

# YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, July 1995

## THE BASENJI

First compare the three similar Basenji heads to determine which one has the correct length of muzzle before reading the paragraphs on muzzles. Then, with length of muzzle in mind, be prepared to forgive an incorrect muzzle length in favour of virtues when placing these four stacked real-life (only the colour markings have been changed) champion Basenji bitches in order of merit. Two happen to be Best in Show winners.

### MUZZLE

There is a growing breeder concern in regard to length of muzzle. To address this issue, I have drawn three heads, one above the other, at a larger scale; they are identical in outline except for muzzle length. Only one of these three heads has a correct muzzle.

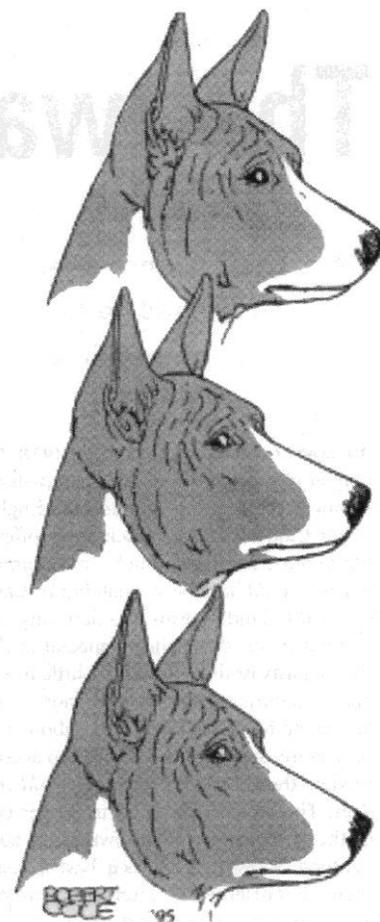
Basenji standards call for a muzzle shorter than the skull or a skull slightly longer than the muzzle; either way, the bottom head, with its muzzle and skull of equal length, is incorrect. Technically, since the standards do not give a precise ratio, either the top or centre head could be correct – but they're not, really. In my illustrated book *The Basenji Stacked and Moving* (Doral Publishing), I depicted the correct ratio of muzzle to skull as five is to seven. I haven't changed my mind. The ideal head in the centre is five to seven; the head at the top is a too-short four to seven. These three recent drawings demonstrate the subtle but definite influence length of muzzle has on type.

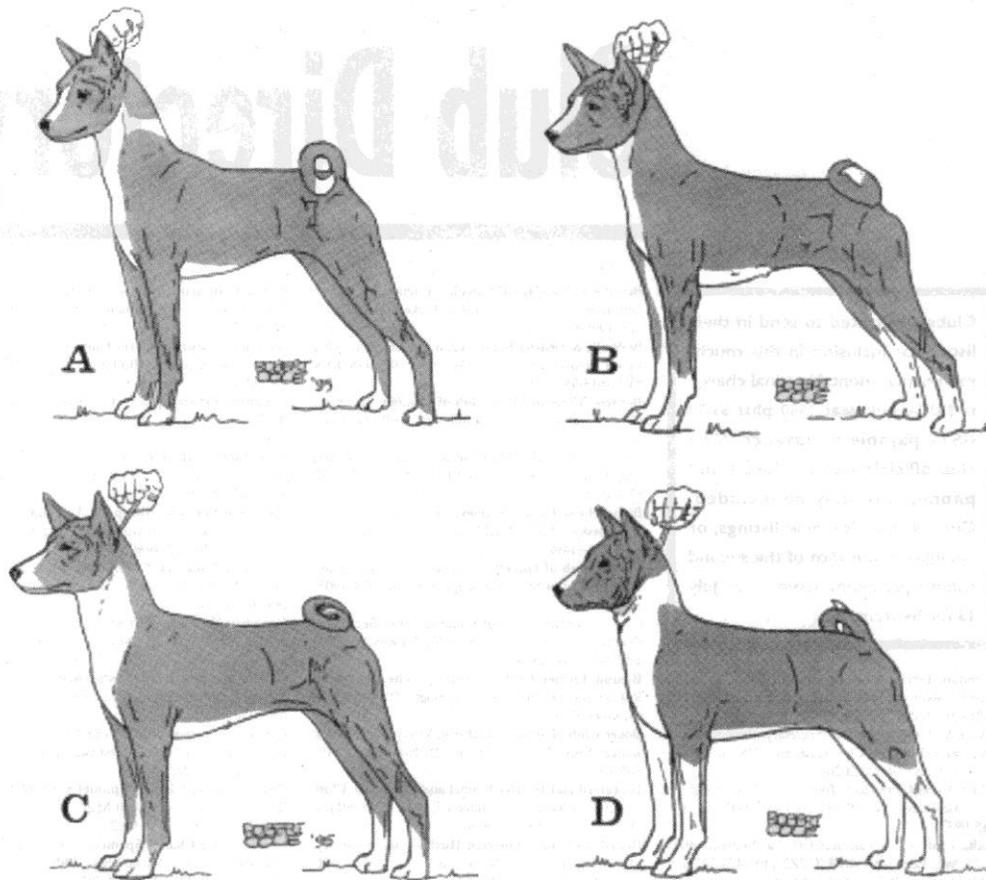
### JUDGING THIS CLASS

No one said judging Basenjis was easy; especially when the class possesses the combination of virtues and faults (many not immediately obvious) that this class does. I selected these four particular examples because they provide a judging scenario that takes into consideration certain sighthound requirements and specific breed characteristics that seldom are presented in a competition format.

### SIGHTHOUND REQUIREMENTS

The Basenji is a fast galloping sighthound, and the following eight criteria can be used to determine an order of merit for these four particular bitches: 1) a small, balanced with body head of medium width; 2) a lightly built body with short level back, short coupling, moderate breadth, definite waist (tuckup), and a forechest slightly in front of point of shoulder; 3) a well crested (arched) neck of good length, full at the base of the throat; 4) a moderate degree of angulation front and rear; 5) a foreleg longer than the body is deep, the elbow level with brisket and the pastern having a slight slope as well as good length; 6) a high set tail above and forward of a good shelf (buttock); 7) a short rear pastern positioned vertically; and 8) small, oval, compact feet. (In this scenario, all four bitches have correct feet.)





### BREED CHARACTERISTICS

In this particular judging scenario, the following four important breed characteristics can be directly applied. They are: 1) small, erect and slightly hooded ears set well forward on top of the head; 2) head wrinkles on forehead and side (but not exaggerated into dewlap); 3) a muzzle shorter than skull; and 4) a well curled tail.

### APPLICATION

Recognizing and applying the eight sighthound criteria in your evaluation of fundamental merit will not be difficult, especially if you have attended a sighthound field trial and can appreciate, for instance, the difficulty a Basenji without tuckup would have in getting up enough speed to produce a second period of suspension during each cycle at the fast gallop.

Application of the four breed characteristics may prove more difficult because one of the functionally best of these four hitches has a poorly curled tail, while another has large ears and a long muzzle. The think tis not to get hung up on obvious and perhaps disturbing faults and thereby fail to see the whole dog.

### FIRST PLACE

Basenjis are seldom square, but the first place bitch, with her short back, long legs, high withers, good tuckup, level topline and high set tail, appears to be. As the standard advises, she “appears high on the leg compared to length”. This square appearance is enhanced by a correct head carried proudly on an arched neck of good length, light build, good tuckup and clean, fine bone.

Her dark, almond shaped, obliquely set eyes have dark rims. Her head has a perceptible stop, the muzzle shorter than skull. Her nose is black and her bite is scissors (seldom will you find other than a correct scissors bite in a Basenji).

As for white markings, she has the required four white feet, chest and tail tip. White legs, blaze and collar are optional; the amount of white should never predominate over the primary colour.

Her rear pasterns from hock to foot are correctly positioned perpendicular. The appearance of Basenjis low in front or high in rear is often improved by stretching the hind legs rearward and wide, reflecting a current handling concern. Her curled tail could be tighter and curled double for perfection, but this is a minor consideration; the high set on of the tail is far more important than tightness. Of the four, 16 inch Bitch A is most typical. She is one of the two BIS winners.

## **SECOND PLACE**

Bitch C – the one with the incorrect long muzzle – is the other BIS winner. Her ears could be a little smaller and sit higher on her head, and her front pasterns could have less slope, but it is her incorrect long body that provides for interesting discussion. In combination with long legs and very good angulation front and rear, her long body provides excellent action at the trot, ensuring that even at an undesirable, too fast show ring trot, she would not have to over reach to avoid leg interference. However, at the fast gallop, the extra energy required to fold and unfold her longer body would reduce endurance. Her long body is a breed departure, regardless of how well she moves at the trot.

It is important to note, however, that her body's extra length is due not to a long, weak, unsupported loin (which would reduce soundness) but to forequarter, ribcage and hindquarter length, the three combining to produce a long body that is sound for a dog but not for a Basenji.

## **THIRD PLACE**

Her head is large, her ears are large and low, her front pasterns could be slightly stronger and her hind legs have been stretched rearward to level her topline. Her back is short but her ribs are too well sprung. Her loin is too long and her hindquarters are superior to her forequarters. Third place Bitch B also has a steep upper arm.

Her upper arm, because it is steep rather than moderately sloped rearward, positions her elbow forward on her body, creating a hole between her front legs and raising her body above the elbow. Viewed from above, the transition from body into loin is abrupt due to her wide ribcage. Viewed from above the shoulders, body, loin and hips should flow smoothly from one part into the next; hers don't.

## **FOURTH PLACE**

Bitch D would be sound if she were any of a number of breeds. Gone is the high-on-the-leg elegant appearance; her legs are only moderate in length. Her shorter legs make her body appear long; so do her lower withers, her very full forechest, and her lack of tuckup.

Her shorter leg length and lack of tuckup prevent her from attaining the speed necessary for the fast double suspension gallop but again, like long bodied Bitch C, she excels in the show ring at the trot – although not with the same grace.

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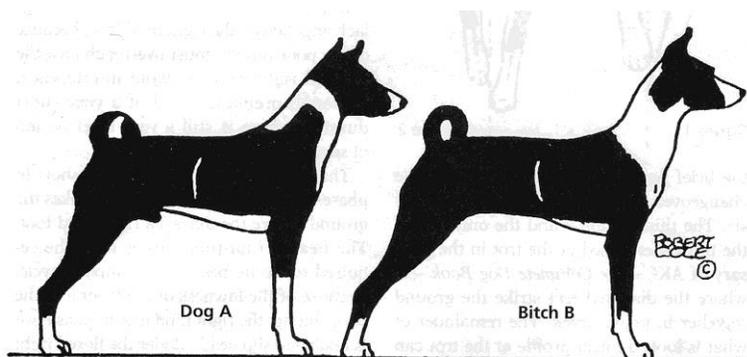
## TWO BASENJIS STACKED AND MOVING, OR MINIMIZING FAULTS

### DOG A OR BITCH B?

Which of these two real life Basenjis stacked in profile is the sounder? Both were filmed on the same day, on the same table, as well as coming, going and in profile (as you will see later in this article). At this point you are invited to compare Dog A and Bitch B stacked and decide which one you prefer and why?

If you decided in favour of sounder Dog A, you're probably aware of the two faults the cunning exhibitor could not hid on Bitch B, and wondered about a third – regardless of the handling tricks used to minimize these faults.

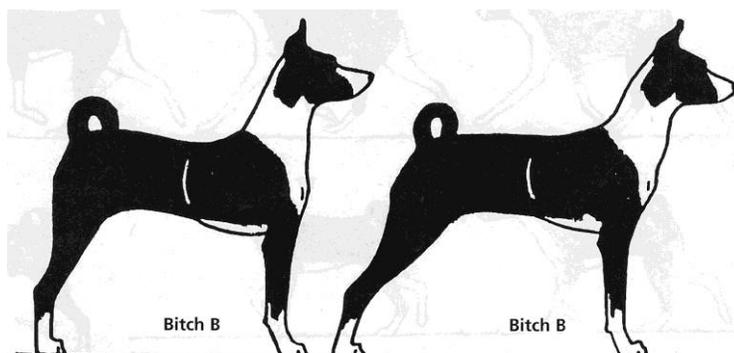
Minimizing faults is fair game. The exhibitor presents his or her imperfect dog to the dog's best advantage. Judges who may have utilized the same means, easily see past the subterfuge to find the true dog. Are you aware of what the exhibitor has done to improve Bitch B's appearance? Can you identify the two faults; one in the forequarter area and the other in the loin area?



### TWO VISIBLE FAULTS

Bitch B's first fault is a long loin, helped made visible by the white line defining the position of the last rib. The second fault is a steepness in the forequarter area. The exhibitor has done a good job of stacking this unsound Basenji, but is unable to line up the elbow with the brisket. Since the body possesses the required depth and the upper arm is of correct length, the fault must be a steep upper arm, positioning the elbow below the brisket.

### BITCH B AND BITCH B



By luck I chanced to film unsound Bitch B on the table in a natural stack and then, a second later, in an improved stack. The exhibitor, in one smooth motion, had improved Bitch B by simply moving the hind feet back two inches and exerting forward pressure with two fingers at the base of the tail. The improvement to appearance was and is dramatic.

In the 'before' stack, there is an obvious dip in the topline due, in part, to the long unsupported loin. The second

thigh – or the upper thigh, or both – could be longer. The front pastern could have less slope, and the forequarters should not be so far forward on the body. The too high carriage of the head does not help to produce a forechest and suggests a less than desirable shoulder angulation.

Aside from a low, below the brisket elbow position, most of these faults have been minimized in the ‘after’ stack. Of course, the rear pasterns are no longer vertical, but this form of subterfuge often goes unnoticed, even in win photographs.

Many standards ask for vertical rear pasterns, the exception being the 1989 AKC Boxer standard. It states, “From the side, the leg below the hock (metatarsus) should be almost perpendicular to the ground, with a slight slope to the rear permissible” (emphasis mine). Why was this permission granted to the Boxer? It helps Basenji Bitch B. Does it do the same for some Boxers?

## COMING AND GOING AWAY

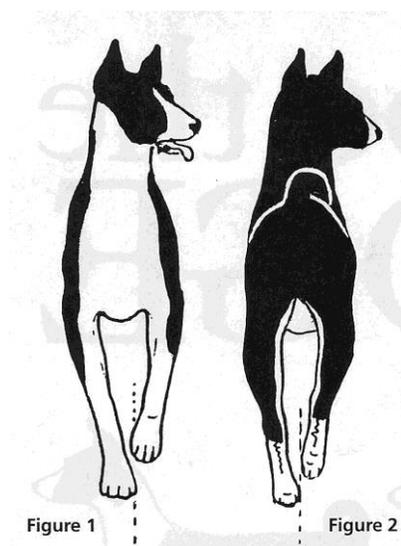


Figure 1

Figure 2

Both Dog A and Bitch B moved in a similar fashion coming and going away, as in Figure 1 and Figure 2. However, Bitch B was moved slower down and back because of a tendency to crab, and her head was carried lower; otherwise, their action was much the same. This was not the case when they were viewed moving in profile.

What things should be looked for when viewing a dog at the trot in profile?

## WHAT TO OBSERVE IN PROFILE

As important as the view coming and going away is, the view in profile tells a much fuller story.

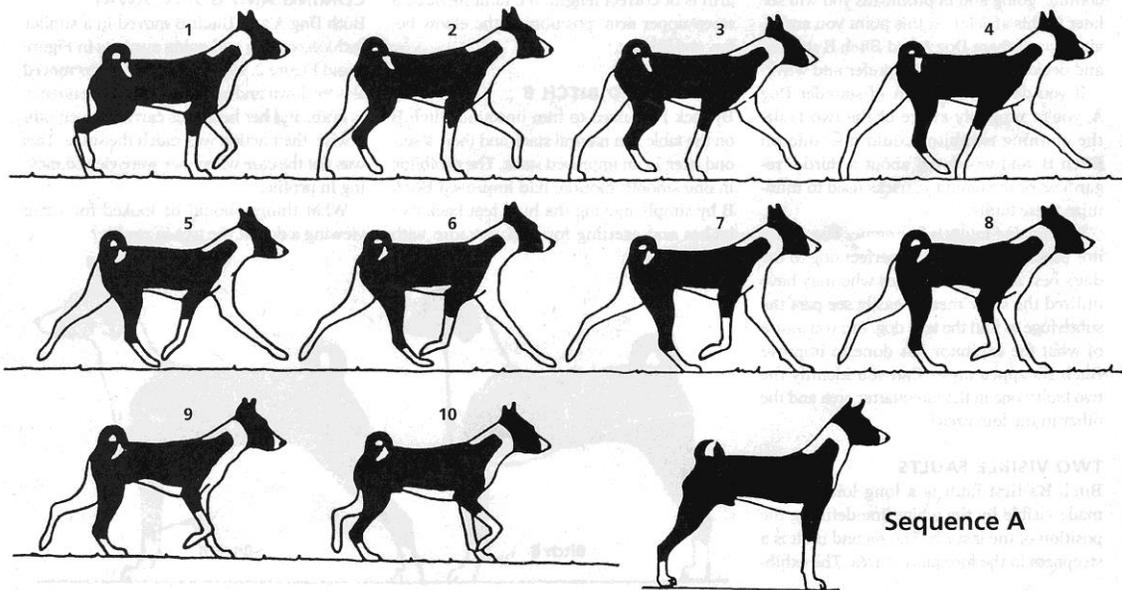
It discloses the degree of up and down and levelness of the topline; the carriage of the neck and head; the reach and extension of all four legs; the degree of front pastern flex; the synchronization of diagonal footfalls; and the means an unsound dog may utilize to attain a degree of balance front to rear.

The best method of documenting action at the trot in profile and depicting it graphically is the transfer of motion-picture film, taken at 54 frames per second, into a sequence of line drawings. Since the trot is a diagonal gait and one half of a complete cycle is a mirror image of the other half, only 10 drawings are required.

To enable you to compare, phase by phase, the action of two differently constructed dogs, each illustrated sequence begins with the right front leg in vertical support. The position of the other three legs will vary depending on how well the dog is constructed. Dog A at the trot (Sequence A) will serve as the norm for this breed.

## SEQUENCE A

When you are aware of the three important actions applicable to all breeds, ‘seeing’ action at the trot becomes almost intuitive. The first important action can be seen in phase four, where the diagonal left rear and right front legs are about to relinquish support at exactly the same time. The second is the brief period of suspension during the changeover of diagonals in phases five and six. The third action – and the only one of the three mentioned at the trot in the glossary of AKC’s *The Complete Dog Book* – is where the diagonal feet strike the ground together in phase seven. The remainder of what is looked for in profile at the trot can best be appreciated in the departures from the norm produced by unsound Bitch B (Sequence B).

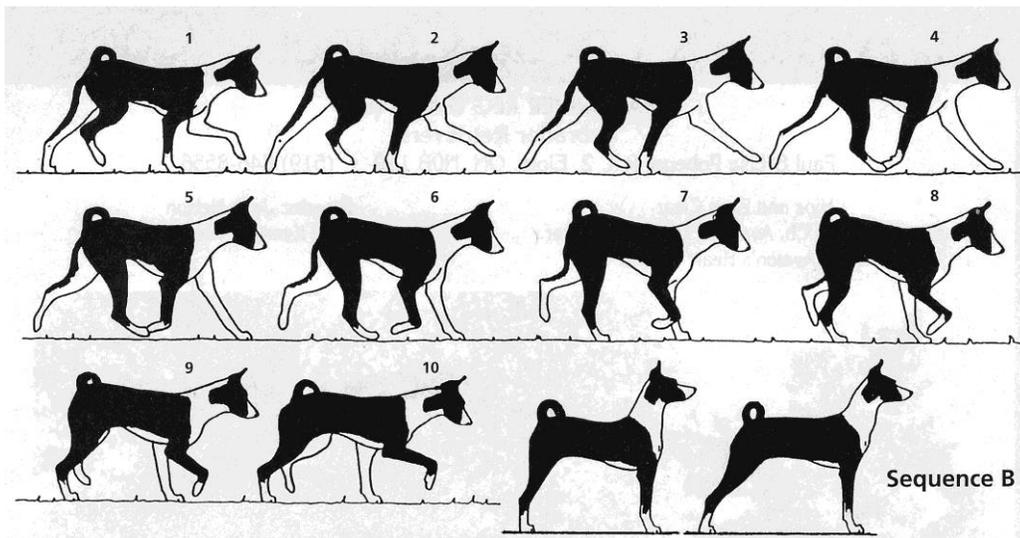


### SEQUENCE B

Imbalance front with rear is captured early in phase one, the too-far-advanced right hind leg being a giveaway. Notice that the left hind leg, rather than supporting in phase one, is actually exerting rearward pressure. The topline slopes down toward a low carried head and the left front leg is lifted wastefully high.

Because of this imbalance, the diagonal left hind leg and right front leg in phase three do not relinquish support at the same time – the right front leg is still in a support mode. This one front leg support ironically allows the left front leg to reach further forward than her steep shoulders would normally permit.

In phase four, even though the hind legs lack angulation, the right hind foot, because of the poor timing, must overreach past the delayed right front to avoid interference. Although premature and of a very short duration, there is still a very brief period of suspension.



This period of suspension is cut short in phase five when the left front foot strikes the ground before the diagonal right hind foot. The beat is four-time rather than the required two-time beat for a complete cycle. Because of the lowness of the front and the poor timing, the right hind foot in phase five is unable to slip neatly under the flexed right front foot and occupy the spot vacated by the latter.

In phase six, the bitch is prematurely supported by the left front leg. With three legs in the air and one on the ground, she appears to be running downhill.

The right hind foot finally strikes the ground in phase seven and, in doing so, the hind end arches up high and forward because the supporting diagonal front leg is now too close. The space between supporting diagonals at this point should be approximate the distance between the front and hind legs while stacked.

### **FINAL IMPRESSION**

The judge had many opportunities to see Bitch B standing naturally. On the return from the view going away was an excellent time. In a large class, the trick is to retain the true image of the dog standing naturally and relate it to the action you saw in profile because, on a final look down the line, examples like Bitch B can be stacked to produce a much improved final impression.