

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

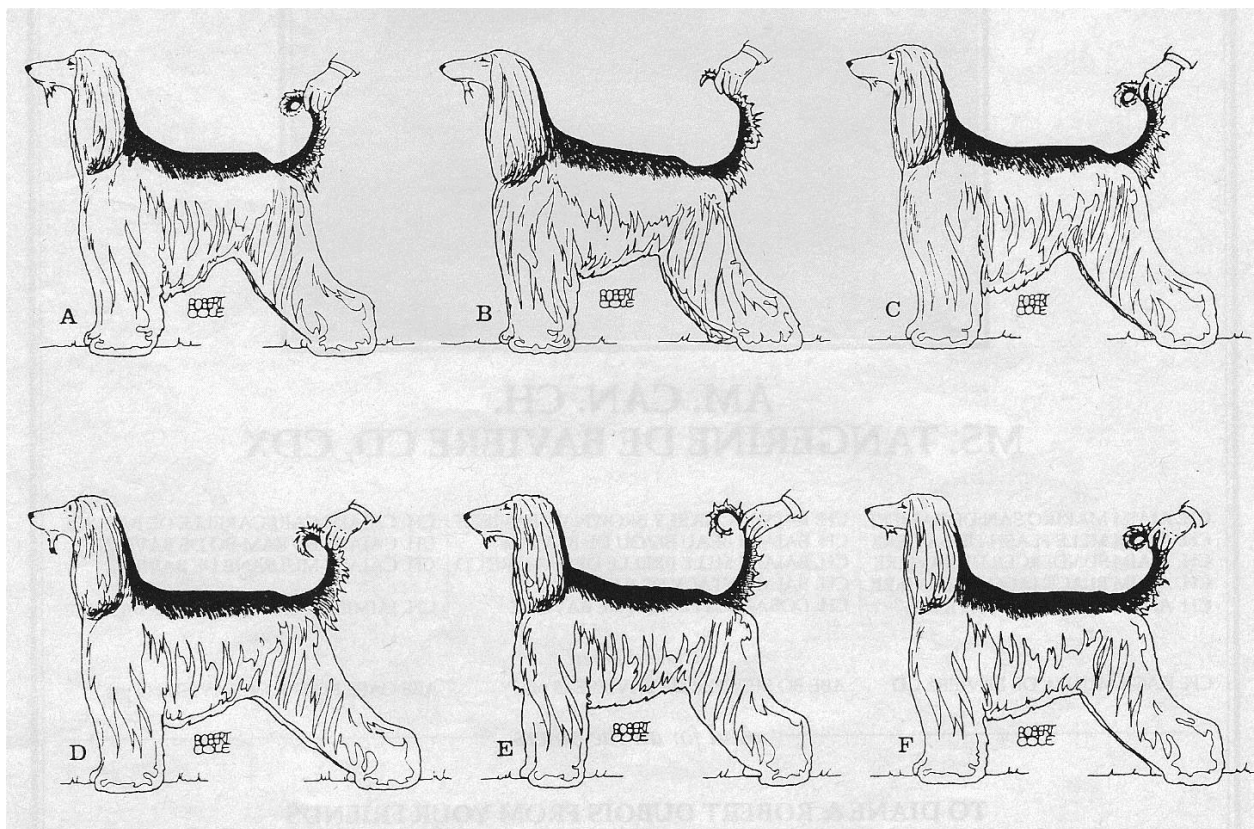
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THE AFGHAN HOUND

Three of these six Afghan Hounds are real life Group winners; in fact, two are Best in Show winners. These three serve to illustrate certain characteristics which set the breed apart. They also serve to illustrate three personal type preferences. You can, but it is not necessary that you correctly identify which three are the real life winners.

The other three are graphic departures based on the real life Afghans. Two represent departures from the official CKC description and one represents a departure from depicted reality towards the worded ideal. Combined with reality, these three also help formulate an image of perceived ideal.

You be the judge. Let's pretend they are all real life Afghan Hounds and this is their first show. They are competing in the Open Dog class. To minimize distractions I have given them all a short, closer saddle (a traditional breed characteristic) over beige without any white (white markings especially on the head are undesirable). Select a first place, a second place, a third place and a fourth place.



FIRST PLACE

Based on a breed standard which calls for: "Height at the shoulders to equal the distance from the chest to the buttocks," I would have to go with Dog A. This Afghan Hound's height to length in profile must be close to ideal, however, it is not one of the BIS or Group winners. Dog A is one of the imaginary examples.

Dog A is actually real life Dog C with a piece taken out of the centre of his body equal to the width of the back of the hand illustrated supporting his tail. This dog may exist in reality but I have no published photographs of square Afghans taken at right angles to the camera. (I do have some photographed at a three-quarter angle but, from that angle, the dogs are optically square). Nothing I have on file exactly matches this square dog's outline: the short, deep body made to appear ultra short by his high withers. Of the six, this square example most closely resembles the worded ideal. Judged to the exact wording in the CKC Standard, this graphically improved Afghan, stacked, would place first.

SECOND PLACE

This multi BIS Afghan came close to being an all time, top winning hound. Second place Doc C sets himself. Aside from tail support (there is nothing in the Afghan standard requiring this carriage – only in action is it raised – but it does help to optically shorten the body), he was photographed free standing. Whether the tail is supported or not, in profile he can be seen to be longer than tall, longer by the width of the back of the exhibitor's hand. He stands 28 in. tall and weighs 63 lbs. (dogs are to be 27 in. plus or minus an inch and bitches 25 in. plus or minus an inch: dogs about 60 lbs., bitches about 50 lbs.).

In profile this aristocratic head, as with Dog A, can be seen to be well chiseled and refined, neither lacking stop nor possessing too much stop. The slightly roman muzzle is equal in length to skull and set on parallel planes, the head surmounted by a topknot (also an outstanding Afghan characteristic) of long silky hair. The long ears are set on low and well back. The dark eyes are almond shaped. The nose is black, bite is scissors (may also be pincer, current standard gives pincer preference).

The straight forelegs are longer than the body is deep, the elbow level with the deep brisket, the pasterns slightly sloped, the feet large. The hindquarters are powerful and well-muscled with great length between hip and hock; the rear pasterns short. There is good angulation at both stifle and hock.

THIRD PLACE

My choice for third place is between the other two real life winners, Dog B and Dog E. Each possesses certain virtues and certain faults which have to be weighed one against the other, then one dog's virtues and faults against the others. Having done so I shall go with the BIS and SBIS winner over the Group winner, not because I like his type – I don't – but you go with what you have.

This BIS winner is Dog B. I call him Borzoi-Setter type. This dog has been stacked (by preference) so that the topline slopes downward like a Setter's. To do this the exhibitor has had to stretch the rear pasterns back at an angle (rather than correctly perpendicular), effectively lowering the rear. This subterfuge, unnecessary here, is usually resorted to when the rear raises because the pelvis is flat, steep or the front is low.

The Borzoi part relates to this Afghan's type of head which, in addition to resembling that of a Borzoi in profile, is also narrow viewed head on as well as having fill in front of the eyes.

FOURTH PLACE

Fourth place goes to real life Dog E. Obviously he is not without virtues but we have talked about virtues – let's talk about this dog's faults; there are four which tend to disturb. The first is a very heavy head bordering on coarse. Second is a short neck. Third is an abrupt break at the juncture of neck and withers. Fourth is an overly long rear pastern (hocks are too high). The uneven topline is not a fault – a rule of thumb is that the tops of three vertebrae should stand above the topline as evidence of proper weight.

DOG D

I have taken graphic license with what once was a BIS Afghan. One thing I did was reduce the height of withers to the height of those I remember decades ago. This tends to optically lengthen the body. Many breeds would be extremely pleased to possess the height of withers I left. Also, it may well be that in removing this example's characteristic hip bones I have added to the appearance of body length.

The head lacks underjaw. The Standard advisers: "the underjaw showing great strength." Further, this dog has too much stop and a round, bulging eye.

Lastly, I have given extra length to the second thigh, a current trend that is causing many breeders concern. Which reminds me ... unlike a horse, a dog can move off from a standing position without first having to bring a hind foot forward to take the weight off the front. When you assess an Afghan stacked in profile you should have the impression the dog has only to lean forward to take a step with a front foot. Not so this Afghan or any Afghan which has to position or is positioned in a 'park stance'.

DOG F

The third make-believe Afghan. Based on Dog C I have only made three changes in the form of departures. Beginning with the head the muzzle is too short. The muzzle and skull should be of equal length. Given that ratio, the head should also fit the body.

Second is the high set tail. The Afghan's tail should not set too high on the body. A straight tail (one without a ring or curve on the end) is not a serious fault; a tail that curls over the back is. A high set tail can contribute to curl over the back; however in this instance, the question is: does the tail set high because the sacrum is too horizontal or, more serious, is it because the pelvis is too flat? The answer is that the sacrum, rather than following the slope of the correct pelvis, is too horizontal.

The third and functionally, as a Sighthound, most serious departure is that his legs are two inches too short. To excel at the fast double suspension Sighthound gallop the Afghan's foreleg from elbow to ground (the elbow level with the bottom of the chest) must be longer than the body is deep. This dog may excel in the show ring at the trot; he might even win if he is thought to be too long in body rather than too short in leg. With the profuse coat, part of the enjoyment in judging a class of Afgans is determining how short is too short in leg and how long is too long in body.