

JUDGING THE CHESAPEAKE BAY RETRIEVER

by Betsy Horn Humer

First impressions are important. When a class of Chesapeake Bay Retrievers enter the ring, the first thing I look at is the outline and proportions. From the side, the head planes should be parallel and the length of muzzle should be the same length as the backskull. The neck should be close to the same length as the head from nose to occiput. As you move further along the dog, the elbow should be underneath the shoulder, displaying good layback. The shoulder and upper arm should balance each other and be the same length. There should be full liberty of movement. The body should be short and well-coupled and of medium length, not cobby.

The topline is unique when comparing it to other retriever breeds. The hindquarters may be a "trifle higher" than the shoulders. This topline is found in the majority of the breed, although it may also be level. The dog should not be sway-backed. The underline shows a hollowness as you approach the flanks and can be termed "tuck-up". Continuing back to the hindquarters, one should see legs of medium length demonstrating power as they move. There should be well-angulated stifles to match the forequarters. Front and rear legs should be straight when viewed from the front and rear. Ideally the tail should be carried so that it is straight, without curl, and no higher than 2:00-3:00 p.m. on a clock (!).

By now you have seen the dog from the side and will have the class gait around the ring. As you watch the dog's gait, you are looking for balance and reach and drive – especially a strong rear so that the dog can perform as a good swimming dog. He should be able to move with agility and strength. He should be strong and well-muscled but not coarse. He should demonstrate power and have a good return stroke as the legs come together under the body.

As you approach the dog from the front, quickly ascertain that the eyes are of "yellowish or amber hue". Amber includes gold, orange and light brownish shades. Many breeders prefer that the eyes blend with the coat because it aids in more camouflage in hunting situations. Eye color is a distinctive feature. Ears are small set up high on the head at about ear level to keep them out of the water when swimming. They are to hang loose. The skull is broad and round with jaws capable of carrying large birds. The muzzle is tapered, but not sharp. Lips are not pendulous with loose flews, but should be trim so that water does not easily flow into the dog's mouth when working. Loose flews could also retain feathers. A scissors bite is preferred, but a level bit is acceptable. Overshot and undershot bites are a disqualification.

Now you are ready to examine the dog's coat, which is a double coat. You see and touch the coat – it should be short, dense and thick. The outercoat should be harsh and should not be longer than 1 ½ inches. The coat should feel as if there is a "spring" to it and should be examined closely for the undercoat which is soft and wooly. The colors are varied and may be any shade of brown from light brown to dark brown, all shades of deadgrass (light blonde to straw-colored) and sedge (reddish-tones). There are many shades of deadgrass which may result in striping, masking or hound markings. A recessive gene may result in a diluted brown referred to as "ash". "Any color of brown, sedge or deadgrass is acceptable, self-colored being preferred". A self-colored dog is one with shades of the colors listed. White is permissible as "a white spot on the breast, belly, toes or back of feet (immediately above the large pad)...the smaller the spot the better, solid colored preferred". The term "solid colored" means – without white. A disqualification applies to white markings located in places other than those mentioned above. The coat should be wavy – not straight or curly. The coat

should be wavy and there are types of coats with different amounts of wave. The wave is not important – the texture is, although it is possible that a tighter wave may result in a drier dog. There must be sufficient coat to keep the dog dry when he is doing what he was bred to do. The coat is a hallmark of the breed and relates to his function.

A “black-colored” dog is a disqualification. Such a dog is black all over or black with white Patches. It is genetically impossible for a purebred Chesapeake to have black coloring. Do not be distracted by dark hairs that appear in a coat. They are not black. They are dark brown and are part of an acceptable color. There is also a disqualification for a curly coat or a tendency to curl all over the body. In addition, feathering on the tail may not be over 1 ¾ inches long.

On examining the dog closely you can also check on his conditioning and amount of muscle and substance. His pasterns should be slightly bent for flexibility. His chest should reach to his elbows. Some younger dogs may not show the depth of brisket. Check the underline in a heavily coated dog. As you move to the rear, check length of hock. In the Chesapeake, the hock is medium as opposed to a short hock. It provides leverage and more speed. The hare foot (in which the two center digits are appreciably longer than the outside and inside toes of the foot) also provides more leverage and enables the dog to balance and have better traction on muddy banks.

There is a great variation in size with males from 23”-26” and females from 21”-24”. There is no preferred size – all are acceptable. We see very few 23” males or 21” females. There is also a specified weight range of 65-80 lbs for males and 55-70 lbs for females. The Chesapeake is a moderate sized dog and should remain within standard so that he can serve as a hunting dog, sitting in a duck boat.

When each dog is gaited individually you should look for “smooth, free and effortless, giving the impression of great power and strength”. The dog should not be so heavily overdone so that movement is affected and becomes cloddy. The dog should move straight coming and going. As speed increases, feet tend to converge towards the center. You may see elbows that are out in the front and cowhocks in the rear movement. As the dog is moving away from you, you should see pads on the rear feet.

The temperament of the Chesapeake is described as a “bright and happy disposition, intelligence, quiet good sense, and affectionate protective nature.” It is not always easy to see these traits in a dog show ring. Many tend to be reserved and are not outgoing. They are quiet, but usually are quite willing to please their owners and handlers. Chesapeakes are very bonded to their owners and families.

Current faults in our breed are:

- a. incorrect proportions resulting in a body that is too long and legs that are too short.
- b. incorrect heads with large ears
- c. lack of balance usually caused by a lack of reach in the front due to a short upper arm.
- d. rear angulation may also be lacking – our standard calls for a well-angulated stifle.
- e. coats: dogs shown out of coat, incorrect coats, groomed coats (back-brushed, blow-dried and use of products)

The highlights or hallmarks of our breed are the harsh double coat, the outline, the head with a rounded topskull and small ears set up high on the head, amber or yellow eyes and hare feet. These qualities set the Chesapeake apart from the other retrievers. The breed has greatly improved in coat,

gait and soundness and also in temperament. Because we do have what can be described as “kennel types or styles” (where one kennel may be known for producing excellent coats, and another kennel produces dogs that always gait soundly, and a third produces “type-y” heads) you may find that there may be more of a representative entry of a particular style, and you should consider that perhaps the most correct dog is outnumbered by other “styles”. Just because he is in the minority, does not mean that he is wrong.

The Chesapeake Bay Retriever is the only retriever breed which is still able to earn a Dual Championship: FC /CH (Field Champion/Bench Championship). The standard emphasizes form and function. When you are judging this breed – “the question of coat and general type of balance takes precedence...The Chesapeake should be a well-proportioned animal with a good coat and well balanced in other points rather than excelling in some areas and being weak in others. The dog you choose should be able to do the job he was bred to do.

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Breeder Judge since 1988.

Raised with Chesapeake Bay Retrievers (Eastern Waters'
Kennels established by Janet & Dr. Daniel Horn)

I breed and have shown Chesapeakes for over 45 years, owning and producing Specialty winning BOB, BOS, AOM, BOW and Sweepstakes winners. I also title my dogs in obedience, rally, agility, tracking and hunt tests – I believe that a Chesapeake should be titled at both ends.

I am currently serving the American Chesapeake Club as Judges Education Coordinator on the JBEC and have previously served as AKC Delegate (10 years), Board of Directors, Standard Revision Committee, ACC Show Committee Chair and Challenge Trophy Committee and National Specialty Show Committees.