

Judging Movement in Bull Terriers

Side Movement versus the Straight Up and Down Movement

Over the past number of years we have found that far too many badly constructed Bull Terriers are winning CC's and in a number of cases they have become Champions. Therefore we have prepared this article to help the learner, novice and some of the older judges who have difficulty in judging a Bull Terriers movement.

Certain judges place far too much importance on the straight up and down movement and not enough importance is placed on the side (profile) movement. If the dog is moving parallel it is regarded as good movement by these judges, who tend to overlook the construction of the dog and in some cases don't even ask for a triangle.

The fact is that there are Bull Terriers with upright shoulders and / or with straight stifles that are still capable of moving parallel, but it does not mean that their construction is correct.

The breed standard states that a Bull Terrier should move parallel front and back, but some of these specimens that do, have a hollow back caused by upright shoulders or straight stifles that tend to push the backend up causing a dip behind the withers, which is a very ugly blemish. In many cases these specimens are winning at the highest level, with these faults, that are very difficult to breed out.

By looking at the dog moving in profile a judge should immediately pick up the following:

- 1) Head – curve in profile**
- 2) Neck – length**
- 3) Back – length & whether it is level or has a saddle back**
- 4) Forelegs – reach or lack thereof**
- 5) Hind movement - are the hind legs reaching out well under the dog's belly, almost taking the place of the front foot or are they taking much shorter strides.**
- 6) Is the dog covering the maximum distance with free and easy strides**
- 7) Underline – tuck-up**
- 8) Tail – tail set (should be horizontal)**

From the above you can learn far much more about a BT by looking at its side movement than from a straight up and down.

The following indicators will show you that something is wrong with a Bull Terriers conformation at a glance, whilst moving in profile:

Neck - If the neck appears short and stuffy, it is an indication that the dogs shoulder placement is incorrect (upright shoulder). This is often accompanied by a long back, and depending on how upright the shoulder placement is it may be accompanied by a very long hollow/ saddle back that dip's behind the withers, spoiling the dog's backline and overall balance.

The neck should be very muscular, long arched, tapering from the shoulders to head and free from loose skin.

Note: A very thick neck can also give the appearance of a short stuffy neck, therefore it is very important to feel the shoulder blades with the hands or fingers. I find it amazing how some judges run their hands from the neck over the back and sides in the blink of an eye and then spend more time measuring the length of the tail, by pulling it down to the hocks or checking the dog's testicles, than they spent going over the rest of the animal. How they can assess anything by doing this except checking for spring of rib or substance is just amazing.

In the second Australian BT book, a well known breeder and specialist judge describes a long neck, as one been able to reach its tucker bowl.

The back should be short, strong and **level behind the withers**, with a slight roach over broad, well muscled loins

*Summary: A short stuffy neck plus a long back or a very long hollow back
= upright shoulders.*

Standing in profile you will notice that a BT with an upright shoulder and short upper arm will lack forechest (Fox Terrier front). This may be accompanied by excessive muscling around the upper arm (loaded shoulders), which causes the elbows to stand out and forward from the chest (loose elbows) which is easily seen when moving from the front, as the legs will toe inwards and when moving from the side, the dog may have a hackney action. Loose elbows can also be seen from behind when the dog is moving.

Elbows - should be held straight, tucked into the sides but still have freedom of movement.

Summary: Therefore a short neck, long back, very long back, dip behind the withers, lack of forechest, looseness at shoulders, loaded shoulders, loose elbows and short steps = upright shoulders, which can be easily seen by the judge when the Bull Terrier is moving, viewed side on.

A top Australian Bull Terrier breeder / judge wrote, “Most Bull Terrier enthusiasts don’t recognize a bad front when they see it”. He states, “The number of BT’s that I have encountered with acceptable fronts would be no more than 2-3%. “A good front is probably the hardest facet of construction to cement into a bloodline”.

Therefore side movement is far more important than just the straight up and down movement.

The truth is that the majority of judges and breeders struggle to recognize an upright shoulder and good movement.

Here is an easy guide to accessing shoulder placement.

- 1) First make sure that the dog is standing correctly on his/her front legs.
- 2) Place your thumb and middle finger on the withers (the highest points on the shoulder blades).
- 3) Once you have your 2 fingers on these points, run your eye down to the dog's elbow. If the shoulder placement is correct, you will find that the withers are behind the elbow. If it is in the middle of the forelegs, the shoulders are upright and if the withers are in front of the leg, then the shoulder placement is incorrect (very upright), which will be accompanied by a long dipped back, loaded shoulders, loose elbows and poor front movement.

See sketch:

Some judges have the following incorrect method of assessing shoulder placement. They run their hand from the middle of the dog's back towards its neck and stop where the shoulder blades end. By assessing the shoulder placement with this method, you will find that the end of the shoulder blades will always be behind the dog's elbows, even a dog with an upright shoulder.

Dip in the back

N.B: If a dog has a dip in the back and the length of neck appears to be correct and there is sufficient forechest, the dip may be caused by the dog having straight stifles. Very straight stifles tend to raise the dog's backend so that it appears to be higher at the back than the front, whilst the dog is moving in profile, which causes the dog's backline to dip from behind the withers.

We hope that this article and photographs will help you recognize these faults at glance.

Gary Evangelides (Rhinestone)

