

A Discussion of the Official Standard for the

KEESHOND

In the following text you will find a presentation that was given to the LA Dog Judges Association by Dennis LeHouillier on the Keeshond Breed Standard in 1997. The breed standard is shown in italics and is followed by a discussion in bold type. It is hoped that this discussion may aid newcomers in better understanding the words presented in the official breed standard. This discussion reflects the opinions of one breeder and other breeders may have their own interpretation.

Dennis LeHouillier has been raising and showing Keeshonds for more than 25 years in Southern California under the Cari-On kennel prefix. He has owned such notable greats as Ch. Windrift's Willy'Weaver, ROM and BIS Ch. Coincidence of Cari-On. He has been invited on numerous occasions to judge Sweepstakes at Keeshond Specialties.

Official Standard for the Keeshond

* *General Appearance*

The Keeshond (pronounced kayz-hawnd) is a natural, handsome dog of well-balanced, short-coupled body, attracting attention not only by his coloration, alert carriage, and intelligent expression, but also by his stand-off coat, his richly plumed tail well curled over his back, his fox-like expression, and his small, pointed ears. His coat is very thick around the neck, fore part of the shoulders, and chest, forming a lion-like ruff -- more profuse in the male. His rump and hind legs, down to the hocks, are also thickly coated, forming the characteristic "trousers". His head, ears, and lower legs are covered with thick, short hair.

Note the key words: natural, handsome, well balanced, short-coupled, alert carriage, intelligent fox-like expression. You will see these key words throughout the standard as they attempt to signify the importance of how we define the breed.

* *Size, Proportion, Substance*

The Keeshond is a medium-sized, square-appearing, sturdy dog, neither coarse nor lightly made. The ideal height of fully mature dogs when measured from top of the withers to the ground is 18 inches for males and 17 inches for bitches -- a one inch variance either way is acceptable. While correct size is important, it should not outweigh that of type.

Note the key words medium-sized, square-appearing, neither coarse nor lightly made. The objective is to breed a dog that is not only square, but is square-appearing. Some dogs' coats are too profuse and so rough that they stand out too far. As to substance, we have both problems in our breed -- dogs so large in bone they appear Chow-like with coarse heavy heads, and dogs so lightly made that they lose all typical traits of the breed. As to size, that's pretty clear.

Years ago, the concern was about too many dogs and bitches that were way too big; today there may be more of a concern about many being too small.

Notice the statement regarding the fact that type is at least as important as exact size. This does not mean that a 21 inch, 65 pound male exhibiting otherwise good type shall be put up. It means that judges don't need to get out the wicket for a typey dog that may appear to be slightly above or below the standard plus or minus one inch allowance. If the dog is of better type than any of the standard-sized dogs in the ring, a minor size deviation shall be considered no better or worse than any other minor fault. The breed on the whole is to be moderate and balanced, a dog that is slightly undersized or slightly oversized, yet balanced, shall not be overlooked solely based on its size deviation.

Throughout the standard you will find repeatedly words like too much or too little. Moderation is the key to describing the breed. If the dog appears to be lacking in moderation with too much coat, or too small in size, or too big, or too light, or too dark, or too angulated, it is not moderate and is therefore atypical of the breed.

* *Head*

* *Expression*

Expression is largely dependent on the distinctive characteristic called “spectacles” -- a combination of markings and shadings in the orbital area which must include a delicate, dark line slanting from the outer corner of each eye toward the lower corner of each ear coupled with expressive eyebrows. Markings (or shadings) on the face and head must present a pleasing appearance, imparting to the dog an alert and intelligent expression.

Very Serious Fault: Absence of dark lines which form the “spectacles”.

Note that “spectacles” are the dark lines slanting from the outer corner of the eye toward the lower corner of each ear. It has been my experience that the majority of spectacle markings I’ve observed tend to droop lower on the head, rather than to the ear, as the standard requires. To me this gives appearances of a sad expression.

I’d like to point out that spectacles are not the light-colored round circles surrounding the eyes. Exhibitors, thinking that judges expect to see large, round circles around the eyes, or exhibitors with darker-faced dogs lacking good contrast will attempt to trim the dark tips off the facial hair to provide more contrast. This trimming tends to give the dog a rather harsh or unnatural expression. Natural Keeshond expression is soft and very appealing.

* *Eyes*

Eyes should be dark brown in color, of medium size, almond shaped, set obliquely and neither too wide apart nor too close together. Eye rims are black.

Faults: Round and/or protruding eyes or eyes light of color.

Eye color has improved over the years, lighter eyes tend to impart a rather harsh, predator-like expression. The standard calls for “almond-shaped” eyes. It has been my experience however, that you are more likely to see rounder eyes. Bulging, or protruding eyes are most offensive and tend to impart a rather wild-eyed expression. Eye rims should be black. Eye rims with lighter, or liver-colored pigmentation tend to detract from the desired softer expression.

* *Ears*

Ears should be small, triangular in shape, mounted high on head and carried erect. Size should be proportionate to the head -- length approximating the distance from the outer corner of the eye to the nearest edge of the ear.

Fault: Ears not carried erect when at attention.

Note here, ear size is “small”, however balance and moderation are the key. Ears should not be so large or so small as to give the head an unbalanced appearance. The standard calls for ears to be carried erect when the dog is at attention. Some judges expect Kees ears to remain erect at all times, however, Kees rarely will gait with their ears erect. In addition, Kees may fold their ears back when being approached, spoken to, or petted, a natural canine expression of submission. An alert Keeshond may even prick one ear forward and another back when listening to sounds while in the ring. These are all normal behaviors and should not be faulted.

* *Skull*

The head should be well-proportioned to the body and wedge-shaped when viewed from above -- not only the muzzle, but the whole head should give this impression when the ears are drawn back by covering the nape of the neck and the ears with one hand. Head in profile should exhibit a definite stop.

Faults: Apple head or absence of stop.

Since the width of the wedge is not described, we can rely on our old, favorite term -- moderation.

* *Muzzle*

Of medium length, neither coarse nor snipey, and well proportioned to the skull.

Again, moderation...medium length is the key word.

* *Mouth*

The mouth should be neither overshot nor undershot. Lips should be black and closely meeting -- not thick, coarse, or sagging -- and with no wrinkle at the corner of the mouth.

Faults: Overshot, undershot, or wry mouth.

Lips should be black. Liver, spotted lips, or lips with poor pigmentation detract from the overall expression.

* *Teeth*

The teeth should be white, sound, and strong, meeting in a scissors bite.

Fault: Misaligned teeth.

Any more, it seems like the breed is experiencing a higher incidence of bad bites -- overshot or undershot.

* *Neck, Topline, Body*

* *General*

The neck should be moderately long, well-shaped and well set on shoulders. The body should be compact with a short, straight back sloping slightly downward toward the hindquarters: well ribbed, barrel well rounded, short in loin, belly moderately tucked up, deep and strong of chest.

Keys to that silhouette are: moderately LONG neck, SHORT, STRAIGHT back, SLOPING slightly downward towards the hindquarters. Many Keeshonds being exhibited today are demonstrating insufficient length of neck, which makes for a lack of balance. We see a lot of long backs and dogs that are very high in the rear. Handlers will attempt to carry their dog around the ring by stringing it up. A properly proportioned Keeshond, balanced with adequate angulation fore to rear and appropriate shoulder layback should be able to carry itself. Also, don't be fooled by a sculpted dog. An excessively trimmed dog can give appearances of neck where there is none, make a long back look short, give a short dog more leg, etc.

* *Tail*

The tail should be moderately long and well feathered, set on high and tightly curled over the back. It should lie flat and close to the body. The tail must form a part of the “silhouette” of the dog’s body, rather than give the appearance of an appendage.

Fault: Tail not lying close to the back.

The ever-important silhouette of the Keeshond, distinctly his, must be enhanced by the tail -- it’s set, how it lies on the back, and the plume it carries. Breeders take great pride in having achieved lovely tail sets, wonderfully flat with beautiful plumes. One way to judge the tail set is to put your hand on the base of the tail; the closer that base is to the back, the better it is. Some sculptors have taken to trimming around the anus to create the illusion of a high tail set. A Tail that loops over the back like the handle on a teacup while the dog is gaiting is unsightly and entirely incorrect.

* *Forequarters*

Forelegs should be straight seen from any angle. Pasterns are strong with a slight slope. Legs must be of good bone in proportion to the overall dog. Shoulder to upper arm angulation is between slight to moderate.

Our previous standard did not mention shoulder or pastern angulation, however the current standard requires shoulder angulation to match rear angulation. Pasterns should be slightly sloped, but dogs that are down on their pasterns are not in keeping with the vision of moderation in the breed. Moderation is again the key. Too much angulation makes for a loose loping dog, too little would be stiff and terrier like. The Keeshond moves briskly with moderate reach and drive. We are seeing a lot of weak fronts and narrow fronts of late ... forelegs should be straight from any angle.

* *Hindquarters*

Angulation in rear should be between slight to moderate to complement the forequarters, creating balance and typical gait. Hindquarters are well muscled with hocks perpendicular to the ground.

This wording is a compromise between the previous standard's "hocks only slightly bent" and the English standard's "straight as a Chow Chow". The wording "slight to moderate" indicates we are closer to the Chow than to other breeds with moderate angulation. Frequently seen problems in the breed are dogs that are cowhocked, dogs that are too close in the rear, and dogs that toe in.

* *Feet*

The feet should be compact, well rounded, cat-like. Toes are nicely arched, with black nails.

Nice and clear.

* *Coat*

The body should be abundantly covered with long, straight, harsh hair standing well out from a thick, downy undercoat. Head, including muzzle, skull, and ears, should be covered with smooth, soft, short hair - velvety in texture on the ears. The neck is covered with a mane -- more profuse in the male -- sweeping from under the jaw and covering the whole of the front part of the shoulders and chest, as well as the top part of the shoulders. The hair on the legs should be smooth and short, except for feathering on the front legs and "trousers" on the hind legs. Hind legs should be profusely feathered down to the hocks, not below. The hair on the tail should form a rich plume. Coat must not part down the back. The Keeshond is to be shown in a natural state with trimming permissible only on feet, pasterns, hocks, and -- if desired -- whiskers. TRIMMING OTHER THAN AS DESCRIBED TO BE SEVERELY PENALIZED.

Faults: Silky, wavy, or curly coats. Part in coat down the back.

Note the word "straight". Hairs with a slight crinkle often look dull and make for a wooly coat. Silky coats show an exaggerated gloss and do not stand out from the dog. Curley coats are incorrect, and usually appear on the back near the tail. The mane is definitely part of the silhouette. With the mane standing high on the shoulders, it always results in exaggerating the slightly downward turn of the topline. On the legs, breeders try to achieve thick hair, as well as smooth and short.

This is a good spot to discuss trimming, how the dog is trimmed and why trimming is usually done. Remember those wooly coats? They make wonderful coats to trim. Just brush up the bib and trim the entire ruff to be short and turned up instead of down. Then the rear end is trimmed so that tail set looks better and the dog appears shorter in body. The belly hair is trimmed to give a short dog more length of leg and to provide a tuckup. It is fairly simple to see how and why it is done. However, trimming is not acceptable except on the feet, pasterns, hocks, and whiskers.

* *Color and Markings*

* *General*

A dramatically marked dog, the Keeshond is a mixture of gray, black, and cream. This coloration may vary from light to dark. The hair of the outer coat is black tipped, the length of the black tips producing the characteristic shading of color. Puppies are often less intensely marked. The undercoat is very pale gray or cream, never tawny.

Light, medium, and dark dogs are all correct. The key here is to have good color contrast. The breed does not have a black saddle. If the dog is light in color, the black tips on the outer coat hairs may be less than an inch long. The black tips tend to become longer as the dog ages, so that some “oldies” may finally become quite dark, far darker than is desirable for a show career. Thus, breeders often prefer lighter colored young dogs. Puppies are sometimes a vision in silver, with little black visible.

One way to test whether a dog is too dark is to check the color of the undercoat along the top of the back. If the undercoat is darker than pale gray or light cream, for instance a dark charcoal color, it is too dark. Pale gray undercoated dogs are rarely tawney. Dogs with pale cream undercoats occasionally get tawney spots on them. Tawney spots are undesirable.

* *Head*

The muzzle should be dark in color. “Spectacles” and shadings, as previously described, are characteristic of the breed and must be present to some degree. Ears should be very dark -- almost black.

Note that the standard says “dark in color” for the muzzle, not black. The dark color of the muzzle sometimes shades into a soft, tapering

black line up the forehead and between the ears. Other times, the dark muzzle ends abruptly at the stop, leaving the skull light. Whatever the color, the spectacles must be clearly visible, and the whole effect must be pleasing to the eye. Often, if the skull is very light, the ears will be too light. White and/or silver hairs around the mouth, on the chin and spreading above the lips are often present in Kees as they grow older and should not be penalized.

*** *Ruff, Shoulders, and “Trousers”***

The color of the ruff and “trousers” is lighter than that of the body. The shoulder line markings of light gray must be well defined.

The shoulder line markings must be present, even on very light dogs. Shoulder line markings and a light ruff are present on correctly marked dogs, and are part of being dramatically marked.

*** *Tail***

The plume of the tail is very light in color when curled on the back, and the tip of the tail should be black.

The black tip will be there; don’t worry about it. Do make sure the tail plume is very light; it should not be sooty or filled with black hairs.

* *Legs and Feet*

Legs and feet are cream.

Faults: Pronounced white markings. Black markings more than halfway down the foreleg, penciling excepted. White foot or feet.

Very Serious Faults: Entirely black or white or any solid color; any deviation from the color as described.

It is a matter of pride with breeders to produce dogs with “clean” legs and feet; the less smuttiness the more eye appealing.

* *Gait*

The distinctive gait of the Keeshond is unique to the breed. Dogs should move boldly and keep tails curled over the back. They should move cleanly and briskly; the movement should be straight and sharp with reach and drive between slight to moderate.

Ideally, the Keeshond tracks on parallel lines. A Keeshond should not single track. At a fast gait the feet may converge slightly to maintain balance but the Keeshond should not single track like other breeds having standards that call for greater angulation and more reach and drive. The Keeshond should not move like a German Shepherd.

Keeshonds are not required, nor is it desirable for the breed, to be moved fast. I believe they should be moved by being trotted easily or walked “briskly” to evaluate carriage, topline and attitude in motion.

When viewed trotting toward you, the Keeshond should move cleanly; feet turning neither in nor out; pasterns should be firm and elbows held close to the body, neither elbowing out nor appearing pinched

and constrictive. The fore-assembly should not be so stiff or restricted as to give an appearance of a pounding or jarring type of movement.

When viewed from the side, the Keeshond moves with his head up and only slightly more forward. The neck should arch smoothly down through the withers into a topline that tapers slightly downward toward the croup. There should be no unnecessary sway or roll to the back or midbody. The Keeshond gait from the side should appear brisk and authoritative, not choppy or hackneyed. A correct short-backed dog will not dip across the middle of the back when moving.

When viewed from the rear, the Keeshond's feet should move parallel in a straight, clean, forward-and-back motion with no twisting of the hocks, and no toeing in or out of the hind feet. Pads will be visible.

*** *Temperament***

Temperament is of primary importance. The Keeshond is neither timid nor aggressive but, instead, is outgoing and friendly with both people and other dogs. The Keeshond is a lively, intelligent, alert, and affectionate companion.

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Effective January 1, 1990

The Keeshond should be willing to be examined, without shrinking or aggression, although some puppies may be a bit unsure of themselves the first few times in the ring. The Keeshond is easily bored, and hates to spend a lot of time staring at a piece of bait and interest in squeaky toys or unusual noises may be fleeting. Posing for minutes on end like a statue is not their "thing". It is unlikely that you will see much more than a quick flick of the ears to an upright position adequate for determining correct ear set, especially in hotter weather.

Being an alert and very curious breed they are far too interested on what is going on all around them. If you press on their backs or hind quarters they usually oblige you by sitting down. If you put your face to close to theirs you will probably get a kiss. If you speak sweetly to them they will probably try to jump up to greet you or begin wagging their entire body in a gesture of friendship.

Review

So, after reviewing the standard it is apparent that the things which especially set the Keeshond breed apart from other breeds are Silhouette, Coat, Color and Gait.

The Silhouette - the standard tells you repeatedly that the dog should be square-appearing, short and compact, that the neck is moderately long, that the tail must be held closely to the back, and that the whole impression of the dog is one of a dog with a slightly sloping topline from front to rear, accentuated with a large ruff and a flat plumed tail. Please do not reward the long-backed, short-legged Keeshond, such a dog could never have been agile enough to get quickly out of harms way on the narrow decks of a barge.

The Coat - The correct coat on a properly constructed Keeshond does not require trimming, it is easily maintained without a great deal of trouble by a pet owner. When the coat is too profuse or incorrectly textured, it is impractical for casual management. A barge captain would never have put up with a dog whose excessive coat required too much attention or could result in drowning of the dog from water absorption should the dog ever fall overboard.

The Color - The breed is a mixture of black, gray and cream. The coat color may vary from light to dark. Appreciate clean legs and feet and dramatically contrasting markings. Wide, beautiful shoulder lines are to be appreciated, as are dark muzzles and ears, light ruffs and trousers. Tawney dogs, dogs with smuttiness on their legs, smudgy ruffs, britches and tail plumes are not very pleasing to the eye. A dramatically marked dog was something a barge captain could be proud of, such a Kees would stand out on the deck, truly a prince of the Nordic seas!

The Gait - Our breed is not extremely angulated, Keeshond movement is beautifully functional, but not overwhelming in reach and drive. Appreciate it

for what it is, consider it for how well it serves the dog's purpose (barges provided this companion dog with very close quarters, there was no room for a "flying trot"!)