

Judging The Bull Terrier

By Victoria Corse (Corsaire Bull Terriers)(FIRST PRINTED JUST TERRIERS MAGAZINE, VOL 3 NO.2)

Raymond Oppenheimer, arguably the most influential Bull Terrier breeder-judge of the Twentieth Century, once wrote, "*Lack of virtue is the greatest fault of all.*" Any judge would do well to keep that statement engraved in their brain as they step into the ring to begin sorting through their Bull Terrier classes.

The Bull Terrier Club of America encourages judges to reward virtue in their entries, as opposed to "*fault judging*", or attempting to eliminate an animal because of an easily discernable flaw. To that end, the standard clearly states that, "*Any departure from the foregoing points shall be considered a fault, and the seriousness of the fault shall be in proportion to its degree...*" Bull Terrier exhibitors seem to be most affected by the propensity of the non-breeder judge to eliminate from consideration any animal lacking a perfect scissor bite. The bite is the perfect example of "*degree of fault*", because the correct egg-shaped Bull Terrier head asks for what should be impossible; that the lower jaw must in some way manage to compensate for the upward arch of the top skull and meet in the required "*level or a scissor bite*", as opposed to undershot, or narrow, with in-standing canine teeth. The balance between that lovely, type-defining head, and a functional and healthy dentition is an ongoing struggle for breeders and judges alike, and must be carefully weighed in any decision.

When I judge a class of Bull Terriers, there is always the "*breeder's eye*" lurking in the back of my decisions; the question of whether I feel that the particular Bull Terrier has the type and virtue to contribute to the progress of the breed. Because the head defines our breed most clearly, it is what I focus on first. "*Begin at the front, and work your way back*" is a good way to orient yourself to priorities.

Bull Terriers should be particularly three-dimensional dogs. While a lovely silhouette can make you catch your breath, there must also be width, and a sense of substance and muscle to a Bullie. When you put your hands on a Bull Terrier head, (and oh, yes, you **MUST** put your hands on that head to know what it really is, especially if it is a solid color, or if white, has dark markings) you should feel your palms filled with a solid, football shaped bulk. A dramatically curved profile that has no width and fill is of no more value than a big, fat head with a concave profile, or an eyebrow so defined as to resemble a stop. That Bull Terrier head must say "*Bull Terrier*" from every view... eggs, after all, don't have angles!

Correct eye and expression are also vital to that correct head; there must be the high, triangular and obliquely set dark eyes that give the characteristic "*piercing glint*", and triangular ears right on top of the head. A Bull Terrier with rounded and gentle eyes, or ears set low on the sides of the head does not convey, "*keen, determined and intelligent expression, full of fire...*" but instead reminds one of a placid cow.

If a dog with a particularly lovely head and expression is hampered by an incorrect bite, the question becomes one of degree; how far a departure from perfection is the bite? I pause only minimally for a bite that is undershot, but that still has upper incisors in contact with the lower. Often referred to as a "*reverse scissor*", this configuration causes no discomfort or inconvenience to the dog's health and well-being, nor does it offend the eye to any great extent. The further out the lower incisors move from the upper, the more likely that the lower jaw will appear disproportionate, and that the dog's ability to pull apart its food will be affected. Far more serious, to my mind, than a minimal underbite, is the perfect scissor bite that is allowed only by a narrowed bottom jaw. This narrowed jaw sets the lower canine teeth inside the gum line and digs them into the hard palate. While the Bull Terrier standard makes no mention of premolars, or of counting teeth, it is still extremely important that judges look past the incisors and back into the mouth. Both lower canines should be visible from gum to tip, and set outside the upper jaw, and the incisors should be uncrowded and in alignment with the gum line.

Despite the importance of head and expression, a Bull Terrier should still be unmistakably a Bull Terrier, even if its head is hidden from sight. Keeping in mind the three-dimensional importance of the Bull Terrier, a strong, arched neck should meet the body at a shoulder that is broad and flat, covered by smoothly sculpted muscle. The body should be shapely, with a visible definition between ribcage and abdomen, and equally well muscled. The strength of the front end should be carried through the short, gently rounded loin into a powerful rear end with well-developed second thighs. Don't be fooled by extra weight, packed onto a skeleton that lacks the good round bone that can support the bulk. Fat can never substitute for honest substance, made up of hard-earned muscle and solid, round bone.

Like many other breeds, there has also been a move towards mistaking "big boned" with "mammoth". Our standard clearly states "not to the point of coarseness". As you step back from the dog, the overall picture should be of a versatile athlete; one with strength, flexibility, and explosive power. All the components of a good Bull Terrier may be wrapped in a 45 pound, Terrier style package, or in a 75 pound Bull type one. Bigger does not necessarily equal better, and the deciding factor should go beyond personal preference to the overall type, proportion, and balance of the dog in question. Equally, a big dog with

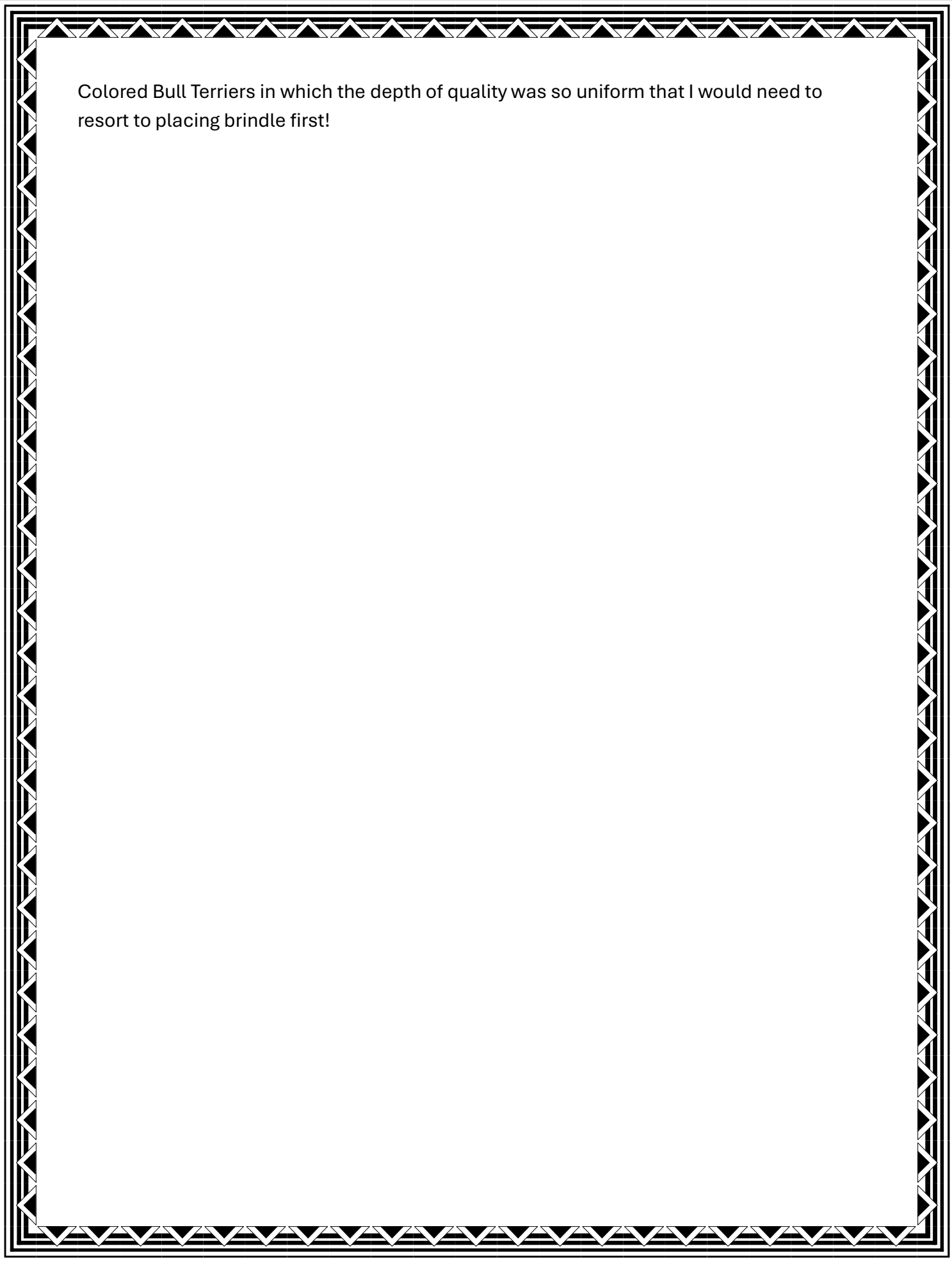
correct proportions and balance should not be penalized for its size. There is no mention of height or weight in the Standard for Bull Terriers.

Movement may answer any questions still remaining as to the relative virtues of the dogs in the ring. Bull Terrier movement is not best measured at high speeds. The movement should be clean and parallel, but instead of the racing trot of a Working or Sporting breed, each step should exhibit power and agility, with an air of supreme indifference to the forces of gravity! The standard describes ideal movement as both "jaunty" and "smooth". Therefore, there should be no hint of restriction to the gait, nor should there be any hint of restriction. Both a coarse Bully and an overly refined one will exhibit compromise in their movement; one caused by its ungainly bulk, the other by its lack of power. If a dog is moved out at racing speeds, by all means ask the handler to slow down. A racing gait can hide deficiencies of power, and attempt to dazzle by side gait when impulsion is lacking.

As for any breed, type and soundness combined will produce the ideal Bull Terrier. Faced by the usual spectrum of sizes and styles, judges must ask themselves which exhibit best combines the presence of virtue and the absence of fault. In what animal lies the unmistakable and unique head quality and presence that "screams" Bull Terrier (Bull Terriers are not subtle dogs) while also demonstrating structural integrity and athletic movement? While one dog may stand out to any eye, as the judge moves through the class, the challenge becomes to balance the dogs exhibiting extremes of both virtue and fault against those who approach a more middle ground... and lack any real "presence". Here is where the "breeder's eye" becomes insistent. If a fault is one that I know will reappear generation after generation, I steer away from it in my breeding program, and often in the ring as well. An out at elbow front, with clear curve to the long bones of the front legs is an example of a fault that can haunt a breeding program for generations, and that will cause visible cringing from some breeder judges and so is an overly roached topline, with its corresponding lack of reach and drive in the rear movement. A minor mouth fault causes me no such soul-searching, nor does a bit of extra length of back, provided that the topline is strong and flexible, both standing and on the move. As a breeder judge, I am very hard on expression. To me, a Bull Terrier that lacks a "varminty" little eye lacks type, and I know how hard it is to consistently produce the correctly placed and shaped eye. That expression is a virtue on which I place a high value, just as I prize a correct topline and front. Avoid the commonplace dog, and the animal whose deficiencies of make and shape seem to limit its abilities to function comfortably. Reward the Bull Terrier who demonstrates its virtues of type and structure in a package that demands your attention, and whose confident, outgoing demeanor reflects its sound temperament.

Bull Terriers are primarily an owner-handled breed. An additional burden for the judge is the need to see past deficiencies in presentation to the virtue of the dog. It can be exasperating to watch while a neophyte handler fusses with bait, mishandles the lead and generally confuses the situation.... and their dog! However, as more and more Bull Terrier breeders encourage their puppy buyers to venture out into the dog show world, it is deeply satisfying to watch a new-comer's eyes light up and their chest swell with pride as they achieve even minor wins in the all-breed ring. It is also gratifying to hear, "The judge was SO patient with me; I was so afraid I wouldn't do my dog justice, but he made me feel like I did just fine!" That's an actual quote, made in reference to someone's first time in the ring, under Charlie Foley. That "newbie" and their Bull Terrier are halfway to an owner-handled championship, thanks to the encouragement they received, and their handling skills have improved markedly with experience. A good dog's virtue should be discernable under any circumstances, although complete disregard for ring procedure and protocol shouldn't be rewarded. Don't forget to look past the loop end of that leash and focus on what is presented, even if the presentation lacks polish.

One final word... in many breeds color and markings are a critical component of breed type. In Bull Terriers, there are four issues regarding color. Number one is a disqualification. Should a Colored Bull Terrier actually have white markings covering more than 50% of its body, it must be disqualified. There are animals who visibly walk a razor's edge as regards the amount of white coat. However, unless a judge chooses to actually disqualify the dog for too much white, the amount and placement of white markings are irrelevant to its quality and should be disregarded. Number two is defined as "a serious fault". Any White Variety Bull Terrier who has colored marking "behind the collar" should be penalized for that color. However, a Bull Terrier of obvious virtue with a tail base patch of color should not be ignored in favor of a snow-white nonentity. Number three is the notorious "brown" issue. There is no mention of the liver pigmented Bull Terrier in the standard for the breed. However, it is important to note that the standard requires a BLACK nose and an eye "as dark as possible". A liver pigmented Bull Terrier, whether white or colored, will have a light brown or gold eye, and nose pigment is invariably brown. Therefore, that dog should be penalized for its departure from the standard, although again, its color should not eliminate from consideration an otherwise virtuous Bull Terrier. The fourth mention of color rarely comes into play, as it contains the defining phrase, "All other things being equal...", a situation so rare as to be practically unheard of. In that case, should it ever be a consideration, the standard asks that brindle be favored over other colors. The brindle factor is dominant in Bull Terriers and to produce brindle puppies, one parent must be a brindle. Without a conscious effort to maintain the presence of the brindle factor, the breed runs the risk of losing it altogether. I would personally be delighted to have a class of



Colored Bull Terriers in which the depth of quality was so uniform that I would need to resort to placing brindle first!