

## THE BREED STANDARD – Another Point Of View

By Linda Daves Siekert ©2008

I always enjoy reading Mary Lou Kenworthy's Point of View. Though I might not always agree with her premise, I can always rely on her subject matter eliciting thought provoking ideas and/or discussion; the Oct/Nov/Dec 2007 BCOA Bulletin is no exception. While there were a number of points within her article I could easily remark upon, I have decided to just focus on one area of the standard that has vexed me for many years.

Ms. Kenworthy writes:

"In his excellent book, **Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis**, Curtis Brown says this of dogs and endurance, *"In general, a somewhat long body is advantageous for either trotting or flexible back galloping, whereas a square body is advantageous for endurance galloping."* So the compromise must go to the square body if the basenji is to get back home safely before the leopards come out. The "tireless trot" must be effortless, as asked for in the standard."

The argument for the square body equating to endurance seems faulty in relations to the basenji due to the fact that the basenji is not an endurance galloper (square body) but an endurance trotter (long body); the ideal gait as mentioned in our 1990 breed standard, no less than three times and described as early as the 1942 revised British standard. If one support's Mr. Brown's premise of the long body being the only body advantageous to either a trot or a gallop, with the square body being solely for galloping, the tireless trot described in the basenji standard must then come from a longer bodied animal, not the square body Ms. Kenworthy is willing to compromise for.

Not too surprisingly Mr. Brown's supposition is supported by the breed characteristics of the American Trotter (also known as the Standardbred) the only horse that races in a full out trot, to which our standard ultimately compares. The US Trotting Association, or USTA, the American Trotter/Standardbred registrar, has this to say about the breed:

"In many respects, the Standardbred resembles the Thoroughbred. However, it is often more muscled and longer in body, and does not stand as tall, averaging between 15 and 16 hands."

*How interesting!* The animal in which ideal basenji movement is greatly compared is a short, long bodied beast; sounding more like native African basenjis to which our breed descends and less like the aesthetic, dare I say generic, basenjis seen too often in the ring today.

Ms. Kenworthy's article once again encouraged me to pick up, and pick through, the 1990 American basenji standard, and once again my interpretation is stymied by obvious contradictions found within, including but not limited to, asking for a short backed, high on leg, *presumably* "square" dog, though the word square is never used in our standard in relations to body style, while describing a gait that "resembles a racehorse trotting full out" - a gait which, according to Mr. Brown et al, needs a long body. The questions for me become: Does a long body always equate to a long back or could properly angled, and placed, front and rear assemblies create the impression of length? Does a long body always mean short legs or could the leg length be correct but due to the proper depth of chest, described as deep in the standard from its very inception, thus making them appear somewhat shorter than their shallow chested, albeit leggier looking, brethren?

Which of course leads to the question - just what does "appearing high on the leg" actually mean with regards to proper structure? I personally have never seen a true "high on the leg, compared to its length" basenji - by true I mean one that did not have a structural fault giving the appearance of height; straight angles, shallow chests, front assemblies glued under its chin, pasterns so stiff and upright you could snap 'em like twigs or mistake them for terriers. Nor can I recall ever seeing a well-put together, sound moving basenji and thinking, "Gee - that dog's on stilts!" Where does the appearance of height come from if not via structural faults, up to and including, loss of important depth of chest?

You can see my quandary, as I am forever questioning exactly how the breed standard evolved when so little of it actually resembles the native dogs our breed is founded upon. It's as though we imported ten native specimens, nine of which had large ears, and declared the one with smaller ears a typical characteristic of the breed, and said as much in our breed standard (albeit 15 years *after* the first two standards were written and accepted!). Over the course of 69 years the breed standard has changed a number of times and with each revision the *ready made* animal of which our breed descends becomes nothing more than a forgotten stepping stone to the generic, man made mediocrity we see too often today. 'Tis a shame really, especially when we have been afforded unique opportunities in previous, and future years, to actually go back to the source of our founders and recover much of what we have lost; well laid back shoulders as described in many ways in every British standard since the first of 1939, long second thighs, depth of chest, point of chest - to name just a few.

In conclusion, please find the attached photo comparison of two horses in the same gait sequence at the trot. These still pictures have been captured off videos of two yearlings, approximate age unknown, gaiting naturally in a field without human guidance. One is a pureblood Arabian, a breed known for their 'high on leg, short backed appearance' - the body style implied in our breed

standard. The other, the Standardbred, known for long bodies and shorter stature, whose gaiting style the basenji is supposed to emulate. Note the difference in reach and drive. The questions are: which body style is correct for our breed? Which gaiting style is correct for our breed? And which is most important; body style, which creates a pretty picture or movement necessary for the all day hunt? You be the judge.

