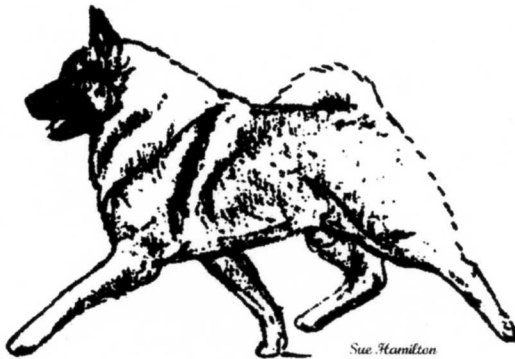


THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURE IN THE NORWEGIAN ELKHOUND

FORM VERSUS FUNCTION

By Daniel R. Lawer, D.V.M.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel R. Lawer, D.V.M. has been a member of the Norwegian Elkhound Association of America, Inc. Canine Health and Research Committee since its inception in 1998, overseeing the DNA typing and research of the Norwegian Elkhound. He graduated in 1970 from Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine and served over six years in the U.S. Air Force Veterinary Corp before starting private practice in Sacramento, California in 1977. Dr. Lawer is the past president of the Sacramento Valley Veterinary Medical Association and has served on the AKC Tracking Advisory Committee. He is currently the Tracking Program Coordinator for the Sacramento Dog Training Club, an approved AKC tracking judge, and a breeder/exhibitor of Norwegian Elkhounds since 1973 working his dogs to both obedience and tracking titles.

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Recommended Reading:

Canine Terminology, Harold R. Spira, Howell Book House, Inc., 1982

Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis, Curtis M. Brown, Hoflin Publishing, Ltd., 1986

Dogsteps, Illustrated Gait at a Glance, Rachel Page Elliott

Interpretive Comments on the Norwegian Elkhound and Standard, NEAA 1989

Official Standard of the Norwegian Elkhound, Approved December 13, 1988

The Dog in Action, McDowell Lyon, Howell Book Co., 1950

INTRODUCTION

After the 2000 National Specialty, I entered into discussions with other members of the NEAA regarding comments made by the specialty judge at the annual awards dinner. We felt that it was appropriate to remind those in the fancy, particularly breeders, that the Standard was written for a purpose, that this dog must be put together correctly if it is to function as it was intended — a medium sized working dog with great stamina and agility.

It is easy to measure the height of the dog and rule out those that are too big or too small. Any individual more than one inch above or be-

low the Standard is to be avoided. Add to this the proper proportions of leg and back length, and we should have a dog that is well balanced and appears square in profile.

The Standard recommends bitches be 19½ inches and dogs 20½ inches at the withers.

Whether the head is too broad or too narrow ... or the ears too big or too low set ... does not really have much to do with the ability of the dog to work in the field. However, how the bones and joints are put together has a tremendous impact on this. There seems to be a great emphasis on the picture presented by side movement — how much reach (stride length), how much extension front and rear, and nothing else. Single tracking, the front and rear movement of coming and going, seems to be of lesser importance to some. Unfortunately, this is a serious mistake.

Imagine your dog to be like a fine automobile with independent four-wheel suspension. Well tuned and properly running, it is a pleasure to drive all day long. Now, imagine riding in that same automobile with no springs or worn out shock absorbers. Your back, and backside, would get very tired very quickly. This is what your

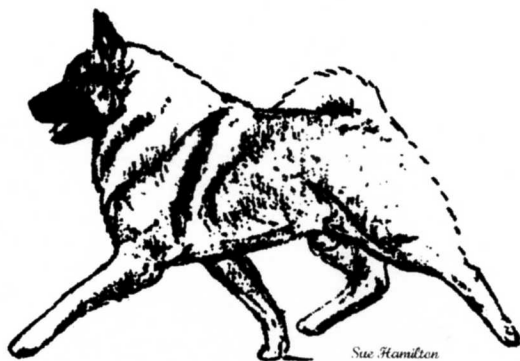


dog feels like if the feet are not correct. Well-constructed feet — relatively small, tightly closed toes, slightly oval — act like shock absorbers to your dog. If they are flat and loose, there is no spring and the dog tires easily. Unlike people that can put arch supports in their shoes, dogs with flat feet get tired feet. They wear out quickly.

The rest of the joints in the leg, from the shoulder and hip to the carpus (wrist) and hock, are also a part of the suspension system of the dog. If they are out of alignment, poorly tuned, the dog tires easily. My first two Elkhounds provided an excellent contrast in suspension. Smokey had a very straight front while Holly had excellent front assembly. I would exercise them while I rode a bicycle. Smokey would last about one block with his top line moving up and down like a yoyo while Holly could go all day with a table top smooth back. If you would like to test this on yourself, see how far you run with your legs stiff. Each step causes your whole body to shudder. You tire easily. A dog with a straight front or rear tires very quickly. The well put together Elkhound performs well because their suspension system, the feet and joints, are properly constructed and angled.

Another important part of structure is the distance between the front and rear legs. Unlike the Pontiac Grand Prix, wider is not better in the Elkhound. Neither is too narrow. An Elkhound

should look neither like a Bulldog nor a Whippet. When standing naturally, the legs should be straight and parallel when seen from the front or the rear. The elbows should not be pinched, the feet should point straight ahead, neither turned in or out. Any dramatic deviation affects the efficiency of movement. Any amount of extra effort that might be required to move poorly assembled legs decreases stamina.



the wet and cold freezing temperatures. It should not be fluffy like a Keeshond or Chow Chow. The open, fluffy coats are incorrect as they allow moisture to get to the insulating undercoat and skin, which allows the trapped warmth of the undercoat to escape. These fluffy dogs look bigger and more impressive, but they cannot withstand the cold and wet weather of the far North.

A well setup and arched neck gives carriage to the Elkhound. Proper angulation of the shoulders and elbows allow for efficient muscle movement and add to proper function of these joints in the suspension system of the front leg. The pastern should be strong and only slightly bent. Proper tip of the pelvis and angulation of the hip, stifle (knee) and hock insure similarly efficient movement in the hind leg. A plumb line dropped straight down the back of the thigh should line up with the metatarsus (rear pastern). We are seeing too many dogs now that look more like Boxers or German Shepherds when stacked, with their hind feet being placed too far back in order to have the metatarsus perpendicular to the ground. This is wrong for the Elkhound and affects the dog's stamina.

If we present judges with correct dogs they will win. If we present incorrect dogs, judges will put up the best of the worst and some will become champions and make more incorrect dogs that will go on to win more. I feel it is unfortunate that too many American dog show judges feel obligated to judge dogs against what else is in the ring rather than against the Standard. We do the breed a disservice by continually breeding what wins instead of what is correct. The Standard was written for a reason — function follows form. It should be studied and each breeding carried out to strive and get each new litter as close as possible to the Standard. Do not breed a dog just because it wins a lot or because it is close by. If we breed the best we have to the best available, pretty soon we will have dogs in the ring that win because they are correct, not just flashy.

While coat does not affect physical stamina, it does impact the dog's ability to withstand the cold temperatures of the far North. The coat is accurately described in the Standard. The outer guard hairs are to be hard and smooth lying, the undercoat dense and soft. It must be resistant to



AKC BREED STANDARD

General Description: The Norwegian Elkhound is a hardy gray hunting dog. In appearance, a typical northern dog of medium size and substance, square in profile, close coupled and balanced in proportions. The head is broad with prick ears, and the tail is tightly curled and carried over the back. The distinctive gray coat is dense and smooth-lying. As a hunter, the Norwegian Elkhound has the courage, agility and stamina to hold moose and other big game at bay by barking and dodging attack, and the endurance to track for long hours in all weather over rough and varied terrain.

The forequarters (thoracic limbs) of the dog are each composed of approximately 41 bones. All but five are in the foot. While not attached to any bones, most dogs do have a small clavicle. It is buried in a tendon of one of the muscles and serves no functional purpose. Unlike the cat, the canine clavicle is rarely visible up on X-rays. The upper arm (brachium) contains the humerus, the largest bone in the forelimb. It articulates with the shoulder blade (scapula) to form the shoulder joint and the radius and ulna of the forearm to form the elbow joint. The radius is the main weight bearing bone of the forearm. The longest bone in the dog, the ulna parallels the radius and serves as the back portion of the elbow joint and for muscle attachment.

The shoulder blade (scapula) is the large, flat bone of the shoulder. Triangular in shape, it is attached only by muscles to the body. The inner surface is flat and a shelf of bone, the spine of the scapula, divides the outer surface. The spine is an easily palpable ridge running almost the full length of the scapula.

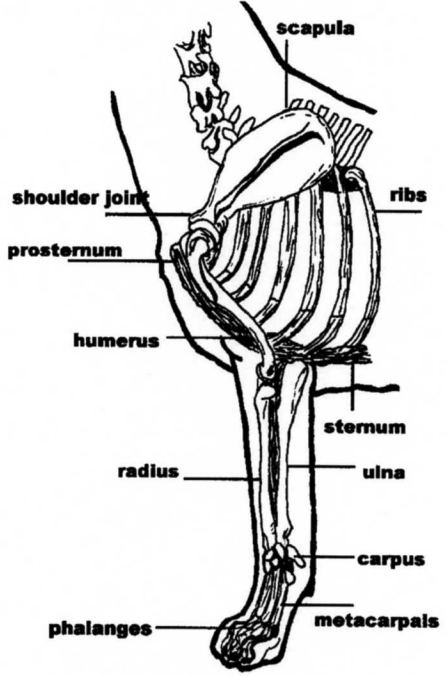
The ideal slope of the scapula is about 45 degrees. Since the front leg cannot move forward much more than the angle of the scapula, the amount of layback affects the reach of


the front leg. The shaft of the humerus (upper arm) should be almost at a right angle to the scapula. The distance from point of the shoulder to the top of scapula should be about the same as that from the point of the shoulder to the tip of the elbow. When standing, the elbow should be level with the bottom of the brisket (sternum).

The bones of the foreleg should be straight and perpendicular to the ground while the pastern (metacarpal bones) should be strong and only slightly bent (10-15 degrees) when the dog is standing straight. The bones that make up the framework of the leg should be "substantial, but not coarse", neither too fine nor too heavy.

Viewed from the front, the legs should be straight and parallel without any turning in or out of the bones or joints. For balance when standing, there may be a slight tendency for the feet to toe out a little.

Ideally the radius (forearm) should be about the same length as the humerus (upper arm) so when the elbow is fully flexed the wrist



 **AKC BREED STANDARD**
Forequarters: Shoulders sloping with elbows closely set on. Legs well under body and medium in length; substantial, but not coarse, in bone. Seen from the front, the legs appear straight and parallel. Single dewclaws are normally present.

Feet: Paws comparatively small, slightly oval with tightly closed toes and thick pads. Pasterns are strong and only slightly bent. Feet turn neither in nor out.

