

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Standard Revision Catherine O. Cooper

Note to the Reader: In 2003 the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog breed standard was revised. This article was prepared for publication in the AKC Gazette. The AKC publication date was July 2003.

Approximately two years ago, a committee appointed by the GSMDCA (Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America) embarked on the task of revising our standard. The previous standard, adopted in 1995—the year the breed was accepted by the AKC—had served us well, but there were certain areas that were quite vague and others that seemed to be creating problems for some judges. It was our intent to clarify these areas and also bring the AKC standard more in line with the standard of the breed's county of origin. We wanted to avoid making any changes that would alter the historical description of the breed. We were not creating the Greater American Mountain Dog.

I will highlight the main changes to the new standard. We began with a more in-depth description of the GSMD as a “striking, tri-colored, large, powerful, confident” sturdy draft and drover breed that, in spite of its size, is an agile dog. The old standard focused only on the drafting abilities of the breed and did not do justice to the all-purpose farm uses of the breed in Switzerland.

The description of the head now includes ore specific proportions. “The back-skull and muzzle are of approximately equal length. The back-skull is approximately twice the width of the muzzle.” We also included the “slight rise before the end” of the muzzle that was omitted from our previous standard.

In the description of the body, forequarters, and hindquarters, we tried to emphasize that this is a moderate breed, slightly longer than tall, with a depth of chest approximately one half the height of the dog at the withers. The GSMD is a sturdy working dog with moderate shoulder layback and moderate rear angulation. Everything in balance should give the impression of a dog that can work at a moderate pace for long periods of time, whether pulling a loaded cart or following a herd of sheep or cattle.

The revised standard goes to great length to describe the difference between the always-black topcoat and the undercoat, which may vary from the more preferred dark gray to light gray or even tawny. The presence of the undercoat is necessary to protect the dog from inclement weather. The undercoat is almost always present on the neck but may be present throughout the body.

We also went into much detail describing the “typical” tri-colored markings as well as variations that may occur within the markings. Although the beautiful black, white, and red are certainly an integral part of breed type, they are cosmetic and “should be considered of lesser importance than other aspects of type which

directly affect working ability.” A white tail tip should not be judged more valuable than a well-constructed body.

The only traits in the breed to be severely penalized are shyness or aggressiveness. Correct, stable, working-dog temperament is the hallmark of this breed. Aggressive or shy behaviors should never be rewarded. We added a statement in summary that reads, “Defects of both structure and temperament are to be judged more severely than more lack of elegance because they reduce the animal’s capacity to work.”