

A NOSE WITH A DOG ATTACHED: BLOODHOUND FORM AND FUNCTION

by CAMILLE MCARDLE, DVM

We love our dogs for as many reasons as there are dogs. But there are some fantastic things that dogs do besides just loving us back: herding, serving the disabled, water rescue, guarding, hunting, retrieving, police work, scent work. It is in this last category that the Bloodhound is king!

Hard-headed, sensitive, large and independent, this breed is not for everyone. They drool. They are curious, entertaining themselves by seeing what is inside the stuffed furniture if left alone. They are strong and can easily drag a smaller person along if they want to go somewhere. They can be difficult to show and therefore difficult to judge.

Following a scent trail, even hours or days old, is hard-wired into this breed. We start seeing this gift in puppies only a few weeks old. Bloodhounds only a few months old have successfully located missing people. For them, following a scent trail is their favorite thing to do. In the American Bloodhound Club we highly value this ability and we breed to enhance it in every way possible. Lives might be at stake.

For those interested in judging this breed we ask that you always keep in mind the purpose of the Bloodhound: to follow scent. A successful trail requires more than a good nose. Equally as important is having the conformation, as a whole and in parts and

pieces, that will support the animal for miles and miles, hour after hour, until the missing person has been found. If the lost kid wandered 15 miles away but the hound wants to stop after 10 miles because its feet or back hurt that child could die.

The very first words in the Bloodhound breed standard tell us that he "...possesses, in a most marked degree, every point and characteristic of those dogs which hunt together by scent." So what are these characteristics that you need to look for?

Your first impression should be that of power and substance. This is not a racy breed. A good Bloodhound needs to be solid and somewhat rectangular,



Very desirable furnishings on this black and tan bitch



Overall impression of substance and power, with deep body

Excellent headpiece on this liver and tan male



“THE MUZZLE IS THE BUSINESS END OF THE DOG.”

Easy balanced movement and solid topline



Good bitches should not be faulted for being female



Large open nostrils, deep-set eyes, generous lips, flews, and dewlap



Short, well-knuckled up toes with thick padding

with a deep body, good bone, and a strong topline. There is very little drop off at the croup. The underline is almost as level as the topline, with minimal tuck-up. The dog must be balanced, with moderate angulation, to endure the miles and difficult terrain that it may need to traverse. But athleticism should not be sacrificed for size. This breed needs to be agile to do its job.

To stand up to the demands of a search the hound's body needs to function as efficiently as possible, to conserve energy. This need is met when well-muscled thighs and second thighs push from the rear, through a strong, short loin, along the back, while the muscling of the neck, shoulders, and forechest allow the front legs to reach forward in the same rhythm. The neck must be well-muscled as well to support the large head while it is in a downward position as the dog trails.

Bad feet are a deal-breaker. What you want to see are short toes, well knuckled up, with thick padding. The hound's feet are like the tires on your car; flat will not take you very far.

The unique head of this breed enhances the hound's scenting ability. It is proportionally long when compared to other scent hounds. The muzzle should be at least one-half the

total length of the head, with a large nose and well-opened nostrils. Viewed from the side the planes of the muzzle and skull are ideally close to parallel. The occiput is prominent. Viewed from the top the skull should be more of an oval than a square. The head is relatively narrow, with almost no tapering from the temples to the end of the muzzle. The muzzle is the business end of the dog.

Then you have the aesthetic pleasure of the skin. Soft, loose, and thin, it slithers through brush, rarely getting caught. It moves fluidly over the head and face as the hound lifts or lowers its head. The very low-set ears have thin leather that curls slightly at the front edge. They reach well beyond the end of the muzzle. The lips and flews are long and loose, transitioning into a pronounced dewlap. When the head is down the wrinkles protect and almost blind the deep-set eyes. In addition, in this position the ears tend to twist shut. This effectively removes the stimuli of sight and sound and thus enhances the sense of smell. All of this loose skin forms something like a cone where the scent particles can concentrate as the ears swing back and forth. Bitches tend to have less wrinkle than do dogs but they should never be

placed behind an inferior dog because of lesser furnishings.

The standard describes the gait as “elastic, swinging and free.” The side-gait should be easy, without the drama of racing speed or a flashy kick behind. Look for synchrony and balance. The topline should remain level as the hound moves. With the dog coming or going you will note a tendency to converge toward the midline (after the few steps needed for the dog to pull itself together). This best supports the large body. The Bloodhound most comfortably moves with its head free rather than held up by a tight lead.

Young Bloodhounds seem to take forever to mature. Many do not reach their prime until the age of four or five. The youngsters tend to be lacking a bit in body and muscling but should still not be racy. Look for balance and breed type.

Ambiguous wording in the breed standard has led many judges to think that bigger is better, that the larger dog is to be preferred. However, that wording refers to the size and weight ranges listed in the standard. Our show dogs of today well exceed those ranges. If we select for size these days we run the risk of breeding hounds that are too big to do the job.



The Rectory's Bishop, one of the greats in the breed



Strong neck; skin on head and neck slides forward freely when head is lowered

Bloodhounds are pack hounds and should be easy-going. They can, however, be reserved with strangers. It is not uncommon for a dog to pull its head back a little when first approached. Often this is just to move the skin away from their eyes, as their field of vision can be limited. But do not reward the growly or reactive dog. Temperaments have drastically improved over the past 25 years and we want to keep it that way.

Aside from forward fronts and too-short upper arms, common to many breeds, the problems we are struggling with these days include wide backskulls, lack of body depth, soft toplines, and poor feet. Lately we are also seeing undershot bites as well.

The American Bloodhound Club asks that judges remember the purpose of this breed when evaluating an entry of Bloodhounds. Faults that are more serious are those which might negatively affect the ability to last on a long trail or to be safely handled. Our club-approved breed mentors welcome your questions. Please refer to the mentor list on the American Kennel Club website. ■

BIO

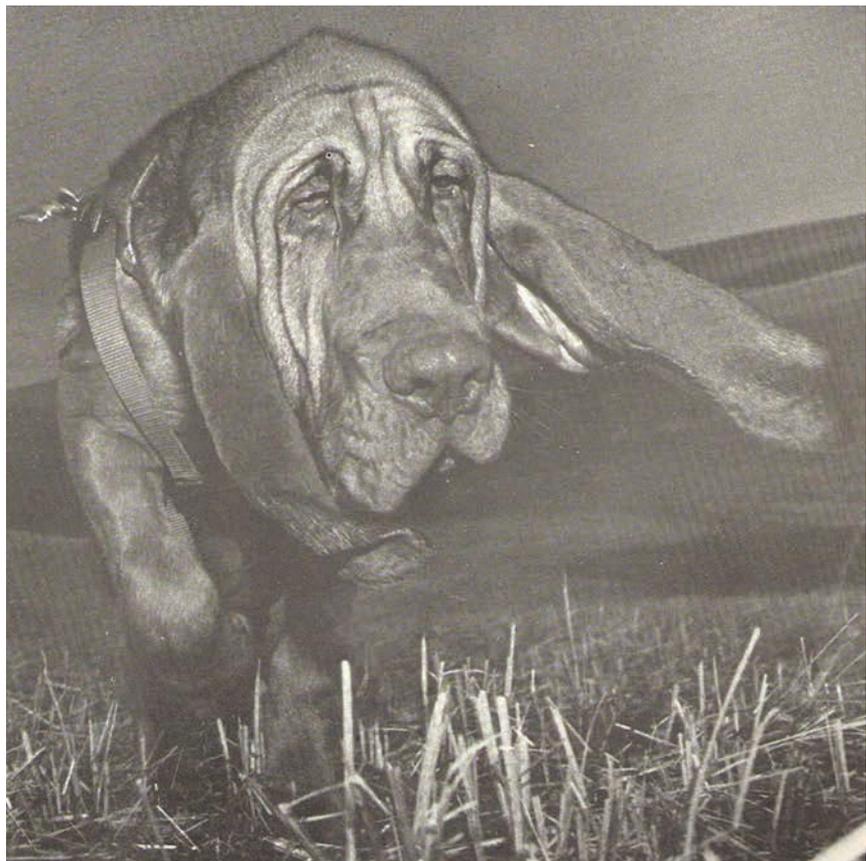
Dr. Camille McArdle has been an American Bloodhound Club member for close to 30 years and a judge of the breed for over a decade. She is an ABC past-President and now serves as the Judges Education Coordinator. She had the honor of judging the 2017 National Specialty. She can be reached at camillemca@earthblink.net.



Flexibility and strength while trailing



Correct shoulder and good feet for shock absorption



Ears sweep scent particles toward nose