

## ***Virtue is its Own Reward***

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Did you ever wonder what a judge or breeder meant when he spoke of “rewarding the virtues”? Just what are the virtues he is talking about, and why should they be rewarded?

Our breed standard describes what a Bull Terrier should look like, but the descriptions are more or less a list of parts, with no emphasis given to the priorities. This makes it difficult for a person reading the standard to decide how, for instance, a clear coat is valued as compared to a filled and turned head.

It is easier to visualize the Bull Terrier Standard if the “list” is organized into four major categories. These four categories are head, bone and substance, soundness, and temperament. These are the four VIRTUES, and a Bull Terrier must possess positive characteristic attributes in all of these categories to be a good Bull Terrier.

In Bull Terriers, the distinguishing feature is the head. In order to be an obvious, typical and preferred breed specimen, the animal must have a filled-up head with no protrusions or indentations. It should have a distinctly curved profile, an undented arc from between the ears to the tip of the nose. From the front, it must be ovoid or egg shaped, with the widest part across at the eyes and the nose. The expression is important too – the correctly shaped skull is NOT enhanced by large open eyes placed low in the head (looking donkey-like). The high-placed, small, dark, triangular eye and small ears placed close together and pointing upward give the Bull Terrier a very characteristic expression, piercing and alert – This expression is often described as “varminty”.

The head must also have a deep and strong underjaw, and the teeth should meet in the correct scissors or level formation without protruding beyond the upper jaw in a frankly undershot configuration.

The correct head is a virtue comprised of elements which make up the whole. It’s difficult to find perfect in every detail, so the heaviest weight is given to the presence of correct shape, fill, and turn, giving the head a smooth, powerful and ovoid appearance. Correct details add to the positive virtue of the filled correct turned head, these being a correct bite; correct eye color, shape, and placement; correct ear placement and stiffness of the ear itself; and a black nose.

The second important virtue, almost always linked together physically, is the presence of bone and substance. The Bull Terrier has no size minimum or maximum, but the standard implies that the Bull Terrier should be the maximum dog in the available space. We want a thick, muscular animal with heavy round bone, and impression of density throughout, although not to the point of coarseness. The Bull Terrier should, with his density, maintain an impression of balance and agility, the back should be short, the shoulder sloping and muscular, the hindquarters angulated and well knit with a muscular second thigh. The underline should be deep through the brisket with a slight, but noticeable, tuck-up behind the last rib. The presence of heavy bone and a muscular dense body are virtues, the presence of the correct details such as a correctly sloping and muscular but smooth shoulder, short back, good

topline, graceful underline, and thick muscular hindquarters adds to the strength of this necessary basic virtue; bone and substance.

The third basic physical virtue in a correct Bull Terrier is soundness. The Bull Terrier must be constructed soundly with tight fitting, straight front legs, well up on the pastern. The forelegs must move parallel to the body centerline when viewed from the front. The hind legs should be angulated in the stifle from the side view, and flat and straight from the hind view, not bowed out in stifle or cow-hocked. The movement behind should be straight and true, it should also be parallel to the body centerline, but the hind legs may be slightly closer together than the front without prejudice. The Bull Terrier in motion should give an impression of power and agility.

A fourth consideration when assessing breed virtues is the temperament. The correct temperament is essential and represents the fourth major virtue. The standard says that the Bull Terrier should be of "keen, determined and intelligent expression, full of fire but of sweet disposition and amenable to discipline." This description covers a lot of ground but actually pinpoints the most characteristic virtue of the breed. A perfectly made Bull Terrier who is dull, shy or maniacally aggressive has lost the whole point of being a Bull Terrier. A cheerful, intelligent and outgoing temperament is a virtue and should be weighed as a positive, essential factor along with the three physical virtues when judging or breeding Bull Terriers.

These then are the four supreme virtues; a typical HEAD, filled and turned with good expression; DENSITY of bone and body; SOUNDNESS; and an alert, agreeable TEMPERAMENT. A Bull Terrier possessing these basic virtues, yet displaying faults such as a dudley (little or no pigmentation) nose, coat ticks, high tail set or a faulty bite should always be considered superior to an animal who lacks one or more of the basic four virtues yet is clear of minor faults.

The faults in Bull Terriers are many and diverse and the presence of a fault which is present to a large, distracting degree can have the effect of negating the presence of a basic virtue. The seriousness of a fault is described in the standard as being in exact proportion to its degree; thus a very badly undershot mouth would tend to negate the positive virtue of a correctly shaped head, although the better the head is in basic shape, strength and other detail, the worse the mouth has to be to negate its worth as a positive virtue.

Faults which affect the head shape and expression, the bone and density, the soundness, or the temperament of the Bull Terrier are more serious than those which are more in the "decorative" category such as color of nose, minor misalignment of teeth, tail carriage or length, or marks in the coat. Mismarks or colored spots on a white Bull Terrier should be penalized, but not at the expense of putting a dog lacking some or all of the basic virtues over one who has a small mismark. Large mismarks bigger than, say, a silver dollar, are distracting and deserve a more severe penalty, but the mismarked animal is still superior if he possesses a good head, bone and substance, soundness and a typical temperament, and his nearest rival lacks one or more of these basic virtues.

The breed standard for colored Bull Terriers also instructs the judge that all things being equal, brindle is preferred. Since it is very unlikely that all things would be equal, color should hardly ever be a decisive factor when judging. This preference is based on genetic principles however, as we shall see in the next part of our discussion.

The reason for the importance of rewarding the four basic virtues in the judging arena are twofold. On an individual basis, as an entity, the animal must be typical of the breed. Without the correct head, he is just a nice big white dog; without the bone and substance, he is a weed, lacking strength and power; without soundness he is prone to crippling genetic difficulties; and above all, without the correct temperament, he is either a dangerous and unpredictable menace or a quivering jelly.

It is on a breed production basis that these four virtues become so necessary in the individual animal. The Bull Terrier is a hybrid. He is made up of diverse genetic pools, a combination of a small, fine agile Terrier, a heavy muscular Bulldog, and a scopy elegant Dalmatian. In order to preserve the ideal combination of these diverse genetic origins, we try to keep the soundness and agility of the Terrier, the density and muscularity of the Bulldog, and the shape and style of the Dalmatian. We also must preserve the unique qualities of our hybrid, the head and temperament. We can only do these things in breeding if they are present in the individuals being bred. The virtues are dominant characteristics which means that unsound animals will never, of their own accord, produce soundness. Animals with poor temperaments will not, bred together, produce good temperaments, and animals with weak pooky heads will not, bred together, produce strong curved heads. The brindle color is also dominant and must be present in at least one parent to appear in the offspring.

If, in breeding, we can preserve the dominant virtues of head shape, bone and substance, soundness and temperament, we can breed away from the faults which compromise these virtues. A breeder is infinitely more likely to produce a Bull Terrier closer to the standard by breeding from (rewarding) the virtues than he would be by only breeding away from faults; for instance, breeding two animals with weak heads which had good bites and black noses. He will never produce the correct head this way although the animals he produces are free of minor faults.

Balancing the virtues and faults is the breeder's art. The straighter and sounder the animal, the more likely he is to lack substance; the denser the dog, the more likely to coarseness and crooked legs; the more filled and turned the head, the more likely to be badly undershot.

While both the breeder and judge must tend toward a balance of the virtues, their presence in the Bull Terrier must be demonstrated – if they aren't there in the parents, they won't be there in the puppies. Without each of the four virtues present in some degree, the dog in front of the judge is not a typical Bull Terrier, and the same dog used by the breeder will not produce a typical Bull Terrier.

What are the virtues? They are HEAD, DENSITY, SOUNDNESS, and TEMPERAMENT. Remember them. You'll profit by it.