

10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE JUDGING *the Scottish Deerhound*

BY PAULA PASCOE

1. BREED HISTORY

The Deerhound was developed in Scotland for coursing and bringing down the red deer, a species that still thrives in Britain. The red deer is considerably larger than the whitetail deer we are accustomed to in the United States, the red deer in Scotland being around four feet tall and weighing several hundred pounds. The hounds normally coursed and brought down the deer in pairs.

Clearly a member of the Greyhound family, the Deerhound was developed by the Scots, his various distinguishing features a reflection of his function and homeland. A dog with greater strength and speed than the basic greyhound-type dog was needed to be effective on the big red deer. Comparing the Deerhound to the Greyhound and Irish Wolfhound gives one perspective on where the Deerhound should fall in terms of size and substance – the dog had to be larger of size and bone than the Greyhound, but not as big and substantial



A stunning bitch, with a correct coat shedding water!

Photo: Grant Dickson

as the Irish Wolfhound. The climate and vegetation of Scotland dictated the Deerhound coat, which was also developed for function, the ideal coat shedding rain and briars.

The Deerhound has existed as a recognizable type for hundreds of years. There are numerous written accounts of hunting with large, fast Scottish Sighthounds in the 16th Century.

Deerhounds were well established as a breed 200 years ago. They were shown at the very first organized dog show that included breeds other than gundogs, held in 1860 in Britain.

A lovely head. Note the parallel head planes, aquiline muzzle and strong underjaw.

Photo: Pam Smithson

2. THE STANDARD

The original breed standard was drafted in 1892, and reads much like today's standard in the general description of the dog. There has been one material change in the standard since the original writing, that being the text describing the desired height, the specifications for which were raised in the early 20th Century.

3. TYPE

The breed standard describes type in a nutshell in this one sentence: "A Deerhound should resemble a rough-coated Greyhound of larger size and bone." Like the Greyhound, the Deerhound's outline should be a series of flowing curves, with a well-arched loin, a deep brisket gracefully drawn up in a curved underline to a well-cut-up belly, and long, angulated bones in the front and rear assemblies.

The Deerhound should represent a combination of strength and elegance. The hound should not appear coarse or lumbering, nor should it be weedy or dainty. It is a hound of speed and power, striking a fine balance between the two.

The Deerhound should be generous in its proportions, long and rangy of body and leg – not compact nor cobby, and not low on leg. The neck should be moderately long and very strong.

4. MOVEMENT

Our standard is concise in its description of correct Deerhound movement: "Easy, active and true." The British standard adds "...with a long stride." A Deerhound should be light on its feet, with a balanced movement that gives the impression of the dog floating effortlessly. When you see a hound move this way, you

know immediately what the words “easy” and “active” ask for. Typical Deerhound movement is springy and lilted.

The loin, croup and hindquarter construction of the Deerhound is probably the main reason the hound is propelled a bit upward as well as forward at the trot, giving the Deerhound the lift one does not see in, for example, a Great Dane. A big, open stride is wanted – restricted or mincing movement is, of course, incorrect. Conventional expectations of true columns of support when seen from the front and rear apply to Deerhounds.

5. SIZE

As mentioned earlier, the present-day standard has not been changed materially since the original writing, with one exception – height. The height specifications originally called for a male to stand 28 to 30 inches. Early in the 20th Century this was changed to request that a dog should not be less than 30 inches. The current American standard asks for a dog to be 30 to 32 inches tall, “or even more if there be symmetry without coarseness” Bitches are to be a minimum of 28 inches,



Beautiful eye shape, size and placement, with the classic soft expression.

Photo: Pam Smithson

with the standard adding, “There is no objection to a bitch being large, unless too coarse, as even at her greatest height she does not approach that of the dog, and therefore could not be too big for work as overbig dogs are.”

This is an interesting remark, as many tall bitches not only approach, but surpass, the height of smaller dogs. Even more interesting is the mention of an “overbig” dog, with no explanation of what would be considered “overbig.” Since the standard also says “As tall as possible, consistent with quality” (point # 3 in the standard’s “Points of the Deerhound, Arranged in

Order of Importance”), “overbig” is up to interpretation. This matter is the source of periodic argument among the most expert fanciers in the breed!

The bottom line has to be that you must use today’s standard as your guide when evaluating dogs in the show ring, and a tall dog is strongly encouraged. It is important to keep size up in a giant breed, just as it is to keep it down in a Toy breed.

Weight is specified to be 85 to 110 pounds for a male and 75 to 95 pounds for a bitch. This wide range should be matched with the range of height one might find, with the shortest hounds being of the lightest weights, and the heaviest weights belonging to the taller hounds.

I believe most hounds in the ring today answer well the standard’s height and weight requirements. I heard that one judge called a 32-inch, 110-pound male in her ring “too big,” and I can’t imagine the basis for this remark, given our standard’s specifications.

The Deerhound should give the impression of being strong and swift, finding a delicate balance between speed and power, substance and refinement. The Deerhound should have good bone and muscle, and still appear elegant.

6. HEAD

A Deerhound’s head is one of its most important features – it is ranked fourth in the standard’s list of points in order of importance, after type, movement and size. There are a great many elements that compose the correct head, making it an elusive feature.

The head should be long of both skull and muzzle. When viewed in profile, the planes of the skull and muzzle should be parallel, and only slightly separated by a very slight rise over the eyes – there should be “nothing approaching a stop.” The skull should be flat. However, the muzzle features an aquiline drop-off to the nose, which is one of the head qualities that sets a Deerhound head apart from that of the Greyhound or Irish Wolfhound. The definition of “aquiline” is “curving like an eagle’s beak.” This curve is near the nose – the muzzle drops off slightly to the nose. A flat muzzle going straight to the nose is incorrect.

The Deerhound should have a good underjaw, though the head definitely looks pointed at the nose in profile, not squared off. There should be no throatiness.

Viewed from the top, the Deerhound’s skull should be just slightly wider at the back than at the eyes, then tapering more to the nose. It is not a triangle when viewed from above, nor is it extremely narrow at the backskull.

The expression should always be soft. Eye size, shape and placement are extremely important to correct expression. The eye should be moderate in size, not small and beady or large and bulging. It is not slitted nor round, but “moderately full.” The eyes should not be too far apart. Eye color can be any shade of brown.

Low-set and/or improperly folded ears can also badly damage the expression. The ideal ear is small, tightly rosed and high set.



Correct balanced, springy movement and good carriage.

Photo: DogAds

7. TOPLINE

The Deerhound should have a well-arched loin, drooping to the tail. The construction of the arched loin and drooping croup gives the Deerhound an advantage running uphill, which was needed in his original work of coursing deer. A Deerhound should never be flat of loin, standing or moving.



A well-proportioned young bitch with excellent length from hip to hock and front assembly.

Photo: Pam Smithson

A Deerhound should not be level from the withers to the croup, or even worse, high at the rear. The standard uses the word “drooping” in its description of the loin and also the hindquarters. A Deerhound’s croup should be steeper than that of most dogs, but it should still flow from the loin in a continuous, unbroken curve. There should never be an abrupt change of angle at the pelvic bones, with a too-steep croup, nor should the croup be too flat. The croup should be relatively long, with a low-set and low-carried tail.

8. CARRIAGE

The Deerhound should carry his head high. A head carried near the level of

the topline is incorrect. Head high, tail low.

9. COAT

The correct body coat is harsh and close lying, about 3- to 4 inches long. There will be some variation in length at different parts of the dog’s body, but the main body coat should be of that length, and should fit rather tightly on the dog, not standing off

or fluffed out. The coat serves an important function in rainy Scotland; a soft, fluffy coat soaks up the rain that is repelled by a close, harsh coat. The correct hard coat also sheds the native Scottish thistles and brambles, but that vegetation will be tangled into a poor coat.

The mane on the neck is another type feature of the Deerhound, setting him apart from the rest of the Sighthound family. It is typical for a mature Deerhound to carry a thick, rather profuse mane on the neck. This mane should not be stripped out, which gives the neck a thin, weak appearance.

Facial furnishings are also typical,



A male combining strength with elegance.

Photo: Jim Boyd


and should be present in the mature hound. There should be some brow, but not so much that it falls in front of the eyes. The standard describes a “good moustache and a fair beard,” the comparison indicating the relative profusion of muzzle furnishings and moderate beard. The head furnishings are of softer coat than the body coat.

Do not expect a puppy or adolescent hound to carry an adult’s coat. A puppy coat is normally shorter, and the neck mane and head furnishings are often scant or even absent. This kind of coat is faulty in an adult, but a puppy should be forgiven for not having his adult coat!

10. PERSONALITY

Our standard does not describe personality or temperament, but it’s safe to say the Deerhound is typically

a dog with a lower-than-average energy level (except when game is afoot!). Deerhounds are often very lazy, and it’s not easy to get one to sparkle in the show ring. Most Deerhounds come across as quiet and relatively easygoing (which they are). It can be a challenge to develop a happy show attitude in a Deerhound.

That does not mean a Deerhound should not enjoy itself in the show ring – a Deerhound having fun in the ring is a wonderful thing! A Deerhound should not be sullen or sad, fearful or nervous, sharp or aggressive – these attitudes are not typical or acceptable. Deerhounds can have a sense of humor and a sense of fun, and can certainly enjoy dog shows, but don’t expect Deerhounds to tear around the ring like Sporting dogs! 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Pascoe acquired her first Scottish Deerhound in 1972, and bred her first litter under the Lehigh prefix in 1976. To date she has bred eight SBIS winners (five national and three regional) as well as four all-breed BIS winners. 11 of those owner-handled (and the other amateur-handled). Three hounds of her breeding were in the Top Ten for 2010.