

THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

by LISA DUBE FORMAN

Instead of proselytizing on my breeding program and old-style Wolfhounds, I wish to approach this topic differently. That is to offer guidance, helpful instruction and stimulation to both aspiring and approved AKC Irish Wolfhound judges. For the latter, especially, because it is human nature to fall into a pattern and lose sight of the ABC's of overall dog conformation in the less than two-minutes per dog "get'em in and get'em out" show ring rush. The consequences of doing so, though, can and have been harmful, especially for Gaze-hounds who possess unique blueprints that distinguish them from other breeds.

Inferiority and mediocracy abound in the conformation show ring today. In my considered opinion, of this, there is little ambiguity. Missing is an integral character of the Wolfhound breed essence, that being a fluid, gently curved topline. More often than not, we observe specimens with flat, level backs having no arch nor muscling over the loin. These representations, as a rule, are rectangularly shaped and or having a tubular outline usually accompanied by too long a torso, are slack-loined and have insufficient leg length. Without question, shorter legs and a lack of an arc over the loin is the antithesis of the galloping Gazehound. Long legs and lengthy upper arms are symbolic of swiftness, and the arch provides flexibility for bending and folding. This hinge should be broad and

well-muscled, as it is the coupling that attaches and transfers the locomotive's energy through the torso to the load-bearing joints of the forequarters.

Allow me to touch upon just a few other frequently seen failures in engineering. Beginning with forward-set, and steep shoulder articulation with a poorly fashioned set-on of the neck, flat withers and straight, short upper arms. All of which invariably produces Wolfhounds with hollow or concave forechests, uncharacteristic narrowness and lack of bone throughout, who by and large, I would argue are "shelly" in appearance. Who'd have thought that this term could apply to the Irish Wolfhound breed? For those unacquainted, this phrase describes a shallow brisket with a narrow or slab-sided body which is lacking the desired correct amount of bone. In actuality, when viewed in profile often the brisket depth, owing mostly to coat, will appear to meet the elbows, but the ensuing hands-on exam of the forechest will detect little depth or even a hollowness usually under an abundance of hair. Naturally, the architecture of forward-set (Stuck-on fronts), steep shoulders, and the critical dearth of development in the forepart of the chest dramatically reduces the area for muscle mass resulting in a shortage of "fill."

Form and function will dictate the desired quantity and quality of "fill" within a dog's station which effectuates performance. Fill is not just skeletal

parts, particularly the prosternum and sternum (breastbone), but muscling that protects the vital organs and is to be plentiful and productive while surrounding the bow or keel. The fill or musculature collection includes the serratus ventralis muscle, which is the sling and stabilizer of the thorax as well as the deltoids and brachial muscles. The descending and transverse pectorals, which advance the forelegs and draw the limbs in towards the axis or center line of the body, and the superficial and deep pectoral muscles which stabilize the forelegs.

The cause and effect of a poorly designed forehand with shallow fill on a hunter who dispatches wolves and large game would put that hound at high risk of injury or even death. Consider that the forechest has a multifold purpose. It is part of his bulk to both injure prey plus it absorbs and disperses the force of that impact preventing damage to the frontal portion of the skeletal structure. The hollow-chested Wolfhound with flatter ribs who frequently is not well-ribbed up will have a deficient area for muscling. All conclusively affect the diaphragm, heart and lung capacity that even our novice judges must recognize is a contradiction for a "Wolf killer."

Having said all that; we are not seeking a barrel or accentuated 'spread' of the chest, as in the Bulldog, as this exaggeration is most unquestionably not appropriate for any galloping Gazehound. Mainly because it would prevent



the scapula and elbows from swinging backward smoothly over the ribcage, and at a bare minimum, it would result in "elbow burn," abrasion caused by friction to the skin.

All of the faults mentioned above are discernible on a giant, athletic Wolfhound, and any qualified AKC Judge should be able to identify these aberrations. Regrettably, more often than not these glaring structural faults are being overlooked and awarded. All one has to do is flip through magazine advertisements to behold such phenomenon. What is happening? Are not judges educated in the fundamentals of anatomy or is it that they do they not value these elements, any longer?

Judges are confronted routinely with Irish Wolfhound entries who lack essential character. For those enthusiasts seeking to judge sighthounds, one must be able to recognize harmony. The absence of conforming forequarters and a flowing, curving form alters the shape and the design of the archetypical Wolfhound. Appreciate symmetry as it allows an animal to move efficiently and expeditiously. A hound with a steep scapula assembly cannot gait as efficiently as one who has an oblique shoulder arrangement, assuming all other things



being equal such as long, smooth muscling versus overly developed abductor muscles. Symmetry is functional and practical and not just for aesthetics. Symmetry begets beauty based on reasonable goals.

As an aspiring all-around Hound specialist, I have attended my fair share of judges educational programs and have asked an uncomplicated question of each breed specialist. In their judgment, what points or virtues are more indispensable in connection with the weaknesses of that breed? Admittedly, judges, mentors and fanciers will disagree as to how to apply the breed standard to a dog.

Even so, I grill mentors about trade-offs because the reality is that while adjudicating, many times we are faced with mediocre and inferior entries creating a circumstance whereas compromise will avail. I spoke briefly about several inherent embodiments of the Wolfhound breed already. Facts speak for themselves when identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each entry as compared to the breed standard and yet, subjectiveness seems to win out during the show ring 'race against time,' with the standard manner of proceeding always more comfortable than stepping back and pausing for reflection. Though my visual presentation transcends this essay, it will have to suffice.

What one seeks is a rough-coated Greyhound-like dog of great size and commanding appearance, a wolf killer. You must value balance and look for strength! We strive for a hound with substance and symmetry, fore and aft, who 'fills the eye.' One having sloping shoulders and a forechest that fills the hand, over which the ideal blend of neck and topline flow rearward over a moderately curved, broad loin on a well-ribbed up torso poised on long legs. This hound retains their shape on the move! The above typifies the blueprint and effectuates the hound's purpose.

Be aware of breeding shortcuts such as a Wolfhound who may appear to have an attractive silhouette of curves but is narrow throughout lacking the requisite substance, bone, who commonly has an upright shoulder. One tip is to step to the rear of the Wolfhound and view the torso from above. We endeavor to have an elliptical-shaped chest and rib spring. Another frequently seen variation is the hound who has a deceiving "presence" but whose forward-set frontal column and tubular-shaped neck place the skull and ears directly over the footpads of the front feet. Although the hound may have contours in profile, he is vertically built and moves with an upward motion versus driving forward with momentum. The flip side is the Wolfhound whose build includes a tolerable shoulder into a flat topline on a long, low-slung, rectangular-shaped body with a shorter leg. All of these physiques are unorthodox and represent the majority of what we see in competition and the uneducated or faint-hearted Judges pick "the best of the similar" ignoring the well-made outlier if any. Be mindful of the fact that there is no such thing as different types in the Irish Wolfhound breed; just variances in form and anatomy.

In conclusion, when you assess the Wolfhounds in your presence consider the following introspections of two highly regarded breed presenters and specialists. The first is Joel Samaha who explains that you are looking for, "A wolf killer in Greyhound form, a large, rough-coated, Greyhound-like dog, fast enough to catch a wolf and strong enough to kill it." The other, Samuel Evans Ewing III, while musing on dog show judges' reliance on what they perceived as type and soundness stated, "If you don't know type then you don't know soundness for that breed either...If I had to choose between the two, I would go first to type and then to soundness. I think soundness is determined somewhat by the type of the animal and its purpose in life." ■

