

## **Type or Structure** **Catherine O. Cooper**

Which is more important in your breeding program, type or structure? The answer is both. First of all I need to define what I mean by breed type. I often hear the phrase used among novice Swissy owners to mean bone and substance where in actuality that is not the definition of type. An Italian Greyhound with bone and substance certainly does not have breed type. Breed type is the quality that makes a breed unique from all of the other breeds of dogs. Bone and substance are a part of correct GSMD breed type, but a Swissy that is overdone lacks type just as much as a Swissy that is underdone. Early in my judging career I heard a judge say that her cardinal rule for judging was “Thy shalt not remind me of another breed.” That has stuck with me. Just as a Swissy should not resemble a smooth collie or coonhound it should also not resemble a St. Bernard or Rottweiler.

How do you learn correct breed type? That is what the breed standard describes. It is a blueprint for the perfect GSMD. Our standard is by no means describing a “cookie cutter” breed. If you prefer a 25 1/2 inch dog with a 2 inch coat and I prefer a 28 1/2 inch dog with a 1 1/4 inch coat they are both perfectly acceptable according to the standard. This is where personal preference enters into every individual breeding program.

Personal preference does not allow you to deviate from the breed standard. As a breeder you are the steward of the standard. It is your responsibility to breed dogs that as closely adhere to the standard as possible. If you are not able to guesstimate if your dog fits the standard, get out your tape measure and take some measurements. The standard has very specific measurements regarding head and body proportions. I have often heard people remark on what a beautiful head a dog has and although it is a beautiful head it does not fit the standard by any stretch of the imagination. The standard is your bible when it comes to correct breed type.

As to structure the Swissy is no different from any other slightly longer than tall working breed. All body parts should be in proportion. Depth of body should equal length of leg. Length of upper arm should equal length of shoulder and length of upper thigh should equal second thigh. The angle of the shoulder should balance the angle of the pelvis. The Swissy should have no structural anomalies like the dachshund's acondroplasia. Structural problems are not unique to this breed. Cow hocks, east-west fronts, sway backs are identical regardless of what breed of dog. There are many good books and articles dealing with the subject of canine anatomy. Anyone that is considering breeding whether they are going to do “just one or two” litters or plan on developing a sophisticated breeding program need to familiarize themselves with correct structure and its effect on proper movement.

The structural attribute that I value most highly in the GSMD is a good front assembly. They are few and far between. In order to have a really great front assembly you must have proper shoulder lay back and lay on as well as equal length of shoulder (scapula) and upper arm (humerous). There must also be a well defined prosternum and the elbows should be placed well under the body and be neither pinched nor loose. I have found that the easiest front fault to correct is an east/west front. This can generally be achieved in 1-2 generations. Straight shoulders and wide shoulders are so common that I think that we sometimes start looking at them as "not too bad" or acceptable but they are extremely hard to breed out. If you can add a dog to your breeding program that is prepotent for a great front, treasure that attribute. Rears can be "fixed" in one generation, it takes for ever to stamp in good fronts.

Toplines are another problem in this breed. I have heard judges comment that they expect to see bad topline. Our standard calls for a level topline. As a breeder you should settle for nothing less. Common topline faults are swayed backs and dogs that are high in the rear. Both can be improved by making judicious breeding decisions.

Unfortunately in this breed I find it a rare occasion when really superb structure and correct breed type occur in the same dog. In making breeding decisions I always try to make sure that one of the partners is very well constructed and the other possesses very good type. I have had the best luck when I have used a bitch that is rather plain but put together very nicely, bred to a dog with an abundance of type but some structural flaw. It is then very important to properly evaluate the offspring and only breed those that are an improvement on their parents. Out of every cross there should be only a couple of offspring that are so superior to their parents that they should be bred. I find that too many Swissys are placed in show and breeding homes when they are not an improvement on the previous generation. The greatest challenge about breeding is that you will never achieve perfection. It is like putting together a puzzle that always has a few missing pieces. Once you have the passion in your blood you will keep trying to find all of the pieces. Type and structure are a very important part of the puzzle as are health and temperament.....but that is another chapter.