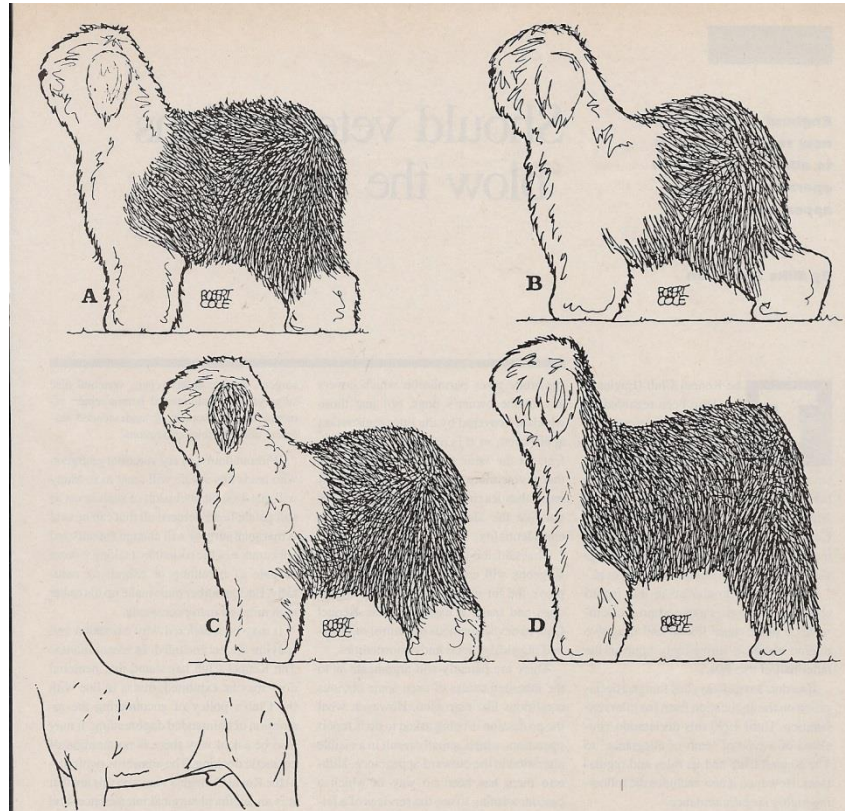


# YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, November 1991

## OLD ENGLISH SHEEPDOG



Regardless of profuse coat, you have probably made a preliminary assessment of this class of four Old English Sheepdogs stacked in profile. You have no doubt found that even without a hands-on examination two examples are seen to look very much alike, a third to have dramatic angulation, and a fourth to be steep in front and steep in rear. Make a preliminary selection of first, second, third and fourth place, but be prepared to change them around after a hands-on examination.

Because of profuse coat, the OES requires a close, hands-on examination. My detailed description of each example will serve as a substitute for your hands. In describing typical I shall follow the hands-on procedure that I use, elaborating on what I believe to be required type and structure for this shepherd or drover's dog. Then I shall describe each of the dogs individually and you can confirm or rearrange your placements, agreeing or disagreeing with my placements.

### TYPICAL

Viewed in profile the typical OES should appear practically square, having the same length of body as height. Viewed head-on his forelegs are straight and his feet point straight forward. On examination of the head you should see a large, black nose with wide nostrils, and feel a broad solid cut-off muzzle. The skull

should feel capacious and rather square. A long, narrow head of snipey muzzle is a deformity – I cannot put it more strongly than that.

Use your thumb to feel for a well-defined stop and pronounced ridge over the eyes. This particular example has one brown and one blue eye (both could be brown, blue, pearl, china or walleye). An amber or yellow eye is most objectionable. Pigmentation around eyes is preferred, even if not always stated as so. Check the ears; they should be small, flat and carried to the side of the head.

You should be able to feel a degree of forechest in front of the point of shoulder and put a hand's breadth between the forelegs, the brisket level with elbows. Feel the arch of the fairly long neck and ensure that the shoulders are well laid back and narrow at the points. Place your hand at the withers and move it firmly along the backbone towards the croup. You should be able to feel a definite rise over the loin. This rise causes the OES to stand lower at the shoulder than at the loin. The rise may be slight, perhaps an inch or less, but it should always be perceptible (see outline sans coat). This is one aspect of breed type that separates the OES from other breeds.

Another aspect of OES breed type you must feel for is a rump broader than the shoulders. Also feel for ribs well sprung neither slab-sided nor barrel-chested. The tail is customarily docked close to the body when not naturally bob-tailed. The measurements from withers to elbow and from the elbow to ground (the elbow level with brisket) are practically the same. The feet are small and round, the toes well arched, the pads thick and hard.

The typical coat is profuse, but not so excessive as to give the impression of the dog being overly fat; and it must be of good hard texture, not straight, but shaggy and free from curl. Quality and texture of coat should be considered above profuseness, and profusion to be considered above mere length. The undercoat is a waterproof pile when not removed by grooming or season. The head is well covered with hair, ears moderately coated, neck well coated, forelegs well coated all round, hindquarters more heavily coated than the rest of the body. Neither the natural outline nor the natural texture of the coat may be changed by any artificial means except that the feet and rear may be trimmed for cleanliness.

Colour may be any shade of grey, grizzle, blue or blue merle with or without white markings or in reverse. Any shade of brown or faun is undesirable.

Size is 22 inches and upward for dogs, 21 inches and upward for bitches in Canada and United States; in Britain and elsewhere height is 24 inches and upward for dogs, 22 inches and upward for bitches. Weight is not mentioned in any standard but varies with the size of the OES from about 55 pounds for a small bitch to 120 pounds and over for a very large dog.

## **DOG A**

This square, sound example possesses most of the OES characteristics described as typical. In addition, his straight forelegs have sufficient bone and the front pasterns slope slightly. In the rear his hindquarters are round, muscular, angulated at stifle and hock, and his hocks are well let down. On the debit side his topline is level – there is not the required rise over loin.

## **DOG B**

He is not as tall as the other three dogs but he is within the limit. He is not as tall because his legs are short; the forelegs should be half the distance to withers, the body deep, and the elbow level with brisket.

His topline correctly rises over his loin, his rump is wider than his shoulders, but his second thigh is overly long setting his rear pasterns too far rearward of a line dropped down from the buttocks. To compensate, the rear pastern sickles.

## **DOG C**

His strong muzzle correctly measures half the total length of head and his eyes are set well apart. He illustrates my description of typical except for some sun bleaching of his hair, which should not be confused with objectionable brown or fawn. This is a good time to mention that some slow shedding puppy coats have a temporary red-brown tinge to the ends, a frustration to the owner.

## DOG D

The small size and shape of an OES's nose is a good indication of what you can expect to find under the hair on his narrow muzzle. The nose should be large, black and prunelike. This example's small round nose goes with a narrow head, snipey muzzle, lack of underjaw and 'spoon shaped' placement of the incisors. A long, narrow head or snipey muzzle is a deformity in this breed.

Flick back the hair from the eyes and check eye colour. Eyes can be brown, blue or one of each, very dark being preferred. If blue, a pearl, china or walleye is considered typical. This dog has one amber eye and one yellow eye – both objectionable.

His body is longer than the other three examples. He still appears squarish because he is leggy, a departure warned of in the standard. His shoulders and upper arms are steep. His withers are lower than the loin, as is correct, but the dip behind the withers is soft. The loin is longer than desirable and is not correctly broad. The pelvis is steep, this has straightened the hind leg, reducing angulation at stifle and hock and raising the hindquarters. Both ends are equally inferior.

## PLACEMENT

First place is between Dog A and Dog C. The only important difference between the two is topline. A strong topline, *lower at the withers than at the loins*, is a distinguishing characteristic of the breed. Dog A has a level topline, a departure. Dog C's correct topline is lower at the withers than the loin. I gave Dog C first place. I gave Dog A second place over short-legged, over-angulated-in-rear Dog B. Fourth place went to Dog D.

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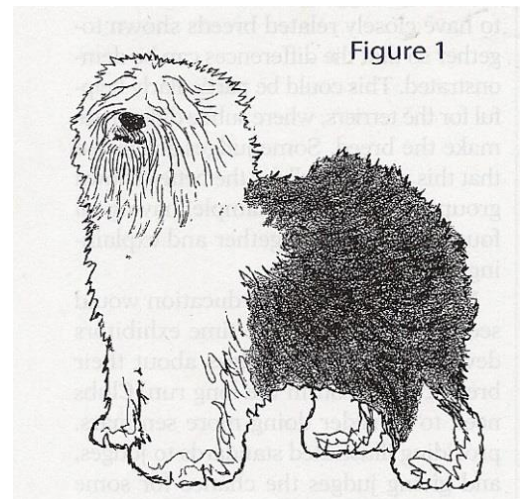
From *Dogs in Canada*, December 2003

## OLD ENGLISH SHEEPDOG

### YOU ARE INVITED

After you examine the Old English Sheepdog using see-through drawings in place of hands, you will have the opportunity to increase your appreciation of OES type, thanks to constructive comments on type received from an irate OES breeder. You will be invited to identify and discuss 31 important OES features, judge three OES classes, and identify the trot, pace and amble.

Figure 1: "A strong, compact, square, balanced dog. Taking him all around, he is profusely, *but not excessively* coated, thickset, muscular and able-bodied. These qualities, combined with his agility, fit him for the demanding tasks required of a shepherd's or drover's dog."



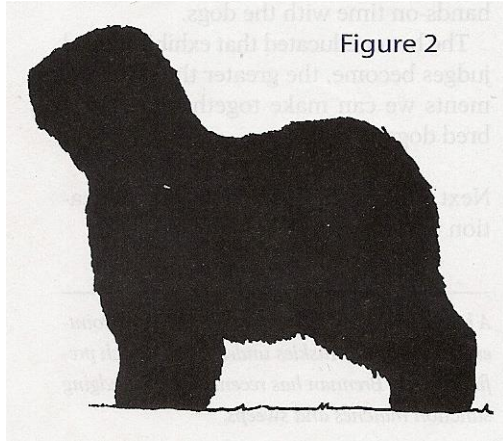


Figure 2

## DISTINCTIVE SILHOUETTE

An Old English Sheepdog's silhouette (Figure 2) is distinctive. The combination of profuse coat, a fairly long neck, a gentle arch over the loin and a short rear pastern contributes to its distinctive outline.

These four features and a great deal more are hidden under the profuse coat, so I've produced a see-through outline (Figure 3) disclosing 31 important features. Before discussing these features it should be noted that seven of them (numbered in bold) do not receive mention in the standard.

## SEVEN FEATURES

The seven features not mentioned in the standard are: the length of muzzle (4); where the top of the ear joins the head (9); the length of loin (15); a degree of tuck-up (24); a slight slope to the front pastern (26); the upper arm's length and position (29); and, a degree of forechest (30).

## ELABORATION

Without a degree of forechest, the forequarters would position too far forward on the body.

- The standard calls for a "fairly long muzzle". "Fairly long" is subject to interpretation. My original muzzle was an inch longer than this one. I reduced it based on a drawing in *The Old English Sheepdog*, produced by the Conformation Judges Association of Florida (1990).
- According to the same drawing in the aforementioned book, the top of the ear joins the head at eye level.
- A slight slope to the front pastern positions the foot more directly under the forequarter and absorbs concussion.
- The length and angle of the upper arm dictates the position of the elbow, ideally placing it directly under the top of the shoulder blade and level with the brisket.
- A tuck-up is necessary if there's to be speed at the gallop.

## TOPLINE

Of the 31 features touched on, there is one particular OES feature that breeders would like fully understood and that is the OES's unorthodox topline. In April 1989, the Old English Sheepdog Club of America Judges Education Committee sent out a letter in regard to the topline, to all AKC judges approved to assess the OES. The letter read in part: "We ask that you pay particular attention when evaluating Old English Sheepdogs to toplines, one aspect of breed type that separates this breed from others, but which is far too frequently found to be incorrect."

## FROM THE STANDARD

Two important phrases in the official standard for the Old English Sheepdog are: "The loin should be very stout and gently arched" and "The dog standing lower at the shoulder than at the loin."

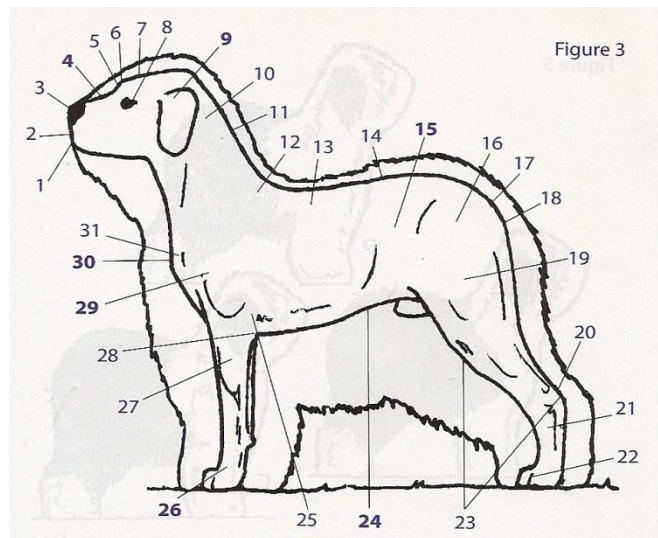


Figure 3



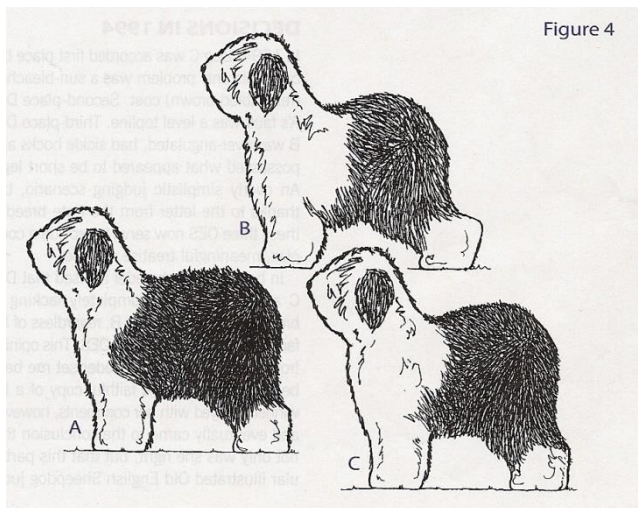
## INTERPRETATION

The correct OES topline has a slight depression behind the withers. This should *never* be confused with a weak or sagging back, which often occurs in poorly conditioned or overly long dogs. The back is level until it reaches the loin, where skeletal arrangement and strong muscle development cause a gently rising arch. This arch over the loin causes the dog to stand “lower at the shoulder than at the loin.” The rise *may* be slight, perhaps an inch or less, but it should always be perceptible. Straight toelines, sway backs and roached backs are incorrect and must be severely faulted.

It is impossible to assess a correct topline by eye. *The hands must be used.* Place your hand at the withers and move it firmly along the backbone toward the croup. You should be able to feel 1) a slight dip behind the wither; 2) a level back; and 3) a definite rise over the loin.

Awareness of these 31 features is important, but recognition and appreciation of the way these features combine to produce type is a primary requisite.

In the September 9, 1994, issue of *Dog News* three drawings (Figure 4, Dogs A, B and C) were used to focus on these features in the form of an early, over-simplified, illustrated judging scenario. Today, the benefit of these drawings is not in showing soundness, but in demonstrating type. This is because an irate OES breeder in New Jersey was disturbed enough by the 1994 value that was, in her opinion, wrongly accorded Dog A and Dog C, to write me and explain why.



## DECISIONS IN 1994

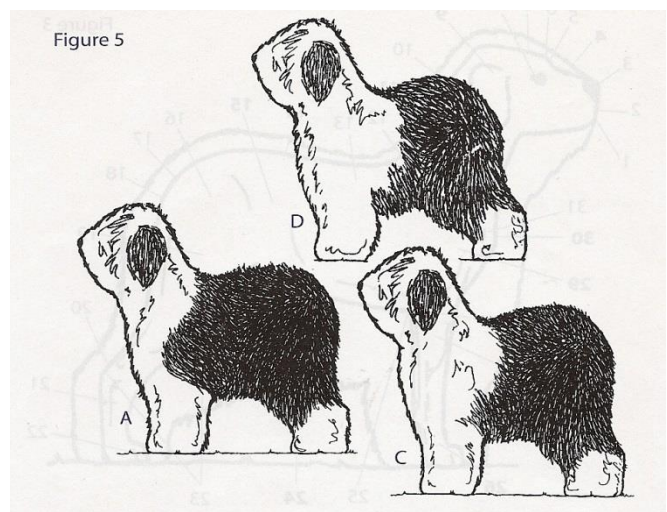
In 1994, Dog C was accorded that first place because his only problem was a sun-bleached (resembled brown) coat. Second place Dog A's fault was a level topline. Third-place Dog B was over-angulated, had sickle hocks and possessed what appeared to be short legs. An overly simplistic judging scenario, but thanks to the letter from the irate breeder, these three OES now serve to provide a complex, meaningful treatise on type.

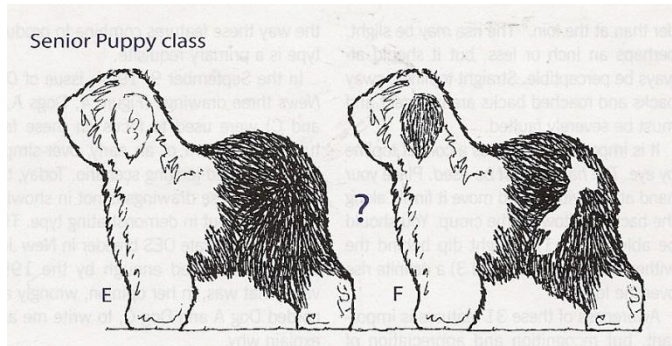
In her letter, the breeder advised that Dog C and Dog A were completely lacking in breed type, and that Dog B, regardless of his faults, was by far the better OES. This opinion from a respected OES breeder set me back because Dog C was a faithful copy of a big winner. I stayed with her comments,

however, and eventually came to the conclusion that not only was she right, but that this particular illustrated Old English Sheepdog judging scenario provided an excellent way to investigate OES type. Unfortunately, the intent to utilize these three drawings somehow got lost in the shuffle only to appear again by chance this year, but the irate breeder's comments on these three OES are as applicable today as they were then.

## FIGURE 5

As it turned out, Dog B's legs were not actually short, and when I reduced the length of his second thigh and the rear pastern, as in Figure 4, he no longer had to sickle. This improved-OES Dog D serves unofficially to represent typical. Keep him in mind as you go on to judge these next three classes.





## SENIOR PUPPY CLASS

You are aware that both OES in this class have type. They are practically square, are balanced front with rear, and are well muscled with plenty of bone. On examination, however, Dog E's eyes are found to be different colours – one is brown and one is blue – whereas Dog F's are dark brown. Dog F has an obvious splash of white in his soft, blue coat. Dog E's brown coat has pleasing symmetrical markings but his head is all white. Aside from eye colour, coat colour and

markings, these two dogs are remarkably alike. In addition to selecting one of these two OES for first place you must also remember his virtues and faults because he will be coming back into the ring to compete for Winners Dog.

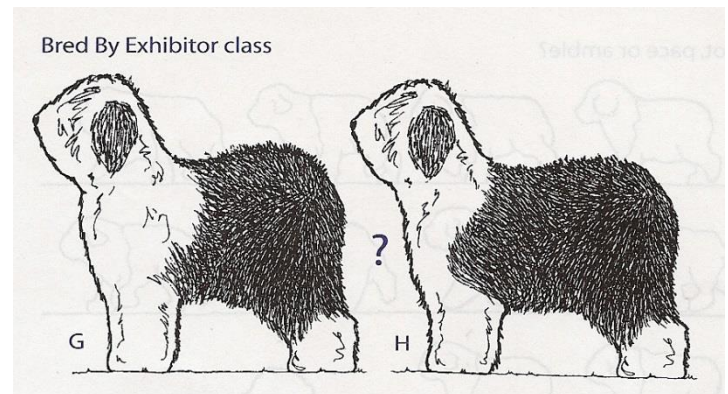
### SENIOR PUPPY FIRST AND SECOND

Dog E's one blue eye and one brown eye is not an OES fault. Nor is Dog F's splash of white. There's nothing wrong with Dog E having an all-white head – in fact, at one time an all-white head was highly valued. What is wrong with Dog E's coat is that it is brown. "Any shade of brown or fawn to be considered distinctly objectionable and not to be encouraged." Objection to sable/fawn harks back to England in the late 1800's when the parent club advised severing ties with the Collie. Dog F's soft coat "is to be considered a fault". The soft coat may appear attractive but it offers no benefit.

### BRED BY EXHIBITOR CLASS

Dog H has the faulty level topline mentioned earlier. Dog G has the required gently arched loin, the hindquarters as broad as the forequarters. Dog G has a slightly overshot bite; Dog H's bite is pincer.

They both have coats of hard texture, not straight, but shaggy and free from curl. Dog H's body is longer than desired, and Dog G's elbows are further from the ground than they are from the withers. Your task is to weight their respective virtues and faults, keeping in mind the breed's original purpose, and award one of these two OES first place.



### BRED BY FIRST AND SECOND

Dog G's slightly overshot bite is faulty; Dog H's pincer bite (equal to scissors) is correct. Their coats are of hard texture, not straight, but shaggy and free from curl is correct for both dogs.

Dog G's body is practically as long from point of shoulder to buttocks. Dog H's body is a little too long for an OES.

Dog H's level topline is a serious characteristic departure. Dog G's elbows position closer to the withers than the ground which suggests that his legs are long – a serious departure, since the standard requires that the OES be "Absolutely free from legginess."

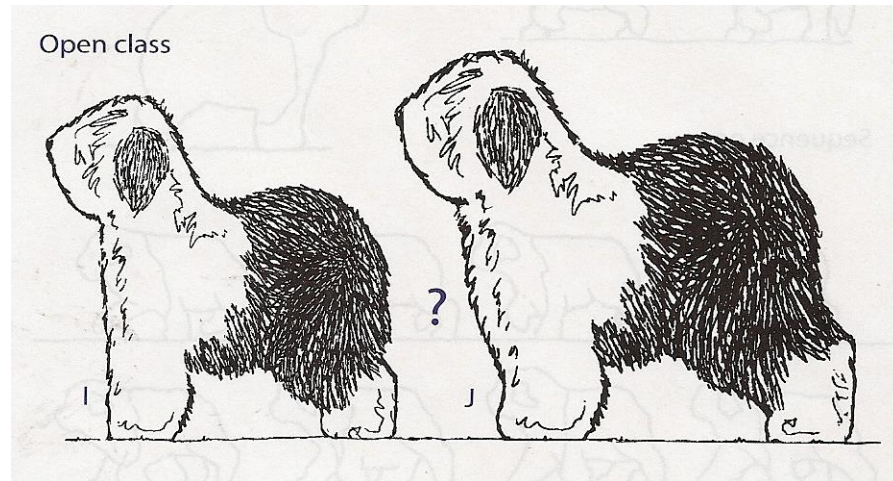
### OPEN FIRST AND SECOND

Dog I lacks required angulation and has a narrow head. The latter is a serious departure; the standard reads, "a long narrow head or snippy muzzle is a deformity." All this is mostly hidden under the profuse coat.

Dog J is four inches taller than the minimum height, which harks back to the original work required of the breed. The sheep were heavier in southern England than in the north, where the OES was smaller. But in



1927 the sentence, "A height of twenty-six inches or over for dogs or bitches to be considered objectionable and not to be encouraged." was added in italics to the standard.

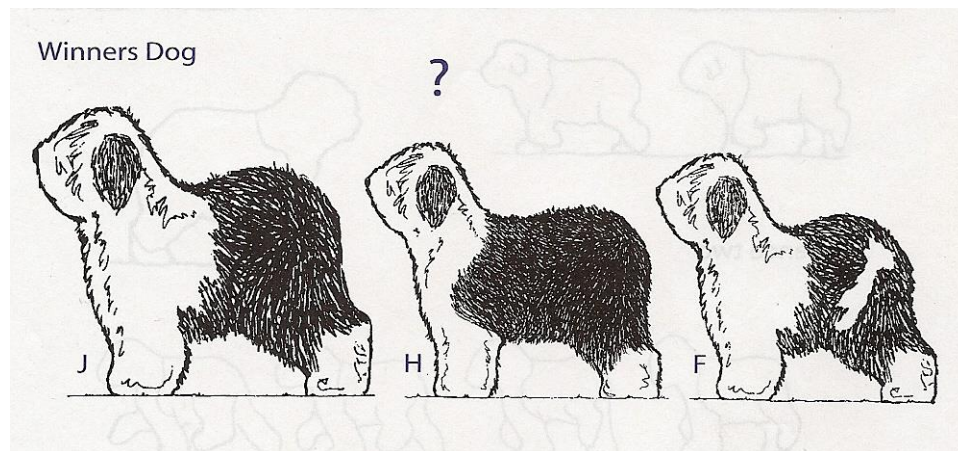


This sentence was removed in 1954, but we are reminded by breeders that extreme oversize can lead to other faults.

Be that as it may, type should remain unchanged regardless of size and Dog J's high hocks and short neck create disharmony. Select your first-place and second-place winners.

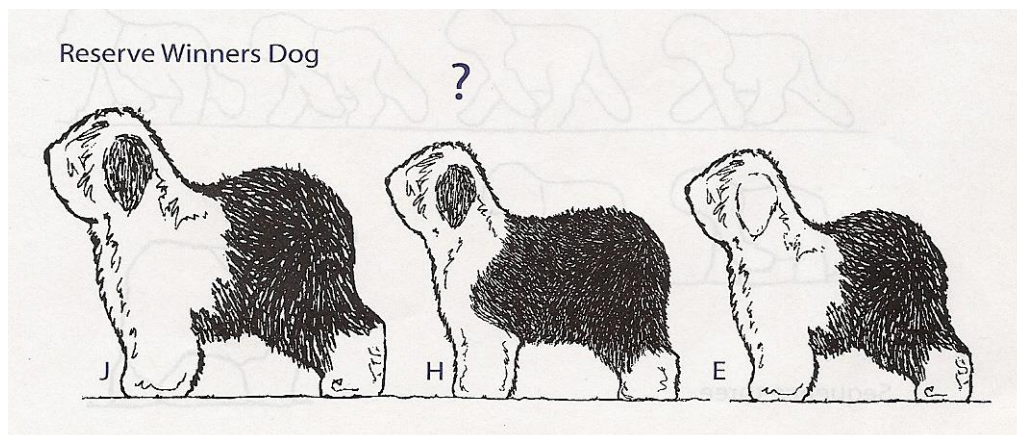
### WINNERS DOG

DOG J won the Open Class, Dog H won Bred by Exhibitor and Dog F won the Senior Puppy Class. Now decide which of the three is your Winners Dog.



### RESERVE WINNERS DOG

I chose Dog F for Winners Dog, so he has now been replaced by second-place Dog E. Decide which of the three will be your Reserve. I selected Dog J. I could not get by Dog E's brown coat or Dog H's level topline and long body.



## GAIT

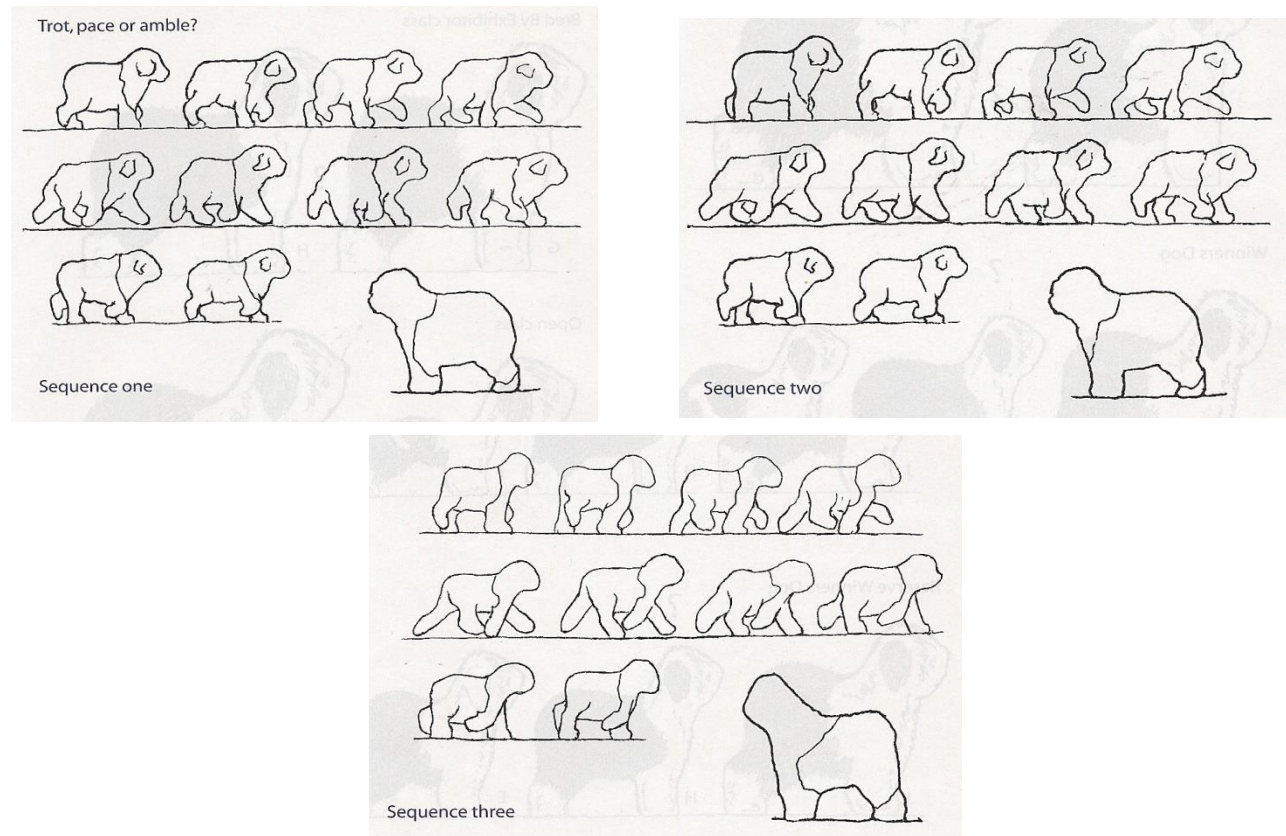
The OES Standard is somewhat confusing when it comes to describing gait. See if you can see why the club revised the following description: “When trotting, movement is free and powerful, seemingly effortless, with good reach and drive, and covering maximum ground with minimum steps. Very elastic at a gallop. May amble or pace at slow speeds.”

The problem with this description is that a dog does not amble or pace at the trot. The OES standard now describes the trot as “free, powerful and seemingly effortless, with good reach and drive covering maximum ground with minimum steps.” The revised standard adds, “May amble or pace at slower speeds.” Good, but the authors failed to say what the slower speeds were. Some people interpret slower speeds as the slow trot and the walk, while other believe the OES’s unusual conformation calls for the dog to pace at any speed and that the OES should never be penalized for pacing.

In my opinion, a judge should be able to assess each OES in the show ring at the normal trot. The normal trot has a period of suspension and is not a slow speed.

## THREE ILLUSTRATED SEQUENCES

One of these illustrated sequences is the trot, one is the pace and the other is the amble. Can you identify which is which?



It should help to know that the trot is a two-time diagonal gait with a period of suspension during changeover of diagonals. The pace is a two-time lateral gait with a brief period of suspension in Phases 5 and 6. The amble is a four-time gait, each foot striking the ground independently without a period of suspension. At the amble there is always one or two feet in support, whereas at the trot and pace there is normally either two feet in support or none.