect the working ability of the dog.

## Discussion



When viewed as a whole, the Belgian Sheepdog should present a well-balanced impression. No part must seem out of balance and no part should overwhelm the others. From the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail, the parts must fit together into a harmonious flow for true breed type and soundness. Correct skeletal structure, proper musculature, proper temperament and intelligence lead to the soundness and correct overall impression of the dog. The elegance so necessary to the breed is readily visible in the general appearance of squareness, strength, harmony and exceedingly proud carriage of the head and neck. Coarse, heavy, plodding dogs are as undesirable as spindly, long, weak dogs. At no time should a

Belgian be preferred just because they are bigger and heavier. These qualities are uncharacteristic of the breed that was developed for ease of movement, quick footwork, strength and beauty. The breed standard has a height range and limits both upper and lower dimensions, so that the breed is kept "medium sized". Adult males are distinctly masculine, whereas females are likewise feminine, and the judge should be able to distinguish between a male and a female with ease. A male that looks bitchy, and a female that looks doggy due to size or secondary sex characteristics are not representative of the breed.



# General Appearance

## Male



## Female





# Size, Proportion, Substance

## AKC Standard

Males should be 24 - 26 inches in height and females should be 22 - 24 inches, measured at the withers. Males under 22 1/2" or over 27 1/2" inches in height and females under 20 1/2" or over 25 1/2" in height shall be disqualified.

The length, measured from point of breastbone to point of rump, should equal the height. Bitches may be slightly longer. Bone structure should be moderately heavy in proportion to his height so that he is well balanced throughout and neither spindly or leggy nor cumbersome and bulky. The Belgian Sheepdog should stand squarely on all fours. Side view - The topline, front legs and back legs should closely approximate a square.



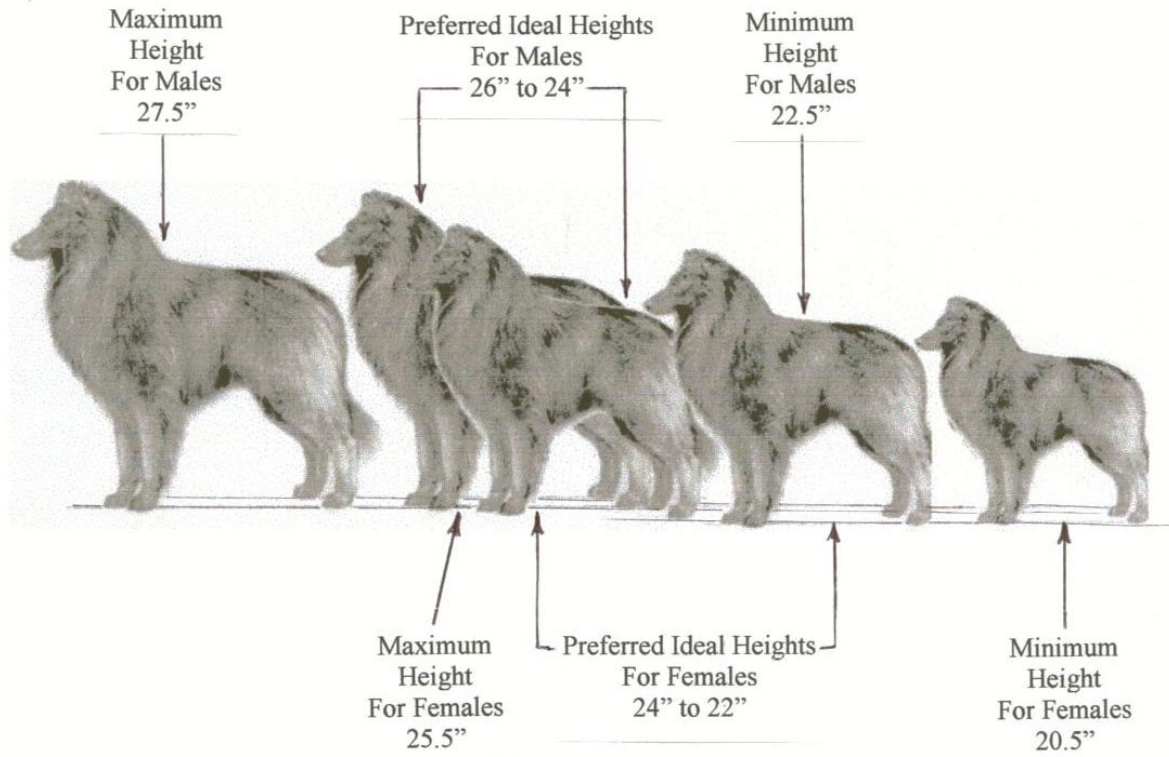
## Discussion

The essential impression of the Belgian Sheepdog is that of a square dog. The four legs should be squarely under the dog and require proper placement and angulation of both front and rear assembly to meet the standard. Dogs that are long in body or short on leg can never represent the ideal.

Bone Structure is proportional to the medium size and harmonious appearance presented.

The height measurements (24" - 26" for males, 22" - 24" for females) reflect the desire to have a medium sized dog capable of being large enough to fulfill the role of guardian of the flocks and property, but not so large as to limit the herding ability.

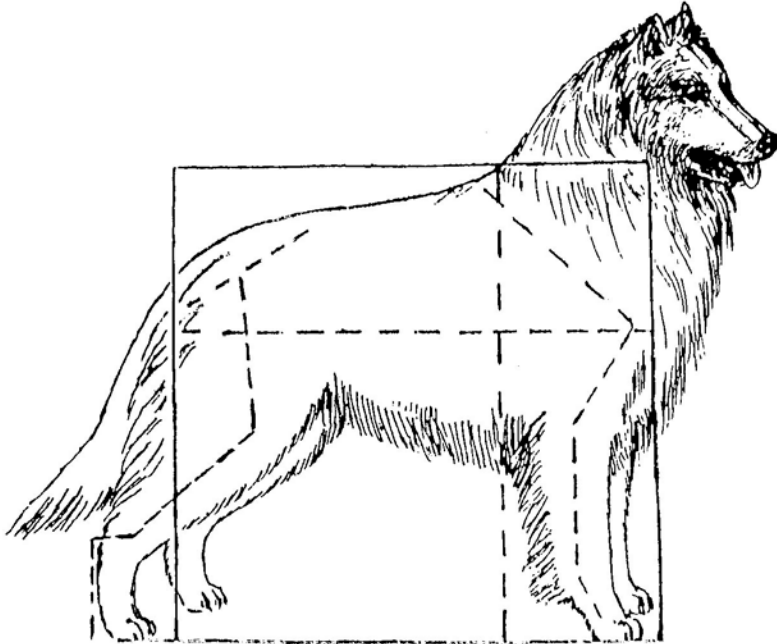
## Size, Proportion, Substance



This graphic represents the maximum height for males on one end and the minimum height for females on the other end. Please be aware of the height variations and do not penalize a dog that is within standard. The whole dog should be considered with reference to how the dog's height would affect the working ability of the dog.

When in question, measure!

## Proportion



The length from the point of breastbone to the point of rump should be equal to the height. Care should be taken as the quantity of coat will affect the perception.



# Head

## AKC Standard

**Head** – Clean-cut and strong, overall size should be in proportion to the body.

**Expression** - indicates alertness, attention, readiness for activity.

**Gaze** - should be intelligent and questioning.

**Eyes** - brown, preferably dark brown. Medium size, slightly almond shaped, not protruding.

**Ears** - triangular in shape, stiff, erect, and in proportion to the head in size. Base of ear should not come below the center of the eye. Ears hanging (as on a hound) shall disqualify.

**Skull** – top flattened rather than rounded. The width approximately the same, but not wider than the length. Stop moderate.

**Muzzle** – moderately pointed, avoiding any tendency to snippiness, and approximately equal in length to that of the top skull. The jaws should be strong and powerful.

**Nose** – black without spots or discolored areas. The lips should be tight and black, with no pink showing on the outside.

**Teeth** – A full complement of strong, white teeth, evenly set. Should not be overshot or undershot. Should have either an even bite or a scissors bite.



## Discussion

The head, comprising both the skull and muzzle, of the Belgian Sheepdog is one of the chief indicators of breed type. Without proper proportions, this uniqueness is not possible, and the head becomes common and untypical. The standard requires that the skull never be wider than its length. The standard also requires that the muzzle should be as long as the skull. Therefore, the muzzle length, skull length and skull width are approximately the same. The head should be in proportion to the rest of the body, with clean, well-defined lines and no looseness of skin anywhere on the face or lips. The stop is clearly defined but not deep or abrupt. The plane of the top of the muzzle should run on a line parallel to the plane of the forehead. There should be no cheekiness. Rather, there should be a slight chiseling under the eyes and flatness which permits the eyes to assume their proper placement and their proper part in expression.

# Head – Expression

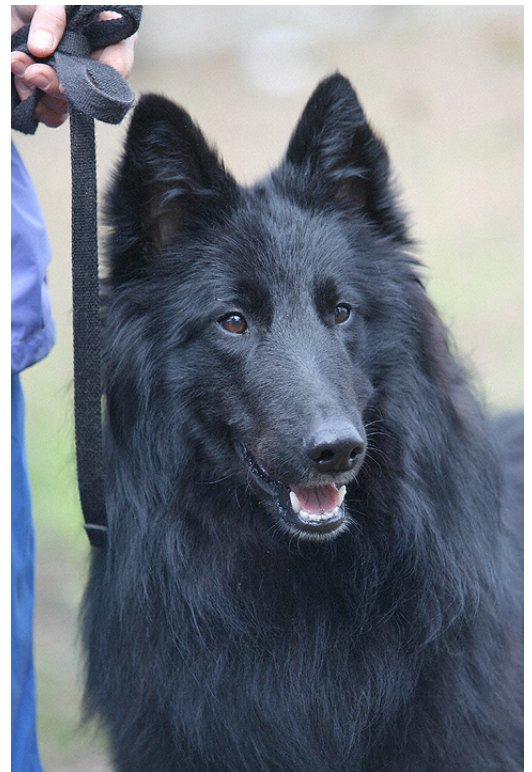
## AKC Standard



Expression indicates alertness, attention, readiness for activity. Gaze should be intelligent and questioning.

## Discussion

Emphasis in the standard is placed on the alertness, intelligence and readiness of the breed. No Belgian that has a dead, sulky, apprehensive, dull or lazy attitude or appearance, can ever represent the ideal of the breed. The desired look of alertness and intelligence can only result from the proper combination of inherently sound temperament and superior intelligence required in the breed standard. Dogs not showing these qualities should be penalized.



# Head - Ears and Eyes

## AKC Standard



*Eyes* brown, preferably dark brown. Medium size, slightly almond shaped, not protruding.

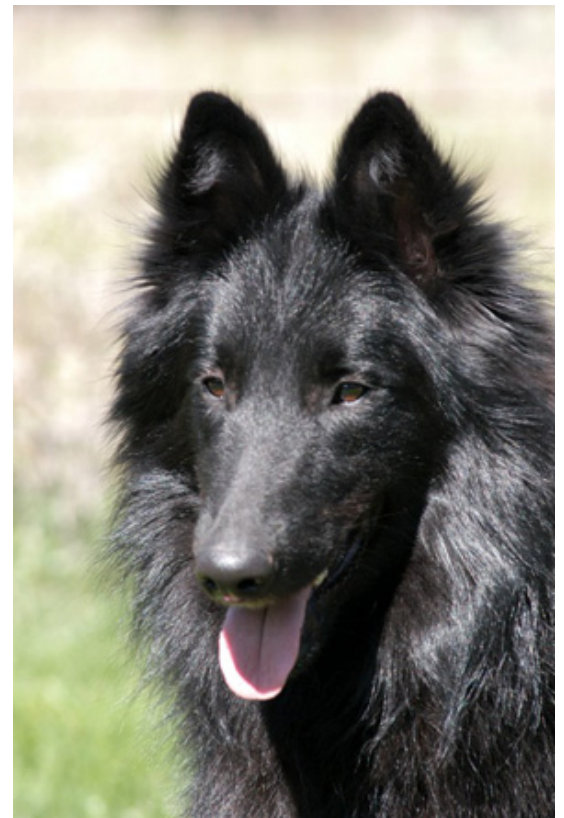
*Ears* triangular in shape, stiff, erect, and in proportion to the head in size. Base of the ear should not come below the center of the eye. Ears hanging (as on a hound) shall disqualify.

## Discussion

Correct eyes and ears give the Belgian Sheepdog's head its attractiveness and are considered essential to good breed type.

The eyes should be almond shaped and dark brown, with an alert, intelligent look. Protruding, round, or light-colored eyes can destroy the look of a good head.

The ears should be triangular in shape, set high on the head, giving the Belgian Sheepdog's head its unique beauty and distinguishing it from many other breeds having naturally erect ears. A high set, small to medium sized ear permits the proper expression, so essential to the breed.





## Head - Eyes

### Discussion

The bitch on the right has a lighter rounder eye than the bitch on the left.

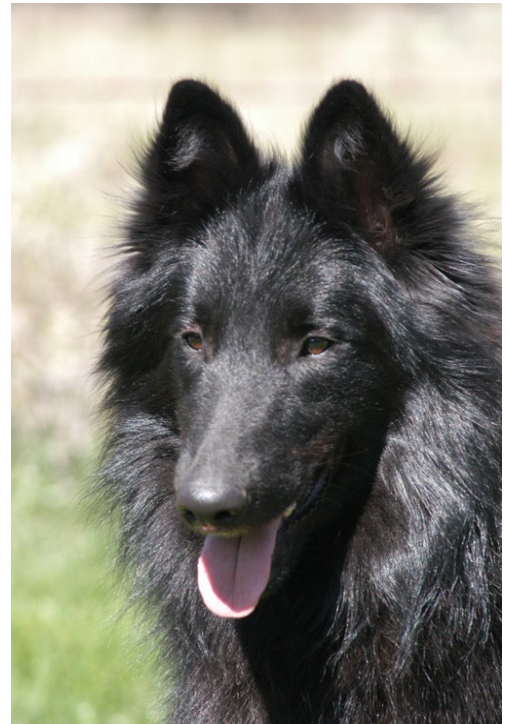


## Head - Ears

### Discussion

Judges should be aware that not all dogs will use their ears as well as others. As long as proper placement and size has been determined, a dog should not be penalized for not "using his ears". When the dog is moving the ears will often be carried down. Belgian Sheepdogs ears are mobile and react to sounds around them. This is not to be penalized.

While the shape and set of these ears differ, all are very good examples of ears.



# Neck, Topline, Body

## AKC Standard

**Neck** - round and rather outstretched, tapered from head to body, well muscled, with tight skin.

**Topline** - The withers are slightly higher and slope into the back, which must be level, straight, and firm from withers to hip joints.

**Chest** - not broad but deep. The lowest point should reach the elbow, forming a smooth ascendant curve to the abdomen.

**Abdomen** - Moderate development. Neither tucked up nor paunchy. The loin section, viewed from above, is relatively short, broad and strong, but blending smoothly into the back. The croup is medium long, sloping gradually.

**Tail** - strong at the base, bone to reach hock. At rest the dog holds it low, the tip bent back level with the hock. When in action he raises it and gives it a curl, which is strongest toward the tip, without forming a hook. Cropped or stump tail shall disqualify.

## Discussion

The Belgian Sheepdog has a beautiful neck, which is moderately long in length and slightly arched. The neck should not be so short, or the shoulder assembly placed forward or so straight, that the head appears to sit on the shoulders or form a sharp angle with the backline. This would detract from the harmonious lines and would adversely affect the usefulness of the dog.

Height at the withers should be caused by the proper placement and blending of the neck into well laid back shoulders. Because of this proper placement of the neck and shoulders, the back is relatively short and flows smoothly into the loin and croup.

The chest of the Belgian Sheepdog should be deep, but the dog should not stand broadly front or rear. The forechest should be apparent to the extent that it is not hidden inside the shoulders. The underbody should form a smooth, ascendant curve.

The tail is strong at the base and should flow smoothly into a line from the croup, the last vertebra reaching at least to the tip of the hock. At rest the tail is dropped. The tail is lifted when the dog is in motion, but it should not be carried above the backline or hooked. Neither should it be tucked between the legs.





# Forequarters

## AKC Standard

**Shoulder** long and oblique, laid flat against the body, forming a sharp angle (approximately 90 degrees) with the upper arm.

**Legs** straight, strong and parallel to each other. Bone oval rather than round. Development (length and substance) should be well proportioned to the size of the dog. Pastern medium length, strong, and very slightly sloped.

**Feet** round (cat footed), toes curved close together, well padded. Nails strong and black, except that they may be white to match white toe tips.



## Discussion

Angulation of the forearm and hindquarters should be moderate as necessary to cover ground smoothly and efficiently, with neither too much power on one extreme, no stiltedness on the other. The shoulders should be long and slanting to form an angle with the preferably long forearm to permit easy movement of the leg. The shoulder assembly should not be placed forward.

# Hindquarters

## AKC Standard

**Legs** – length and substance well proportioned to size of the dog. Bone oval rather than round. Legs are parallel to each other.

**Thighs** – broad and heavily muscled. The upper and lower thigh bones approximately parallel the shoulder blade and upper arm respectively, forming a relatively sharp angle at stifle joint. The angle at the hock is relatively sharp, although the Belgian Sheepdog does not have extreme angulation. Metatarsus medium length, strong and slightly sloped. Dewclaws, if any, should be removed.

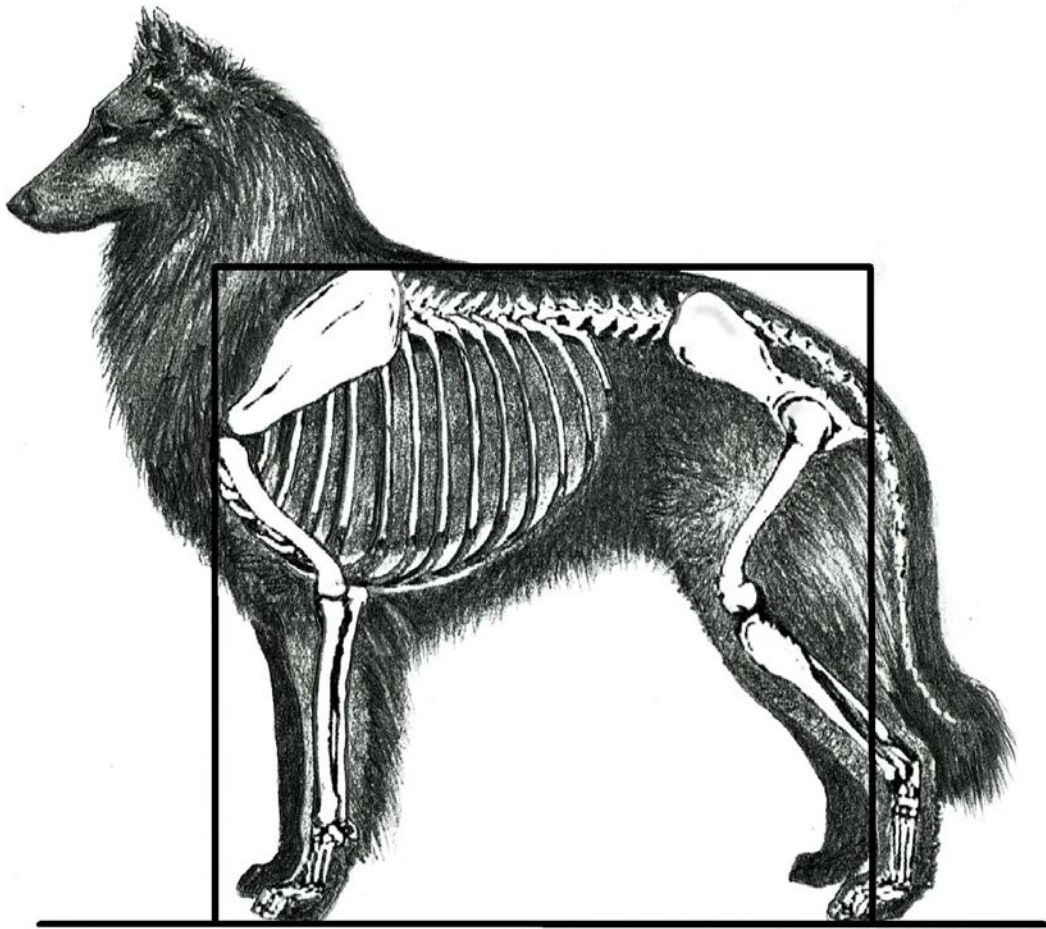
**Feet** – slightly elongated. Toes curved close together, well padded. Nails strong and black, except that they may be white to match white toe tips.



## Discussion

The thigh should be wide and well muscled with moderately angulated hindquarters in balance with the shoulder. The hock should be set low to the ground for balance and efficient movement, and should be moderately bent. The Belgian Sheepdog has balanced moderate angulation throughout, and is not a dog of extremes or straightness. The pasterns are short but very slightly sloped. The feet should be closed front and rear, with the front feet resembling a cat's paw, and the rear feet slightly elongated.

## Forequarters - Hindquarters



Shoulder long and oblique laid flat against the body, forming a sharp angle (approximately 90 degrees) with the upper arm.

The upper and lower thigh bones approximately parallel the shoulder blade and upper arm respectively, forming a relatively sharp angle at the stifle joint.



# Coat

## AKC Standard



The guard hairs of the coat must be long, well fitting, straight and abundant. They should not be silky or wiry. The texture should be a medium harshness. The undercoat should be extremely dense, commensurate however, with climatic conditions. The Belgian Sheepdog is particularly adaptable to extremes of temperature and climate. The hair is shorter on the head, outside of the ears, and lower part of the legs. The opening of the ears is protected by tufts of hair.

**Ornamentation** – Especially long and abundant hair, like a collaret, around the neck; fringe of long hair down the back of the forearms; especially long and abundant hair trimming the hindquarters, the breeches; long, heavy and abundant hair on the tail.

## Discussion

The Belgian Sheepdog should have a medium harsh, straight, outer coat with a thick dense undercoat as necessary for extremes in weather. The dog should never be trimmed or groomed in such a way that the coat appears open or sculpted. It should fall naturally so that it will repel moisture and protect the undercoat. The long outer hair lies flat, emphasizing the outline of the body. Coat should be plentiful without matting or interfering with the dog's usefulness. Adult males characteristically carry a more profuse coat than females, but an excessive amount of coat impairs working ability. The collarette adorning the neck is particularly attractive when it frames the face and ears. Females are not to be faulted for the short collaret, as this is a sex-linked characteristic.



## **Additional Information on Coat**



This is a young male not in full coat. This coat should NOT be penalized if it is the correct texture.



This is the same male in full coat. Notice the difference the coat can make in the appearance of the dog.



## **Additional Information on Coat**



This is a 7-month old male. Notice the beautiful profile that can be seen before the coat comes in. This is acceptable coat on a young dog or bitch and should not be penalized.



This is a young bitch. A bitch out of coat could also have this amount of coat. If the texture is correct, do not penalize the lack of coat.



# Color

## AKC Standard



**Color** - Black. May be completely black, or may be black with white, limited as follows: Small to moderate patch or strip on forechest. Between pads of feet. On tips of hind toes. On chin and muzzle (frost may be white or gray). On tips of front toes—allowable, but a fault. Disqualification - Any color other than black, except for white in specified areas. Reddening due to climate conditions in an otherwise correct coat should not be grounds for disqualification.

## Discussion

The color of the Belgian Sheepdog along with coat type distinguishes this breed from the other Belgian breeds. It is essential that the Belgian Sheepdog have a black coat, with white in the designated areas permitted. White is permitted on the forechest, between the pads of the feet, and on the tips of the hind toes. Grey or white frost is permitted on the muzzle, and is not a sign of aging. It is often seen in puppies at birth. White on the forechest should be a small to moderate patch. White on the rear toes is allowed, but white on the front toes is a fault and should be penalized. Any color other than black is cause for disqualification.

Black coats do have a common problem; they have a tendency to get sunburned in the heat of summer. This condition is seasonal and should not be confused with poor pigmentation in an otherwise proper coat.



## Color



A small to moderate patch or strip on the forechest is allowed.



The white tips on the hind toes are allowed but the white tips on the front toes are a fault and should be penalized.

## Color



Grey or white frost is permitted on the muzzle and is not a sign of aging. This shows acceptable frosting.



This picture shows reddening of the coat due to climate conditions.



# Gait

## AKC Standard

Motion should be smooth, free and easy, seemingly never tiring, exhibiting facility of movement rather than a hard driving action. He tends to single track on a fast gait; the legs, both front and rear, converging toward the center line of gravity of the dog. The backline should remain firm and level, parallel to the line of motion, with no crabbing. He shows a marked tendency to move in a circle rather than a straight line.



## Discussion

The Belgian Sheepdog should excel in movement. It should be one of its most outstanding assets. In every aspect, movement should show total balance and efficiency. Nothing about the gait should show effort or lack of symmetry between all of the parts. At no time should the front and rear quarters of the dog seem to be out of balance or coordination. The gait is light and graceful, with easy but not extreme reach. As with everything else in the breed, the ideal is perfect balance.



The Belgian Sheepdog's backline in movement should remain firm and level with no excess rolling or choppy motion. The Belgian should give the impression that they can continue at their natural speed all day, having not only great endurance but also agility. They should appear to be capable of making quick turns needed for herding and working tasks. Coming and going, the dog should approach a single-track when moved at a trot, neither interfering with itself nor traveling on a wide base.

Notice the position of the feet, the front feet are at the tip of the nose and the rear foot has the same amount of extension. Also notice how relaxed this movement appears, you should notice ease of motion at all times.

## **Additional Information on Movement**

As the speed increases the legs converge toward the center line. The Belgian Sheepdog tends to single track.



Notice the position of the tail, it should be an extension of the top line. This photo shows nice flexibility in the front and rear, nice extension without being hard driving.





## **Additional Information on Movement**

Notice the tail position, this is also acceptable. The tail tends to rise as they reach full speed and the excitement increases. It can be carried slightly above the top line.

The tail comes off the topline level then rises toward the end. This is typical, the standard wording states, “When in action he raises it and gives it a curl, which is strongest towards the tip, without forming a hook.”





# Temperament

## AKC Standard

The Belgian Sheepdog should reflect the qualities of intelligence, courage, alertness, and devotion to master. To his inherent aptitude as a guardian of flocks should be added protectiveness of the person and property of his master. He should be watchful, attentive and always in motion when not under command. In his relationship with humans, he should be observant and vigilant with strangers, but not apprehensive. He should not show fear or shyness. He should not show viciousness by unwarranted or unprovoked attack. With those he knows well, he is not affectionate and friendly, zealous of their attention, and very possessive. Viciousness is a disqualification.



## Discussion

Belgian Sheepdogs should not be fearful. They should be very stable and intelligent dogs. Temperament is very important to their ability as a working dog.

When judging our breed, please ask yourself if this dog would be able to walk down a crowded street, visit a nursing home or stand firm and protect his home. The BSCA requests that you give awards only to those specimens of the breed that conform to our standard and to heavily penalize those that do not.

If you cannot examine a dog, or it has to be physically held up, or it cannot move around the ring with confidence – **DO NOT AWARD THE POINTS.**

The BSCA feels so strongly about the temperament of our dogs that a letter has been prepared for all judges. To read a copy of this letter, please see the next page.

## BSCA LETTER

Dear Judge:

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter which is being sent to all judges of Belgian Sheepdogs. As you are reading this letter, please consider the **IMPORTANT** role you play in the future welfare of our breed.

Our Standard states:

“The Belgian Sheepdog should reflect qualities of intelligence, courage, alertness and devotion to master.

In his relationship with humans, he should be observant and vigilant with strangers but not apprehensive.

He should not show fear or shyness.

He should not show viciousness by unwarranted or unprovoked attack.”

The members and breeders of the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America are trying to improve the image of our breed. Belgian Sheepdogs should not be fearful! They should be **VERY STABLE** and **INTELLIGENT** dogs. Temperament is very important to their ability as a working dog.

We write this letter, strongly requesting that you give awards **ONLY TO THOSE SPECIMENS OF THE BREED THAT CONFORM TO OUR STANDARD AND TO HEAVILY PENALIZE THOSE THAT DO NOT!** When judging our breed, please ask yourself if this dog would be able to walk down a crowded street, visit a nursing home or stand firm and protect his home, as well as have the correct structure it takes to herd or compete in obedience.

If you cannot examine a dog, or it has to be physically held up, or it cannot move around the ring with confidence – **DO NOT AWARD THE POINTS!**

It is within your power to withhold ribbons or to excuse or disqualify any dog. We are sure that a few shows of receiving no ribbons, dogs with questionable temperaments will not continue to be entered; or, through proper training and socialization, the dog will demonstrate temperament worthy of the points. If not, the dog will not finish its championship and hopefully will not be bred.

Sincerely,

The Membership of the  
Belgian Sheepdog Club of America

# **Disqualifications**

## **AKC Standard**

Males under 22 ½ or over 27 ½ inches in height

Females under 20 ½ or over 25 ½ inches in height

Ears hanging (as on a hound)

Cropped or stump tail

Any color other than black

Viciousness

Approved December 11, 1990  
Effective January 30, 1991



# A Review

## Discussion

Looking realistically at showing and breeding, the perfect dog has yet to be born. A judge must learn to be forgiving in the sense that each fault seen be put in perspective, taking the entire dog into consideration. While it is of primary importance that the Belgian Sheepdog has the character and the structure to enable it to perform as a herding dog, it is also of great importance that the dogs possess the characteristics that make it unmistakably a Belgian Sheepdog.

The judge must be able to answer the question “How seriously do these faults affect the working ability of the dog or detract from the essence of the breed?”

It is our desire that a judge recognize outstanding quality and breed type when it is presented in the ring.

