

Breed Type

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The breed standard is the blueprint. The breeder is the builder. And the judge is the building inspector.

— Percy Roberts

This analogy was shared by respected author-judge Richard Beauchamp during his February seminar “The Five Elements of Breed Type.” Sponsored by The Dog Judges Association of America the lecture was part of the judges education symposium held in conjunction with the Westminster KC show. According to Beauchamp, the five elements are:

Breed Character—whether or not it looks, carries itself and acts as it should for that specific breed

Silhouette—correct proportions

Head/expression

Movement

Coat

He stressed that breeders must first determine correct type and then make sure we are not drifting away from that ideal.

When building the perfect Norwich it can be a difficult mission. The dog which passes all the health tests and has the right pedigree may still be too big, lack proper head, have poor coat texture, or have a topline that resembles the best ski slope that Aspen has to offer. On the other hand, an exhibit might possess all the right individual ingredients including proper movement but still lack that essential hard-to-define morphology (the external form) which adds up to ideal breed type. It’s a classic conundrum. Does a judge/breeder begin by selecting for soundness and then look for the best type amongst those? Or does the judge/breeder first select for type, then look for soundness?

Peter Green in a recent interview stated, “I don’t think Norwich Terriers are as good as they were fifteen years ago.” He went on to say that his 1994 Westminster BIS Ch. Chidley Willum the Conqueror was his ideal breed type. “Willum was the most correct, absolutely beautifully made Norwich.” When asked what he is seeing today while on the judging circuit, he commented that some have gotten big and long and that dentition is a major problem. He added that a Norwich Terrier should be very compact and that head and expression are of critical importance. “The joy is in the face. Type is a combination. If they don’t have a good head, you don’t have good breed type.”

As he sees it the problem lies partially in geography. “In this country they don’t have a concentration of breeders as they do in England.” British breeders may see each other every weekend and so their eye has developed in the same way. In essence, UK breeders and judges seem to have reached a consensus on what a Norwich Terrier ought to look like.

Scattered as we are across the US it is essential that breeders attend regional and national specialties. These can be viewed as opportunities to train the eye—to see current dogs which are deemed to be very good—role models. Upon returning one is then better able to discern where variations away from the ideal have crept in.

It is not an easy task. Our breed is not etched in stone. And not everyone agrees. One has only to go to early photos to see how our ideal has changed. Foundation dogs like “Smudge” and Ch. Farndon Red Dog look very different from some of the most successful dogs seen in the ring today. In essence, our breed is in the process of “drifting.” Of course health and temperament are absolutely crucial too and it is possible to make a case that some of the “typiest” imports come with skeletons in the closet. But we must keep in mind that without an agreed upon morphology which defines the breed, we are lost. The challenge is to direct the “drift” and to have a consensus on our ideal while maintaining health, temperament and soundness.

— Leandra Little, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist

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