YOU BE THE JUDGE

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LHASA APSO

You can push back the hair and see and feel the Lhasa Apso head, but do you know what you are really looking for?

The breed standard helps; however, it neglects to mention a few important features hidden under Figure 1's head furnishings and relies on ambiguous words like "moderate", "moderately narrow" and "not square" to describe various hidden parts.
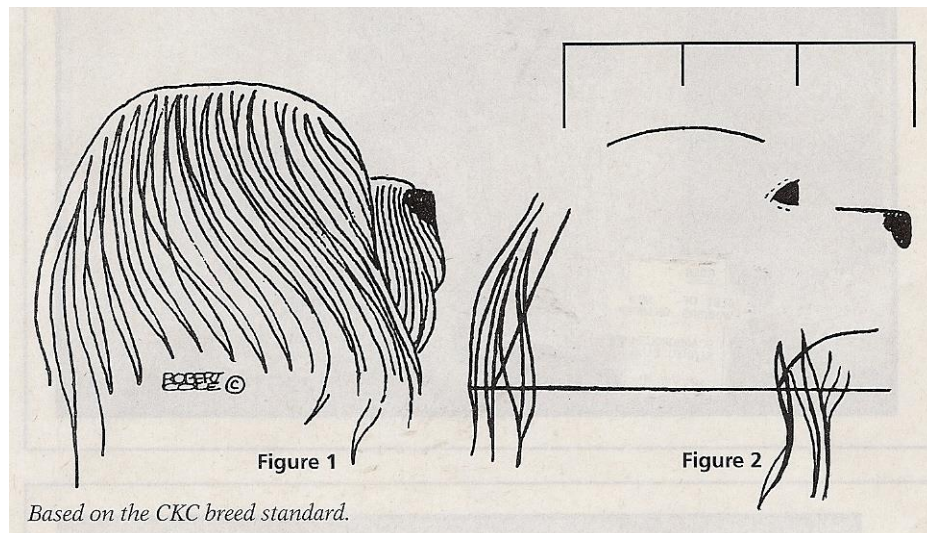

Figure 1   **Figure 2**

*Based on the CKC breed standard.*

FIGURE 2
The Lhasa Apso head has "heavy furnishings with good fall over eyes, good whiskers and beard." (The Canadian and American standards neglect to mention there is a moderate undercoat.) The nose is black; the skull is not quire flat; the 1 ½ inch long muzzle is straight and roughly one-third the total length of the head; the oval eyes are dark; the ears are pendant and heavily feathered; and the bite is a reverse scissors. A pincer bite is acceptable in Canada, and both pincer and slightly undershot have equal status in the U.S. I stress this because a pincer bite greatly influences Lhasa Apso expression, as you will see.

MISSING PARTS
To discuss the features that set this head apart from those of the Tibetan Terrier, Tibetan Spaniel and Shih Tzu the first task is to identify the missing parts. The Lhasa Apso standard neglects to include a precise description of the stop, or to mention a particular kind of backskull, eye-rim pigmentation, a specific position for the ear (and its shape) and, for this unique oriental breed, a characteristic upper and lower jaw angle.

WHICH HEAD IS CORRECT?
An acceptable stylized head in profile has been placed among seven incorrect heads. As the reader studies the following description of correct, both virtues and departures should take on special meaning.

Figure 3   Figure 4   Figure 5   Figure 6

Figure 7   Figure 8   Figure 9   Figure 10
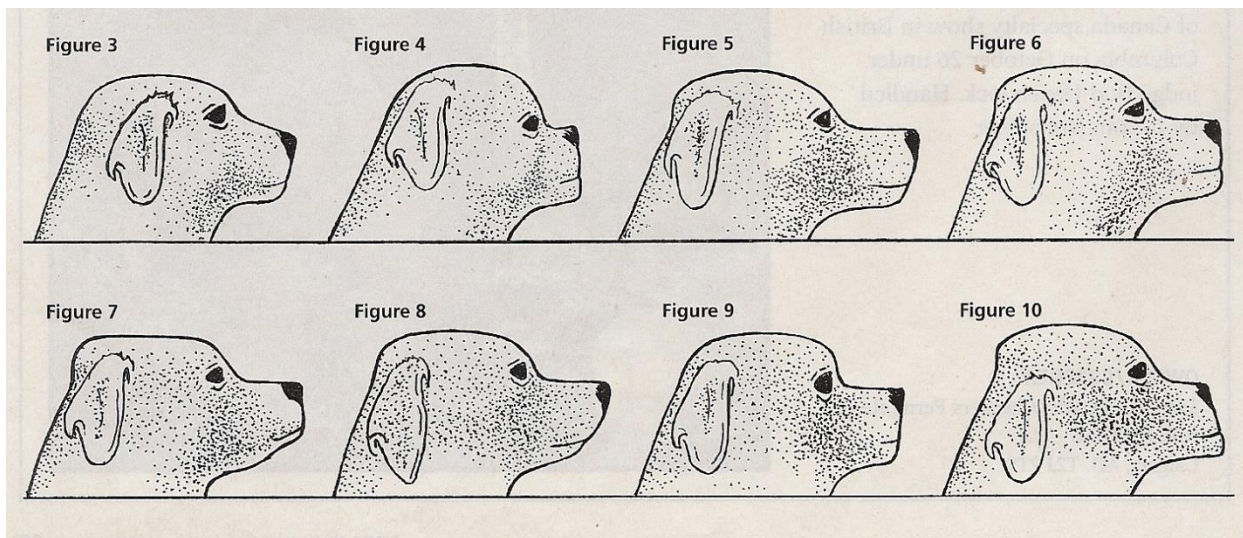
The one correct head is, as the standard advises, two-thirds skull to one-third muzzle. On an average 10 ½ inch tall Lhasa, this 1 ½ inch muzzle produces the desired oriental expression. If the muzzle is longer than this, the head resembles that of the Tibetan Terrier (Figure 5); shorter and expression remains oriental but more like the Shih Tzu (Figure 4).

The fact that the moderate stop does not receive fuller mention is one reason for head variety. The comparatively shallow stop rises smoothly from the muzzle at a degree that could be considered defined but not well defined, and certainly not abrupt. The outline changes direction behind the eyebrow ridge to join the not-quite-flat skull. Continuing to the backskull, the correct Lhasa head has a "knobble" or pronounced occiput. (Figure 3 lacks a knobble).

The Lhasa's eye is oval (Figure 11) and the eye rims are black. The bottom of the eye is level with or very slightly above the top of the muzzle. (This is wrong on Figure 4).

The description "ears pendant, heavily feathered" can be expanded to include that they should set on level with the eye (Figure 4's ear set is too high) and well rearward on the skull (Figure 3's ear set is too far forward). The tip of the ear is rounded, not V-shaped (as in Figure 8). The ears hang low, close to the head and, in a full-coated, mature dog, the hair on the ears blends with hairfall.

Now we come to the mouth and muzzle. The preferred bite is a revers scissors (upper incisors close inside lower incisors). A pincer (Figure 9) bite (incisors meet edge to edge) is a fault or, as in Canada, only acceptable. Why? It has a lot to do with expression. A level bite reduces the muzzle's bluntness – not as much as an undesirable scissors bite (Figure 3 and 5), but sufficient enough to change expression. An overshot bite (Figure 8) completely destroys the desired oriental expression. A blunt shape at the end of the muzzle contributes greatly to correct Lhasa expression.

The ideal bite (Figure 6) produces a neat blunt end to the muzzle whereby the underjaw neither juts forward nor slopes back. The ideal is where the upper jaw is on the same plane as the lower jaw, being at right angles to the top of a straight horizontal muzzle. The lips fit closely one on top of the other, with a highlight on the lower lip.

PLACE THE FOUR BEST HEADS

After you have selected the best four heads in profile, take the next step and place the four in order of preference.

First place belongs to Figure 6; that's easy. Deciding on second place is not so simple. However, having read the description of the correct head in profile, you know that the occiput should be pronounced and the stop should be abrupt.

My selection for second place goes to undershot Figure 10. I give third place to Figure 9 and fourth to sloped-muzzle Figure 3. (The loss of correct Lhasa expression and scissors bite are more serious than the too-far-forward position of the ears).

THE HAIRY HEAD FACE-ON

Both of Figure 11's expressive oval eyes are uncovered and the "heavy head furnishings with good fall over the eyes, good whiskers and beard" and "ears heavily feathered" can be appreciated face-on. As is the custom, the coat has been parted from the nose to the tail. There is no white showing at the top or bottom of the eye.

Figure 11   Figure 12   Figure 13
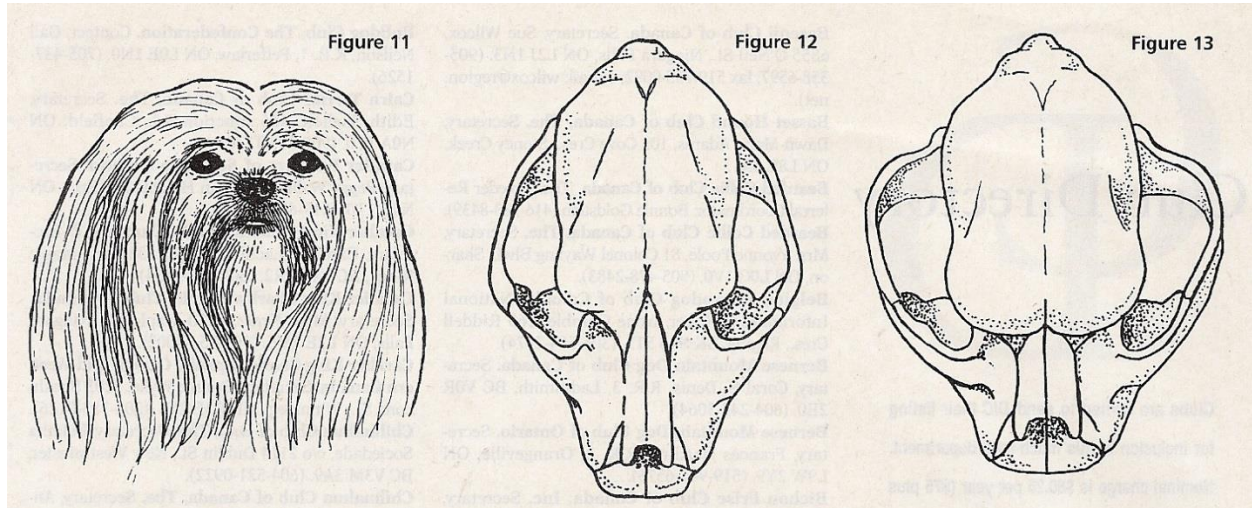
FALLING AWAY BEHIND THE EYES

Under this hair, there should be a moderately narrow skull, falling away behind the eyes in a marked degree. The intent of this description was very well explained by Don L. Hanson in 1993 at a Dog Judge Study Group seminar; and I quote: "To evaluate the term falling away behind the eyes, it is usually necessary to gently push the ears back and feel the zygomatic bone. This bone running horizontally, directly below the eye and toward the back of the skull, should be slightly curved to the touch, but not prominent. This minimal curvature and lack of prominence creates the 'falling away' requested by the standard."

TWO SKULLS FROM ABOVE

To appreciate what Hanson is saying, it helps to be aware that the Lhasa Apso skull is a climatically modified mutation as illustrated in Figure 12. Compare this partial mutation with Figure 13, the conventional brachycephalic (shortest of the three canine head types) skull. Notice that the Lhasa's zygomatic bone viewed from above in Figure 12 falls away behind the eyes, as compared to the continued greater width of the Shih Tzu's (Figure 13) zygomatic bone.

At some point in its history, the brachycephalic head with its shortened muzzle was introduced into the small Tibetan dogs, claims Frances Sefton in *The Lhasa Apso*. Sefton goes on to advise that the very short-faced type of head with its restricted nasal development would not survive in the high altitudes and was eventually modified by natural adaption into a head more suited to the environment of Tibet.

Although the Lhasa's zygomatic arch falls away behind the eye, you can see that the eye socket itself retains a wide, forward-looking position. (The eyes are not set obliquely at the sides of the skull.)

The muzzle on Lhasa Figure 12 has been made longer than on Figure 13, and the stop made more gradual to correspond to Sefton's climatic modification description. The end of the muzzle has been made blunt to convey that the six lower incisors are set in a straight line and not in the curve that is normal for many breeds.