

One Word

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The Basenji February 1977 page 8

One word, or rather the absence of one word in the Basenji Standard has occasion to again cause concern. In 1973 I wrote and illustrated an article describing the desired degree of shoulder lay-back for the Basenji, primarily because an author in "*Popular Dogs Magazine*" presented the theory (using the Basenji as an example) that the requirement for a short back precluded possession of a well laid back shoulder blade. Concern for the breed caused me to dispute this theory in 1973, and now again in 1977.

A recently published book, "*The Art and Science of Judging Dogs*", by Curtis and Thelma Brown, states on page 102 that: "The Basenji, like other short backed dogs, has a problem with steep shoulder blades. Its neck is of 'good length' and 'well set into flat, laid back shoulders,' and is 'short coupled.' There is room for interpretation; the words are: 'laid back shoulders' not 'well laid back.' (*BU Note 2010: 1990 AKC Standard is 'moderately laid back.'*) Many authors describing Basenji conformation insist that 'well laid back shoulder blades' are desirable. A possibility always exists that a mutation may occur and the shoulder blade will become attached further back."

I am one of the authors who have insisted on 'well' laid back shoulder blades. In my book, "*The Basenji Illustrated*," I again insist on the same oblique degree of slope, however as Thelma Brown was selected "Best Judge of the Year" for 1972 by the readers of "*The Basenji*" magazine, and as my book has yet not gone to press, I again reviewed my notes and authority. My opinion has not altered.

The Browns' book is excellent and I recommend it as required reading for anyone interested in the judging of dogs, however, it is my opinion that in this one aspect of Basenji conformation they have erred in the one word 'well' and in erring have not assisted in the promotion of sounder Basenjies.

They base their belief that authors should not insist on Basenji's shoulder blades being well laid back on the interpretation of the present AKC Standard (1954), which does not include the word 'well.' Veronica Tudor-Williams in her book "*Basenjies the Barkless Dogs*" (1954) and again in her new book (1976) under the same title, states: "the shoulders must be well laid back." The wording of the British Standard (1965) and the New Proposed (1972) AKC Standard for the Basenji both require well laid back shoulders; in fact, both demand that the shoulders MUST be well laid back.

It is not necessary to wait for a mutation in order for the shoulder to be attached further back – what is not fully expressed is that the angle at which the shoulder blade is attached depends on the relative length of the cervical (neck) and dorsal (withers) vertebrae, especially the latter. The reason why the degree of layback is dependent on the length of these splines is because no matter what the degree of shoulder inclination, the muscles are always attached to the same vertebrae.

The first dorsal vertebra (withers) must be long and slope rearward, this allows for a greater inclination of the shoulder blade that attaches to them than if they were short or vertical. The remaining dorsal vertebrae (back) are shorter, more vertical and produce the level back. The

difficulty in the breed (as in many others) is to keep the splines of the withers long and those of the loin short. This can best be described graphically by means of comparison.

When the vertebrae of the neck and the withers are short, the shoulder blade may be laid back but not well laid back.

The shoulder blade can be inclined further back by lengthening the body while keeping the loin short, but for the Basenji this is no more the answer than acceptance of steep shoulders.

The answer is the promotion of long sloping vertebrae of the withers and neck. This allows for a greater inclination of the shoulder blade without lengthening the body. The withers are then higher than the level back and neck flows smoothly into the shoulders.

The importance of high withers is best appreciated when considered in respect to their anatomical relations. The high carriage of the Basenji's head is dependent on the great elastic ligament implanted in the summits of the bones in that region. Muscles that raise the head and neck, move it from side to side and others which elevate the shoulder and extend the spine are connected with it. High withers and the resulting well laid back shoulders increase forward reach and ability to absorb greater concussion. The New Proposed Standard for the Basenji, when adopted, will be like that of the country that produced the original guideline, will, by inserting that one word "well," give those who breed and those who assay to judge the breed much better direction.