

Breed Standard for the Lhasa Apso

The breed standard for the Lhasa Apso is effectively a “blueprint” for the breed.

It sets down the various points of the dog in words, enabling a picture to be conjured up in the mind of the reader. However, this is more easily said than done. Not only do standards vary from country to country, but people’s interpretations of breed standards vary also. It is this difference of interpretation that makes judges select different dogs for top honors, for their opinions differ as to which dog most closely fits the breed standard. That is not to say that a good dog does not win regularly under different judges, nor that an inferior dog may rarely even be placed at a show, at least not among quality competition.

The breed standard and presentation vary from the US to the UK, the author’s homeland. The breed standard given here is that authorized by the American Kennel Club (AKC), in which the size clause is more flexible than that used in Britain, where the ideal height for dogs is 10 inches at shoulder, with bitches slightly smaller. Another significant difference is in the section on mouth and muzzle, for in Britain the standard only calls for a reverse scissor bite, the option of a level bite having been deleted from the standard many years ago. However, in the US, the bite may be level or slightly undershot.

It is true that for the show ring, most of the undercoat is groomed out for purposes of presentation, but we must never lose sight of the fact that the Lhasa Apso comes from a land with extremes of climate where a good undercoat is imperative for survival.

Now to the thorny question of dark tips, which in the US may or may not be present on the ears and beard. Although not evident to non-breeders, this is related to the black nose pigment required in the standard. Breeding together, over a prolonged period of time, Apsos that carry no black coat pigment at all eventually lose depth of skin pigment. This can be seen especially on the nose, which loses color, not just in the winter months when “winter nose” can all too often be used as an excuse for poor pigmentation.

THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB STANDARD FOR THE LHASA APSO

Character: Gay and assertive, but chary of strangers.

Size: Variable, but about 10 inches or 11 inches at shoulder for dogs, bitches slightly smaller.

Color: All colors equally acceptable with or without dark tips to ears and beard.

Body Shape: The length from point of shoulders to point of buttocks longer than height at withers, well ribbed up, strong loin, well-developed quarters and thighs.

Coat: Heavy, straight, hard, not woolly nor silky, of good length, and very dense.

Mouth and Muzzle: The preferred bite is either level or slightly undershot. Muzzle of medium length; a square muzzle is objectionable.

Head: Heavy head furnishings with good fall over eyes, good whiskers and beard; skull narrow, falling away behind the eyes in a marked degree, not quite flat, but not domed or apple-shaped; straight foreface of fair length. Nose black, the length from tip of nose to eye to be roughly about one-third of the total length from nose to back of skull.

Eyes: Dark brown, neither very large and full, nor very small and sunk.

Ears: Pendant, heavily feathered.

Legs: Forelegs straight; both forelegs and hind legs heavily furnished with hair.

Feet: Well feathered, should be round and catlike, with good pads.

Tail and Carriage: Well feathered, should be carried well over back in a screw; there may be a kink at the end. A low carriage of stern is a serious fault.

While the Lhasa Apso’s breed standard is concise but fairly self-explanatory, readers interested in showing their Apsos should learn as much as possible from established breeders and exhibitors. It is sensible to attend judges’ seminars, often hosted by breed clubs. Here the finer points of the breed can be explained fully and discussed.

There are, however, a few further points that benefit from further elaboration in this book. Those not familiar with the Lhasa Apso often find it difficult to understand the construction of the mouth and most usual placement of teeth, which is “slightly undershot,” or in British parlance, “reverse scissor.” Often a new pet owner can be thoroughly dismayed when, taking his new puppy along to the vet for the first time, he is wrongly told that the mouth is incorrect.

Level bites, in which the incisors meet edge to edge, are still found in the breed and in the US are considered correct, but a slightly undershot bite means that the upper teeth close just inside the lower. This is a highly functional bite. However,

the lower teeth should not be too far forward of the upper set, nor should they be set into the jaw such that they protrude at a severe angle, for these not only look untypical but also are not at all a practical set of teeth. Normal scissors bites are also found, but these causes the typical Oriental expression to be lost. Another anomaly is the "parrot mouth," which is severely overshot. Thankfully this is a rare occurrence and is highly undesirable, so any puppies born with such a mouth should never be bred from.

Something not mentioned in the standard is the chin. However, all dedicated Apso breeders will agree that an Apso does need to have some chin to give the desired Oriental expression to which I have previously referred. Most dogs with slightly undershot bites do have sufficient chin, although there are exceptions.

Looking at the head of the Lhasa Apso in profile, the proportion from tip of nose to stop versus stop to back of skull should be 1 to 2. Thus, this is actually a partial-brachycephalic breed (partially short-nosed).

Length is measured from "point of shoulders to point of buttocks." This is the foremost point of the shoulder blade, not the top tip of the blade as has sometimes been misreported. Thus, in effect, the Apso is really not much longer than the majority of breeds of dog. It should certainly not be so long that it resembles a train!

In the AKC breed standard, there is no mention of the movement or gait of the Lhasa Apso, but in Britain it is described as "Free and jaunty." An incorrect action found in the hind movement of many Apsos today is that the dog shows the full pad of the hind feet as he moves away. This is the correct movement for a Shih Tzu, but certainly not for a Lhasa Apso. When an Apso moves away, you should only be able to see a third of the pad, for the feet should not be kicked up so high into the air that the whole foot is visible.

Excerpt from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Lhasa Apso