

Assessing and Approaching the GSD

When judging the GSD, it is best to stand back and get an overview of the dogs first, your impression of their outlines and overall balance. Ideally, move the class together around the ring once or twice at a walk to allow the dogs to settle down a little and again get an impression of the dogs in movement and the overall quality of the exhibits.

Judging Individual Dogs

Stand back and get the outline and balance of angulations clear in your mind. See the strength of the dog or bitch - does it sufficiently represent the breed?

The stance of the GSD - is a natural pose where the dog feels balanced, this then can be exaggerated by the handlers into an appealing "shape". If at any time you cannot see the true outline for the "stacking", ask the handler to move the dog forwards 1 or 2 steps.

Approach the dog, - generally from the side, near the head and I always ask the age of the dog of the handler. This allows two things - one to find out the age of the dog, but more importantly lets the dog connect to you - a stranger approaching, that the handler is totally unconcerned about. GSD's in the ring should be unconcerned and relatively easy to handle, however you are invading their space and the sound of your voice is a connection to the dog that I find settles them.

Look at the head, - check the bite and the dentition, if at all concerned, ask the handler to show you the teeth. Double P1's are permissible, missing teeth are not. Do not eyeball the dog directly, rather you are flicking your eyes around the head to check the shape and strength.

Then examine the body, - move along the dog and check the withers, lightly run your hand down the back if needed and check testicles on the males. I generally will check where the chest reaches to under the coat - it should reach to the elbow and not below it. You can check the breadth of muscle in the hindquarters gently - *don't grab and maul the dog*.

Stand back and look at the proportions, - are the angulations balanced?, does the dog have good top and underlines? How does the dog stand in front? - it should be straight and the feet and legs should stand directly under the shoulders - not too narrow or wide, not "east-west" or "pigeon chested".

Moving the Dog

Ask the handler to walk the dog out and back - the legs should be straight and directly under the body, they should not be too wide or narrow - the breed was developed to run in the furrows at the edges of the fields - they do not single track, rather at speed the legs will move towards the centre line. Look at the hocks and elbows are they firm or do they "wobble in the breeze"? A young dog will be looser in ligamentation than an older dog - but excessive looseness in the hocks or elbows is not desired and should by 12 months be fairly firm.

Ask the handler to move the dog around the ring - if there is time ask the handler to settle the dog and gradually pick up speed so that you can see the dog moving freely at a gait - preferably on a loose lead once the dog is moving well. *Look for balance, is there good reach and drive, is the topline remaining firm or bouncing all over the place*. Are the withers remaining slightly higher or is the forequarter falling and the rear end kicking up? You should be looking for a flowing reach and drive, seemingly effortless that the dog could maintain for long periods or time without tiring. Nothing should be wasted, minimal number of steps covering the maximum amount of ground.

When Placing the Dogs

It is a combination of type, sound character, strength, balance and movement that should easily position the dogs.

If the class is large, always look for what strikes you - *the best and the worst in the class*. By the time you have done the individuals, your ideas on the relative qualities of the exhibits should have resolved somewhat. Place the dogs in your desired order and move the class.

When walking or gaitting the dogs, assess :

Balance in movement - does the length of reach balance the length of drive from the hindquarter? - can the dog extend freely at all speeds?,

Toplines - is the wither higher than the rest of the back or falling below? - is the steepness of the croup restricting the hindquarter drive?, and

Overall firmness of ligaments - does the back bounce all over the place or stay firm and steady?

In the Specialty ring we often break the class into smaller groups (4-5) and then gait them to assess the dogs at speed, and then move them out and back for a final assessment of firmness of ligaments of hocks and elbows. This can be done from either end of the class ie. working either up or down the class. The advantage of working from the rear of the class forwards is that one can move a dog that you may have missed up the class as you go.

Common Problems seen when Judging GSD's.

Size - we tend towards the top end in the size range. Some very large dogs and bitches can be seen, when they get too large, the balance of proportions (height to length and depth of chest to leg) tends to swing out of balance and the dog becomes cumbersome and very heavy on its feet.

Forequarters - very commonly there are restrictions in the length and lay of the upper arm, reducing the reach. Occasionally the whole front assembly is forward placed - steep shoulder, steep upper arm, lack of prosternum, loose elbows - these dogs on the stand often have a high wither placement but are restricted in length of reach and by instability of the elbows.

Croups - often short and/or steep - this restricts hindquarter drive.

Hindquarters - poor hindquarters often going hand in hand with a short steep croup is a short upper thigh combined with long hocks - these dogs have trouble getting their hindquarters sufficiently underneath themselves to get a long stride hence reduced drive and a tendency to kick up behind.

Overangulated hindquarter - this occurs when the lower thigh is much longer than the upper thigh, often accompanied by longer hocks - this leads to an instability of the hocks - going away they are very loose. Hocks can be loose on youngsters but should be fairly stable by 12-18 months.

Balance - lack of - commonly seen - overangulated behind in relation to the forequarter angulation - these dogs tend to fall on the forehand at the fast gait (or on a loose lead). Less commonly seen - very good forequarter, short steep croup, short upper thigh, long hocks - no drive, tires quickly.

Desired Features to Look For when Judging the GSD

Correct proportions - height to length, depth of chest to length of leg. Older bitches may approach 50/50 chest to leg proportions.

Heads - very good strength of top and underjaw - weak underjaws are more likely to have missing teeth.

High wither - as opposed to low - maintain a better topline in movement, tighter ligamentation over the shoulders.

Firm backs - preferably without nicks and dips, but not roached during movement, particularly in the older animal.

Croups - of good length and lay - the length of the pelvis affects the width of the hindquarter musculature - broad thighs are very desirable. Steep croups will restrict hindquarter drive, equally will flat croups.

Forequarters - well laid back shoulders, and very good length and lay of the upper arm to enable maximum reach.

Hindquarters - equal of length of upper and lower thigh, this gives perfect balance to the hindquarter, and with it usually the desired width of muscles of the thighs and maximum length of stride, thus a more powerful drive.

Hocks - short, strong and firm - shorter hocks give greater stability to the drive.

Overall - ideally looking for balance of angulations ie. very good fore and hindquarter angulations. Clear, flowing top and underlines, nothing lacking in a free flowing effortless ground covering gait, with a minimal number of steps covering a maximum amount of ground.

Problems of Youth

Ears - the ears can be every which way when young, but should be erect by 6-7 months and are definitely penalised from 9 months if not firmly erect. The erect ears of the GSD have been called "the equivalent of the Mercedes Benz symbol", ie. no ears, no GSD.

Bat or low set ears - not common and penalised in proportion to the degree relative to the overall quality of the dog.

Overly strong ears ie. leaning inwards, kinked/tilted at the base so they sit over the head - not uncommon below 6 months of age, should be straightening by 9 months and no or very little lean by 12 months. Tilted ears are penalised in the adult.

Soft ears - where the ears fall to the side in stance or movement - again should be erect by 6-7 months and firm in stance.

Ears can be held back during movement, but should not flap/wobble around.

Backs - in youth, the back of the GSD can appear arched or roached in stance, but should not be roached in movement ie. the middle of the back should never be higher than the wither.

Hocks - going away hocks can be rather loose at the walk but should firm as they reach their natural gait ie. the trot.

Elbows - until the chest develops many GSD's can be rather loose in elbows but both hocks and elbows should be reasonably firm by 12-15 months.

Ligamentation - *Excessive* looseness of ligamentation should be penalised at any age, more so in the older animal.

Judging the GSD

By Karen Hedberg BVSc. – Compiled: 2003

