

WHY UNIQUE? THE BASSET HOUND

By Kitty Steidel & Sue Frischmann

The Basset Hound is a long, low scent hound, bred for hunting small game. Its uniqueness in structure is an accommodation for balance due to its shortened forelegs. His 'different' stature, a result of achondroplasia is commonly called dwarfism. However, his form of achondroplasia causes arrested development of only long bones, yet retention of his other normal sized features. His body remains that of a larger, taller dog. In order to support the rather heavy body on shorter legs he needs a special wrap around front. It is a balance issue: he needs to have a unique column of support. If one understands the reason for his different front, the Basset will not be difficult to judge and intelligently breed.

Since the original purpose of the Basset Hound was "to follow a trail over and through difficult terrain", the breed should be an agile and effortless mover. His conservation of energy provides for endurance. It is important when evaluating a Basset to keep his original purpose in mind.

The Overall Proportion & Balance

The Basset Hound proportion is rectangular, approximately two to one; i.e., he is approximately twice as long as tall. We generally measure from fore chest to



the point of buttocks. In addition, the distance from the deepest point of the chest to the ground should be no more than $\frac{1}{3}$ the total height of an adult.

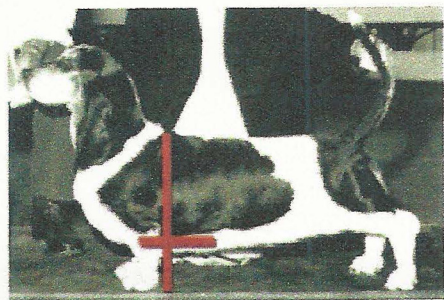
Forequarter Assembly

Because the Basset is an achondroplastic breed, we sometimes find structural problems that are not generally seen in longer legged breeds with straight columns of support.

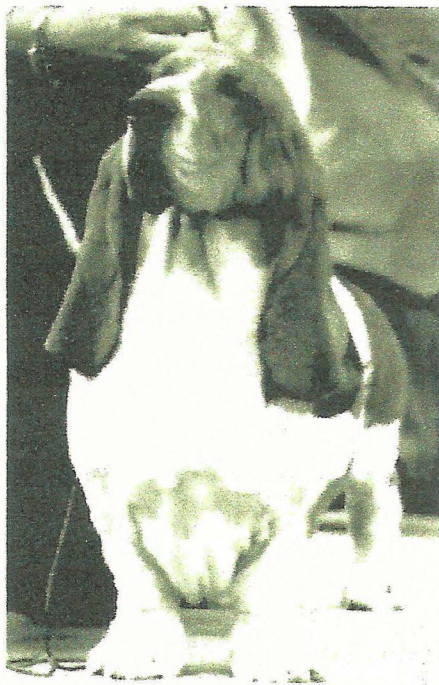
The Basset has crook'd forelegs meaning curving foreleg to accommodate

the chest. Crook'd is not turned out feet, as is erroneously thought; this adaptation along with his heavy bone and large, well rounded front paws are features that gives him body support, especially to the forequarters. The chest falls below the elbow.

Front feet should be matched, that is the feet will turn out a trifle and balance with the width of a proper shoulder, neither wide nor narrow. A prominent sternum is a hallmark of the breed. Short neck, lack of forechest, a short upper arm all suggests an ill-fitting and



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forward assembly. Proper shoulder length and matching length of upper arm, with elbows lying close to the chest are mandatory in this hunting breed.

The shoulder angle in the Basset should be approximately 90 degrees, with the upper arm and shoulder blade of equal length. Good shoulders if present should be rewarded; they are very hard to breed.

Hindquarters

Rear angulation should also be 90 degrees with well-let-down stifles. Cow hocks and bowed rears are serious faults.

Ribcage

The Basset Hound ribcage should be long and smooth; the breed's length is in his ribcage not his loin. The posterior ster-

num should extend beyond the forelegs by about four inches. Flanged (flared, as in a flip hairdo) ribs are faulty.

Movement

Movement is a good indicator of the overall conformation. Without correct movement, the Basset could not perform as originally intended. Movement is deliberate, in no sense clumsy. There should be good reach and drive, powerful and effortless; with backline level. Going away, the Basset hind legs should move true and coming back; the front legs should show support and good depth of chest. That wrap around front allows the legs to support the body by coming in under the dog. Bassets converge toward their center of gravity but do not single track. The down and back is important.

Some believe movement is not important because of the Basset's unique structure. However it is due to his unusual proportions, to be functional, that could not be further from the truth. The Basset should be penalized (to the extent of degree of departure) for the same movement faults commonly found in other breeds.

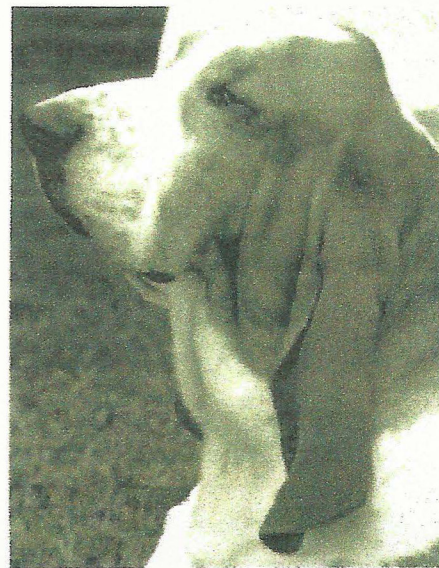
Head

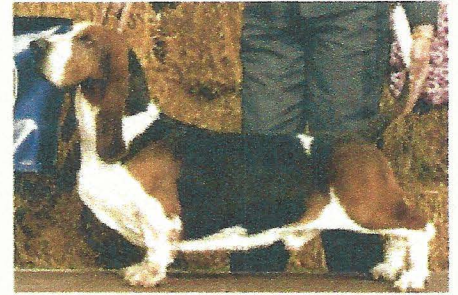
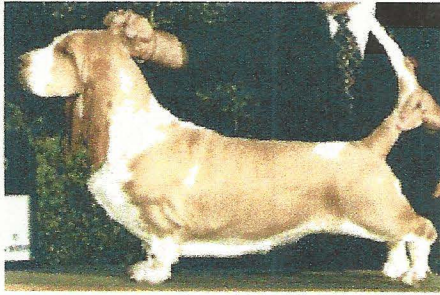
The head is large, exhibiting a well-domed skull with a deep muzzle and moderate stop. The dewlap is pronounced. Eyes are dark, with prominent haw. Prominent haw does not mean gaping droop to the eyelid, hazardous to a hunter. Ears are long



Heidi Martin

“THE HEAD IS LARGE, EXHIBITING A WELL-DOMED SKULL WITH A DEEP MUZZLE AND MODERATE STOP.”





All good type but shades of different styles.

“IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CORRECT BREED TYPE AND STYLE WITHIN BREED TYPE.”

and velvety, low set and turning slightly inward for funneling/stirring up scent. High set flat ear is a serious fault, the only serious fault not related to movement as defined in the standard but one related definitely to function. Although the head displays important elements of breed type, we do not want undue emphasis placed here as we are not a head breed.

Size, Bone & Length of Leg

Some Bassets may have more bone or weight than others; some may be taller than others. Length of leg, ears, and body can all vary, but remain correct within the breed standard. It is up to the judge to determine if each hound meets the breed standard.

Regarding size, the standard says simply, “more bone, size considered, than any other breed”. Many breeders, exhibitors and judges find this statement confusing. Perhaps a reasonable way to interpret the statement would be to consider the height

of the exhibit being examined, and ask the question, “does it have more bone than another breed of the same height—for example, the beagle. We are not suggesting the breed have bone of some of our taller dogs—St. Bernard, Wolfhound or Mastiff.

Style Vs. Type

It is important to understand the difference between correct breed type and style within breed type. The official breed standard identifies the features which define breed type. Style is individual interpretation of that standard. More than one style may exhibit correct breed type and meet the standard. Think about your own breed, the breeds you know well, you have different styles within type.

‘Icing’

Another confusion of style and type is “icing” —type features us like but not in excess. The unique look and structure of

the Basset lends itself toward caricature but more is not better. Rewarding animals with highly exaggerated features at the expense of soundness is deleterious to the breed. Breeders and judges have a tendency to overemphasize one or two features, such as excess skin or bone, forgetting the soundness demanded for this breed.

Consistency in Judging

We often hear that a judge didn’t evaluate dogs consistently, because two different styles have been awarded.

Good judges and breeders look beyond “style” and award or breed the best examples of the breed, according to the standard, regardless of style.

Color, Markings & Temperament

Bassets may be any recognized hound color; markings and distribution of color is not important. The Basset is known for his even temperament: mild, never, sharp or timid.

“THE BASSET IS KNOWN FOR HIS EVEN TEMPERAMENT: MILD, NEVER, SHARP OR TIMID.”

“PLEASE DO NOT PULL THE BASSET’S SKIN OVER ITS HEAD OR UP ON THE BACK TO CHECK FOR ELASTICITY OR LOOSENESS.”



Prioritizing

It is important to understand how the breed standard prioritizes virtues and faults in the breed as you evaluate the “whole”. The standard prioritizes faults as follows: (italics below offer commentary)

- **Serious faults:** Faults relating to incorrect movement (running gear—especially forequarter assembly) which will hinder endurance and performance are considered serious faults. The only exception is the high set flat ear, also a serious fault.
- **Faults:** In general, faults relate to features including the head, ribcage, and topline features, body and proportion.
- **Permissible But Not Desirable:** Cosmetic details such as a liver colored nose or light eye color are permissible but not desirable.

In general, faults relating to movement or which affect the health or well-being of the dog are to be penalized, based on the

severity of the fault. Faults which are cosmetic in nature which do not impede the dog’s ability to perform are less serious. Judges and breeders alike must consider the dog as a whole, as individual parts are indeed useless if not in balance and able to work together.

Disqualifications

There are three disqualifications in the Official Basset Hound Breed Standard. Not seen often, they are:

1. **Height over 15” inches:** It is unusual to see a Basset over height in the ring. If a judge has any doubts, they should be comfortable measuring the exhibit.
2. **Knuckling over**
3. **Distinctly long coat**

Examining the Basset

The Basset Hound is expected to be judged on the ramp for breed judging. Judges may request a ramp for group judging if they wish. The Basset Hound is a sensitive breed, and should be examined with efficiency and gentleness.

Please do not pull the Basset’s skin over its head or up on the back to check for elasticity or looseness. Be aware that when judging the Basset, loose clothing, long ties, scarves or jewelry can interfere with the dog.

Never pick up a Basset Hound to drop its front, and don’t push down on the hindquarters. It should go without saying, never straddle or step over a Basset during an exam.

It is inappropriate to make sounds to see expression. If you feel the need to re-examine the Basset, please put it back on the ramp.

Generally speaking, the Basset Hound is not a “baiting” breed. ■

Authors’ Note

We hope that this article helps bring better understanding of this wonderful, unique breed and that you come to enjoy it as we do. The 2013 BHCA National Specialty is being held at Purina Farms this year in October. Judges’ education will be available, as well as the opportunity to see Bassets involved in all areas of performance. The Nationals website is www.2013bbcanationals.org.

The photos/sketches are from Basset Hound Club of America’s JEC Materials: “Pocket Guide to the Basset Hound,” as well as a Judges Education CD. Other informational materials are available for interested individuals or breeders who wish to learn more about this fascinating breed through Basset Hound University at www.bhca-bhu.org.

“IF YOU FEEL THE NEED TO RE-EXAMINE THE BASSET, PLEASE PUT IT BACK ON THE RAMP.”