

Date: Sat, 22 Feb 2003 13:57:38 -0500
To: psg@poodle.org
From: "Mary Jane T. Weir" <mjtweir@hurontario.net>
Subject: PSG: Re:10 degrees - the ins and outs of "toeing out"
Sender: owner-psg@poodle.org

It is with disappointment that I am reminded again that the "perceived wisdom" prevalent in poodles today often has little relation to actual knowledge of structure. The question about the 10 degree requirement in the new Canadian standard is a case in point.

First of all, if you compare the 180 degree circle to an analog clock face, we are talking about 2 minutes past the hour. This degree is a fraction of the "toe out" which is a fault. McDowell Lyon, Hollenbeck and Rachael Paige Elliot all show this degree of turn out in illustrations of correct fronts, but do not explain why. Ms Elliot says it is for "balance".

The key is the shape and connection of the radius and ulna - the two bones which form the "long" bone of the foreleg, from elbow to pastern. (A good illustration can be found in Millers "Anatomy of the dog", fig. 1-69) In the course of the dog's stride, as it extends its leg, these two bones rotate around one another, so that when the paw strikes the ground, the strongest possible support exists. The result is that the paw which stands at a 10 degree angle will point straight ahead when the paw strikes the ground. A paw which points straight ahead while standing will toe in at the strike phase,(and the elbow will be out of alignment). On working dogs with this structure, you can see the wear on the outside of the paw, pad and toes - even nails which wear unevenly, as well as the overdevelopment of certain muscles in the leg and shoulder. (See McDowell Lyon, The Dog in Action, p.131 for a comparison illus.)

To illustrate this point in your own anatomy, stand with your arms straight ahead from the shoulders, with your hands pointing straight up. You will feel tension in the upper muscles of your arm from wrist to elbow, and in the the muscles leading from the elbow to the side of the shoulder. Lock your hands in position and swing your arms toward the centre of your chest; you will feel the muscle tension increase to the point of discomfort. Now, repeat the exercise with your hands at the 10 degree angle - there will be less discomfort, and as you swing your arms toward the centre of the body, you will observe that they begin to point straight ahead. This exercise is an approximation of what happens during the gait sequence.

The majority of poodles today do not have structurally correct fronts. In fact, the "good front" commonly found is a combination of two glaring faults - the forelimb assembly forward of the body's centre of gravity and the support of this weak structure by a barrel rib. Dogs with this type of front stand with their toes pointing straight ahead, their elbows out (just watch legions of handlers turning the elbow out to get the paws in the "correct" position") and gait with their elbows out. The barrel rib interferes with the front leg's rearward extension, so that, in combination with a position already too far forward, you see a high-stepping, rather flashy front action - but if you examine video of the stride,

frame by frame, you will see that this high action (which is often confused with "light springy action") doesn't get very far - the paw which is extended is pulled back before the paw strikes the ground. If you video from the front, with the dog coming toward you and with a short-coated dog, you will see the elbows fly out. Depending on the shape of the mane, you can even see it in a full-coated dog. Incidentally, this type of front also produces the ewe neck, carried straight up and practically over the back.

If you wish to see structurally correct fronts in poodles, you have to look at pre-1950 dogs - ie, Poodles in America, vol 1, pg 56. Three pictures of Puttencove dogs - the top two are correct, with the elbow at the body's centre of gravity. The bottom dog has a front assembly forward by one rib. The last time I saw proper fronts in the ring was in the mid '70's - the first two generations of Wycliffe, which were based on the Carillon kennels of Blanche Saunders - also primarily dogs with good fronts.

Mary Jane

PS: As for the "even bite" - The US standard was changed in 1959 to call for a scissors bite - the traditional bite of all retrieving dogs was an even bite, and the standard which was common to England, US and Canada pre-1959, called for an even bite.