YOU BE THE JUDGE

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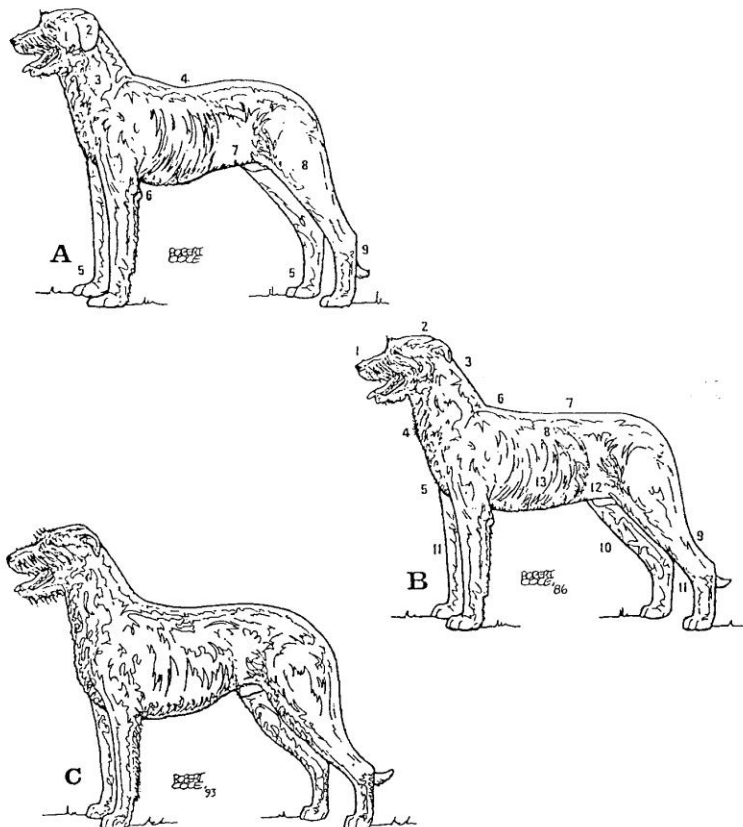
THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

Which of the three exhibits gets your vote?

First identify Irish Wolfhound A's nine most obvious faults, numbered 1 through 9, without referring to Dog B, which reflects improvements. After you confirm Dog A's obvious faults, move on to identify Irish Wolfhound B's less obvious faults – again, without referring, this time, to further improved on Dog C.

FUNCTIONAL TYPE

The nine obvious faults possessed by Dog A reduce its ability to excel at the fast double suspension sighthound gallop. To fully appreciate the functional importance of these particular nine faults, remember that the IW is a large sized, rough coated, Greyhound-like breed whose balance lies between speed and power – speed fast enough to catch a wolf and, once caught, strong enough to kill it.

DOG A

1. His head is too small for his body, reducing ability to close with a wolf.

2. Instead of wind reducing, rose shaped, Greyhound-like ears, his ears are large and hang against the side of his face.

3. The neck is short instead of rather long and, although not obvious, there is loose skin about the throat. A short neck is not conducive to speed at the gallop.

4. He has a sunken or hollow back, which would make ease of locomotion difficult, particularly at the fast gallop, where the spine must bend into an arch.

5. Toes are not well arched and closed. Although correctly large and round, his inferior feet are a functional handicap.

6. His brisket is not level with his elbow, or vice-versa. His body could lack depth (be shallow); his forequarters could be steep, forcing the body up above the elbow; or the reason could be a combination of both. A hands on examination would quickly determine what the eye questions.

7. Loin is excessively long: about a hand span is correct. A long loin weakens locomotion ability at both the trot and the gallop. When stacked, his excessively long loin has overarched to compensate for structural weakness in this unsupported (by ribcage) portion of topline.

8. Hindquarters lack desired angulation at stifle and hock, reducing speed. Power is reduced by the absence of upper thigh thickness.

9. Rear pasterns are too long (the hocks are not well let down), limiting endurance at the gallop.

IMPROVED ON

Now look at Dog B. Identify this average Canadian Irish Wolfhound's 13 less obvious faults. Twelve of them reduce this dog's functional sighthound ability, one of which (No. 8) is intended to draw attention to incorrect length of body. The one fault that does not relate to function is the incorrect angle of skull.

DOG B

1. His muzzle is short where it should be long. The eye is equidistant between nose and occiput. Any deviation should be in the muzzle, which may be slightly longer without spoiling the head (Helen Baird, U.K.). A short muzzle reduces holding ability (so do missing teeth, a problem in some parts of the world).

2. Top of skull and muzzle, I am told, should be on parallel planes. This dog's skull and muzzle are not. Specialist writers emphasize the danger of too highly arched frontal bones (a Dane-like look) and deepness between the eyes.

3. The neck is not "well arched". It is correctly "rather long" but does not convey required strength. Strength is more important than great length ("rather long" is sufficient), as the IW has to hold or throw its quarry and does not, as the Greyhound, have to scoop it up from the ground.

4. Front of neck is too full. This fullness could be due to a false outline caused by fringe hair, easily determined by a hands-on examination. I included this fullness to draw

attention to ewe necks, a condition where the neck appears to be stuck on backwards like that of some sheep. In the case of a true ewe neck, the back of the neck would be concave.

5. Forechest lacks sufficient prominence. The IW standards assume you know that a good forechest (filling the space between the front legs) is required. This dog has a hollow between his front legs – not as much as some, but sufficient to disrupt balance.

6. Steep shoulders have caused Dog B's forequarters to locate too far forward, reducing forechest and creating the hollow between his front legs. His steep shoulder blades have also forced his body to raise above his elbows, increasing his height by way of a fault. The dog's ability to reach forward and back are reduced in proportion to the degree his shoulders are steep. Note that the junction between neck and withers is incorrectly abrupt, and the front pasterns should have a slight slope.

7. Topline is incorrectly flat. Experts like Betty Murphy and Professor Samaha warn that a flat topline, rather than the required arch over the loin, is frequently seen. The professor advises that flat toplines may please the inexperienced, but the judge of the IW must recognize and heavily penalize this fault.

8. The body is too short. It should be "rather long than short," a rather vague description for readers more familiar with precise breed standards, especially since IW standards shy away from mentioning leg length. Body length is equated to height and height is very much dependent on leg length. Add to this that Dog B's body is raised up and inch or two above the elbow because of steep shoulders, making the body appear optically shorter than it actually is, and you can understand the difficulty in describing IW balanced proportions using words alone.

9. Lack of angulation at hock. Sufficient for many breeds, IW breeders suggest that a longer second thigh would improve this dog's rear angulation.

10. Lack of angulation at stifle. Again this degree of angulation at stifle would be considered sufficient for many breeds but not for the Irish Wolfhound.

11. The bone is too heavy. Power (substance) should balance with speed. Professor Samaha advises that you put your hand around an IW's forearm at the elbow and run it down through to the pastern. You should feel thick bone covered with plenty of hard muscle. Your hand, if it is good sized, should only just reach around the foreleg immediately above the dog's wrist.

12. No tuck-up. This dog's under carriage resembles that of a Rottweiler more than an Irish Wolfhound. At the fast gallop, an IW must bring his hindlegs up and far forward under his arched body. Absence of tuck-up would prohibit this galloping capability. A belly not well drawn up is as great a handicap to the IW as a flat topline.

13. Round ribcage. The IW's ribcage should be deep and oval, with greater spring toward the upper portion – sort of egg shaped. This dog has a barrel chest not easily illustrated from this angle.   A shallow ribcage often compensates with width, giving a barrel chest. From the front there should only be a generous hand's width between the elbows and from above only space for three fingers between the shoulder blades. A barrel chest, like a flat topline or no tuck-up, is not conducive to speed at the gallop.

RECOGNITION OF FAULTS

One judges to virtues, not to faults; however, recognition of faults furthers appreciation of virtues and reduces the chance of surprises when you enter the show ring. In the case of the IW, awareness of how certain faults affect function is especially important because one is constantly weighing virtues against faults and, like the necessity of attending sighthound lure coursing trials, judges of IWs owe it to the breed to take functional sighthound faults into consideration.