



## *Comments on the Basenji Head*

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*The Basenji*, April 1981, page 8-9

I receive a lot of letters from the States, nearly always extremely kind and often far too complimentary. Even so, they make me very happy.

I had been going through some old letters, as I have to clear them out periodically, when I found the following letter, and this extract is perfect for what I want to say. It was written by a very famous breeder just after I last judged in the States (1975). He wrote, "It was my great pleasure to have met and talked with you, I agree with all you said and hopefully we will meet again. Veronica, your evaluation of Basenjies in America is a true and honest one; we are all guilty of not holding to the standard. But please believe me when I say that some of us are trying."

You must remember that I have not done any breeding for a number of years, so have no axe to grind, and hope I never have. I have always tried to stick to the standard so carefully taught me by the famous pioneers of the breed: Mrs. Burn, the late Lady Helen Nutting, Lady Kitty Ritson, Captain Richards and Mr. K. B. Smith, all of whom knew Basenjies in the Congo and South Sudan. Once you have seen a number of the right type, anything else is displeasing to the eye.

What worried me when I judged in America were so many long muzzles and quite a lot of round light eyes. Many of the muzzles were as long as the



Illustration A. Bull-terrier type head with long muzzle, filled between the eyes and eyes set too high in the head giving a mean appearance.



Illustration B: Filled out collie type head with long muzzle and a light eye.



Illustration C: Low-set ears, light nose, long and heavy muzzle with heavy underjaw which is not uncommon in some lines without being undershot. Heavy jaw and neck go together. Nice eye.

Illustration D: There is little difference between the plane of the forehead and muzzle, it is not filled out, but rather as though the head was pushed in. The muzzle is long.

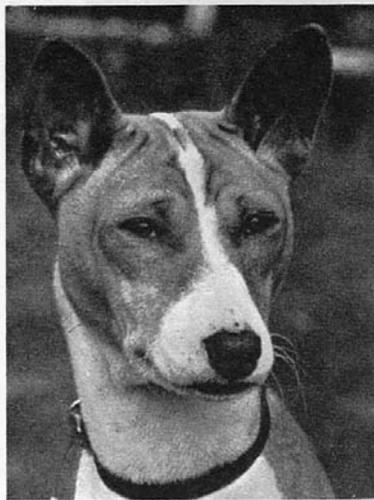


Illustration E: Cheeky and with large low-set ears which are set far too wide. The eyes are too close set and not quite sufficiently slanting.

skull with some even longer. The original description was that the muzzle should be approximately one-third the length of the head. The skull is measured from stop to the highest point on top of the head.



These photographs represent a sampling of typey Basenji heads including some of the original stock imported from Africa, some dogs from years gone by and some current dogs in several countries. Note overall shape of the head, relationships of planes, length of muzzle, and shape, color and location of the eyes.



I have even heard it said that some in America want “balanced” heads. It was explained to me that a balanced head is when the skull is equal in length to the muzzle. My description of this would be an “unbalanced” head. It is totally wrong and completely spoils the unique Basenji expression. A good test of this change in the Basenji head is to take the “blue Basenji book” which I wrote in 1954 (with a number of later reprints) and note that practically every dog illustrated has a short muzzle and typically correct Basenji expression. Then compare those heads with various editions of *The Basenji*. I think you will find a big change in heads and expressions – and they are certainly not for the better: with muzzles too long, some with a fill-up like a bull terrier, eyes round and light (even in black and white photos you can judge a light eye by its being pale, with black pupil showing up distinctly), other eyes are set too high, or too close together giving a mean appearance. Some of the heads would do justice to collies.

This warning doesn’t just apply to the States. We are getting some bull-terrier type heads in Britain; Australia is getting light eyes and a few long muzzles. We are all losing wrinkle. Perhaps this well meant warning will make people take a long clear look at their dogs and see faults in them which they had not noticed. These faults can be bred out.

By Veronica Tudor-Williams with suggestions from various breeders and illustrations by Susan Coe

Correction made appeared in letter July 1981 page 2