

# TAKE NOTE

... .. of the Scottish Deerhound standard



*Barbara Heidenreich (Fernhill) has been enslaved by Scottish Deerhounds and the Deerhound temperament for more than 40 years. This passion has involved her attending 36 SDCA national specialties, eight Deerhound Club (UK) breed shows, three Dava Quaich coursing meets, and countless coursing events. Under the Fernhill prefix she has been breeding, coursing and showing with the key goal of maintaining a functional hound that can excel in both the ring and field. The most glorious activity in the world she considers to be watching her own Deerhounds in full flight on the fields at Fern Hill.*

In this new Sighthound Review feature, we ask prominent fanciers to sit down with "their" AKC standard and "take note" about where they think judges and breeders often go astray. You'll find the commentator's literal notes in red after the highlighted portion of the standard.

*Barbara Heidenreich writes: The preface to the Scottish Deerhound Club of America breed standard reminds the fancy (if you look hard) of the historic function of the Deerhound. Brief mention is made of "coping with large Scottish deer (often weighing 250 pounds)" and much is made of the mythology of the "royal dogs" owned by earls and noble lords. More on function would have been helpful in interpreting the standard, in particular helping to grade the severity of "faults," "undesirables" and other deviations noted in the standard by assisting the reader in understanding to what extent the deviation affects the original purpose of the breed.*

*Two elements are instrumental in understanding Deerhound conformation: its quarry, the red deer (*Cervus elaphus scoticus*), and the terrain over which this breed coursed. Red deer are smaller than elk, but larger than white-tailed deer. The Scottish red deer, smaller than the Western European red deer thanks to the inhospitable, windswept hills of its habitat, weighed 225 to 350 pounds, with a shoulder height of about 40 to 47 inches. The terrain is extraordinarily rough: peat bogs, stony hills covered with coarse heather, rocky crags and rushing burns. Watching Deerhounds work in their home terrain illuminates how this breed needs to be constructed and the standard's attempt to describe this.*

## Head

Most standards start with *General Appearance*, but this one follows the format of the original Hickman and Hood-Wright Deerhound standard approved by the U.K. club in 1892. Head is mentioned first, but foremost in Points Arranged in Order of Importance is *type*. **Point # 1:** *A Deerhound should resemble a rough-coated Greyhound of larger size and bone.* This is the *General Appearance* missing at the beginning of this standard.

Should be **broadest at the ears, narrowing slightly to the eyes, with the muzzle tapering more decidedly to the nose. The muzzle should be pointed.** The description of a "tapering" head and pointed muzzle reinforces the Greyhound look. A Deerhound head is not a small Irish Wolfhound head, but a decidedly tapered and pointed Greyhound head, but the teeth and lips level. The head should be long, the skull flat rather than round with a very slight rise over the eyes but nothing approaching a stop. The **hair on the skull** should be moderately long and softer

than the rest of the coat. The nose should be black (in some blue fawns, blue) and slightly aquiline. In lighter colored dogs the black muzzle is preferable. There should be a **good mustache of rather silky hair and a fair beard.** Facial furnishings are a part of the look of a "rough-coated Greyhound." Too little hair is an aesthetic-cosmetic loss of type; too much hair is dysfunctional as well as an aesthetic loss of type ... as in all aspects of conformation, moderation is key.

## Ears

Should be set on high; in repose, folded back **like a Greyhound's.** Again, "like a Greyhound" is key phraseology. Too many ears fall in a half fold and occasionally hang flat. Large, flat, hairy ears are also too often seen. Ears should be small and tightly rosed, though raised above the head in excitement without losing the fold, and even in some cases semierect. A prick ear is bad. Big thick ears hanging flat to the head or heavily coated with long hair are bad faults. The ears should be soft, glossy, like a mouse's coat to the touch and the smaller the better. There should be no long coat or long fringe.





Am./Can. Ch. Fernhill's Kendra.

but there is sometimes a silky, silvery coat on the body of the ear and the tip. On all Deerhounds, irrespective of color of coat, the ears should be **black or dark colored**. "Black" or "dark" is used consistently throughout the standard in describing nose, muzzle, eye, rims of the eyelid, ears. Dark pigment is required in Deerhounds.

### Neck and Shoulders

The neck should be long – of a length befitting the Greyhound character of the dog. Extreme length is neither necessary nor desirable. Deerhounds do not stoop to their work like the Greyhounds. The mane, which every good specimen should have, sometimes detracts from the apparent length of the neck. The **neck, however, must be strong as is necessary to hold a stag**. A strong neck, of moderate length, is a functional necessity. This breed goes straight for the head of the deer and grabs the throat, jaw or ear ... the weight of the dog dragging the head down as the body of the deer continues forward should result in the death of the deer as the neck breaks. Too long a neck, and the wrong neck breaks.

The **nape of the neck**. This "crest" is actually functional, as it reflects the muscling in that most important area where the head meets the neck. should be very prominent where the head is set on and the **throat clean cut**. Note it doesn't say "shaved" or "plucked" clean, too often seen in over-coated specimens. Despite the mane, the throat is clean and that lovely V-ruff sets off the beautiful aristocratic Deerhound head, at the angle and prominent. Shoulders **should be well sloped**. To understand Sighthound shoulders, read Connie Miller's *Gazehounds: The Search For the Truth* (1988) and Curtis Brown's *Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis* (1986) blades well back and **not too much width between them**. Spare me the judge who "knowingly" sticks three fingers between the blades of an exhibit with upright head carriage. Push the head down and those fingers will get pinched! A well-muscled dog will not have shoulder blades that are practically touching. **Loaded and straight shoulders are very bad faults**. Not as bad as a narrow, under-muscled rear held up by cow hocks.

### Tail

Should be tolerably long, tapering and reaching to within **1/2 inches of the ground and about**

**1/2 inches below the hocks**. This does *not* mean a three-inch hock ... a physical impossibility! Dropped perfectly down or curved when the Deerhound is still, when in motion or excited, curved, but **in no instance lifted out of line of the back**. A cosmetic "undesirable" that ruins the elegant, aristocratic look ... but I admit I have seen many fine coursing hounds not hampered in their performance by a curl to their tail or excessively high carriage when excited. It should be well covered with hair, on the inside thick and wiry, underside longer and towards the end a slight fringe is not objectionable. **A curl or ring tail is undesirable**.

### Eyes

Should be dark – generally dark brown, brown or hazel. A very light eye is not liked. The eye should be moderately full, with a **soft look in repose**. If you look at a Deerhound and the word 'wistful' comes unbidden into your mind; if suddenly you seem to see a long vista of Deerhounds stretching away into the past, it is probable that the hound is typical," wrote A.N. Hartley. but a keen, far away look when the Deerhound is roused. Rims of eyelids should be black.

### Body

**General formation is that of a Greyhound of larger size and bone**. This is the essence of breed type. If you have to think "Is this a Deerhound? Or a Wolfhound?" something is seriously wrong. Note that the standard says "of larger size and bone"; it does not say a *giant Greyhound*. Chest deep rather than broad but not too narrow or slab-sided. **Good girth of chest**. Historically, measurements of the great coursing hounds indicate that girth

exceeds height by roughly 3 to 4 inches, with the chest reaching the elbow at maturity, is indicative of great lung power. The **loin well arched and drooping to the tail**. **A straight back is not desirable**. The need for the arch over the loin is essential to function and should not be lost on the moving dog, this formation being unsuited for uphill work, and very unsightly.

### Legs and Feet

Legs should be **broad and flat**. I interpret this as a requirement for bladed bone, which is much stronger than round bone, and good broad forearms and elbows are desirable. Forelegs must, of course, be as straight as possible. **Feet close and compact, with well-arranged toes**. A functional Deerhound depends on its feet. As Miss Hartley describes: "Feet are most important, the pads should be large and thick making the feet look almost as though they had little rubber balls under them." *Idstone* (Rev. Thomas Pearce, a "noted authority on the dog," 1872) elaborates ... "the fault of the present day Deerhound is certainly ... the open loose flat foot. In proportion to weight the foot 'goes' or deteriorates and the strain upon a Deerhound's foot among stones and boulders 'in view' and roused to desperation is greater than that imposed upon any other domesticated animal. No dog but the 'rough footed-Scot' could stand it." The standard does not specify "cat" or "hare" feet; it says "close and compact" ... long, weak toes and splay feet are very serious faults. The **hindquarters drooping, and as broad and powerful as possible, the hips being set wide apart**. This is all about propulsion. Breadth and strength of the rear assembly are essential in performance. This cannot



be overemphasized! Too steep a croup places the hindquarters too far under a galloping hound so the power in the rear is lost; too level a croup gives insufficient leverage for a power takeoff from the rear. To see a Deerhound use its rear as it leaps through the air to remain sighted while bounding through heather is to understand why the standard says this about the rear. A narrow rear denotes lack of power. The **stifles should be well bent.** Bend of stifle should be moderate ... neither too straight nor sickle-hocked; the former does not provide sufficient leverage or suspension for springing through heather and uphill, and the latter is too weak and inefficient, breaking down with hard use. with great length from hip to hock, which should be broad and flat. Cowhocks, weak pasterns, straight stifles and splay feet are very bad faults.

#### Coat

This describes the coat on a mature (3½ years plus) Deerhound.

The hair on the body, neck and quarters should be **harsh and wiry.** Harsh and wiry doesn't mean silky, soft or fluffy ... about 3 or 4 inches long; that on the head, breast and belly much softer. There should be a slight fringe on the inside of the forelegs and hind legs but nothing approaching the "feather" of a Collie. A woolly coat is bad. Some good strains have a mixture of silky coat with the hard, which is preferable to a woolly coat. **The climate of the United States tends to produce the mixed coat.** Horsefeathers!! The ideal coat is a thick, close-lying ragged coat, harsh or crisp to the touch.

#### Color

is a matter of fancy, but the dark blue-gray is most preferred. Next come the darker and lighter grays or brindles, the darkest being generally preferred. **Yellow and sandy red or red fawn, especially with black ears and muzzles, are equally high in estimation.** This was the color of the oldest known strains—the McNeil and Chesthill Menzies. These colors are historically interesting but



**"Highland Dogs" circa 1839 by Sir Edwin Henry Landseer.**  
A vignette of this oil is the frontispiece of William Scrope's contemporaneous book *The Art of Deerstalking*. Photo: Courtesy of the Tate Gallery

genetically the Deerhound today is a *modified brindle*, resulting only in the colors gray, light gray, dark gray, brindle gray, black brindle gray ... all other colors have disappeared forever. White is condemned by all authorities, but a white chest and white toes, occurring as they do in many of the darkest-colored dogs, are not objected to, although the less the better, for the Deerhound is a self-colored dog. A white blaze on the head, or a white collar, should entirely disqualify. The less white the better but a slight white tip to the stern occurs in some of the best strains.

#### Height

**Height of Dogs—From 30 to 32 inches.** The size of the "crack" (or best) coursing hounds of the 1800s is well documented ... males between 28 to 30 inches at the shoulder were considered "correct." The first 1892 standard reflected this size. Then the standard underwent several modifications to accommodate the show fancy's preference for size. Hickman was a proponent of the original

working Deerhound size. Hood-Wright fancied the larger size and went on later to assist in the development of the Irish Wolfhound. Their great compromise was the statement in the standard that greater size is not to be discouraged as long as the dog was not "coarse" and "over-big." "Over-big" is a euphemism for nonfunctional ... too big to do the breed's original purpose. 'Nuf said – this is another debate really about whether it is worth trying to maintain functionality when the original breed purpose is lost, lined up against the human preference for big, biggest, giant! or even more if there be symmetry without coarseness, which is rare.

**Height of Bitches—From 28 inches upwards.** There is no objection to a bitch being large, unless too coarse, as even at her **greatest height she does not approach that of the dog.** This statement reflects the well-documented disparity in size between the sexes in Deerhounds. "Pure" Deerhounds were recognized in the 1800s as having a 4- to 6-inch



height difference between the males and females, and the standard reflects this. Sexual dimorphism in Deerhounds was even noted by Charles Darwin, and therefore could not be too big for work as over-big dogs are.

#### Weight

From 85 to 110 pounds in dogs, and from 75 to 95 pounds in bitches.

#### Points of the Deerhound, Arranged in Order of Importance

1. *Typical*-A Deerhound should resemble a rough-coated Greyhound of larger size and bone.

2. *Movements*-Easy, active and true. This is not a trotting breed, but this description of "easy and active" comes close to describing the distinctive light, springing gallop described by Stonehenge in 1875 ... "the deerhound gallops with his head in the air, and his body raised off the ground ready for a spring at the throat or ear ..."

3. *As tall as possible consistent with quality*. This promotion of increasing size has been the Achilles heel of the breed since the "Points of the Deerhound" were added some 20 years after the first standard was drawn up. Hickman, champion of the working Deerhound, must have rolled in his grave.

4. *Head*-Long, level, well balanced, carried high.

5. *Body*-Long, very deep in brisket, well-sprung ribs and great breadth across hips.

6. *Forelegs*-Strong and quite straight, with elbows neither in nor out.

7. *Thighs*-Long and muscular, second thighs well muscled, stifles well bent.

8. *Loins*-Well arched, and belly well drawn up.

9. *Coat*-Rough and hard, with softer beard and brows.

10. *Feet*-Close, compact, with well-knuckled toes.

11. *Ears*-Small (dark) with Greyhoundlike carriage.

12. *Eyes*-Dark, moderately full.

13. *Neck*-Long, well arched, very strong with prominent nape.

14. *Shoulders*-Clean, set sloping.

15. *Chest*-Very deep but not too narrow.

16. *Tail*-Long and curved slightly, carried low.

17. *Teeth*-Strong and level.

18. *Nails*-Strong and curved.

#### Disqualification

White blaze on the head, or a white collar.

Approved March, 1935



The quality of the photo is a bit lacking, but the same certainly cannot be said of the bitch: Ch. Ardinglas Sonnet (Ch. Geltsdale Brander x Alvie of Ardinglas) winning the 1977 Deerhound Club (UK) breed show.



Ch. Thistle Glen Margot, moving to a Group win at the Westminster Kennel Club show in 2006. Photo: Steve Surfman.