

AN ANALYSIS OF THE AKITAINU HOZONKAI STANDARD FOR THE AKITA

(Written by the research committee of the Akitainu Standard in Japan, with the use of historical records. Translated from the Japanese by Walter Imai, chairman, Akitainu Hozonkai, Los Angeles Branch.)

INTRODUCTION: THE AKITA CHARACTER

The term "character," as applied to an animal, is not easy to define. Our analysis of the Akita's character is traditional and historical, drawn from what has been passed on to us from the older generation, and from our own experiences with the breed, as well as from written material and literature from years past.

An Akita has quiet strength, dignity and courage. An Akita is large, with a powerful bone structure as the foundation of the body. The dog's sheer size, combined with its regal bearing, gives it the aura of being "king of all dogs."

An Akita's nature is to be intensely loyal to its master. This is especially strong in the Akita compared to other breeds. This characteristic parallels the intensely loyal character of the traditional Japanese people.

An Akita's outward appearance, reflecting the inner nature, is calm but at the same time very brave. While the Akita does not challenge first, neither does it back down from the challenge of another.

The character is not an aspect of the Akita that we can measure with a yardstick. Nevertheless it is a fundamental and most important aspect of the breed. Call it what you will—class, pride, bearing - it must be present for a dog to be a good Akita.

A. OVERALL STRUCTURE

The structure of the body governs the capabilities of the Akita. The structure is seen by examining the dog's basic parts and organs and its basic movements. It involves the height, length, weight and general appearance of the dog.

The bone structure must be powerful, tight and well balanced. Muscles, tendons and ligaments must be well developed and strong. Such development must be accompanied by natural beauty. If an Akita does not possess a well-developed structure, the dog is sloppy, loose-jointed, without balance and physically weak.

The torso is divided into the front section, the midsection and the hind section. If the proportions of these sections are not proper, the Akita in its standing position will not look right because it will not have the balance that it requires. Furthermore, its movements will not be smooth, and therefore the dog will not possess staying power. The proper proportions of the sections determine the balance of the structure of the torso.

The location of the front, mid- and hind sections is as follows: Looking at the dog's profile in a normal standing posture, the front section extends from the front of the chest or brisket to an imaginary vertical line drawn through the point of the elbow. The midsection extends from this line to another imaginary vertical line drawn through the point where the dog's hind leg intersects with the body. The hind section extends from this second vertical line to the back of the haunch.

1. The ratio of the torso sections to each other in length: (front)

1 to (mid-) 1.4 to (hind) 1.

2. Depth of chest is 55 percent of the height of the dog.

Example: at the ideal height of 66.7 centimeters (26 ¼ inches), the depth of chest should ideally be 36.9 cm. (14 ½ in.), or between an upper limit of 37 cm. (14 ½ in.) and a lower limit of 33.4 cm. (13 ¼ in.).

3. Chest circumference is 23 percent greater than the height of the dog. Example: At the ideal height of 66.7 cm., circumference of the chest should ideally be 81.8 cm. (32 ¼ in.), or between an upper limit of 84.8 cm. (33 ½ in.) and a lower limit of 78.8 cm. (31 in.).

4. Width of the chest is 44 percent as great as the height of the dog. Example: At the ideal height of 66.7 cm., width of the chest should ideally be 29 cm. (11 1/2 in.), or between an upper limit of 30.7 cm. (12 in.) and a lower limit of 28.1 cm. (11 in.).

5. Width of the hips is 40 percent as great as the height of the dog. Example: At the ideal height of 66.7 cm., width through the hips should ideally be 27 cm. (10 1/2 in.), or between an upper limit of 28 cm. (11 in.) and a lower limit of 25.3 cm. (10 in.).

6. Weight: At the ideal height of 66.7 cm. (26 1/4 in.), the Akita should ideally weigh 45 kilograms (99 pounds).

(Author's note: Measurements are rounded off to the nearest 1/4 inch. Those who wish may make their own conversions from the more precise metric units given. Divide centimeters by 2.54 to get inches. Multiply kilograms by 2.2 to get pounds.)

The relationship of the depth of chest and the stomach is as follows: The chest and the stomach form a gentle curve, with the stomach severely tucked up toward the hips.

The relationship of body length to back and hip is as follows: The back is the portion of the topline between the shoulder blade and the loin. The length of the back is one-third the length of the body and should be level. Example: At the ideal length of body of 79.86 cm. (31 1/2 in.), the back should measure 23.96 cm. (9 1/2 in.).

The ratio of height of dog to depth of chest called for in the Standard is two to one. However, because the desirable cross section of the chest is rather triangular in shape, it is best to have a somewhat deeper chest, thus the statement that depth of chest is 55 percent of the height of the dog. An Akita with a short back would have a deeper chest and wider shoulders, and the cross section of the chest would be rather round in shape.

The height, depth of chest and all other measurements of the bitch are less than those of the dog.

B. THE WITHERS

The withers is the area that connects the neck with the shoulder blade, the shoulder and the chest. There is a slight indentation where the withers joins the back. An Akita with a high base of neck will have a weak back. A low base, on the other hand, will give a powerful back but impeded movement of the front legs.

C. THE LEGS

The legs support the body of the Akita. Because they must initiate, generate and withstand the shock that the movements create, they must be powerfully constructed and at the same time have much springiness. The cross section of the legs is approximately round. This is necessary for withstanding the various moves and shocks, and for supporting the dog's weight.

D. THE SHOULDER

The shoulder blades form the base of the shoulders. Strong tendons connect the front legs to the front section of the torso at the shoulder blades. The shoulder blade is long and wide and must move freely. It moves back and forth about 10 to 15 degrees. When the Akita is standing naturally, the shoulder blade is at an angle of 55 degrees to the ground.

The longer the shoulder blade, the more it slants, and the shorter it is, the more upright it is. Akitas with long shoulder blades have longer steps, and they are faster.

The shoulder blades should not protrude much from the chest, nor should they recede into it. They should turn neither in nor out.

E. THE UPPER ARM AND FORELEG

The upper arm is constructed of the humerus, which is long in relation to the shoulder blade. It is parallel with the center of the torso. The angulation of the humerus and the shoulder blade is 110 to 120 degrees. If this angulation is less than 110 degrees, the forelegs are drawn back and the chest will protrude. If the humerus is too long, the dog's step will be low, and if it is too short, the step will be high.

From the front, the humerus is perpendicular to the ground.

The forelegs must be parallel, but they should open slightly at the pastern. A vertical line from the point of the shoulder should divide the foreleg approximately in half.

From the side, a vertical line through the withers should barely touch the elbow.

F. PASTERN AND GRIP

The pastern serves to cushion the impact of the dog's movement. If it slants to a large degree, it will not support the dog's weight well, but if it is upright, it will not absorb the shock received by the leg. In either case, the dog's normal movement will be impaired. In the Akita, the proper angulation of the pastern to a line perpendicular to the ground is 10 to 15 degrees.

Also, in the Akita, the grip has been considered very important from years back. The paws should be large, round and thick, without spacing between the toes. The color of the pad should be black. A liver-colored pad indicates lack of pigment in the whole body (lips, eye rims, etc.). The nails should be short and powerful. As in the case of the pad, the nails should be dark in color.

G. HIND LEG

The front legs support the weight of the body and change the direction of movement. The hind legs start and propel the move. Therefore, the upper thigh must be broad and powerful and have strong muscles. The bones—femur, fibula and tibia—are long. The angulation of these bones has been deemed extremely important from the very beginning of the breed. When the dog is standing normally, a vertical line from the back of the rump should touch on the back of the hock joint. The metatarsal bone should be parallel to the same vertical line.

The upper thigh must be full, with strong muscle development. It must be wide, long and thick. The length gives the dog its speed, the width its power. The angle between the pelvic bone and the femur is 80 to 100 degrees. The longer the femur, the more pronounced is the angulation. The more pronounced angulation and the longer bones produce the longer gait. Conversely, the less pronounced angulation would mean a shorter bone and a shorter gait.

The lower thigh is also very important to the movement of the dog. The angulation of the tibia to the femur is 110 to 125 degrees. The fibula and tibia should be supported firmly by ligaments and tendons. The longer the fibula and tibia, the more pronounced is the angulation to the metatarsus, which is normally 140 to 145 degrees.

When the Akita is in a normal standing position, the hock joint as viewed from the rear can be bisected by a vertical line that goes through the point of the rump. Hock joints that turn in or out are faulty.

Viewed from the side, a wide angle of the hock joint (called straight hock) would be weak in generating movement. On the other hand, if the angle is too sharp (called bent hock), the metatarsus is too sharply angled with the ground and cannot support the dog's body weight. In either case, the dog will lack stamina.

H. ANUS

The anus should not protrude, but should be large and tight.

I. TAIL

The tail consists of the trunk of the tail and its hair. It expresses the character of the dog and is also the rudder in the movement of the body. It should be thick, and can be either round or flat. The curl should be powerful and can be carried on the left or right rump or even in a double curl.

The *length* of the tail in extended position is specified as reaching the hock joint. However, the position of the hock joint in terms of the height of the dog varies enough so that a more absolute Standard is desirable (the joint has become lower in recent years). Therefore the Akita's tail length should be two-thirds of the body height of the Akita.

Unlike the other Japanese canine breeds, *the Akita has an absolute requirement that the tail be wound*. Furthermore, the shape and type of the tail influence the value and character of the Akita. It is very important that the tail add to the regal bearing and brave character of the Akita. This is especially important today, because the Akita is primarily a show dog.

A tail that is thick would require more than a single curl, as it would lack strength at the tip. However, if a tail is thin, the curl may be shaped well, but the curl itself will be small. On the other hand, a large curl with a thin tail will lack the necessary dignity.

Generally speaking, the tail of a dog is based higher on the back than that of a bitch. This is so because of the dog's more aggressive nature. Furthermore, the hip bone of the bitch is large and is structured in such a way as to make its tail set lower.

J. HEAD

It has been passed on to modern times from years ago that in judging an Akita the structure of the head is important above all, as it houses the brain, which is the origin of all the actions of the dog.

The first requirement is that *the size* of the head be in balance with the size of the body. The size of the head, supported by the neck, influences the center of gravity (the balance) of the Akita. Generally speaking, one of the outstanding features of the Akita compared to the other Japanese breeds (Inu, Shiba, Hokaido Dog, etc.) is that the head is large.

The *shape* of the head from directly above is approximately triangular. The length of the head is approximately 9/22 of the height of the body (41 percent). The *thickness* of the head at its largest point is approximately one-half the length of the head.

The *skull* is comprised of the frontal and the rear skulls. The frontal skull (forehead) is wide, and the rear skull (back of the ears) must be well developed, in a way peculiar to the Akita head. An undersized rear skull thus is lacking in one of the distinct features of the Akita.

An old saying in the annals of Akita literature is that "the neck is long and the jaw wide." A short neck is undesirable because it would tend to restrict the dog's movements.

The *forehead* is formed by the frontal skull. It is broad and only slightly rounded. The forehead must be broad because its development is related to the development of the brain.

The *vertical crease* running down the center of the forehead is shallow but must be distinct. An indistinguishable crease or a round forehead without the crease would be considered totally unlike the Akita of past or present.

The *stop* has a direct bearing on the quality of the facial expression. It should be pronounced. The stop is formed by the meeting of the forehead and the bridge of the nose. Viewed from the side, it gives the Akita its distinct appearance and is very important. However, when the stop is too pronounced it will show a more than strong character and even indicate a violent nature. The side view should show the frontal skull and the bridge of the nose to be parallel.

K. THE EYES

The eyes are *approximately triangular* in shape, and they are *deep-set*. *The eye rim must be dark brown*. The eyes are *slightly slanted*. As it is said of all animals, the eyes express the nature, disposition and feelings of the Akita. The size and position, and the distance between the eyes, are relative to the size of the head.

Together with the stop and the vertical crease, the eyes make up the facial expression of the Akita and are one of the important factors in the overall quality of the breed.

L. THE MOUTH

The mouth is comprised of the upper and lower jaw, including the teeth. Because its function is to chew as well as to bite, it is powerfully constructed and requires some width and depth. When viewed from the side, the line of the mouth forms a 90-degree angle with the front end of the nose. The mouth extends to the corner of the upper jaw, and its width is the width of the muzzle. Although the mouth has to be powerful, it must not be so large or powerful that it detracts from the noble look of the facial features.

M. NOSE

The muzzle starts from the lower part of the forehead and extends to the black portion of the nose. The front part of the nose is large compared to other canine breeds. It is square in shape. Because it possesses the important sense of smell, the nose must be well shaped and tight.

N. THE LIPS

The lips are drawn tightly, paralleling the jaw bones. They should not be flabby, but just full enough to cover the teeth.

O. THE TEETH

Generally speaking, a dog of sturdy bone structure with large paws must have large, powerful teeth. The Akita is no exception.

Because in its wild state the Akita had to fight other animals and also maintain good health, it has exceptionally long, sharp and strong teeth compared to the other native Japanese breeds of dog.

The scissor bite is the only acceptable bite. Among the teeth, the four canine teeth especially must be powerful and have proper bite.

P. THE EARS

It is said that if the eyes are the mirror of the heart, the ears are the heart's windows. The noble bearing of the Akita is greatly enhanced by the proper shape, quality and position of the dog's ears.

Like other Japanese purebreds, the Akita has a stand-up ear, showing alertness. When the dog is not feeling well or when it is not up to the occasion, it will flatten its ears.

The quality, shape, position and size of the ears must balance with the size and shape of the head and face. Ears that are too thick give the appearance of insensitivity; therefore, the ears should only be rather thick.

The Standard says the ears must be approximately triangular. The tips should be slightly rounded rather than pointed, indicating the gentleness of the Akita.

As to position of the ear, when viewed from the front as the dog stands erect and looks straight ahead, a vertical line through the tip of the ear must divide the ear equally in half.

The Standard calls for ears "rather small," but here again size must be relative to the size of the head. When folded forward, the tip of the ear should touch the eyelid. Viewed from the front, the highest part of the outer edge of the ear should be in line with the outside corner of the eye. The distance between the tips of the ears is 75 percent of the width of the face.

Q. THE NECK

Because the neck houses the windpipe, the throat must be appropriately thick and long. The skin that covers the neck must be tight. The muscles in the neck must be strong and powerful, so that the heavy head is supported for quick and free movement. When the Akita is carrying something in its mouth, the neck must be strong enough to support the weight. In order to properly exercise its sense of smell, the Akita must be able to move its head swiftly. In case of a fight, the neck is the most vulnerable part of the body.

When the neck is long, the shoulder blade tilts more, allowing longer steps and faster movement. However, when the neck is too long, the head cannot be stable, and in general the dog is weaker. Its appearance will also lack dignity.

R. THE COAT

The coat of the Akita has three distinct layers: the outer guard coat, the regular coat and the woolly undercoat.

The *undercoat* is a thick, fine, cottonlike coat. It thins out during the summer months, but it is heavy during the winter to keep the body warm.

The *regular coat* is made of coarse hair, very resilient. The regular coat protects the body from injuries and repels water.

The *outer guard coat* is about 1.5 cm. (1/2 in.) longer than the regular coat and stands out like needles.

The *whiskers* are permanent; therefore, they are believed to have feeling, unlike the hair of the coat.

The Akita coat must be stiff and open. In rain and snow, it should not get soaking wet. If the coat is soft, the body will get completely wet.