

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, October 1987

SHIH TZU

The Shih Tzu (pronounced Shid-Zoo) competes in the Non-Sporting Group in Canada and in the Toy Group in the United States. The origin of this friendly little dog is somewhat obscure. Classified as a Chinese dog, having been bred there for centuries, it is considered to have originated in Tibet, where it resided in temples, occasionally to be given as a tribute gift to emperors of China. Bred then and now to be a loving, good natured, healthy companion, this function serves admirably as the backdrop against which this breed is judged.

The Standard for the breed is similar around the world. It is well worded. Aside from being a Toy breed in the United States and smaller, only one feather – the muzzle – differs in the AKC wording from other countries, a difference that serves as a focus when considering the Canadian had in detail. Description of the rest of the dog is also well worded but one part exists that all Shih Tzu Standards fail to mention, a part that greatly influences type, balance and movement. Illustrated discussion focuses on this influence when considering the Shih Tzu's body.

THE HEAD

The size of the Shih Tzu's head should be in balance with the size of the dog, its body and neck. The tail should balance with the head – hence the adage, "You can't tell which end is which." A good Shih Tzu head is considered to be of primary importance and should resemble neither the Lhasa Apso or the Pekingese. Are you aware in what way the Shih Tzu's head differs from these two breeds? The most obvious is that a square muzzle is objectionable for the Lhasa Apso, and a dome-shaped skull is objectionable for the Pekingese, but many more differences exist.

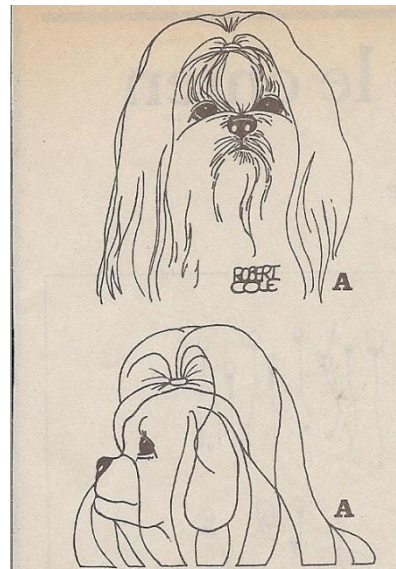
How much more can be appreciated in part by the fact that eight of the 10 faults considered serious by breeders relate to the head. They include: narrow head; overshot bite; snipeness; pink on the nose or eye rim; lack of definite stop small or light eyes. The exception in the case of light eyes is a liver-coloured dog.

On the positive side, the skull with the hair tied on top of the head should be felt and found to be round. The muzzle is square and short but not wrinkled, about one inch from tip of nose to definite stop. The eyes are large, dark and round, but not prominent. The eye rims and nose are black, except that dogs with liver markings may have liver noses and slightly lighter eye rims. The large ears are set slightly below the crown of the skull and droop down, appearing to blend in with the neck.

DOG A

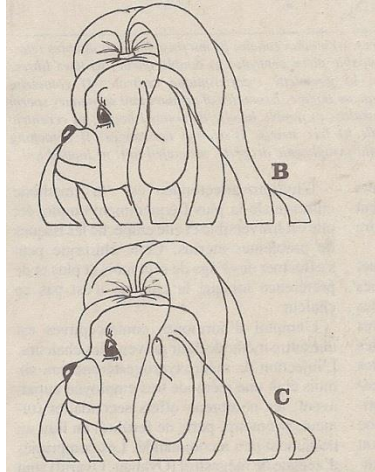
A typical head viewed head-on, this angle reveals a number of things you should look for beyond that which has been previously mentioned. Are you aware what they are? One relates to the relationship of top of nose and eyes from this angle. Another focuses on the eyes themselves. Another on the nose alone. A fourth centres on the mouth, both upper lip and bottom lip.

From this angle the top of the nose should be level with or just slightly above the bottom of the eye. The large, dark, round eyes should not show any white. The nostrils should be open, not pinched. And



fourth, the upper lip should cover the teeth and the lower lip should not protrude.

In profile, Dog A's muzzle can be seen to be flat. The standard for most countries calls for flat. The CKC does not, AKC doesn't, but like the British and Canadian Standard, it wards "but not wrinkled." A wrinkle occurs when the nose tilts up too much, resembling that of a Pekingese. The absence of the word "flat" permits interpretation to include the slightly up-tilted nose of Head B, a trend that has a large following as long as the tilt is slight, does not cause wrinkle, pinch the nostrils or raise the top of the nose higher than the bottom of the eyes.



The up-tilt nose on Dog B is acceptable in all parts of the world. It is described in Audrey Dadds British Book, *The Shih Tzu* (Howard Book House, NY 1985) as a correct, slightly up-tilted nose. Both muzzles from nose tip to stop are approximately one inch – smaller dogs shorter.

Dog C illustrates three faults: the skull here is flat, rather than round, the ears are set too low; the muzzle on this example slopes down. This downward muzzle slope greatly detracts from desired expression both in profile and head-on.

The Shih Tzu's bite influences the shape the short, square muzzle takes. This breed can have (CKC and AKC) a "level or slightly undershot bite." Americans intend, I am informed, to convey a preference for a slightly undershot bite. The British current (1987) Standard reads: "Mouth, Wide, slightly undershot or level, Lips level."

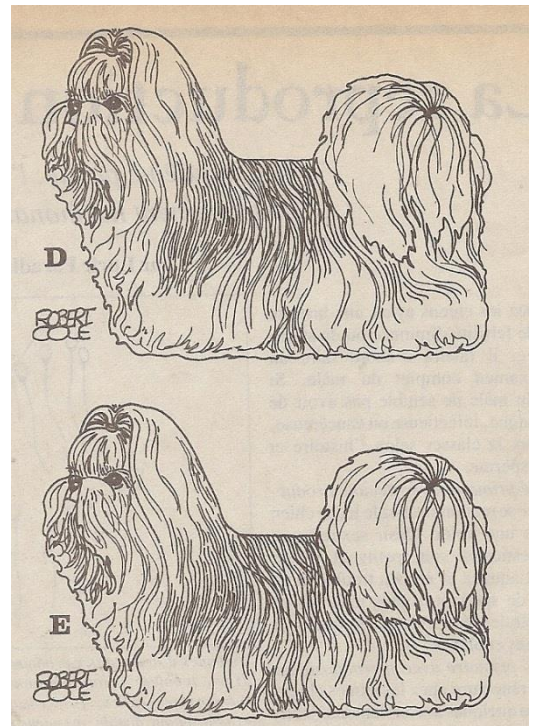
THE BODY

The Shih Tzu's broad, deep chest, sturdy, well-coupled body is hidden under a luxurious, long, dense coat, wavy but not curly and with a good woolly undercoat. The hair parts naturally from the back of the skull to the base of the tail. All colours are permissible. The legs under this coat are short, straight, well boned and muscular. The body between withers and root of tail is somewhat longer than height at withers. This is as far as the official wording prepares you for the two Shih Tzu examples I have drawn in profile for your consideration. *You be the judge.* Which one best conforms to this incompletely worded description?

These two profile examples, Dog D and Dog E, do not represent different types. One possesses a profile outline of a top American winner and represents typical. The other example represents an interesting and, at the same time, serious departure from correct structure. The Standard does not warn of this drastic departure from correct structure and perhaps because of the profuse coat and the nature of his departure, it seldom if ever receives mention.

The effect visually of this structural departure is height. Both of these examples have the same head, length of neck, body, forelegs and tail, but one is 11" (28cm) tall and the other is 12" (30cm) tall. The ideal is around 11" but considerable variation from this standard is permissible, provided other proportions are correct and true to type.

Two questions: Which Shih Tzu, the 11" or 12", is closest to typical height-to-body length balance? And, having decided which one is better balanced as seen in profile, what would you expect to find with your hands under the coat that would confirm your *You be the judge* suspicions as to the reason for the height-length imbalance?



Profile D

The taller of the two, this Shih Tzu is 12", an inch taller than Dog E. If you selected this example as more closely representing the ideal Shih Tzu height-to-length ratio, you were right. To do so you forgave the extra 1".

On the table, your hands validate your decision. The shoulders are nicely laid back, the upper arm slopes rearward, bringing the elbow level with the bottom of the chest. The back is moderately long, the loin strong, the hindquarters compliment the forequarters. The tail sets high.

Profile E

This 11" example is closer to ideal height, but not to ideal height-to-length balance. This example appears longer in body than Dog D but their bodies are actually the same length. Their bodies are also the same depth and their forelegs, measured from elbow to ground, are also the same length. Where then lies the difference? The difference lies in the foreleg – not its length, but the relationship of elbow to bottom of chest.

On the table, your hands followed the same path as they did when you went over Dog D, but when you came to the elbow, which should have been level with the bottom of the chest, your fingers found the bottom of the chest to be an inch below the level of the elbow.

The significance of the chest slung lower than the elbow (similar to a number of short legged, long bodied breeds, but wrong for the Shih Tzu) can be best illustrated head-on. This structural departure greatly affects the straightness of the Shih Tzu's short leg and its movement in the show ring. Hidden by the long, luxurious coat, fingers sometimes mistake straightness from the low-slung chest down to the feet, with straight from the elbow down. The reason can best be appreciated with see-through, head-on illustration of both Dog D and Dog E.

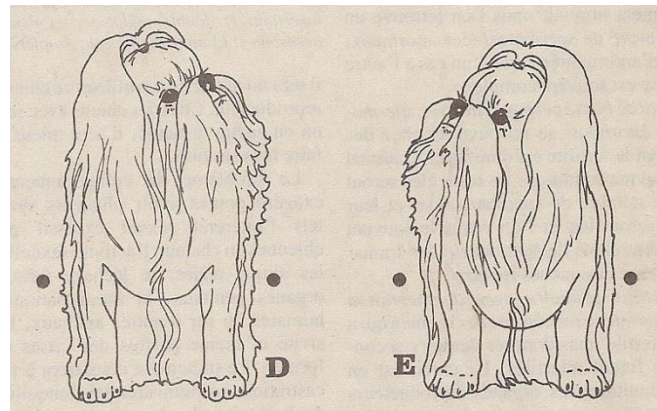
Head-on Dog D

Viewed head-on, this correct straight-legged example is straight from the elbow down. I have drawn a dark circle opposite each elbow. This is a normal, short, straight Shih Tzu leg, the elbow about level with the bottom of the chest. If the Shih Tzu were a smooth-haired breed, any departure from this assembly would be obvious. Hidden by a profuse coat, the presence of this assembly is often taken for granted and departure goes unnoticed.

Head-on Dog E

Viewed head-on, this Shih Tzu's short leg (the same length as dog D's) is straight from the bottom of the chest – not from the elbow, down. Again, I have identified the position of the elbows with dark circles. These circles are the same distance from the ground as the preceding example. The elbows on this dog are above the bottom of the chest. This dog's front leg is straight only from the wrist down, the forearm from wrist to elbow wraps closely around the body.

This type of forequarters in various degrees of straightness is found on a number of short-legged breeds. It is called a wrap-around-front. It lowers this example's height but it is wrong for the Shih Tzu.



Gait

The CKC Standard does not describe gait and I am not all together in agreement with the AKC description other than the four words: "smooth and free flowing." Neither do I agree with Canadian breeders who would like to see mention that the pads should be seen going away. I'm not saying the pads shouldn't be seen going away, but many that do expose their pads do so because the hind leg extends rearward more than it reaches forward – a fault often hidden by profuse coat.

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From *Dogs in Canada*, March 1994

SHIH TZU

The Shih Tzu is not an easy breed to judge. Its unique headpiece requires close study, there are national type differences, and its profuse coat can make its conformation something of a mystery. These three aspects are worthy of illustrated discussion.

I have drawn the head face-on and in profile; provided a sketch of a balanced North American example compared to a balanced British example; and, in the final drawing, unveiled a representation of typical by 'stripping' the long, luxurious coat.

THE HEAD

The expression, from the front, is warm, sweet, wide-eyed, friendly and trusting. This expression results from a head that is round and broad and has good width between large, dark, round eyes. The eyes are placed well apart but are not prominent, look straight ahead and show no white. The nostrils are broad, wide and open. The jaw is also broad and wide; when it is closed, the tongue does not show.

By removing the hair from the head in profile, I am attempting to depict the square, short, un wrinkled muzzle. Set no lower than the bottom of the eye rim, the muzzle is never downturned, and measures about one inch from tip to definite stop. The 1986 British standard and the 1993 Canadian standard say, "Nose level or slightly tip-tilted," which demonstrates how physical subtleties influence Shih Tzu expression.

My preference is for a slightly undershot bite, with the upper lips fitting closely over the lower lips when the mouth is closed – not protruding and never receding. The front of the muzzle is flat.

The skull is domed and there is a definite stop. The large, drooping ears are set slightly below crown of skull. The 1988 revised American standard has deleted mention of drooping ears; however, I do not believe it follows that ears that lift away from the skull, as found on the Tibetan Spaniel, are called for. My Canadian standard does ask for drooping ears, "so heavily coated that they appear to blend into the hair of the neck."

WHICH IS CANADIAN – A OR B?

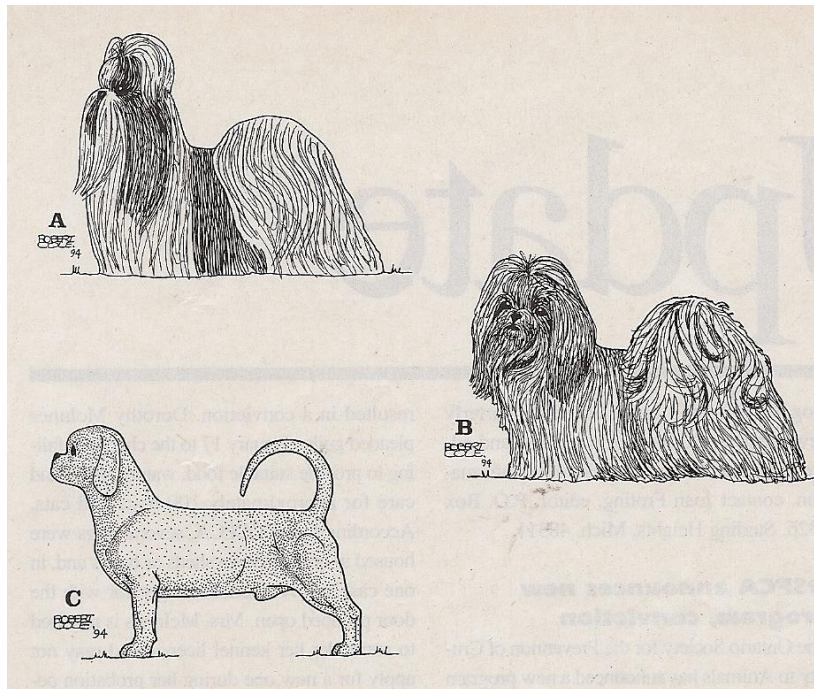
Gay Widdrington, A Shih Tzu specialist, in an excellent article in the August 25, 1989, *English Dog News* explained national differences quite well. She described the North American Shih Tzu as having a proportionately smaller head, a longer neck and a lower tail carriage (not set-on) than the Shih Tzu she is accustomed to in England. My drawing of Dog A represents the type of North American Shih Tzu to which she refers.

Mrs. Widdrington did not stop with three national differences; she also described the North American Shih Tzu as being higher on the leg than his British counterpart, and narrower of body. This observation was made after judging three times in the United States. These observations come as no surprise to me.



Shih Tzus that are high on the leg and have narrow bodies are, unfortunately, still with us today. These characteristics are faults, and always will be – they do not simply reflect national differences. It is crucial that this be stressed, especially in relation to weight.

The 1993 revised American Kennel Club standard advises “solid, carrying good weight and substance” not once but twice. While the American Shih Tzu is judged as a Toy in the United States (and no where else), it must still be judged as a sturdy individual.



COAT REMOVED

The Shih Tzu has a luxurious, double-coated, dense, long and flowing coat, which is permitted a slight wave but no curls. With the coat ‘removed’, conformation can be seen and discussed. Recent revisions to the Canadian and American standards complement the British standard where the wording may be vague or certain topics absent.

THE LEGS

The most controversial Shih Tzu component is its short, muscular front legs. Canadian and American standards no longer ask for short legs; the latter specifies “Distance from elbow to withers is a little greater than from elbow to ground” and “Depth of ribcage should extend to just below the elbow.” Dog C’s front leg length conforms to these requirements.

Part of the controversy stems from Canadian and U.S. standards requiring the forelegs to be “straight”. The British standard wisely concludes: “straight as possible, consistent with a broad chest being well let down (between elbows)”. I have judged Shih Tzu in several countries and have never encountered straight front legs.

CHEST DROP

The degree to which a Shih Tzu’s chest drops down between its elbows greatly determines how much bow there will be to the forearm between elbow and wrist. One country asks for the chest to drop down *just* below the elbow; the other asks for the chest to drop *well* below the elbow. The difference in drop may be minor, but extremes in either direction will result in a balance quite different from that of Dogs A and B, whose proportions are slightly longer than high.

FEEL

Your hands must tell you how much chest drop and departure from straight legs are acceptable. I would be remiss at this point if I did not remind you that an overly heavy body can force the chest to drop down too far and the upper arm between point of shoulder and elbow to change position to horizontal. Not only must the forechest, shoulders, elbow and brisket be examined, the angle of the upper arm (open) must also be determined.

FRONT PASTERNS

The Americans ask for a perpendicular front pastern. I disagree. To bring the front into static balance and ensure a correctly angled upper arm, I think there should be a slight but strong pastern slope. Perpendicular is correct for a Fox Terrier, but not a Shih Tzu.

BODY

The forechest compliments a shoulder blade well laid back and in, and a well-angled upper arm. The chest is broad and deep with good spring of rib. The loin is short; the croup does not drop off. There is no waist or tuck-up. The topline is level, both standing and moving.

HINDQUARTERS

In balance with the forequarters, the short hind legs are muscular and have ample bone. They are straight when viewed from behind. The rear pasterns are short and their position perpendicular when viewed from the side. The thighs are well rounded and muscular, appearing massive on account of the wealth of hair.

TAIL

The tail is set on high, heavily plumed, carried high in a curve over the back, 'teapot handle' fashion, balanced with head. A tight tail is penalized in the show ring if it spoils the dog's balanced appearance.

COLOUR MARKINGS

Canadian and American breeders have requested that I discuss colour markings. All colours are permissible. The problem is the emphasis, at the expense of structure, some judges place on an attractive white blaze on the forehead and a white tail tip – "a highly desirable" characteristic according to the British standard.

This colour-marking preference has prompted the American Shih Tzu Club to state: "All colours and markings are permissible and to be considered equally." The Canadian Shih Tzu Club has gone one step further and deleted *all* mention of colour markings.