

## **Bull Terrier Quarterly, Spring 1994, Never a Dull Moment, by David Harris**

### **Bull Terrier Movement**

There are possible Freudian undertones to my finding topics other than movement to fill a column which is supposed to be devoted to movement. Indeed, I came up with the heading "The Assault on Fortress Movement," but decided this was overly melodramatic. However, I do believe movement is a particularly challenging aspect of our breed. I say this for a couple of reasons: primarily because of the spectrum of types within the breed, but also because of the unwarranted expectation amongst many all-round judges that BTs should share the flowing movement of breeds with similar leg length, but narrower chests and far looser musculature. If the BTs in a class are all at about the same point in the spectrum of types, it is a pretty straightforward job determining how well they move and placing them in order of merit. Comparing movement in a class of BTs ranging across the full spectrum of types and then relating their movement to that of other breeds is a monumental challenge. Some readers may consider that we have a pretty good handle on movement within the breed. In response, I suggest careful scrutiny of the critiques in *Barks*; select a number of dogs that are being shown regularly, then write down your own critique of their movement and compare it to the published ones. A few dogs receive pretty consistent evaluations, but many do not. I would go further to suggest much greater inconsistency of views on front movement than rear.

In making these assertions, I am not suggesting for one moment that I have all the answers or that I have a better handle on assessing movement than my fellow breeder-judges. Simply, I'm stating that it ain't as easy as we might think when glancing at the standard. I would add here that I probably do place greater importance on shoulder construction and front movement than do many breeder-judges, and, inevitably, this does color my views.

It may surprise newcomers to the breed that the English Standard did not cover movement specifically until 1986! While the American Standard made scant reference in the 1936 version: "GAIT, springy and swinging, without roll or pace." Then in 1956 came the NEW standard: "MOVEMENT: The dog shall move smoothly, covering the ground with free, easy strides, fore and hind legs should move parallel each to each when viewed from in front or behind. The forelegs reaching out well and the hind legs moving smoothly at the hip and flexing well at the stifle and hock. The dog should move compactly and in one piece, but with a typical jaunty air that suggest agility and power." This graphic description survived the 1974 revisions and remains as our guide today.

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As an aside, when those “steel” men of the Black country put together the original standard for the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, they did not see fit to include a section on movement. The story behind this is typical of the dry sense of humor of Midlanders. Reportedly, the discussion on movement at the bar of the Old Cross Guns was abruptly terminated with the declaration that “they ay [aren’t] supposed to run away.” Next item on the agenda, please.

The Illustrated Standard for the Bull Terrier put together for the Bull Terrier Club by none other than Tom Horner is still – for me – the bible. I carry a battered copy of the 1972 edition with me to judging engagements, perusing the contents at leisure on my flight to the show. It is commendably brief, not attempting to cross all t’s and dot all i’s with personal prejudices. However, it says quite enough to stimulate one’s grey matter into analysis and reassessment of the key points of the breed. This first edition discusses movement under the heading General Remarks:

“To sum up ... balance – the correct proportion between the parts – is essential in the Bull Terrier. He must be neither too leggy nor too short on the leg; neither too long nor too short in body, but must stand covering a lot of ground, yet with a short, strong back. Then he will attain the highest degree of propelling power, with the greatest length of stride that is COMPATIBLE [emphasis mine] with his general physique.

“Movement is the crucial test of conformation. The forelegs should be carried straight forward, swinging perpendicularly in parallel with the midline of the body. The principal propulsive power is furnished by the hind legs, perfection of action being found in Bull Terriers possessing **WELL MUSCLED THIGHS** and **SECOND THIGHS** [emphasis mine], correctly angulated at the stifle and hock, which produce a strong forward thrust from the hocks. The pads of the feet should be clearly seen when the dog moves away.

“When approaching, the feet should be the same distance apart at the elbows. When stationary, it is often difficult to determine whether a dog is loose at elbow, but as soon as it moves it becomes apparent, the forelegs having a tendency to ‘cross’ or ‘weave.’ When the dog is ‘tied in’ at the shoulder the feet point outwards with a paddling action.

“When hocks are turned in, ‘cowhocks,’ stifles and feet turn outwards, with serious loss of drive. When hocks turn out, ‘bow hocks,’ the hind feet tend to turn in or cross.

“Movement should be assessed from the side as well as from in front and behind. Only then can the length of stride, ease of movement and balance be correctly seen. The Bull Terrier should be moved on a loose lead, never strung up so that his forefeet barely touch the ground.”

During the early 1970's, a red dog named Retsancl Melody Maker was a regular at championship shows, collecting many (more than a dozen, I believe) reserve challenge certificates, though never one of the coveted green cards. I was in awe of this dog's parallel movement and long, free strides. One day I was discussing movement with Raymond Oppenheimer and made the mistake of pointing to Melody Maker as a really good moving BT. This was not a good example, as Raymond made abundantly clear by his immediate departure to talk to someone else. Much later, I asked Raymond to point out to me an example of what he considered to be correct Bull Terrier movement. Time passed by and I assumed he had forgotten about my request, when one day he called me over to watch Miss McCombie's brindle bitch Monkery's Harmony traverse the usual triangle. She powered her way around the ring much as Tom Horner describes above. She possessed excellent spring of rib and a compact body, all in balance with her front and rear angulation, plus well-muscled thighs. She moved as a BT should with that typical jauntiness, even a hint of a roll. In contrast, Melody Maker was a superb moving dog, but not a superb moving Bull Terrier. He was slab sided and long in loin, permitting him wonderfully free movement. But for a BT he lacked type behind the collar, which no doubt explains his failure to win any challenge certificates. I should add here that if competing in America today Melody Maker would probably be highly successful in the Group ring.

To some degree, Melody Maker's movement was closer to that of an Am Staff, though without that unique springiness that enables top moving Am Staffs to "float" around the ring. Watching Am Staffs like Winning Ticket and the male in the AKC video (a relation?) move is just joy to behold. A correctly constructed BT simply cannot match such reach, freedom or grace of movement; they are broader, more compact dogs and possess, as explained by Tom, movement COMPATIBLE with this general physique. In a sense, BTs occupy the middle ground between Am Staffs and Staffordshires. The Staffie is even broader and lower to the ground; indeed, looking head-on, his legs, chest and the ground should make a square. So, judges who expect a Staffie of correct type to approach some abstract ideal of canine movement are going to rate him lowly in this regard. This is why the poor Staffie is often harshly treated in the Group ring, as is the more bully type of BT; the best ones move well and correctly **FOR THEIR PHYSIQUE.**

Returning to BTs, let me make several propositions regarding their movement. These are personal views, made in part to stimulate further discussion. First, today's BTs tend to be too long in hock, leading to movement that is more "hocky" and generally more untidy than the ideal. Second, the correct middle of the road BT has an angle of greater than 90 degrees between shoulder blade and upper arm. The third concerns hind movement; the requirement for a cobby BT to move parallel going away demands a bowing out of the legs from the hip joints.

Let us explore these propositions. The one concerning hock length is hardly controversial; they are too long. Unfortunately, this is so universal – and the problem so low on the totem pole for us as breeders – that the situation is unlikely to change in the near term. Our best hope is for a great stud dog that happens to sport really well let down hocks.

The issue of shoulder angulation being greater than 90 degrees is more argumentative. I am not suggesting there aren't BTs around with 90-degree angulation. However, I do submit that if we construct the exemplary Bull Terrier, per the standard of perfection, we would find an angle of 100, possibly 110, degrees. In other words, there is an inconsistency between this model physique and the requirement of 90 degrees. The corollary: dogs that meet this requirement deviate from ideal construction in doing so. Much ado about nothing? Perhaps, but aren't we telling judges to expect greater extension than our model dog can achieve and so pointing them towards less-than ideal construction (less spring of rib, for example)?

Now to parallel rear movement. It seems to me this is achieved, usually, in one of two ways. Most "really good" movers in the breed tend to be a tad flatter in chest and longer in loin than perfection. For example, the dogs selected to demonstrate movement in the AKC video fall into this category. Both are truly outstanding dogs and they move with the sort of reach and drive for which we all aim. They are beautifully put together and move about as well as they possibly could, given their physique. They are just to one side of our model dog. If we move an equal distance in the other direction – to a dog with greater spring of rib and a very short back – there is no way such a BT can match our video dogs for reach and grace of movement. Angulation of shoulder and stifle is reduced – in BALANCE with the overall physique of this more bully dog. He may have wonderfully muscular thighs and second thighs, producing tremendous drive. However, on the flip side, his reduced extension and typically closer hind movement is unlikely to attract the Group judge.

But there is a category of more bully BTs that sport outstanding hind action. This they achieve not so much by angulation of stifle as by a slight bowing out of the legs from the hips. The rear legs are set further apart, permitting the dog to really motor along with legs absolutely parallel. Such construction is also less prone to convergence, as speed increases, than is the case for our video dogs.

Observation, over the years, of a leading British line suggests that such "bowing out" can be carried too far. This line has produced many of the best moving BTs to be found anywhere. However, the line is also marked by the occasional appearance of quite unsound dogs, in which the bowing is so great that stifles slip and hips seem unstable. Such unsound dogs may come from apparently sound stock and may themselves produce progeny with

excellent hind action. So, breeders may be walking a fine line when it comes to bowing out rear assemblies.

It is always a joy to behold outstanding hind action on dogs of more bullish persuasion. Regrettably, such dogs rarely present front movement to match. Shoulders and front movement on these dogs are at best only adequate, though this does not seem to discourage the writing of critiques describing them as fabulous movers. There are times, I guess, when front movement simply doesn't count.

There is much more we could discuss, but enough is enough. Let me close this column with these thoughts: Don't expect all Bull Terriers to conform to some mythical criterion of good canine movement; balance is essential; movement should be compatible with physique.