

THE SHETLAND SHEEPDOG STANDARD AN ELABORATION

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The current format of the Breed Standards (published in 1986), results from a Kennel Club decision that it would be convenient for all Standards to conform to an identical unified format.

Whilst in the case of the Shetland Sheepdog the present version covers the essential points, some additional evaluation of these will certainly be required by the serious breeder, exhibitor and judge.

The unified layout of the current Standard has involved slightly different paragraph headings and consequent rearrangement or splitting up of various requirements when compared with the previous Standard. In the following evaluation, some of these qualities have been brought together in order to add clarity or emphasis.

Since the first requirement of any standard is to convey a vivid, instantly recognisable mental picture of the specified breed, the Shetland Sheepdog's family resemblance to the Rough Collie (of which, however, it is not an exact miniature copy) makes a good starting point.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Small, longhaired working dog of great beauty, free from cloddiness and coarseness, action lithe and graceful. Outline symmetrical, so that no part appears out of proportion to the whole. Abundant coat, mane and frill, shapeliness of head and sweetness of expression combine to present the ideal.

A combination of the first sentence of this heading with phrases taken from later paragraphs would read "Small, longhaired working dog of great beauty, strong and active but lithe and graceful, free from cloddiness and coarseness". This would complete a picture of substance and refinement in perfect balance. The dog should of course always appear masculine and the bitch feminine.

CHARACTERISTICS

Alert, gentle, intelligent, strong and active.

TEMPERAMENT

Affectionate and responsive to his owner, reserved towards strangers, never nervous.

It will be helpful to read these two paragraphs in conjunction with one another. The resultant combination of qualities explains why, given sensible rearing, the Shetland Sheepdog makes an ideal family dog and why, with sympathetic training, he shows such a marked aptitude for Obedience and Trials work.

HEAD AND SKULL

Head refined and elegant with no exaggerations; when viewed from top or side a long, blunt wedge, tapering from ear to nose. Width and depth of skull in proportion to length of skull and muzzle. Whole to be considered in connection with the size of dog. Skull flat, moderately wide between ears, with no prominence of occipital bone. Cheeks flat, merging smoothly into well rounded muzzle. Skull and muzzle of equal length, dividing point inner corner of eye. Top-line of skull parallel to top-line of muzzle, with slight but definite stop. Nose, lips and eye-rims black. The characteristic expression is obtained by the perfect balance and combination of skull and foreface, shape, colour and placement of eyes, correct position and carriage of ears.

The character, quality and individual breed type of many dogs is expressed most eloquently in the head properties and this is certainly true of the Sheltie. Continuing the suggestion of symmetry which permeates the breed Standard, the head must be balanced and in proportion to the individual dog. It must be refined, but not fine, and the required wedge-shape, though comparatively long, should be blunt when seen (it must be noted) from the top or from the side.

The Standard lists quite accurately all the individual qualities which contribute to the perfectly balanced head and although it does not appear in the official requirements, the term "one-piece head" suggests the smooth moulding which enables the flat skull, the flat cheeks and the ideal stop to blend with the rounded foreface into a harmonious whole.

Seen from the side, the flat skull (not too frequently seen) should be absolutely parallel with the top line of the muzzle, but the skull must be on a very slightly higher plane because of the slight rise of the stop. Although slight, the outline of the stop is of course accentuated by the eyebrows. If the stop is too pronounced, the head frequently appears "old fashioned" because a deep stop often seems to accompany a broad skull and possibly a dished face (in which the muzzle is slightly higher at the nose than in front of the eyes).

If the stop is too slight, the space between the eyes will be filled in, giving a decidedly "foreign" look to the profile and the expression. The skull may appear to recede, and in some cases actually does so, a grave fault.

If the stop is too gradual, starting to rise well in front of the eyes, it will probably spoil the profile of the muzzle, which, instead of being perfectly smooth and level throughout its length, may show a dip hollow.

So too little, too much, or an incorrectly placed stop can alter the profile of the head and the expression quite drastically. This applies also to any lumps on the muzzle profile, any dip or droop of the nose-tip, or any bumps on the skull. Any deviation from the smooth parallel lines detracts greatly from the type and quality of the profile.

Since the underline of the muzzle when seen from the side must also suggest a blunt wedge, there should not be too much depth from the eye down through the back of the jaw, and the under jaw should be reasonably well developed. If the depth is too great and the under jaw weak, the effect will be sharply triangular rather than a blunt wedge.

As the standard clearly states, the head should be in proportion to the size of the dog.



Correct outline of head showing skull and muzzle equal in length and on parallel planes.



Drooping nose and head too deep through.



Receding skull and over-long fore-face.



Rounded skull and head too deep through.



Two piece head, stop too deep, and dish faced.



Total absence of stop (straight through head) and lacking in under-jaw.

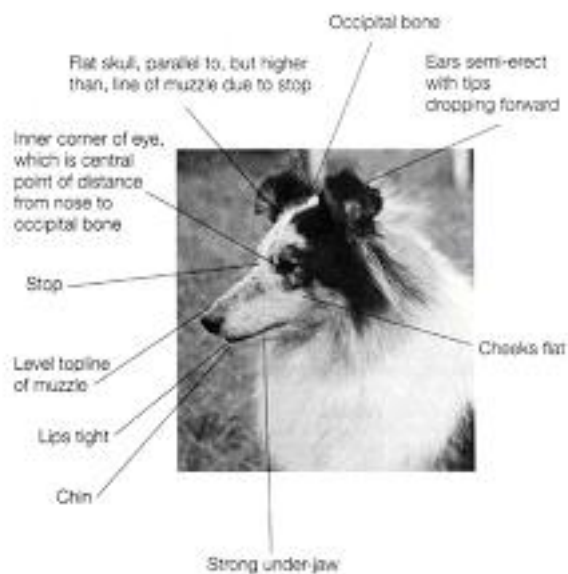
Ears semi-erect with tips falling forward.



Eyes obliquely set, almond shaped.

Well rounded muzzle.

Note the clean smooth wedge shape of the head and the desired expression of sweet, alert, gentle intelligence



MOUTH

Jaws level, clean, strong with a well-developed underjaw. Lips tight. Teeth – sound with a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite, i.e. upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to the jaws. A full complement of 42 properly placed teeth highly desired.

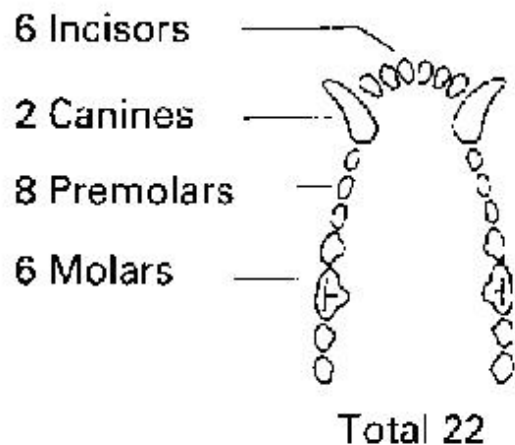
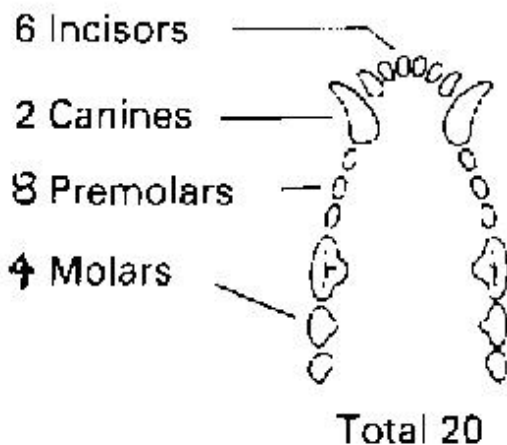
The well developed, under jaw, besides completing the wedge, is usually associated with the desired tight lip formation. A weak under jaw, possibly accompanied by inadequate lip formation, tends to reveal the incisors, especially when the dog's head is raised. This is an unsightly fault.

The markedly overshot jaw (mercifully seldom seen) can go with an over-long muzzle, possibly with a tendency to a roman nose - a very bad and very ugly fault.

A level bite causes undue wear on the incisors.

An undershot jaw is a very rare (and serious) fault in a Sheltie, but individually misplaced lower incisors are sometimes seen and are certainly not desirable. Misplaced canines are a very serious fault both from the functional and aesthetic point of view.

Dentition faults (or omissions) appear to be hereditary to some extent, so although few Sheltie judges are likely to be too censorious over a single missing tooth or one very slightly misplaced incisor, breeding plans should not ignore the desirability of complete dentition.



EYES

Medium size, obliquely set, almond shape. Dark brown except in the case of merles where one or both may be blue or blue flecked.

The correct eye is adequately described here, but its shape and placement make such a vital contribution to the typical expression that its importance cannot be over-emphasised. It is also the ideal complement to the wedge-shaped head into which it fits as though streamlined into position.

A large round eye on the other hand does not fit the shape of the head and gives a decidedly faulty expression. Because in the past this type of eye was a common problem, there has been a tendency for a "nice small eye" to be regarded as desirable. This is certainly not the case. A really small eye can give a very hard expression as can a black or light brown eye as opposed to a dark brown one.

The permitted range of eye colour in the blue merle Sheltie is quite wide. Either or both eyes may be dark brown, blue or a combination of blue and brown. The eyes do not have to "match" in colour. Two very pale blue eyes can produce a somewhat staring look but are unlikely to be penalised unless the expression produced has an adverse effect on the general appearance. Two darker blue eyes on the other hand can contribute to a very pleasing expression. There is also the rare but beautiful "merle eye" in merles where the eye is brown but with a blue fleck, patches or lights.

Any trace of blue in the dark brown eyes of sables or tricolours would be a serious fault.

EARS

Small, moderately wide at base, placed fairly close together on top of skull. In repose, thrown back; when alert brought forward and carried semi-erect with tips falling forward.

These standard requirements are reasonably explicit and it should be noted that the ears should be placed FAIRLY close together on top of the skull. While low-set, obliquely carried ears are obviously ugly and faulty, ears that are placed VERY close together can give an uncharacteristically sharp expression. Sheltie ears are NOT required to be "bang on top - practically touching" as sometimes described with misplaced enthusiasm.

In case a change of a single word in the Standard should cause uncertainty, ("falling" has replaced "dropping" forward) it should be mentioned that the ears should curve gently over rather than appearing to drop sharply from a crisp crease. The latter carriage is another feature likely to give a sharp, terrier-like expression. The tips of the ears should point forward and not to the side. Ears, which are placed low on the side of the head, can make the skull look broad, and heavy ears detract from the desired expression.

The character and appeal of the breed, including its essentially sweet, alert yet gentle, expression are so dependent on the ideal combination of the eyes and ears with the head properties, that all the remarks appearing under these headings must really be read and considered as part of a whole.

NECK

Muscular, well arched, of sufficient length to carry the head proudly.

Although quite adequately described, this feature needs special emphasis because it is currently too seldom seen. This is a great pity as besides contributing to the flowing outline and proud head carriage, a reachy, crested neck adds so greatly to the look of distinction which a really top-class Sheltie should possess.

It is also important because in a breed of normal construction such as this, adequate length of neck will generally accompany adequate length of body and reasonable shoulder angulations. Without all these features, a Shetland is unlikely to be able to stride out with the necessary freedom.

Conversely, the short, thick neck, frequently combined with steep shoulders and insufficient length of body, gives a dumpy outline and restricted movement, neither of which can be described as graceful.

It must be remembered that the full adult coat (more especially the mane of the male) tends to disguise the reach of neck, so a "stuffy" necked puppy is most unlikely to grow into an adult with proud and impressive head carriage.

FOREQUARTERS

Shoulders very well laid back. At the withers separated only by vertebrae, but blades sloping outwards to accommodate desired spring of ribs. Shoulder joint well angled. Upper arm and shoulder blade approximately equal in length. Elbow equi-distant from ground and withers. Forelegs straight when viewed from front, muscular and clean with strong, but not heavy, bone. Pasterns strong and flexible.

Some people profess to find shoulders difficult to assess which is presumably the reason that the upright shoulder is a common and persistent fault. In fact the good shoulder is not difficult to recognise and should be apparent without the need to handle the dog. The poor shoulder is even easier to recognise, as it is likely to produce glaringly obvious faults in both stance and movement.

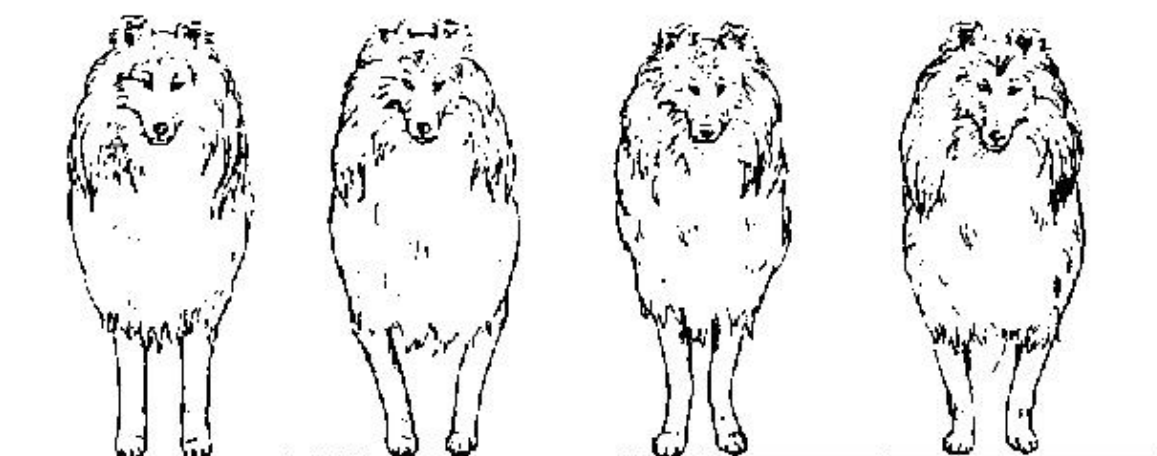
The well-laid-back shoulder (scapula) descends diagonally from well-defined withers to meet the upper-arm (humerus) at what is generally called the "point of shoulder". The upper-arm should then run back at an angle of about 90° from the shoulder to the elbow, the elbow, it will be remembered, should be equidistant from both the withers and the ground. If all the lengths and angles are correct, the elbow will be placed approximately beneath well set back withers. The dog will then be standing with its legs well under it, with a well developed fore chest.

If the shoulder and/or upper-arm are too steep, the withers will be scarcely discernible, as the upper tips of the scapula will be obscured by the base of the neck.

The legs may appear to be in a perpendicular line down from the ears to the ground and there will be no apparent fore chest because the sternum (breast-bone) will be obscured by the upper-arm. The stride will be short and choppy and the forelegs may well be lifted too high. In fact the dog will look quite unbalanced in both stance and movement.

Now for the stipulation that the upper-arm and shoulder blade should be approximately equal in length. The short upper-arm is one of the faults most frequently criticised, but it may not be quite as common as suggested, if only because the term "point of shoulder" is highly ambiguous. The shoulder-assembly is really the combination of the shoulder blade (scapula) and upper-arm (humerus), which meet in a ball-and-socket joint. The tip of the humerus then continues slightly to enclose and protrude slightly beyond the end of the scapula. So it is the upper-arm, not the shoulder blade that should be measured from this point. The end of the shoulder blade lies fractionally farther back.

The foreleg is required to have "strong" bone. This does not mean "heavy" bone. The heavily-boned foreleg will seldom accompany a flexible pastern but it will all too frequently run straight down, with a "thick ankle" instead of a flexible pastern, to a clumsy round foot. The flexible pastern is vital as a shock absorber, but it must not be so sloping as to indicate weakness.



Correct front. Out at elbows. Narrow front weak pasterns. 'Queen Anne' front toeing out.

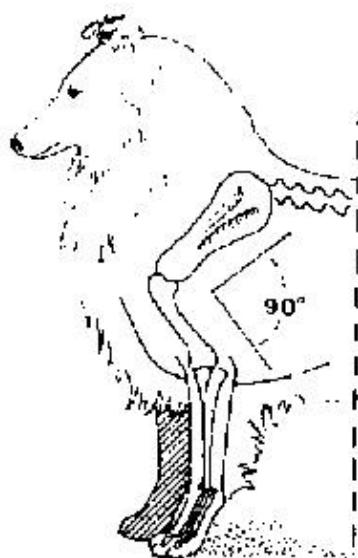
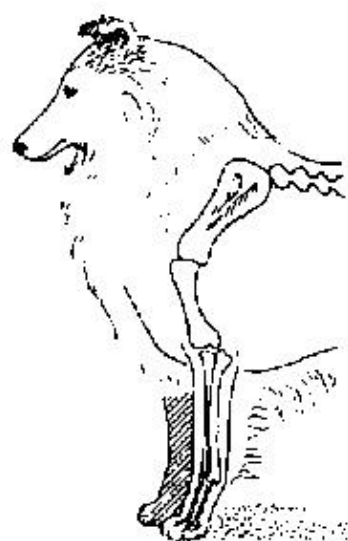


Diagram of correct shoulder angulation.



Incorrect front angulation, showing upright shoulder and short, steep upper arm.

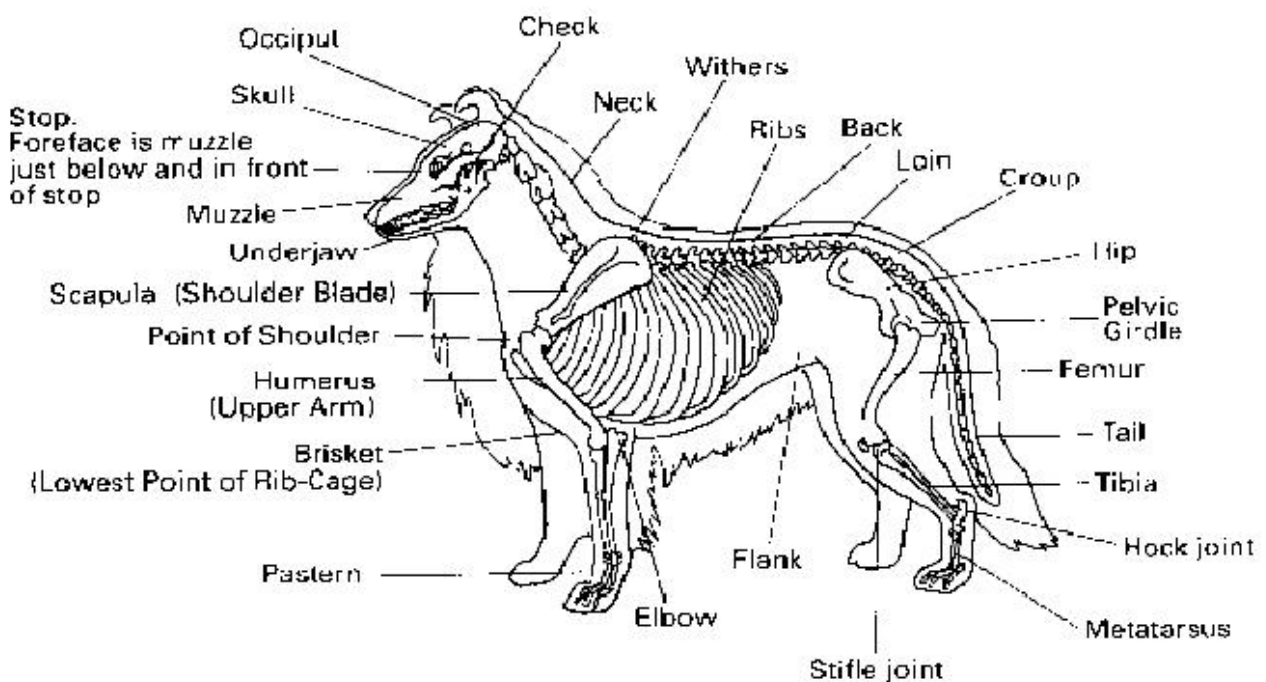
BODY

Slightly longer from point of shoulder to bottom of croup than height at withers. Chest deep, reaching to point of elbow. Ribs well sprung, tapering at lower half to allow free play of forelegs and shoulders. Back level, with graceful sweep over loins; croup slopes gradually to rear.

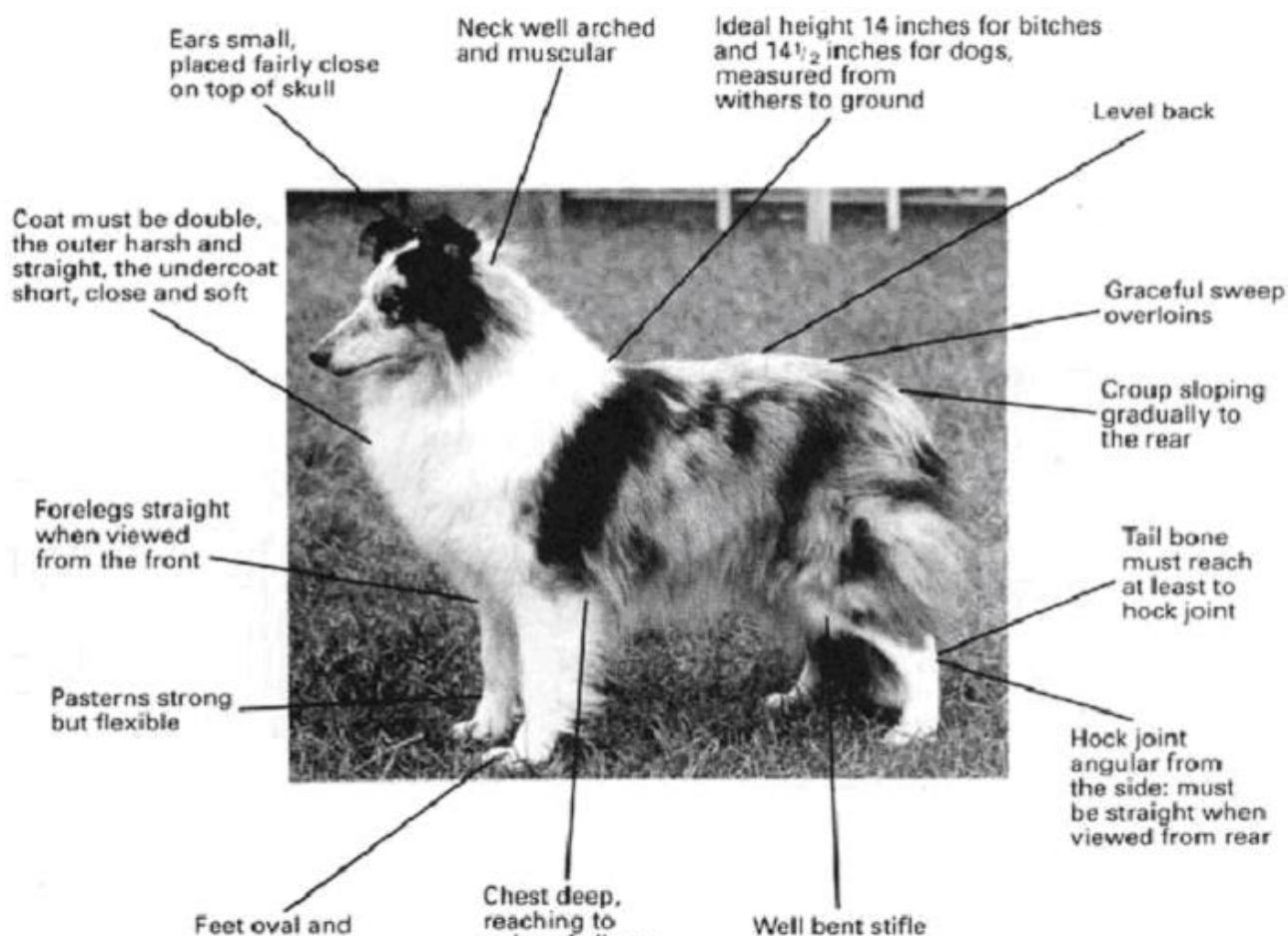
This description of the length of body corrects an error in the previous Standard and should be noted carefully. The measurement now given provides for a body of medium length. It should not be too long in the back (i.e. from the withers to the hips), as this would suggest a weak spine. The length that gives strength is that measured from the point of really well angulated shoulders to the lowest point of a correctly sloping croup. This construction allows scope for powerful hindquarters to achieve maximum propulsion and to combine with well-angulated forequarters to provide the desired length of stride. A too short body inhibits Freedom of movement and the flexibility required for turning at speed.

The depth of chest is often flattered by a profuse coat and should be checked by touch when judging. The well sprung but tapering ribs are very important. Barrel ribs (or, for that matter, obesity) can force the shoulders and elbows out of alignment and so distort the movement as well as making the dog look dumpy. On the other hand "slab sides" (narrow flat ribs) may be associated with tied elbows and mincing movement as well as causing a narrow chest with consequent lack of heart-and-lung-room.

The level back (i.e. without dippiness) flowing into the graceful sweep over the loins should not suggest a hint of roach, being simply the fact that the Sheltie, as a galloping breed, should have strong, very slightly arched loins, the "graceful sweep" being enhanced by the gradually sloping croup and low-set tail.



Drawing by Rosalind Allan



HINDQUARTERS

Thigh broad and muscular, thighbones set into pelvis at right angles. Stifle joint has distinct angle, hock joint clean cut, angular, well let down with strong bone. Hock straight when viewed from behind.

The description of muscular, well-angulated hindquarters sweeping down to lowset, well-angled hocks suggest yet again the construction necessary to provide powerful, flexible propulsion at any speed. As with the steep shoulder or too short upper-arm, lack of angulation or of adequate length of any of the bones of the hindquarters will give a short, stilted stride with too much up-and-down motion. To achieve rhythmic movement it is obvious that the construction of the fore- and hindquarters must balance one another perfectly. The ideally angulated forehand cannot function correctly without the co-operation of equally well-angulated hindquarters and vice versa. Obviously the bone structure cannot function adequately without the help of well-exercised, normally developed muscles. On the other hand muscles, which are grossly over-developed in some specific area may be compensating for a fault of construction or an injury.



Correct rear stance.



Toeing out.



Cow hocks.

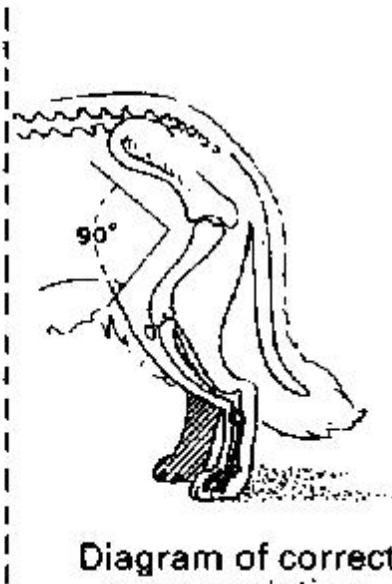
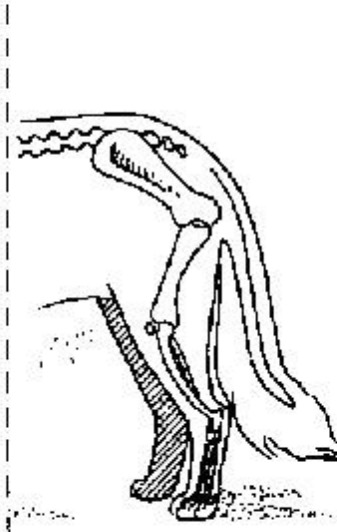


Diagram of correct rear angulation.



Incorrect rear angulation showing straight stifle.

FEET

Oval, soles well-padded, toes arched and close together.

This is the ideal foot for the small, active dog required to move at speed on rough, rocky or slippery ground. The big, round foot (likely to accompany heavy bone) or thin, flat, splayed foot (usually seen with thin, weak and spindly bone, sometimes the result of generations of poor rearing) are much less efficient as well as aesthetically unpleasing. Like the flexible pasterns, thick -pads act as shock absorbers as well as protection, while strong, well-arched toes give grip when changing speed or direction.



**Correct oval foot,
soles well padded,
toes arched and tight.
Flexible pasterns.**

**Incorrect "cat" foot,
and inflexible pasterns.**

**Incorrect long
thin flat foot
and weak pasterns.**

TAIL

Set low; tapering bone reaches to at least hocks, with abundant hair and slight upward sweep. May be slightly raised when moving but never over level of back. Never kinked.

This is self-explanatory. A continuation of the spine, the long, gracefully carried tail completes the beautiful flowing outline.

The upward sweep (neither an acute twist nor a hook) may only be noticeable in movement. In the case of a too-short tail it may not be apparent even then, but the inert tail that hangs absolutely lifelessly even when the dog is moving at speed is likely to have been injured or otherwise damaged.

The maximum height to which the tail may be raised when moving is a line, which continues that of the back.

When checking the tail for length, it should also be examined carefully in case it is kinked. Kinks are misplaced (sometimes accidentally displaced) vertebrae. Kinks can be situated anywhere along the tail, from the root to the tip. Occasionally puppies may be born with very short tails which are kinked in several places, this is not only most unsightly, but can also present practical problems. So kinked tails should be avoided at all costs.

GAIT/MOVEMENT

Lithe, smooth and graceful with drive from hindquarters, covering the maximum amount of ground with the minimum of effort. Pacing, plaiting, rolling or stiff, stilted up and down movement highly undesirable.

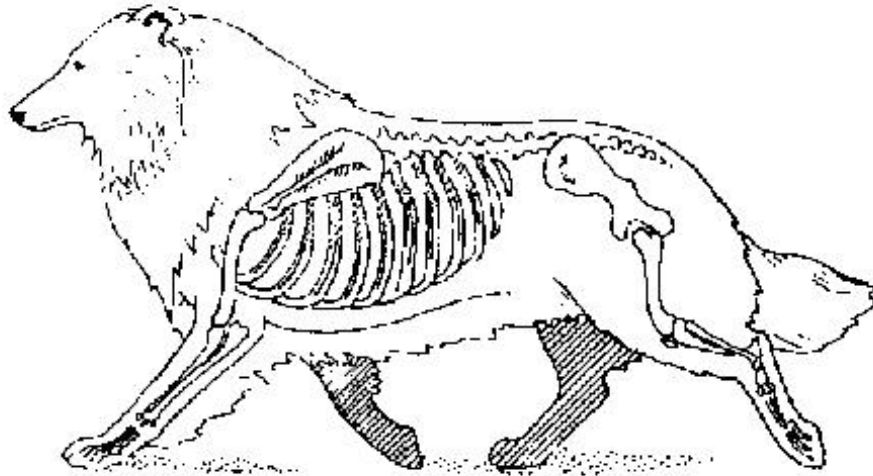
Most aspects of correct and faulty movement have already been covered under "forequarters" and "hindquarters" so it will already be understood that the required long, smooth, effortless stride which only just clears the ground ("daisy-cutting action") is dependent largely upon the construction, angulation and, above all, the balance of the fore-and rear-assembly.

If, for instance, the dog has a steep shoulder but well-angulated hindquarters, the forelegs will impede the potentially longer stride from behind. This may mean that the hind legs may have to take evasive action in one of several different ways. Both hind feet may pass between the paths of the forefeet causing the dog to move very close behind. Alternatively, the body may swing slightly sideways so that one hind foot may pass between and the other outside the track of the forefeet. If the forefeet are plaiting, the hind feet may need to pass outside the forefeet to one side, causing the body swing to be accentuated. Since the dog with steep shoulders may tend to raise the forefeet rather high in any event, this tendency will be exaggerated as it tries to remove the front feet as quickly as possible from the path of the rear feet. There are many variations on the theme of lack of balance between the forequarters and the hindquarters. All of them could result in ungainly and inefficient movement.

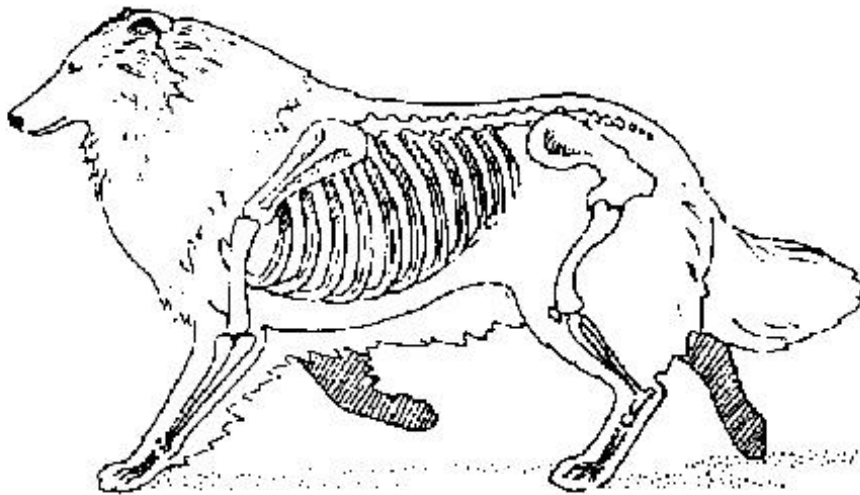
"Pacing" is, as often as not, a habit. It may be adopted by an obese or lazy dog or, more likely, as a result of faulty exercise on the lead. "Road work" is only useful if the dog can be kept at a brisk trotting pace over a considerable distance. ["Pacing" occurs when the legs on the same side move in unison (instead of for example, front right leg, left back leg); this gives a rolling kind of movement].

Other movement faults can result from the handler's bad habits! Dogs adapt themselves to the handler's pace and no dog is likely to move with a long, smooth stride if its accompanying human is tripping along with a stiff, stilted up-and-down movement!

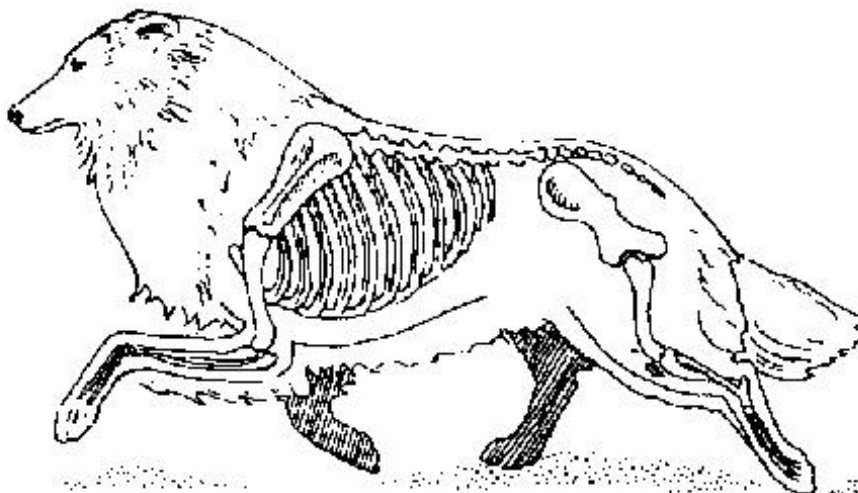
Finally, it should be explained that although the fact is not mentioned in the Standard, the really well-made Sheltie, like most other breeds of perfectly natural construction, uses the gait known as single-tracking in order to achieve the desired balance and economy of movement. Although in stance and at a walk the dog's legs remain perpendicular to the ground, as its speed increases, its legs begin to converge slightly until at a fast trot the inner edge of each foot would touch (but never cross) an imaginary central line.



Correct movement, at the trot.



Faulty gait, showing dog pacing,
both feet on same side moving in unison.



Wrong — 'hackney' like action, due to insufficient
lay-back of shoulder blade.



Correct slow
trot.



Throwing hock
joint out.



Cow hocks
in action.



Correct fast
trot.



Hock joint
too high.



Crossing over.



Correct slow trot.



Rolling movement
throwing weight
from side to side.



Too close
front
movement.



Prancing
movement.



Correct fast trot
showing
single-tracking.



Loose pasterns.



Crossing over
central line
of balance.



Too wide
front movement.

COAT

Double outer coat of long hair, harsh textured and straight. Undercoat soft, short and close. Mane and frill very abundant, forelegs well feathered. Hind legs above hocks profusely covered with hair, below hocks fairly smooth. Face smooth. The coat should fit the body and not dominate or detract from the outline of the dog. Smooth coated specimens highly undesirable.

This paragraph is self-explanatory. The correct double coat with the furnishing as described, is one of the breed's chief beauties, while the texture offers maximum weather-resistance. When a dog is in full coat it is virtually impervious to rain. The incorrect soft, fluffy coat, however, will absorb moisture like cotton wool.

Generally the male Sheltie will have a slightly more abundant and possibly harsher coat than the female, and he will have a more pronounced mane. The bitch will usually have more abundant petticoats and a more luxuriantly feathered tail.

Despite its abundance, the coat should never appear to dominate the dog or obscure its outline. It must fit the body, showing off the graceful silhouette.

The so-called smooth coated specimen was fairly common during the breed's formative years but is never seen nowadays.

COLOUR

Sables	Clear or shaded, any colour from pale gold to deep mahogany, in its shade, rich in tone. Wolf sable and grey undesirable.
Tri-Colours	Intense black on body, rich tan markings preferred.
Blue Merles	Clear, silvery blue, splashed and marbled with black. Rich tan markings preferred but absence not penalised. Heavy black markings, slate or rusty tinge in either top or undercoat highly undesirable; general effect must be blue.
Black & White and Black & Tan	Also recognised colours. White markings may appear (except on black and tan) in blaze, collar and chest, frill, legs and tip of tail. All or some markings are preferred (except on black and tan) but absence of these markings not to be penalised. Patches of white on body highly undesirable.

Little comment is required in the case of sables and tricolours except to point out the preferences for richness of tone and intensity of colour in the cases of the respective background colours, and the richness of tan markings in the case of the tricolours.

In the case of blue merles the requirements are more specific so present more difficulties to the breeder and to the judge. Blue merles should be blue (not iron grey or mostly black!). As the Standard requires, the blue should be a clear silvery blue splashed or marbled with black. Large black patches are unattractive as is a rusty tinge. A merle does not need to have tan markings, but when these occur they should be rich, in which case they contribute a lot to the beauty of a good blue merle. Although colour in merles must always be an important factor, this must be taken into consideration with the whole dog.

In tricolours, the black should be really black (not rusty or "ticked" with white), the tan rich and the white really white.

Sables may be all colours from a very pale gold to a dark rich shaded sable and all colours in between. Wolf sables (where there is a greyish hue) are undesirable. So called "wheatens" (an extremely pale sable) are permissible.

Coloured ticking on white legs should not be penalised in any of the colours. Quite understandably, most breeders and judges have their personal preferences as regards colour and (especially) white markings. The only real problem that may arise is if personal preference is allowed to become personal prejudice, and here judges must always be on their guard. However, there are always limits to which markings are acceptable from the point of view of general appearance. The Standard makes it clear that white patches (no matter how small) are not acceptable on the body (i.e. the trunk). A marking that disturbs the general effect of "great beauty" can only be regarded as a handicap, but such prejudices as, e.g. a white blaze, a white strip up the stifle, a dark muzzle on a shaded sable or odd eyes in a merle, must be kept firmly under control when judging.

SIZE

Ideal height at withers: Dogs 37cms (fourteen and a half inches); Bitches 35.5cms (fourteen inches). More than 2.5cms (one inch) above or below these heights highly un-desirable.

The requirements here are precise, the only change being the fact that one inch under the ideal height is as undesirable as one inch over.

FAULTS

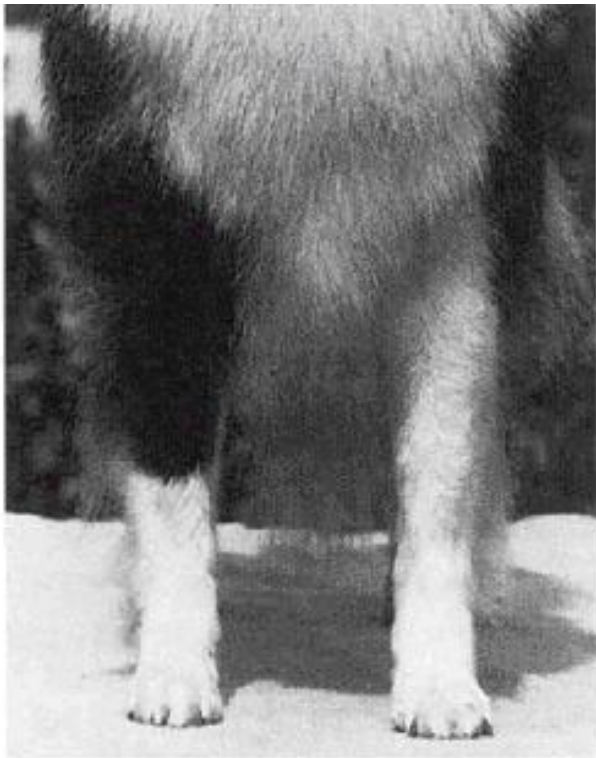
Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.

The Kennel Club's firm refusal to list specific faults under this heading is presumably a laudable effort to discourage so-called "fault judging". This theory is acceptable provided the aspiring judge or breeder remembers and applies the "any departure" phrase.

To those who prefer a more positive attitude, it is pointed out that any characteristic described as "undesirable" may fairly be regarded as a "fault". The "highly undesirable" characteristic should be considered a serious fault.

Efforts have been made to explain most faults under the explanatory paragraphs covering each characteristic.

<p>NOTE: Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.</p>
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Correct Front



Correct Rear