YOU BE THE JUDGE

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THE IRISH TERRIER

HISTORY

Ireland has produced four physically similar terrier breeds, all of which are markedly different from terriers on the Continent and in England. The dog now officially called the Irish Terrier is possibly the oldest of the Irish terrier breeds, but records are so scarce that it would be difficult to prove this conclusively. Before the 1880s, the colour of the Irish Terrier had not been settled. Apart from red, they were sometimes black-and-tan or sometimes brindle.

At the end of the 19th century, efforts were made to breed out the black-and-tan and the bridles, so that by the 20th century, all Irish Terriers showed the red coat. The red-coated terrier soon made its appearance on show benches in England and in the United States where it was enthusiastically received. The Irish Terrier's reputation was enhanced during the First World War when they were used as messenger dogs in the terrifying noise and confusion of trench warfare, thus proving both their intelligence and their fearlessness.

The first club in the breed was setup in Dublin on March 31, 1879, and the Irish Terrier was the first native Irish member of the Terrier Group to be recognized by The Kennel Club, in the late 19th century.

The Irish Terrier's reputation for getting into scraps with others, sometimes even in the show2 ring, is undeserved. Although the terrier may be fierce when the circumstances call for it, the Irish Terrier is easily trained and a gently pet, living up to his early description as "the poor man's sentinel, the farmer's friend and the gentleman's favourite."
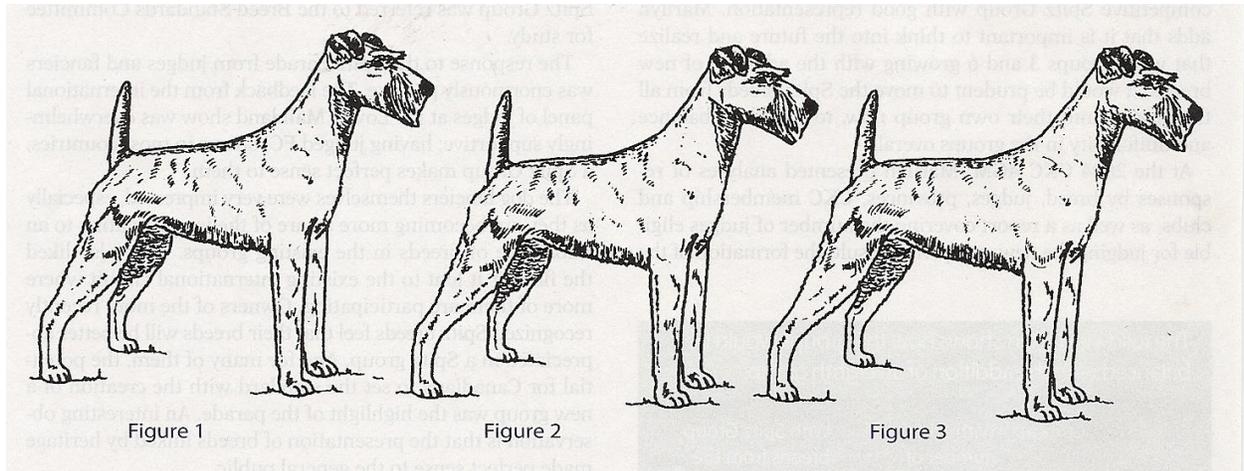
TEMPERAMENT

The temperament of the Irish Terrier reflects his early background: he was family pet, guard dog and hunter. He is good-tempered, spirited and game. It is of the utmost importance that the Irish Terrier show fire and animation. There is a heedless, reckless pluck about the Irish terrier that is characteristic, and when coupled with the headlong dash, and blind-to-all consequences with which he rushes at his adversary, has earned the breed the proud epithet of "Daredevil". He is most affectionate, and absolutely loyal to mankind. Tender and forbearing with those he loves, this rugged, stout-hearted terrier will guard his master, mistress and family with utter contempt for danger or hurt. His life is one continuous and eager offering of loyal and faithful companionship and devotion. He is ever on guard, and stands between his home and all that threatens.

FIGURE 1, 2 OR 3?

Decide which on of these three Irish Terriers best represents typical. To do so you must look for: 1) a neck of fair length; 2) a moderately long body; 3) moderately long forelegs; and 4) built on lines of speed with a graceful, racy outline. Only one of these dogs possesses all of these requirements. Which one?
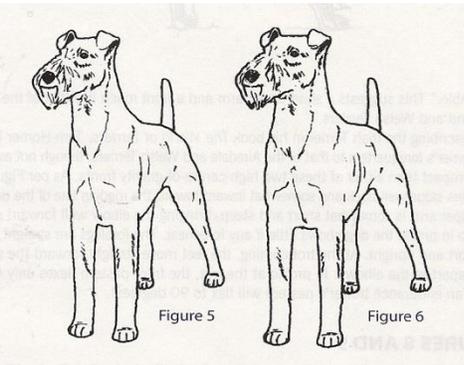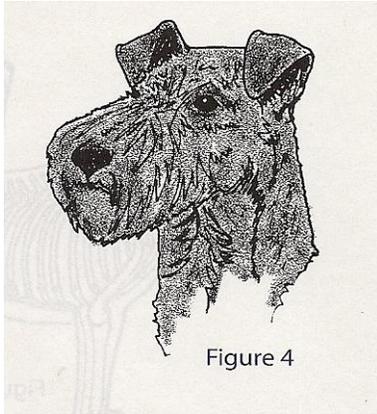
Figure 1's body is too short; it should be "moderately long". Figure 2's legs are short; they should be "moderately long". Figure 3 represents typical.

Figure 1   Figure 2   Figure 3

TYPICAL HEAD

The typical head (Figure 4) is long, with a flat skull that is rather narrow between the ears. The jaws are strong and muscular. The teeth should be "neither overshot nor undershot". That leaves a scissors bite and a pincer bite as acceptable. The foreface and skull are approximately equal in length. I believe the skull and muzzle are also on parallel planes, or near so.

The tight lips on Figure 4 are almost black. The nose must be black. The eyes are dark brown in colour, full of life and small, not prominent. A light or yellow eye is most objectionable. The ears are small and V-shaped, set well on the head and dropping forward closely toward the outside corner of the eye. The top of the folded ear should be well above the level of the dog's skull. A dead or hound-like ear is severely penalized.
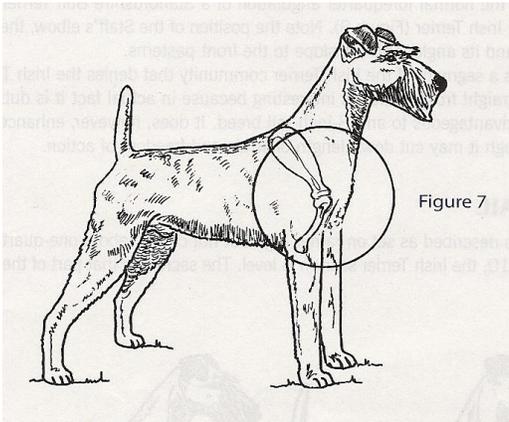

Figure 4

Figure 5   Figure 6

FIGURE 5 OR 6?

Viewed face-on, the chest should be deep but neither full nor wide. Height should be approximately 18 inches. The most desirable show weight for dogs is 27 pounds, and bitches 25 pounds. Figure 6 is too wide for a racy Irish Terrier; that includes his coarse head.

FIGURE 7

The neck as mentioned should be of fair length, gradually widening into the shoulders. The back must be strong, straight and free from an appearance of slackness or a dip behind the shoulder. The loin should be strong, muscular and slightly arched.

I have circled an area worthy of special Irish Terrier discussion: the upper arm. The standard doesn't mention upper arm or the unorthodox makeup of the Irish Terrier's front. However it does mention that the front pasterns are "short,
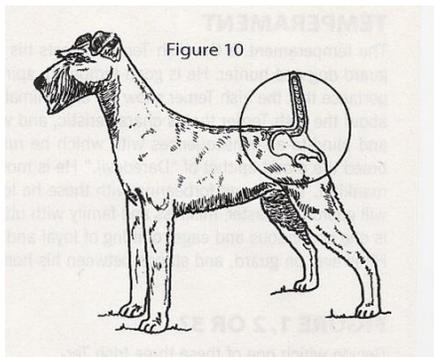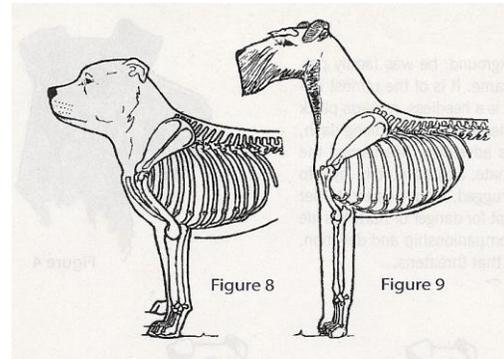

Figure 7

straight and hardly noticeable". This suggests a short upper arm and a front much like that of the Airedale, Lakeland and Welsh Terriers.

   In describing the Irish Terrier in his book *The World of Terriers*, Tom Horner likens the Irish Terrier's forequarters to that of the Airedale and Welsh Terriers, though not as racy and less compact than either of these two high-centre-of-gravity fronts. As per Figure 7, the shoulders slope well back and somewhat inward toward the median line of the dog's body. The upper arm is somewhat short and steep, bringing the elbow well forward on the rib cage so in profile the dog shows little if any forechest. The forelegs are straight, pasterns are short and upright. At the trot coming, the feet move straight forward the same distance apart at the elbows. In profile at the tort, the front pastern flexes only to 45 degrees (an endurance trotter's pastern will flex to 90 degrees).

FIGURES 8 AND 9

   Compare the normal forequarter angulation of a Staffordshire Bull Terrier (Figure8) to that of an Irish Terrier (Figure 9). Note the position of the Staff's elbow, the length of upper arm and its angle, and the slope to the front pasterns.

   There is a segment of the Irish Terrier community that denies the Irish Terrier has this kind of straight front, which is interesting because in actual fact it is dubious that this front is advantageous to an 18-inch-tall breed. It does, however, enhance appearance, even though it may cut down length of stride and freedom of action.
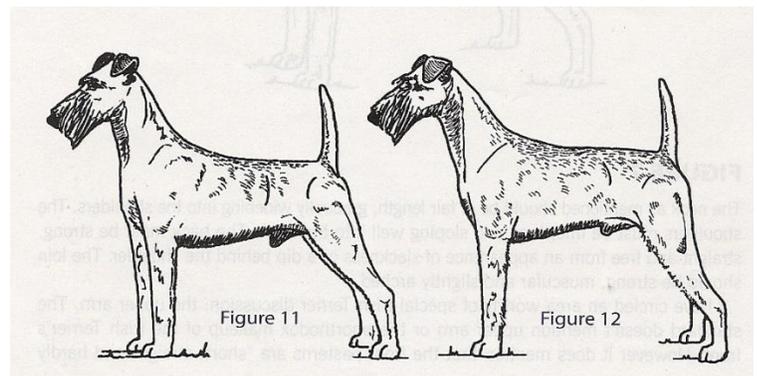

Figure 8   Figure 9

Figure 10

THE TAIL

   The tail is described as set on rather high but not curled, about one-quarter docked. As in Figure 10, the Irish Terrier sacrum is level. The sacrum is that part of the vertebrae directly in front of the tail. In so many breeds the sacrum angles to correspond with the angle of the pelvis. Not so the Irish Terrier's sacrum; it chooses to be level and, in tur, sets the tail high and perpendicular, the same for the other aforementioned terriers.

FIGURE 11 OR 12?

   These two real-life Irish Terrier champions were thought enough of at the time to be promoted in colour. Which of the two do you prefer? Neither appears to be balanced. I prefer Figure 2.

   The question now is, given the opportunity, how would you direct the artist to improve on each? Figure 12's improvement was relatively simple. The topline was made level by simply reducing the length of rear pasterns, which in turn brought the body into better balance.

Figure 11   Figure 12

   Irish Terrier Figure 11 was a much more involved process requiring eight changes. Can you identify the eight? 1) Figure 11 was given a more profuse beard. 2) The neck was lengthened. 3) His croup and sacrum was made level. 4) the curl was taken out of the tail. 5) The forelegs were given more length. 6) The body was deepened. 7) The second thigh was shortened and greater angulation given to the stifle. 8) The slope was taken out of the front pasterns.