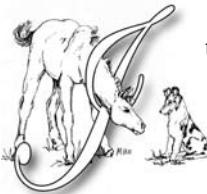

Hard Questions about The Collie Head

*Judie Evans
Clarion*

*Illustrations by
Greg Reyna
Delareina*

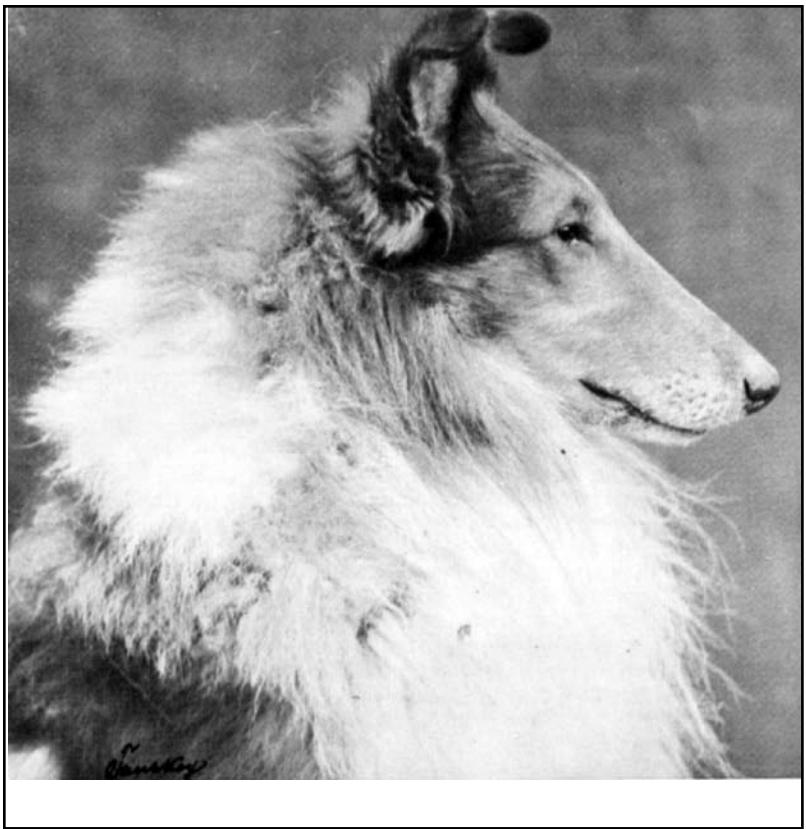


t is disconcerting these days to watch the judging at all-breed shows and observe the trends that are reshaping many breeds, which appear to be losing their individuality as they try to fit the pattern of what has been called the “generic show dog.” Breed-specific characteristics are often lost as breeders try to make their dogs more “winnable” in the show ring. Our Collie is a breed that has certain inherent characteristics that have always been intrinsic to it, and above all, head properties have always been of prime importance. The loss of these virtues so prized in our breed is a disturbing prospect.

Some of the pillars of our breed have shared their opinions of the importance of the ideal Collie head. Gus Sigritz of Cherrivale fame has stated, “The Collie Standard is based upon the consideration of the head first because so much of the beauty of the breed lies in the closeness to perfection of the head qualities.”

Trudy Mangels of Brandwyne writes, “The head is the feature which distinguishes the superior from the ordinary. In no other breed of dog is the head as important in evaluating superiority as it is in the Collie.”

In recent years I have observed our Collie expression changing subtly from what the Standard calls for and for what serious breeders have been working to emulate since I first began breeding in the ‘60s. Rather than search for a mentor to guide them, it seems we find more new breeders who breed to their own personal vision, which is based on something other than the Standard. Social media and the Internet have become a major force in disseminating information. Unfortunately, this venue comes with some major flaws. Facebook above all has brought my attention to a serious problem facing our breed at this time. With the kind of anonymity that Facebook allows to the people who share information, the playing field is leveled, and people new to the breed are at a loss to know the difference between who is



Ch. Laund Lector of Bellhaven

qualified to make commentary and which of them have no real background or experience in our breed. Perhaps it is the fact that so many exhibitors post pictures that show the Collie face with an expression that is foreign to what the Standard describes, that I find myself stunned as many click their “like” button and seem to agree that the image shown is the head and expression that is described as desirable in the Standard.

As breeders, we naturally focus on certain qualities that are important and essential to our personal vision of the Collie. This is what eventually creates strains or families in the breed. The problem emerges when what we are focusing on is in opposition to what our Collie Standard dictates. Our Standard was written carefully, standing the test of time, and describing in detail the characteristics needed to create the framework for a correct head, all in order to make the basis for the ideal Collie expression which is so important to the identity of our breed. If we consider the Standard to be our blueprint to breeding the ideal, perhaps we need to examine its meaning more carefully.

While reading the words and trying to visualize what they portray and how the parts fit together, one realizes how important good mentors are to help to clarify the written description. I can recall the moments in my own education when suddenly I had an epiphany and I “saw” in the

flesh the beauty of a correct expression, effortless movement, or a correct outline and had my impressions validated by my mentors. The kennel hopping trips that John Buddie and I used to take in the summer, visiting successful kennels of the day in the Midwest like Vi Lee, Cul Mor, Twin Creeks, Briarhill, Ravette, and Two Jays and the stimulating conversations as we went over their dogs and shared ideas with our peers were experiences that helped to shape our visions. We talked about the way their particular families developed and the virtues that each breeder considered most important and how they related to

the ideal. We also came to realize that the best dogs in each family resembled each other more closely because they were the ones which approached the ideal described in the Standard. This kind of hands-on examination and the one-on-one contact with a knowledgeable mentor are sadly missing these days. The reliance on social media is no substitute for face-to-face mentoring. Learning to separate the wheat from the chaff as self-proclaimed “experts” pontificate on issues that they unfortunately don’t have correct knowledge of is a challenge for fanciers new to the breed.

So what has brought about this change in what we are seeing now in our advertising and our show ring and becoming more the norm than what has always been desired? Is this change in expression that we see, with the eyes sliding farther and farther apart and the head becoming a narrow brick or a coffin rather than a lean wedge, and the emphasis on a definite stop or “break” in the profile what we will eventually have as our “new look” here in the US? Can these types of fads and fashions really affect our breed here in this country?

In my opinion, we have a classic example in what has occurred in the English Collie. What happened to bring about this change so that the present-day Collie is barely recognizable as the same animal that was considered their



This page -

Top: EngCh. Bririch Gold Emblem, whelped 1969. Imported to the US by Lila Bates of Heathfield, Gold Emblem is present in today's pedigrees through Milas.

Center: EngCh. Aberthorne Arrester, whelped 1976. Sire of nine English Champions.

Bottom: EngCh. Karava Kornishman, whelped 1980. Sire of nine English Champions.

Facing page - Ch. Clarion Marmalade Skies and Ch. Incandescent Limited Edition (inset)

ideal in the recent past? The English dogs of the early part of the 20th Century were the ones that our early breeders imported and bred from in this country. Their Standard is virtually the same in wording as our own, and except for small variations one would expect the dogs of both countries today to be quite similar, but this is not the case.

When I first began showing Collies in the 1960s and early '70s, I was impressed with many of the English dogs being advertised and campaigned at that time. I was fortunate to see Ch. Bririch Gold Emblem, imported after a successful career in England by Lila Bates, and remember him as having one of the most beautiful heads and expressions which even today could be a model to be used in Collie education. In 1986, I had the opportunity to attend Crufts and remember dogs like Ch. Karava Kornishman, who could have competed successfully in the US. We have only to look at the statue of the Royal Doulton Collie which is a model of the English Ch. Ashtead Applause, and we can see in that beautiful porcelain the image of what was their former ideal. Unfortunately, it bears little resemblance to much of what we see in their advertising today. It is obvious that the type of Collie in England, and most notably the head type, has changed dramatically, and in its most exaggerated form we instead see a dog with a short, pie-shaped head, prominent stop and extremely slanted eyes that



no longer resemble what their own Standard calls for. While I am sure there are many factors that contributed to this change, one has only to read the English Standard to realize that this type of head and expression is a far cry from the description.

How did this deviation from their Standard take hold? In the opinion of many, it occurred when certain winning individuals which exhibited these characteristics became fashionable and were inbred upon and this new type became "in vogue." Judges became accustomed to seeing and awarding this variation and breeders who wanted to win sought out the newer look. Once a fad takes hold in a breed and begins to be accepted as the norm, the result can become ingrained. From what one can read and understand in their discussions among breeders in Europe, there is much disagreement over which is now "correct type." A faction of the fancy is in favor of having two types of Collie, with the newer model called the "modern type."

Cont'd on page 24



*Correct Head Type ~
In Profile and in
Front View*



1/2001

*Profile
Defects*



*A long, clean head - but with no stop, just eyebrows. A tube-like head, **not** a lean blunt wedge. Seen from the top, this head has a cylinder shape. It resembles a Fox Terrier head.*



A stop that is too full pushes the eyes to the side of the head instead of forward.



Stop too prominent



Before we find ourselves embroiled in this type of controversy here, perhaps we need to carefully reread and review our Standard and focus on the reasons behind how the ideal Collie head should be constructed. Let's think about what is called for here:

"In both front and profile view, the head bears a general resemblance to a well blunted lean wedge, being smooth and clean in outline and nicely balanced in proportion. On the sides it tapers gradually and smoothly from the ears to the end of the black nose, without being flared out in backskull (cheeky) or pinched in muzzle (snipey)."

This is not a head that is the same width from the end of the muzzle to the end of the backskull. It is not a brick or a rectangle as seems to be much the fad in some areas of the country and sought-after as correct and desirable by some breeders and judges. We are looking for a tapering head that forms a light, lean wedge, smooth on the sides, but not a pie shape.

"In profile view the top of the backskull and the top of the muzzle lie in two approximately parallel, straight planes of equal length, divided by a very slight but perceptible stop or break."

The Standard is not looking for a well-defined midpoint, sometimes referred to these days as a "precision profile" or a "stair-step stop." Nor is the brow the stop, which we now find some exhibitors carefully trimming to make the eyebrows more defined. The correct stop defines the midpoint between the muzzle and the backskull in a subtle but perceptible way.

Returning to the Standard, it goes on to describe the Collie expression, which according to our Standard is "one of the most important points in considering the relative value of Collies."

"...It may be said to be the combined product of the shape and balance of the skull and muzzle; the placement, size, shape and color of the eye; and the position, size, and carriage of the ears."

So here we have our model for the Collie head: a lean, tapered, smooth wedge shape viewed from both the top and the side, and with the muzzle and skull defined by a slight but perceptible stop or midpoint.

Referring again to our Standard: ***“Because of the combination of the flat skull, the arched eyebrows, the slight stop and the rounded muzzle, the foreface must be chiseled to form a receptacle for the eyes and they are necessarily placed obliquely to give them the required forward outlook.”***

And here is exactly where the problem exists and causes the alteration of the eye set and the expression of the Collie with the “deviant” head which has no tapering between the muzzle and backskull and the more pronounced stop. This is unfortunately the variation that we are now seeing more commonly in today’s show rings. The slight tapering between the foreface and the backskull in a correct head leaves room for a “chiseling” where the eye can properly fit into the head, ideally with its inside corner at the midpoint. Without the head being wedge-shaped and tapered, the eye is forced to be placed more on the sides of the head rather than settling into this space that was created for it by the lean wedge.

And as we have begun to observe, without this chiseling the eye placement often becomes even more exaggerated as the eyes slide farther and farther apart. I personally have judged Collies with the eyes placed so far apart and on the sides of the head that I practically had to walk around the dog to see both eyes at the same time.

The correct eye must be placed obliquely to show the desired “inquisitive” expression. If we visualize the Collie head as being likened to the face of a clock, we would find the oblique eyes that are set properly in the head to be located at 10 o’clock and 2 o’clock. In the rectangular head with no tapering, the eye position changes and the eyes are positioned more at 9 and 3.

The Standard is not calling for a heavier head by describing it as a lean wedge. Rather, we are instructed that the head should be inclined to lightness. The sides of the head should be smooth to the touch and the tapering gradual, but nowhere in the Standard is it implied that the muzzle and backskull should be the same width to be correct.

As stated before, there is nothing wrong in an experienced breeder having his particular preferences as to virtues that the Standard places emphasis on. It is what creates certain families or strains within the breed that can be recognized by their emphasis on these traits, and

it affords serious breeders an option when they look for an outcross to improve a shortcoming in their family of dogs. However, care must be taken to make sure that what is being sought after is actually a virtue and not just a characteristic that the breeder thinks is more attractive or “winnable” in his own mind than what is called for in the Standard. The goal for a true breeder should be to understand our Standard and use this as a blueprint above all, refining his or her particular dogs always keeping the ideal in mind. This means becoming the biggest critic of one’s own animals and seeing them as they really are. I am often reminded of a favorite saying of Mrs. Isabel Butler of Kinmont fame who cautioned, “It is alright to love your Collie in spite of its faults, but not because of them.”

The correct Collie head is not an easy one to breed. Perhaps that is why the Standard places such emphasis on it in relation to other aspects of the Collie. We need to be head hunters to breed the ideal Collie. It is a fact that certain head qualities are harder to maintain than others. Length of head is a sought-after characteristic, but it is more difficult to breed virtues on this type of head. I hear new breeders discussing the advantage of breeding a shorter head to get a shorter, tighter lipline or selecting for a deeper stop to show off the parallel planes. Following what might appear to be an easier path to achieve a certain result in the offspring might also result in actually changing the entire look of the breed, and not for the better. The Collie is not a Sheltie, and while a narrow rectangular head with a short lipline and a pronounced stop may seem attractive to some, it is not what the Standard is describing in our breed. Before we succumb to the fad or the fashion of the time, we need to concentrate our own focus on breeding to the Standard and then educate new breeders and our judges on how to evaluate the Collies being shown them.

In my opinion, what our breed really needs at this point in time is more breeder education. One of the best ways to accomplish this would be for the Collie Club of America to support a Breed Seminar that takes place at a time other than during our National Specialty. We have had these types of seminars in the past, and they have been invaluable in getting breeders together in a non-competitive atmosphere where teaching and sharing of ideas can happen and where we can focus on our goals, our Breed Standard, and other breed-specific issues. To have these types of events during the National Specialty is not nearly as effective because most are involved in their elaborate set-ups and grooming preparations and caring for their dogs. The





CHELSEA COLLIES

Gayle & Don Kaye
PO Box 2750
Valley Center, CA 92082

(760) 749-1726
chelscollies@aol.com
<http://www.chelsea-collies.com/>



Heatherfield Collies

Heather Luster
(724) 538-3572
269 Hartzell Rd
Zelienople, PA 16063
www.heatherfieldcollies.com

Business Cards are only \$80/year
Imagine yours here!

AKC POINT SCHEDULE

EFFECTIVE MAY 14, 2014

		1	2	3	4	5
DIVISION 1 - CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT	RGH (D, B)	2	2	5	6	8
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	4	5
DIVISION 2 - DE, NJ, NY, PA	RGH (D, B)	2	2	6	6	9
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	5	5
DIVISION 3 - DC, MD, NC, TN, VA, WV	RGH (D, B)	2	2	5	6	8
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	4	4
DIVISION 4 - FL, GA, SC	RGH (D, B)	2	2	4	5	6
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	3	5
DIVISION 5 - IN, KY, OH	RGH (D, B)	2	2	5	6	8
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	4	5
DIVISION 6 - IA, KS, MO, NE	RGH (D, B)	2	2	4	6	7
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	4	5
DIVISION 7 - CO, OK, TX	RGH (D, B)	2	2	4	7	5
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	4	6
DIVISION 8 - OR, WA	RGH (D, B)	2	2	7	7	11
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	4	6
DIVISION 9 - AZ, CA	RGH (D, B)	2	2	5	5	8
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	4	4	7
DIVISION 10 - AK	RGH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
DIVISION 11 - HI	RGH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
DIVISION 12 - PR	RGH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
DIVISION 13 - ID, MT, NV, NM, ND, SD UT, WY	RGH (D, B)	2	2	4	5	6
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	3	4
DIVISION 14 - AL, AR, LA, MS	RGH (D, B)	2	2	4	4	7
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	4	4
DIVISION 15 - IL, MI, MN, WI	RGH (D, B)	2	2	5	6	8
	SMTH (D, B)	2	2	3	4	7