

What the Bull Terrier Standard Doesn't Say

– by David Alexander

Preamble: AKC standards provide guidance for judges and breeders. They are roughly standardized in terms of explaining how a breed should look, move, and behave. Some are lengthy and detailed. Ours tends to be considered “concise”. Most are fairly definite in providing proportions, and required size, but ours lacks definitive statements in those areas. This makes life difficult for judges. Some examples:

Size: Bull Terriers can be any height or weight. The standard says nothing about either dimension.

Proportion: Most standards provide relative proportions for length vs. height, length of leg vs. depth of chest, and length of foreface vs. length of skull. Our standard is again silent on these issues. Breeders and judges alike must form their opinions and preferences based on their experience.

Some consensus exists among breeders and breeder judges that a Bull Terrier should be:

- (a) slightly off square, with some allowance for a longer back being given to bitches. Penalize bullies that are as long as freight train. Although the standard calls for a short back, adding the forequarters in front of the withers, and the hindquarters behind the pin bones provides this proportion (much like the Staffordshire).
- (b) height of leg to the elbow equals height from elbow to withers. However, the chest drops down below the elbow, giving the Bull Terrier a deep chested appearance.
- (c) length of foreface equals length of skull. The appearance of a longer foreface comes from the shorter dimension of eye to top of skull (not back of skull). Where the top of skull occurs is open to interpretation (it is not the occiput).
- (d) Width of chest vs. length of leg. We are looking for some parity here, giving the dog a broad, stable appearance. The standard provides no guidance.

Angulation. It comes closest with “hocks well let down. Hind pasterns short and upright. The stifle joint should be well bent...”. In front, “The shoulder blades should be wide and flat and there should be a very pronounced backward slope from the bottom edge of the blade to the top edge.” However, the upper arm is not addressed, nor is the amount of fore-chest that is desirable. In Bull Terriers, we would like to see good layback of shoulder, with upper arm length that allows for good reach and front action. The rear should be adequately angulated to promote drive, quick turns. Good angulation with the front legs under the BT, the rear sufficiently supporting the frame, and good movement provides a balanced look overall.

These omissions in the standard can lead to inconsistencies in the way the breed is judged, as these critical dimensions are left open to interpretation and prejudice. Judges and breeders therefore have some latitude in size, proportion and angulation. The hope is that judges look for BT who offer quality and balance, as well as fulfilling requirements stated in the standard, and that preservation breeders present them with such specimens.