

AMERICAN CHESAPEAKE CLUB BREED INFORMATION REPRINTS OF ARTICLES APPEARING IN THE AKC GAZETTE

Article titled - "Type and The Chesapeake Head"

In 1933 Anthony Bliss described the Chesapeake head "with a round skull, broad between the eyes, shallow stop and a long deep muzzle, pointed but not sharp." The length and depth of muzzle are desirable in a dog that must retrieve and carry game, often as large and heavy as Canada goose, with an easy, tender hold.

At the beginning of my personal acquaintance with Tony Bliss some 15 to 18 years later, he **warned us to "keep away from the wedge-shaped heads."** The wedge-shaped head is one of several faulty head types to be found in this breed. This broad, short head lacks the strength and ability to perform with efficiency the demanding tasks a retriever must face in its daily work.

Breeding implies selection, and another head to keep away from in the Chesapeake is the blocky head, broad with a pronounced stop and a short muzzle squared off at the end. This head may remind us of another breed, most often one bred for guard work, but not for retrieving game under arduous conditions. The square muzzle carries a greater risk of a mouth and teeth that are undershot - for good reason a disqualification in this breed.

Among head faults are heavy, over-large, houndy ears and loose, pendulous lips. Although hound crosses were used in the development of the breed, these are hound characteristics that are unsuited to a retriever and should be bred away from.

The scenting power of the hound is enhanced by a longer muzzle with room for the olfactory nerves, and its length in cold weather protects the mucous membranes, warming the air that is breathed in. This is protection for the lungs as well as for the keenness of scent. In hot, dry weather, the moisture of the mucous membranes tempers the irritating dryness as the air is breathed in, and the delicate lung tissues as well as the olfactory organs are protected. These are reasons to breed for and encourage the longer muzzle in the Chesapeake.

McDowell Lyon wrote, "The head and neck together shift the center of gravity from side to side, raise and depress it, and give the major influence in maintaining equilibrium. When running or swimming the dog extends the head and neck forward to put more weight on the forehead and create instability, thus increasing speed." When a dog is retrieving and carrying, the center of gravity moves forward because of the added weight, and the running and swimming dog must compensate for this. Therefore, a large, heavy head is undesirable in a retriever. The heavy, powerful hindquarters of the Chesapeake are also an aid in maintaining equilibrium by drawing the center of gravity towards the rear.

The dog is to be well proportioned, and to be in proportion the head should be well balanced, as defined in Canine Terminology by Harold Spira: "approximately equal lengths of skull and foreface." Balance in these proportions is typical of almost all of the Sporting breeds; the Chesapeake is a Sporting dog and should look as if it belongs in the Sporting Group. Its appearance should not suggest a Working Group breed or a breed from the Hound Group.

I would refer to an article by Nat Horn that was originally printed in this column, entitled "On Judging Chesapeake Bay Retrievers." He wrote, "Eight of the approximate measurements in the standard apply to the head and the neck. The length of the head, nose to occiput, is about 9 1/2 to 10 inches. Therefore, the length of the muzzle should be about 4 3/4 to 5 inches and so should the length of the skull. The skull should be about 5 to 6 inches from root of ear, over the rounded skull. This provides a functional head that with the neck is used to retrieve and carry game, as well as contributing to maintaining equilibrium in movement or swimming. Another important measurement is the width between the eyes. The standard considers about 2 1/2 to 2 3/4 inches as 'wide apart'. The correct width between the eyes contributes to the proper head type and expression.

"In examining components of the head, I consider the following. A medium stop, which implies that the Chesapeake should not be down or dish faced and the look should be clean. A muzzle which is pointed but not sharp is one which gradually tapers to a pointed look at the tip without being extreme or to the point of being sharp, giving a cutting effect. The muzzle should not be blunt, square, short or snipy. Again emphasizing a clean look, the lips should be thin, not pendulous. Thick, heavy or fleshy lips, poised without visible support, and heavy jowls, have a tendency to retain feathers and are not desirable.

"The ears are to be small, that is about 4 1/2 to 5 inches in length. They are to be set high on a rounded skull, above the eye but not so high up as to be like a terrier and not high on an undesirable flat skull. Ear leather should not be too thin or too thick. Everything points to a clean look. The ears are to hang loosely. The eyes are medium large and very clear. I feel that an oval/oblong eye is implied. A tight lid, open lid, round eyes and/or protruding eyes are all undesirable. The color of the eye is specified as yellowish or amber. Amber takes in darker shades which include orange, gold and light brownish shades of yellow. It is desirable that the color blends some-what with the color of the dog to enhance the camouflage within the working environment. Extremely light or extremely dark eyes are undesirable. Good disposition, a willing-to-work attitude and devotion to companion can all be displayed with a clean, well-balanced head and a pleasing expression, which both conform to the standard.

As bones shorten in one part of the animal, they tend to shorten in others, to follow some principle of balance decreed by nature, and so with the short head will be found a short neck -- perhaps with a broad head, a thick neck -- but the flexibility and easy reach to pick up a bird on land or in the water will be lost in this shortening and thickening. Often the dogs displaying these faults are seen to be short in leg. Particularly when these dogs are broad-chested, freedom of movement is lost and the whole dog is out of proportion.

Outline and coat are essentials of Chesapeake type, but the next most important type characteristic is the head. Years ago a breeder who concentrated on producing hunting dogs in Delaware and seldom participated in competitive events told me, "People always want a good head on their dogs," and so he bred for heads to please the hunters who represented his principal market. They had to look like Chesapeakes, as Chesapeakes always should in shows, trials, hunting or at home. ---Janet Horn