

How Performance Affects Conformation

February 1, 2010 by AKC Gazette Breed Columnist • Categories: Breed Columns

Performance competitions are fun. Norwich do great. What else? Their success in performance (or lack of it) gives us important information about our breeding programs. Do you wonder if you're breeding Norwich that can do what your dog was bred for, as well as other tasks and activities that all dogs should be able to do? Do you want to know if you should breed the dog you're considering?

The obvious test of a Norwich Terrier is earthdog competition. In addition, there are numerous other competitions that let us know whether our dogs are sound in structure, intellect, and temperament. Most of them test all three of these areas simultaneously. The good news is that Norwich can and do excel in many areas and are making strides in others.

Obedience competition tests attitude, character, and focus in the beginning levels, and intelligence, scent ability, persistence and a work ethic in the advanced levels. Since the first Norwich UDX in 2006, we've had two more, and now there's one Norwich Obedience Trial Champion (OTCH) with another on the way.

Agility, in which the jumps are set to accommodate the dog's height, tests coordination, speed, maneuverability, as well as physical courage and intelligence. Obviously, Norwich with seizures or breathing issues need not apply. Once again, our Norwich have proven their prowess in this area. Since the first Master Agility Champion (MACH) in 2005, there have been a total of five MACHs, two of them in the last year, and several others are likely to come soon.

Interestingly, Norwich don't display their earthdog ability as readily as many of us think they should. While there have been a small but steady number of Junior Earthdog titles over the years, the number of Senior and Master Earthdogs (the tests for which are very different) have been few. And there have only been two or three Strongdog Norwich, dogs who succeed at both Senior and Master on the same day. The possible reasons for this are another article.

Finally, in tracking, the other AKC event open to Norwich, our dogs have earned fewer titles recently, although the personal experience of this author is that Norwich are willing and able to track through high cover and muddy bogs.

However, do not imagine that the fun ways of displaying structural soundness, good temperament, and intelligence end with AKC events. Our Norwich have also competed in flyball and canine freestyle (doggy dancing), and they have been quite successful as therapy dogs. The author at this time is unaware of Norwich competing in dock diving or cart pulling, although I expect to hear about that soon, but I just learned of a Canadian Norwich who passed his Herding Instinct Test (HIT), herding sheep.

We know that conformation affects performance. Let's make sure that performance affects breeding decisions. In other words, to decide which dog to breed or to see how successful your breeding decisions have been, look at what the dog or its offspring are doing in the broad category of performance events.

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Thank you, Carlynn. — Leandra Little, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist