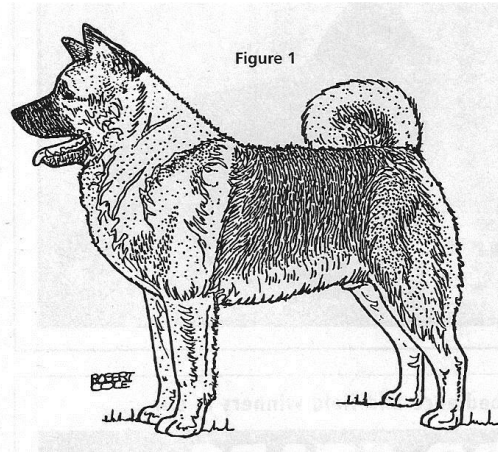


# YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, March 1998

## THE NORWEGIAN ELKHOUND



You are invited to consider progressively improving this drawing (Figure 1) of a sound Norwegian Elkhound – one that moves well in the show ring but is about as far removed from type as it is possible to depart and still remain an Elkhound.

After initial improvements have been made and presented in the form of a second drawing, additional features will be high-lighted and you can consider further improvements. Progression toward a final illustrated ideal will be in five stages.

### STATE OF THE BREED

The working gait of the Elkhound is not the gait used in the show ring to assess sound movement, nor is the conformation of the Elkhound that of rectangular breeds designed to excel at the endurance trot.

Compared to breeds that do excel at the trot, the Elkhound is at a disadvantage in the show ring. At the expense of functional type, the Elkhound can be modified to enable it to impress at the trot. For some people, this is a major concern.

When you talk to experience breeders, you are informed that at the present time, perhaps more than at any time in the past, this breed is suffering from inaccurate judging by the misinformed, uninformed and uncaring. Many Norwegian Elkhound fanciers are disturbed by the incorrect image of the breed currently promoted by advertisers.

### FIGURE 1

**Head.** Sorry about the open mouth. In later illustrations, the angles, length, depth and end of muzzle will be easier to determine with the mouth closed. However, what about the stop and the plane of the skull? The top of the skull should be only slightly arched, and the stop not large but clearly defined.

What is wrong with the ears? They are incorrect in that the ear orifices should not be facing to the sides with the outside edges slanting forward, and they should also be comparatively small.

In profile, it is not possible to see if the dark brown, medium-sized eyes are oval. However it can be seen that they do not protrude. Muzzle length and lips can wait till the mouth is closed. The teeth should meet in a scissors bite.

Judges take obvious incorrect bites into consideration. However, concerned fanciers inform that mouths with as many as eight missing molars and premolars have slipped by unnoticed.

**Body.** Like you, I feel he is front heavy, either because of the profuse hair on the forechest or what is underneath it. Some of the coat in this area can be removed, especially at the throat. (Loose skin at the throat is a fault).

**Foreleg Length.** The foreleg is the correct length in all of these drawings – half the height to the withers and the elbow level with the brisket. The front pastern slopes slightly. The feet are comparatively small and oval, the toes are tight and the pads are thick.

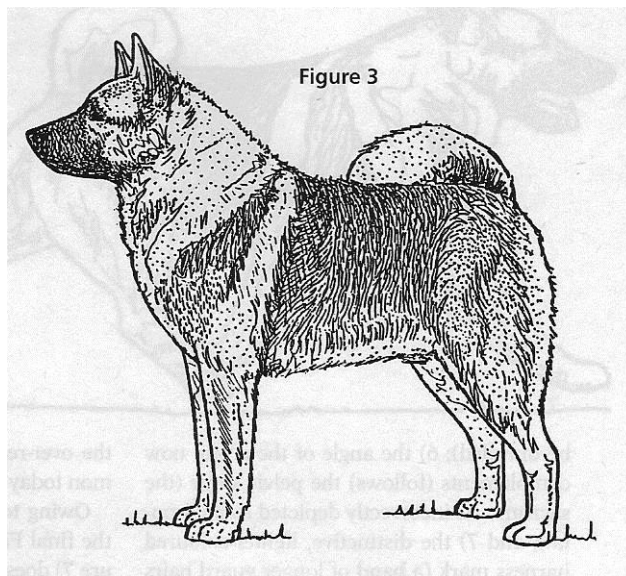
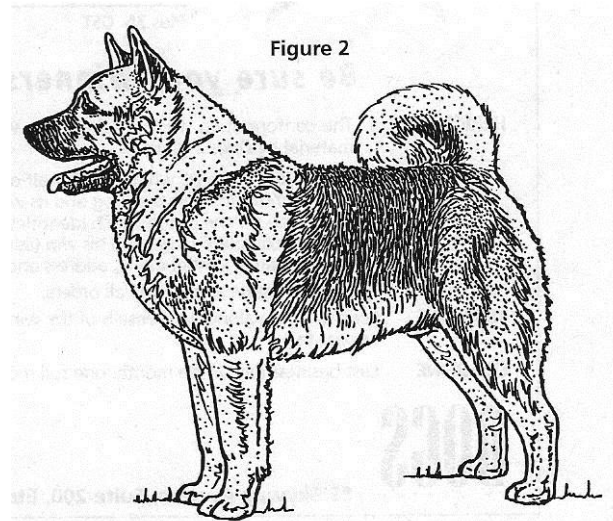
**Body Length.** The body should be short and close-coupled with the rib cage accounting for most of its length. If we remove some of the coat from his chest, will his body then be sufficiently short? I don't think so.

The standard advises that he should be square in profile – the distance from the forechest to the rump equaling the height at the withers.

### FIGURE 2

What further changes would you make to improved Figure 2? His ears are now smaller and more erect, his body is shorter, and his throat and neck are cleaner. He is much improved but he still has a long way to go. Are you fully satisfied with the top of his skull? Does he still appear to have too much substance?

**Substance.** Bone should be substantial, but I am sure you agree that whether optically thickened by hair or not, this is not the amount of front-let substance an agile hunter should convey. Olav Campbell wrote that judges who had not witnessed firsthand the Elkhound working tended to favour the heavier type dog. He likened this to entering a heavy-weight champion weightlifter in a five-mile cross-country race.



### FIGURE 3

Figure 3 represents a vast improvement. We are closer to the square, grey, hardy, northern ideal and closer to the stage where it may take an experienced breed person with an ‘eye’ for type as it relates to the show ring and the hunting of moose over difficult terrain to suggest further improvement

Looking at Figure 3, in what way do you suggest improving the head, neck, shoulders, upper arm, foreleg, tuck-up, croup, tail, buttocks, upper thigh, lower thigh, hock and rear pastern?

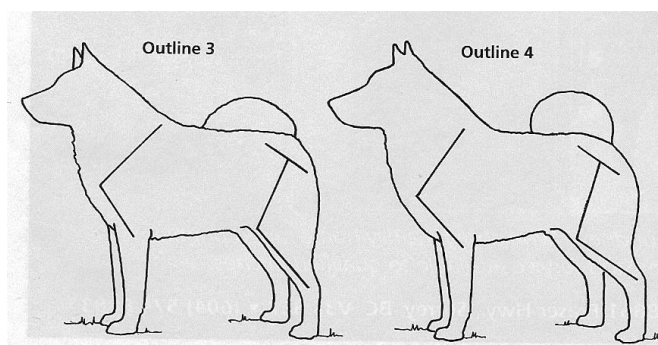
Of the suggested improvements to Figure 3, angulation and lengths of the shoulder blade, upper arm, upper thigh and lower thigh have the most influence on appearance. So that you can fully appreciate the impact on balance of these four important bones (a simplification), I have reduced

them to straight lines within abbreviated outlines and presented them as Outline 3 and improved Outline 4.

### OUTLINES 3 AND 4

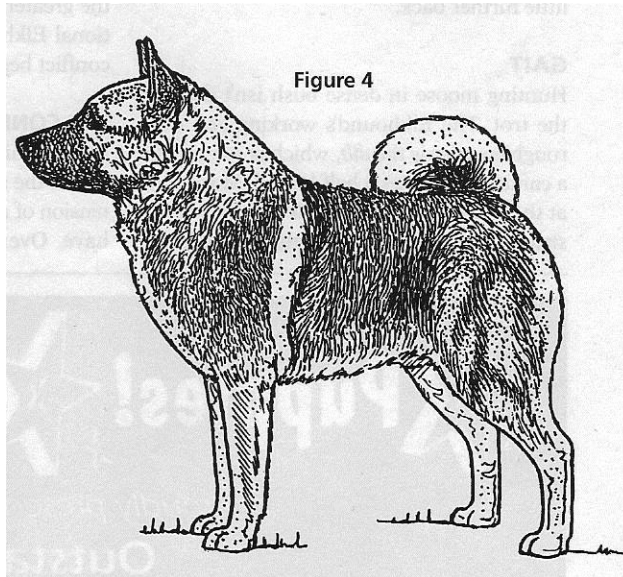
Reduced to simple outlines, compare the straight line indicating Outline 3’s shoulder blade to that of improved Outline 4’s. The shoulder blade on Outline 4 is five degrees steeper (40 degrees off the vertical) than Outline 3’s more angulated 45 degrees.

Next is the upper arm, the bone between the shoulder blade and the foreleg. On Outline 4, it has been lengthened and angled further rearward. This places Outline 4’s foreleg more rearward on the body. The lengths of the shoulder blade and the upper arm now appear almost equal.



In the rear, the angle of the upper thigh has steepened slightly on Outline 4, positioning the stifle slightly below the improved tuck-up. The lower level thigh bone is now longer and more angulated. The greater angulation is brought about by a longer rear pastern, which positions the hock higher and further rearward.

A line dropped down from the end of the pelvis falls in line with the front of the rear pastern, or, as Anne Roslin-Williams words it, “When standing, the hindfeet of an Elkhound should be almost underneath the root of the tail.”



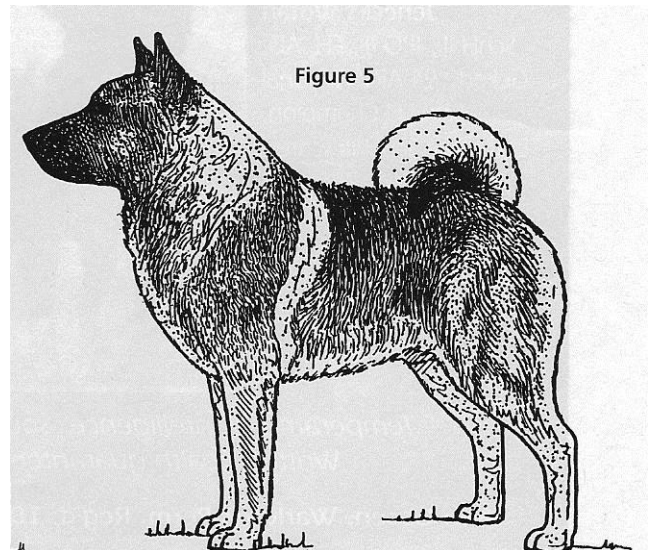
**FIGURE 4**

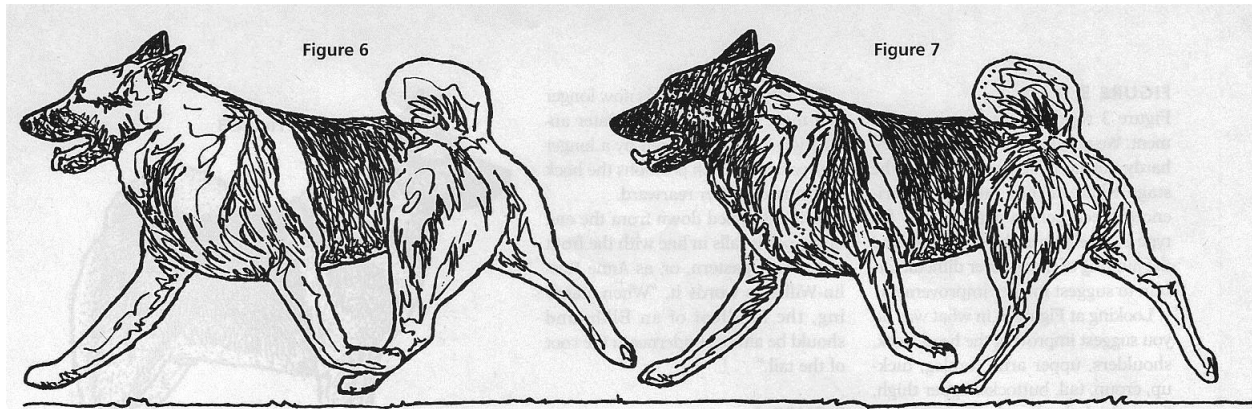
Fully coated, the remaining improvements are 1) a slightly larger head but too much skull; 2) an arch to the nape of the neck; 3) a curled tail centered on the back rather than appearing to hang over the right hip; 4) a slight increase in the tuck-up; 5) longer hair on the buttocks; 6) a higher hock as mentioned; and 7) a more rearward position of the rear pasterns.

**More improvements.** Consider improving the ratio of muzzle to skull, the size and position of the eye, the darkest part of the body (where?), the tip of the tail (colour and position), the angle of the croup, the harness mark (position), and whether Elkhounds have lips or flews (difficult to see with a dark muzzle).

**FIGURE 5**

The final improvements are 1) the muzzle is now the same length as the skull; 2) the eye is enlarged slightly and moved up higher in the skull (the stop is defined in part by the eyebrows); 3) the lips are tight (Elkhounds do not have flews); 4) the grey body is now darkest on the saddle; 5) the tip of the tail is black and usually protrudes to one side (the bone of the tail actually kinks at the end and cannot be unrolled); 6) the angle of the croup now complements (follows) the pelvis slope (the sacrum was incorrectly depicted as horizontal); and 7) the distinctive, lighter-coloured harness mark (a band of longer guard hairs from shoulder to elbow) is now situated a little further back.





## GAIT

Hunting moose in dense bush isn't done at the trot. The Elkhound's working gait over rough country is the *dilt*, which is sometimes a canter; sometimes a half-bound. Movement at the trot in the show ring is still free, unrestricted and seemingly effortless but it is not the over-reaching (Figure 6) style too common today in the show ring.

Owing to the lesser degree of angulation, the final Figure 5 at the trot in profile (Figure 7) does not have the reach and extension in front, rear and underneath the body that the greater angulated departures from functional Elkhound type do. And this is where conflict begins.

## THE CONFLICT

Many exhibitors claim that if you want to win in the show ring, the more reach and extension of all four legs, the better chance you have. Overreach is said to be par for the course. Of course coming and going away, the more angulated specimens are slowed down – crabbing is a fault. But in profile, it is often a race, with the blue ribbon going to the fleetest of foot.

This is the conflict that exists between a powerful, agile conformation suited to function over difficult terrain, and an equally square conformation, with greater angulation, suited to impress at a fast trot in the show ring.