

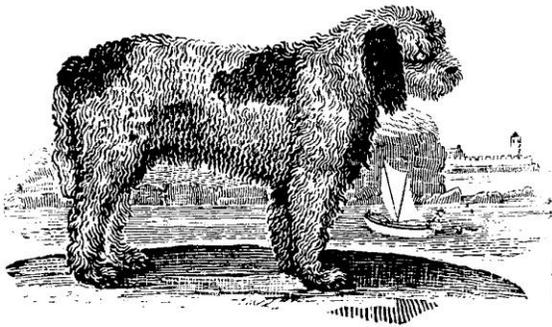
YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

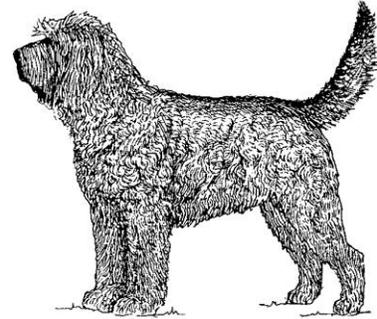
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THE OTTERHOUND

Based on current breed standards



An 1800 woodcut
by Thomas Bewick



“The Otterhound is a large, rough-coated hound with an imposing head, showing great strength and dignity, and a strong body and long-striding action fit for a long days’ work. It has an extremely sensitive nose and is inquisitive and persistent in investigating scents. The Otterhound hunts its quarry on land and water and requires a combination of characteristics unique among hounds – most notably, a rough double coat and substantial webbed feet.”

The Otterhound is a water dog with strongly webbed feet and, it is claimed, the ability to swim for hours without tiring. Otterhounds and otter hunting received mention in 1175 during the reign of Henry II. The original purpose of the Otterhound was to pursue and kill the otter, which at that time was considered to be a vermin.

Fish was an important food source for the peasants. Eventually fishing became an industry and packs of Otterhounds were put together to keep the abundant river otter from destroying this industry. By the mid 1800s, otter hunting has become a sport subject to rules. By the end of World War II, pollution had brought an end to the hunting of otter and eventually the otter was declared an endangered species. This left the Otterhound without a purpose other than hunting on land and being a pet and watchdog (not guard dog). It is doubtful that there are more than 1,000 Otterhounds in the world today. As for adaptability, even though the Otterhound has been a hunter for generations, its engaging countenance and affectionate nature have made its transition to house pet an easy one.

VERY LITTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE

Sometimes when there is very little technical information available I make good use of the standards of other countries. There is a great deal to be learned from studying how other countries see the Otterhound. Often there is greater detail regarding a specific feature in one country than in another. This does not necessarily make the greater detail official, but it does provide further insight into the breed. This is what I have done with the Otterhound, as well as comparing it to a similar breed.

Before the Canadian Kennel Club’s Breed Standards Committee was directed not to compare one breed to another in the standards, there was a piece of interesting advice in the 1982 Otterhound standard. It read: “The Otterhound very much resembles the Bloodhound.” To assist

you in determining just how much the Otterhound resembles the Bloodhound, I have provided a line drawing of an American champion Otterhound (Figure 1) that did a great deal of winning. A smooth-coated breed is much easier to see and assess than a coated breed, and this Bloodhound (Figure 2) is no exception. You are invited to determine how much resemblance there is between the two.

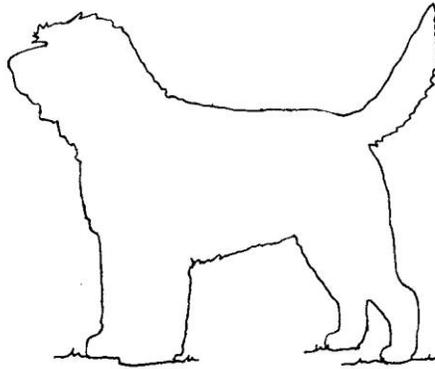


Figure 1

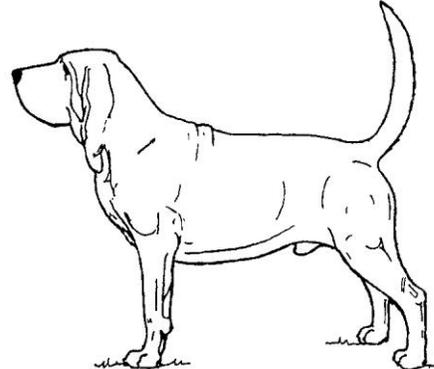


Figure 2

The requirement for both is a body slightly longer than tall. The AKC standard advises: “The Otterhound has good substance with strongly boned legs and broad muscles, without being coarse. Balance, soundness and type are of greater importance than size.” (They are both approximately 26 inches at the withers; the Bloodhound weighs 110 pounds, the Otterhound 115 pounds.)

Both heads are narrow, and 12 inches long. The AKC and the United Kennel Club standards inform that: “The planes of the skull and muzzle are parallel.” The Bloodhound’s skull is nearly on the same plane as the muzzle. Both have eyes that are deeply set. The hawk on the Otterhound shows only slightly. They each have long pendulous and folded ears (to catch the scent). The sameness also applies to the square muzzle, deep flews, wide nostrils and scissors bite.

The Bloodhound’s dewlap is pronounced; the Otterhound may have a slight dewlap. The Bloodhound’s chest is well let down between the forelegs, forming a deep keel. The AKC standard is the only one that addresses how deep the Otterhound body can be. It does so in an indirect way, using the advice: “The chest is deep reaching at least to the elbows on a mature hound”. The words “at least” suggest that a chest that reached lower than the elbows would be acceptable or even desirable.

Both have necks of sufficient length for the dropped head to follow a trail. Toplines are level, loins are short, legs are strongly boned and straight. Forechests are evident. Tails are high set. Pads on the feet are thick, the toes are arched and the feet webbed. Hocks are well let down with angulation balanced front with rear. None of the standards mention degree of tuck-up, but the Bloodhound can be seen to possess a modest degree, so I believe the Otterhound should too.

Aside from coat and feet the comparison to the Bloodhound has provided a good visual introduction to the Otterhound. The coat is an essential Otterhound feature. Coat texture and quality are more important than length. The outer coat is dense, rough, coarse and crisp, of broken appearance. The softer hair on the head and lower legs is natural. The hair is 1 ½ to three inches on the back; shorter on extremities. The short woolly undercoat is slightly oily, and water resistant. It is an essential feature for the Otterhound; however, it may be sparse during the summer months.

COAT CONCERNS

A soft outer coat is a very serious fault, as is a woolly-textured outer coat. Lack of undercoat is a serious fault. Any evidence of stripping or scissoring the coat to shape or stylize it should be strongly penalized as a fault. Any colour or combination of colours is acceptable.

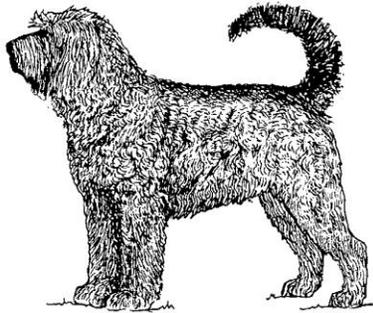


Figure 3

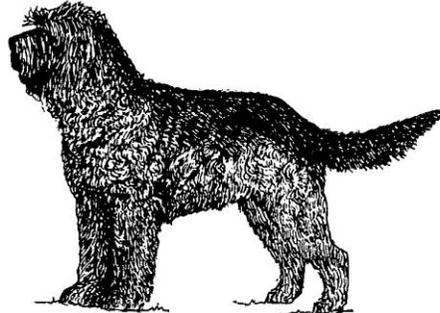


Figure 4

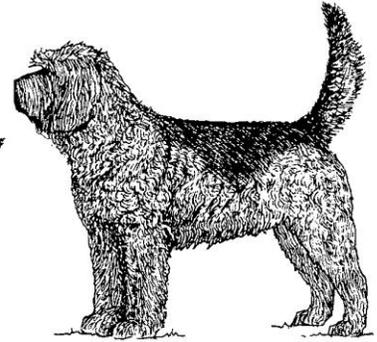


Figure 5

SIX FAULTS

Staying with virtues and faults visible on these three male Otterhounds, can you identify six departures? Treat Figure 4's croup drop-off and low tail set as one fault.

The tail on Figure 3 should be carried sabre fashion, not forward over the back. (The KC and FCI standards use the word "never") Figure 4 has a short muzzle, a short body and a low-set-on tail. Figure 5 has a long body and lacks angulation at the hock.