



**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL
KENNEL COUNCIL**

**Extended Breed Standard of
THE RHODESIAN
RIDGEBACK**

Prepared by

**National Rhodesian Ridgeback Council Australia
1997**

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Extended Breed Standard

of

THE RHODESIAN RIDGEBACK

F.C.I. Standard No 146 dated 10/12/96

Adopted in Australia 1/1/98

Country of Origin: Southern Africa

- **BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The Rhodesian Ridgeback is presently the only registered breed indigenous to southern Africa. Its forebears can be traced to the Cape Colony of southern Africa where they crossed with the early pioneers' dogs and the semi-domesticated, ridged Hottentot hunting dogs. Hunting mainly in groups of two or three, the original function of the Rhodesian Ridgeback or Lion dog was to track game, especially lion, and, with great agility, keep it at bay until the arrival of the hunter.

The original standard, which was drafted by F.R. Barnes, in Bulawayo, Rhodesia, in 1922, was based on that of the Dalmatian and was approved by the South African Kennel Union in 1926



The Rhodesian Ridgeback originated in Southern Africa where the early European settlers mated their sporting breeds with the small, fierce, hunting dogs, owned by the Hottentots, in order to produce a guard/hunting dog ideally suited to the local conditions.

The Hottentot Hunting Dog had a ridge of hair along its spine running in a reverse direction to the rest of the coat; the historian, George McCall Theal, was the first to describe this characteristic when writing on conditions in Southern Africa in 1505.

Possibly the only existing illustration of Hottentot dogs, which actually shows ridges on their backs, is to be found in Dr David Livingstone's book, "Livingstone's Missionary Travel in Southern Africa", published in 1857. There is no way of knowing for certain which of the European breeds do feature in the background of the Rhodesian Ridgeback. The breeds that have been recorded as being in Southern Africa during the 1860;s and 1870's are Bloodhounds, Deerhounds, Greyhounds, Bulldogs (much longer in leg than today), various Terriers, Mastiffs, Pointers (possibly responsible for the brown nose) and, occasionally Foxhounds.

The ridge of the Hottentot Hunting Dog became a feature of the cross matings between the European breeds and the indigenous dogs. These "Ridgebacks" were used as functional, all purpose, guard and hunting dogs and it was found that they surpassed any other breed when hunting lions. "Ridgebacks" were not expected to kill lions – no dog could do that as a lion is an extremely powerful and heavy big cat standing about .95m at the shoulder. The "Ridgeback" would track the lion and bail it up enabling the hunter to come in and shoot it; this required intelligence, cunning and tremendous athleticism and agility of the part of the dogs. "Ridgebacks" were, however, expected to chase, catch and pull down lesser game and would kill a lion cub without hesitation.

The first recorded pair of ridged dogs to go from South Africa to central Africa (then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) were taken by the Rev. Charles Helm in 1879 to Hope Fountain Mission (near what is now Bulawayo), probably from Swellendam, Cape Colony.

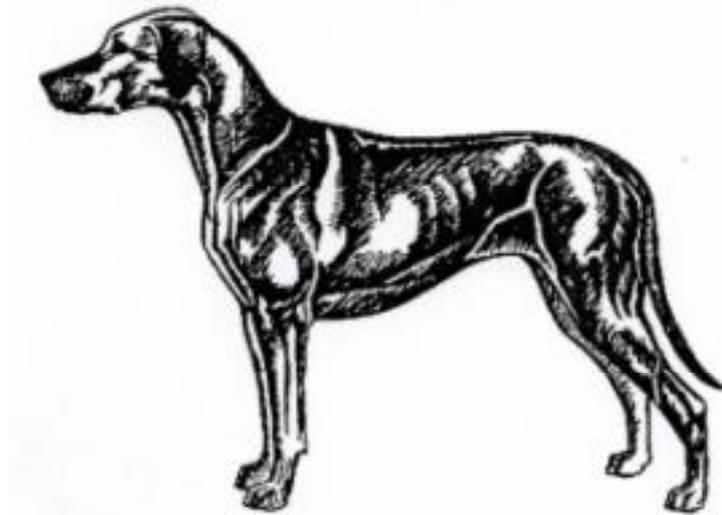
During the late 19th Century, the reputation of "Ridgebacks" in the hunting field became established by the exploits of these dogs. Van Rooyen's dogs were very similar to today's Rhodesian Ridgebacks. By the 1920's, when the days of big game hunting on a grand scale were drawing to a close, it became apparent that "Ridgebacks" might disappear if the breeds were not standardised and breeders encouraged to strive to conform.

The standard of the breed, which borrowed much from the Dalmatian Standard, was drawn up by a Mr F.R. Barnes after he called a meeting of "Ridgeback" owners in Bulawayo in 1922. The standard was accepted by the Southern African Kennel Union (now the Kennel Union of southern Africa) in 1924.

- **GENERAL APPEARANCE**

The Rhodesian Ridgeback should represent a well balanced, strong, muscular, agile and active dog, symmetrical in outline and capable of great endurance with a fair amount of speed. The emphasis is on agility, elegance and soundness with no tendency towards massiveness. The peculiarity of the breed is the ridge on the back, which is formed by the hair growing in the opposite direction to the rest of the coat.

The ideal Rhodesian Ridgeback is an eye catching dog with a rare combination of elegance and substance; therefore it should be neither racy nor too heavy in bone. A Ridgeback should look as if it could run all day and turn on a burst of speed when necessary; this indicates a hound that is athletic, clean cut and agile, with no hint of coarseness, yet, at the same time, having the substance to pull down medium sized game.

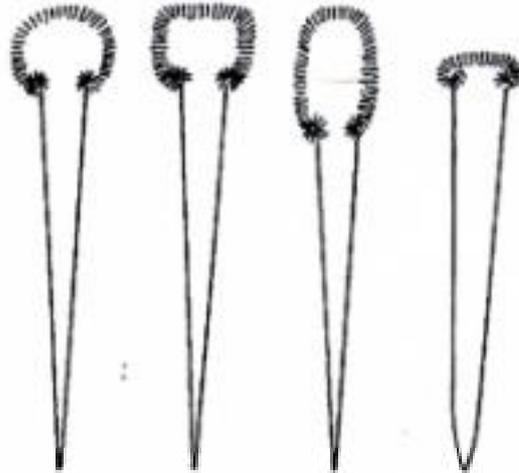


The Ridgeback has an overall symmetry and balance that is very pleasing to the eye – this is one good looking dog!

- **CHARACTERISTICS**

The ridge is the escutcheon of the breed. The ridge must be clearly defined, symmetrical and tapering towards the haunch. It must start immediately behind the shoulders and continue to the hip (haunches) bones. The ridge must contain only two crowns, identical and opposite each other. The lower edges of the crowns must not extend further down the ridge than one-third of its length. A good average width of the ridge is 5 cm (2ins).

The ridge is formed by the hair along the spine of the dog growing in the opposite direction to the rest of the coat. The widest part should start immediately behind the shoulders and taper evenly to a point between the hip bones. The ridge must contain two whorls of hair (crowns), no more than one third of the way down the total length of the ridge. The two crowns should be identical and placed directly opposite each other on either side of the ridge. There should be no more than two crowns or parts of crowns, (such as half crowns or other deviations in the bilateral symmetry of the tapering part) within the ridge. As stated in the standard, 5cm (2 ins) is a good average for the width of the ridge between the crowns and it should taper evenly to the point from the crowns.



Correct Ridges



Incorrect Ridges

There may, or may not, be a “box” above the crowns and the box may vary in shape from dog to dog: it may be fan shaped, rectangular or heart shaped – in fact any shape is acceptable, even if asymmetrical. No box at all is also acceptable. It is the remainder of the ridge that must conform to the requirements as to crowns and symmetry, but if there is a box, the crowns must be placed no more than one third of the way down the total length of the ridge.

- **TEMPERAMENT**

Dignified, intelligent, aloof with strangers, but showing no aggression or shyness.

The Rhodesian Ridgeback should be a confident, stable, self possessed dog. As is stated in the Standard, he is dignified, intelligent and aloof with strangers. The Ridgeback was originally bred as a dual purpose guard/hunting dog and the guard part means that he is not interested in or bothered by strangers, unless they pose a threat to him or those he protects.

A Ridgeback should not be penalised for initially drawing back to assess an unusual situation, provided that, if no threat is present, subsequent examination is borne without demur. Ridgebacks should not show signs of aggressiveness, shyness or fear.

- **HEAD AND SKULL**

Cranial Region : Skull – *Should be of a fair length (width of head between ears, distance from occiput to stop, stop to end of nose, should be equal), flat and broad between the ears; the head should be free from wrinkles when in repose.*

Stop – *Should be reasonably well defined and not in one straight line from the nose to the occipital bone.*

Facial Region:

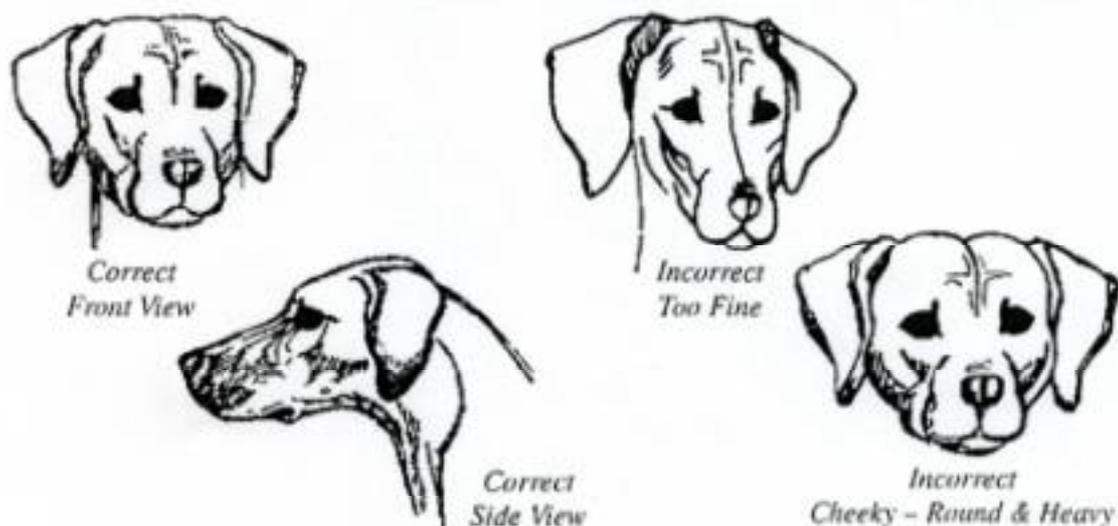
Nose – *Should be black or brown. A black nose should be accompanied by dark eyes, a brown nose by amber eyes.*

Muzzle – *Should be long, deep and powerful.*

Lips – *Should be clean, closely fitting the jaws.*

Cheeks – *Should be clean.*

Ideally, the head must be of fair length in balance with the rest of the body. The width of the skull between the ears should equal the length of the skull from stop to occiput and length of muzzle from stop to tip of nose. The planes of the skull should be parallel. The skull should be flat when viewed from the front and from the side.



The cheeks should be flat or slightly rounded but never prominent. If they are too well developed, the skin will appear rounded, viewed from above.

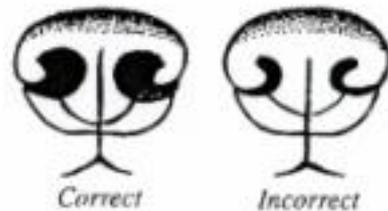
The skin on top of the skull should not be wrinkled, except when the dog is alert. The Ridgeback should present a clean, “dry” appearance without loose skin. The stop is reasonably well defined, not too deep, and drops to the plane of the muzzle.

If the distance between the planes is too little and angle of drop too flat, the stop is insufficiently well defined.

Ideally the muzzle should be the same length as the skull. The muzzle should appear as a blunt wedge of the same size from both views. The topline should be flat along its length, not concave (dished) or convex (Roman nosed). A good proportion of the depth of muzzle should be provided by the lower lip giving a clean line.

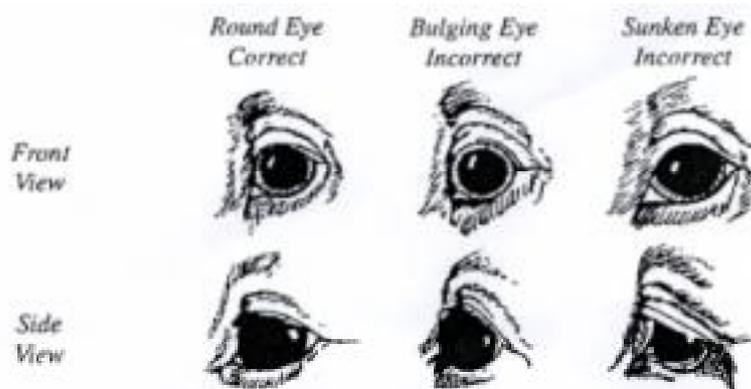


The nose should be black or brown, in keeping with the colour of the dog. A black nose is accompanied by dark eyes and a brown nose is accompanied by amber eyes. A black nose may have a dark muzzle or one matching the colour of the rest of the coat. The nostrils should be ample, well expanded and not pinched.



- **EYES**

Should be moderately well apart, round, bright and sparkling, with intelligent expression, their colour harmonising with the colour of the coat.



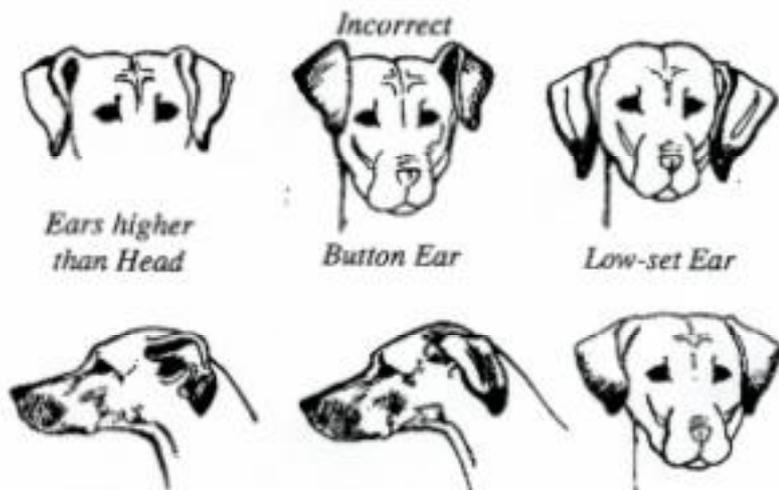
The eyes of the Ridgeback must reflect the true Ridgeback temperament in their expression. The eyes are rounded, neither protruding nor sunken, and there should be no haw showing below or on the inside corners of the eyes.

The eyelids should be close fitting and so reduce the area of the eye exposed to any foreign bodies.

The shape of the eye refers to the shape of the eyelids when fully open and being round so that they in no way interfere with the breadth of vision. Dark eyes (deep brown) in a black nosed dog with dark eye rims are required, as are amber coloured eyes in a brown nosed dog with brown eye rims.

- **EARS**

Should be set rather high, of medium size, rather wide at base and gradually tapering to a rounded point. They should be carried close to the head.



The drop, but not long ear, is the most efficient for this breed, given its environment and purpose. Drop ears are less prone to injury and provide protection to the inner ear. The ear is “set rather high”, meaning the fold of the ear should be level with the top of the skull when the dog is alert, lower in repose. The ear should be set fairly well back on the skull to enable the dog to cover or uncover the entrance to the ear canal at will.

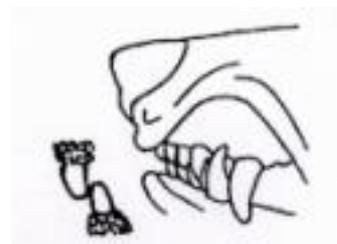
The ear is of medium size and should reach midway between the eyes and nose. The leather is of medium thickness and texture. The ear is triangular shaped and not pointed at the tips.

The ears are carried flat and close to the head in repose, but are very mobile and used for expression.

- **MOUTH**

Jaws strong with a perfect and complete scissor bite, i.e. the upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to the jaws. The teeth must be well developed, especially the canines or holders.

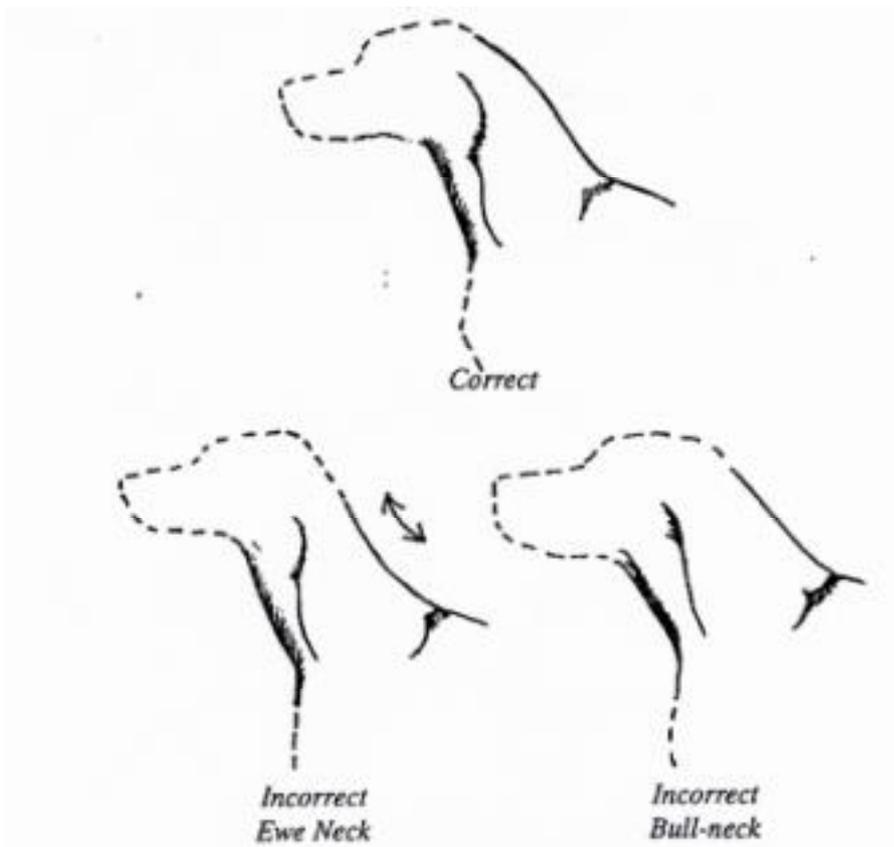
The upper teeth closely overlap the lower teeth and are set square to the jaw, giving a scissor bite. The teeth must be well developed, especially the canines. There should be no missing teeth.



Scissors bite with the upper incisors striking – just along the front face of the lower ones

- **NECK**

Should be fairly long, strong and free from throatiness.



A fairly long neck of correct thickness, length and shape enables the Ridgeback to move the neck and head to the best position to make the best use of the senses of sight, smell and sound.

Consequently, the neck should be elegant, muscular and of good length and should arch well and blend smoothly into well laid shoulders.

The neck must fully support the head and co-ordinate the muscular movements of the shoulders and forehand section. If the neck is short, it is usually accompanied by straight shoulders.

A Ridgeback's head must be as clean as possible and free from throatiness.

- **FOREQUARTERS**

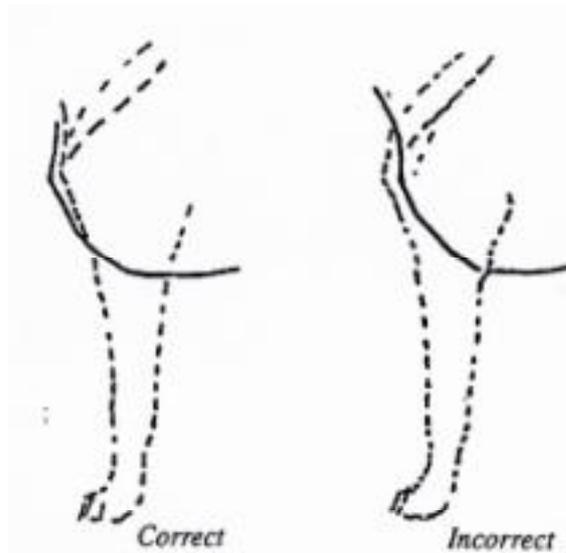
The forelegs should be perfectly straight, strong and well boned, with the elbows close to the body. When viewed from the side, the forelegs should be wider than viewed from the front. Pasterns should be strong with slight spring.

Shoulders – Should be sloping, clean and muscular, denoting speed.

Forechest:

Dotted line indicates point of shoulder, shoulder lay back and leg.

Solid line indicates fore-chest



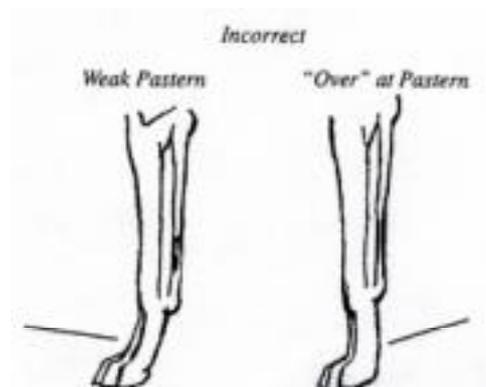
The shoulders are well laid back, sloping, clean, powerful with long muscles. The shoulder blades lie snugly along the rib-cage, fairly close together at the withers.

The length of the upper arm (humerus) should (approximately) equal the length of the shoulder blade (scapula).

The forelegs should be straight when viewed from the front. Viewed from the side, they should be wider near the elbow than the pastern and deeper from the front to rear than from side to side. Never coarse, round bone, but oval bone.

The elbows should be tucked firmly against the chest wall with the forelegs working smoothly close to the ribs.

The legs should continue in a straight line to the ground and, when viewed from the front, the forelegs should drop straight down in line with the shoulders, with the feet facing forward. For overall balance, the distance from the withers to elbow and elbows to ground should appear to be the same.



The pastern is a shock absorber and should be strong and slightly angled to cushion against constant pounding whilst on the move. Upright pasterns should be considered a fault.

- **BODY**

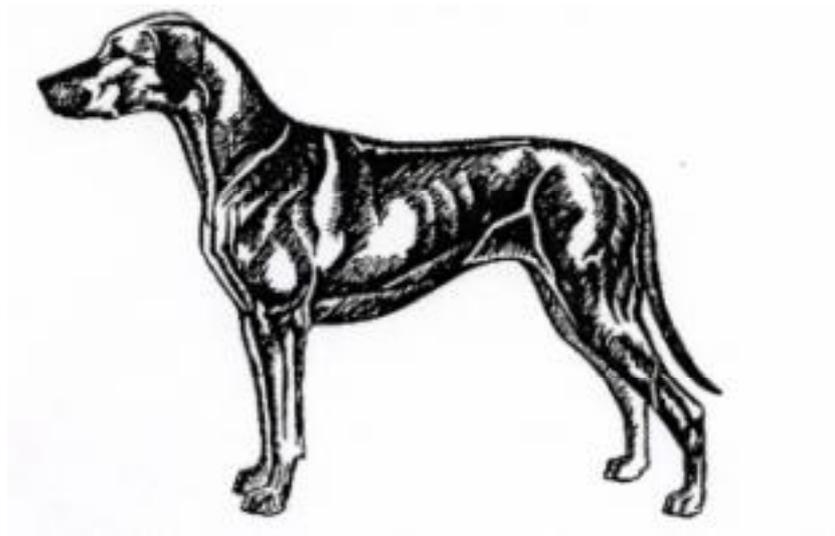
Back - *Powerful*

Loins - *Strong*

Chest - *Should not be too wide, but very deep and capacious; the brisket should reach to the elbow.*

Forechest - *Should be visible when viewed from the side.*

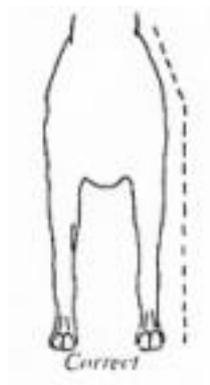
Ribs - *Moderately well sprung, never rounded like barrel-hoops.*



Correct

The Rhodesian Ridgeback should have a deep chest, not too wide between the forelegs and extending down to the elbows. There should also be a reasonable forechest protruding in front of the front legs. A deep chest as described produces good heart room and lung capacity necessary for endurance.

Dotted lines show direction of balance and support



- **HINDQUARTERS**

In the hind legs the muscles should be clean and well defined with good turn of stifle and strong hocks well let down.



Correct



Straight Stifle



Over-angulated

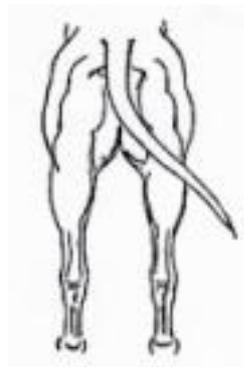


Long on Hock

The stifle should be moderately angulated; on moderate angulation is required for efficient movement over endurance distances. Too much angulation will cause tiredness over long distances (caused by excessively long stride); insufficient angulation will tend to shorten length of stride. The best way to assess correct angulation is to stand the dog with the rear pastern vertical, the tibia and fibula should then lie at an angle of 45] to the ground; then imagine a vertical line dropped from the set on of tail to the ground, if the angulation is correct, the vertical line should fall just in front of the rear toes.



Correct



*Incorrect
Muscle-bound*



*Incorrect
Cow-hocked*

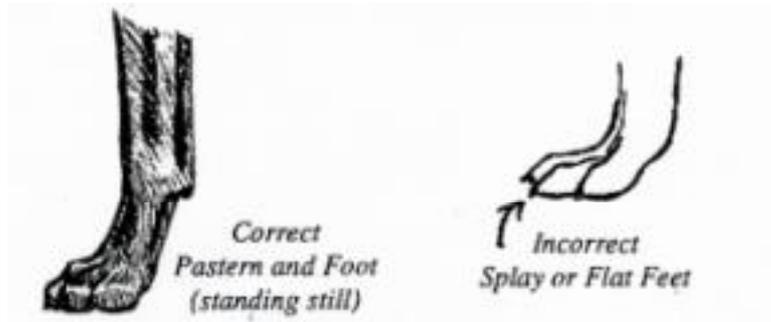
The muscles of the hindquarters should be long, clean and well defined, never bulky or coarse.

- **FEET**

Should be compact and round with well arched toes and tough, elastic pads, protected by hair between the toes and pads.

The Rhodesian Ridgeback originally moved in very rough country, over long distances and the standard, in relation to feet, was designed to ensure that the dog's feet could tolerate these

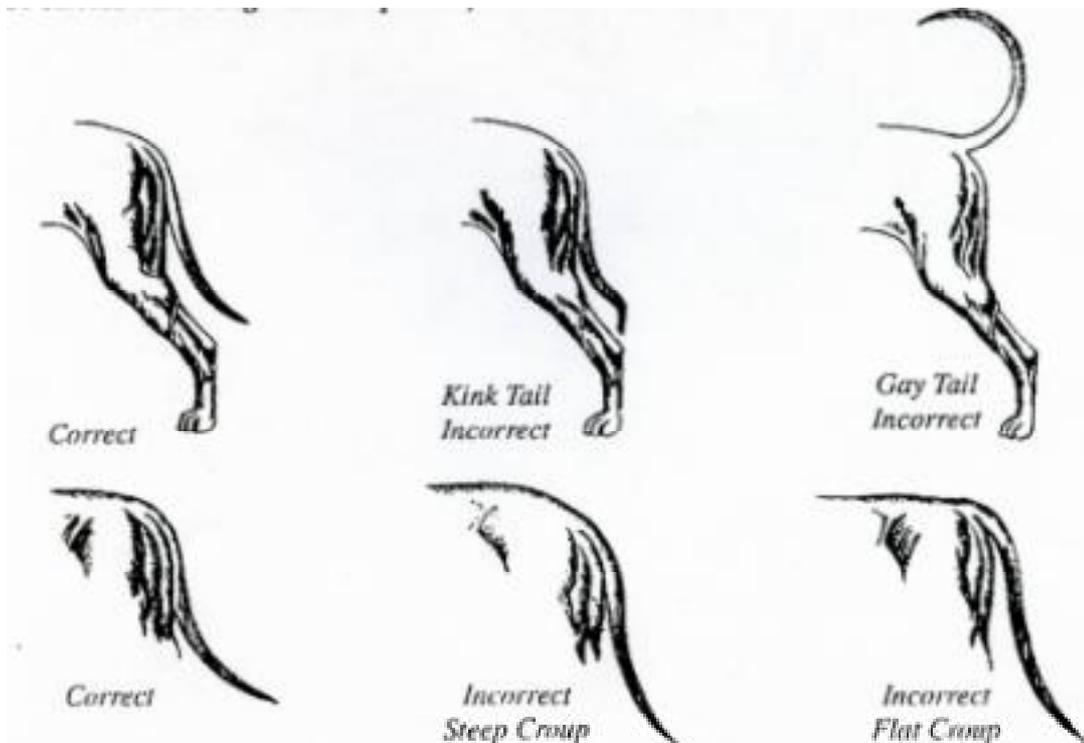
harsh conditions and endure long periods on the move, thus the emphasis is placed on tough, elastic pads, which are extremely important and designed to give protection.



Compact, well arched toes describe an oval, cat-like foot with well padded feet for efficiency of movement, whereas splayed feet are a serious fault.

- **TAIL**

Should be strong at the root and gradually tapering towards the end, free from coarseness. It should be of moderate length. It should not be attached too high nor too low and should be carried with a slight curve upwards, never curled.



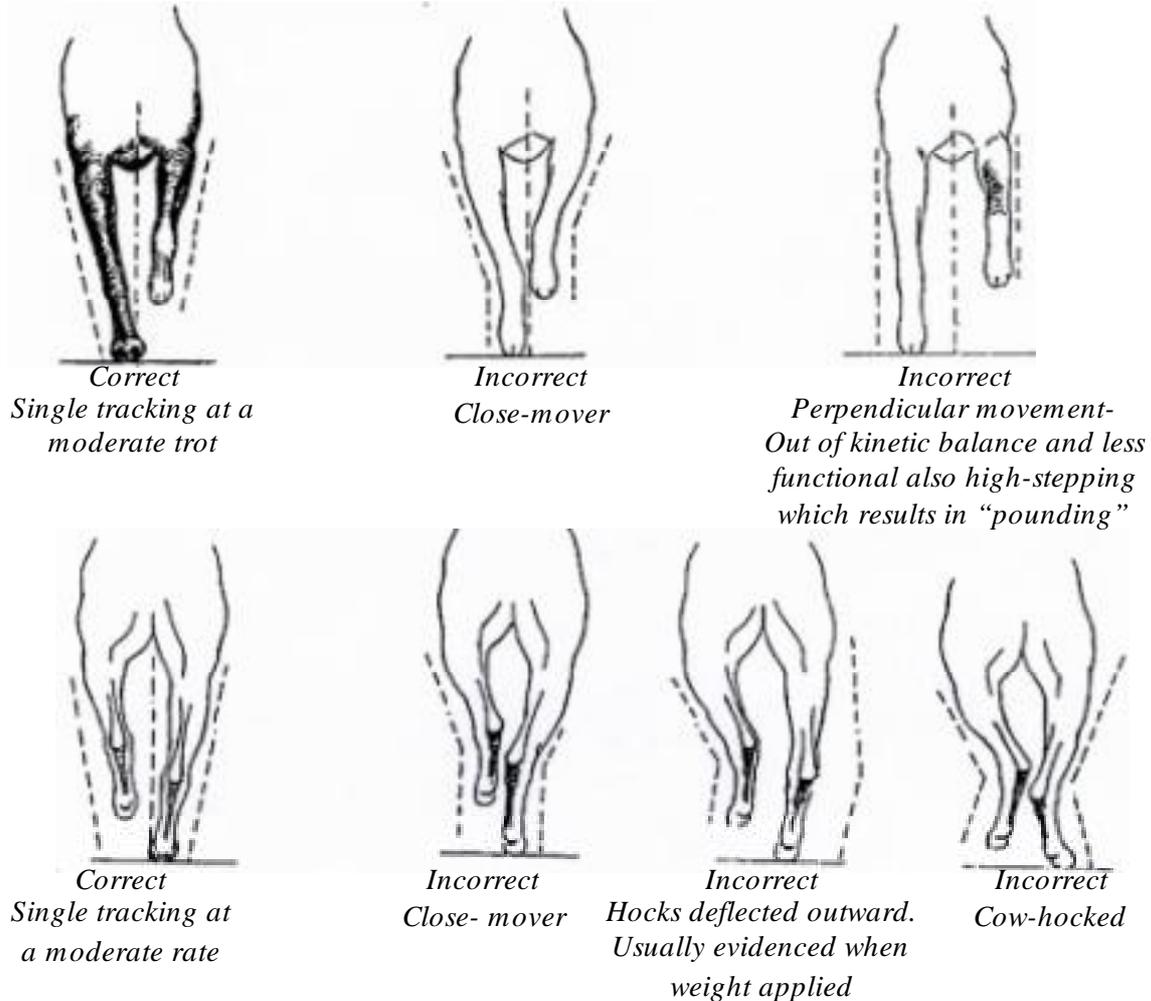
If the tail is set on correctly and allied with a moderately sloping croup, it will be carried in a desirable manner. The tail can be carried level with, or slightly higher than, the back, but a “gay” tail (i.e. carried at right angles to, or well above, the back) is a sign of structural deficiencies and an incorrect set-on and should be penalised. With a flat croup, the tail is usually set on too high, causing the “gay” tail situation whilst moving, while a steep croup usually results in a low tail set.

Correct tail carriage and set-on is necessary as the tail provides balance and acts as a rudder while moving; if the carriage or set-on is incorrect, then the tail cannot perform its function properly.

The tail should reach at least to the point of the hock. Kinked tails are considered to be a fault and should be penalised accordingly.

- **GAIT/MOVEMENT**

Straight forward, free and active.



The Rhodesian Ridgeback should move with long, free, ground covering strides which are characterised by an effortless and full extension of front and rear legs, with minimum lift. This types of movement is required for endurance if the dog is to be on the move for long periods.

In the showing, this required movement is demonstrated at the trot, which is a rhythmic, two beat, diagonal gait and in which the diagonally opposite feet strike the ground together. The imprint of the hind feet tend to cover the tracks left by the front feet.

When a dog breaks into a trot, his body is only supported by two legs at any one time and must therefore balance itself over an imaginary centre column of support in order to move easily and effectively, otherwise the dog would “wobble” from side to side and not move efficiently or effortlessly. To achieve balance, the dog’s legs angle inwards towards a centre line beneath the body. As speed increases, the closer the legs come to tracking on a single line. This is known as single tracking’ or a tendency to single track, and is an important element in the correct movement of the Rhodesian Ridgeback. (Note – Do not confuse with moving close behind.)

The angle of inclination inwards should begin at the point of the shoulder in the front legs and at the hip joint in the hind legs, and the limbs should remain relatively straight from these points to the feet, even as the legs flex or extend in reaching and thrusting, thus “moving straight”. Again, straight movement is an important element in the movement of the Ridgeback.

Good angulation at the shoulders and hips is necessary to facilitate long, effortless strides. Joints that control movement should flex easily and smoothly, providing strong thrust from behind and reach in front and to absorb constant impact with the ground. The swing and reach of the front legs should be co-ordinated with those at the rear so that there will be no overstepping or interference. Poor angulation shortens the stride because the bones meeting at shoulder and hip joints form wide angles, thus limiting the swing of the legs.

The Ridgeback should, therefore, have the following features for correct movement:

- * Effortless, long, free strides
- * Tendency to single track
- * Straight movement
- * Good angulation
- * Good length of stride, front and rear.

Finally, it should be remembered that Ridgebacks often move at different speeds or gaits but, as mentioned, only the trot is assessed in the showing, as it best demonstrates most about a dog’s movement and can confirm or negate impressions gained by a judge during a physical inspection of the dog on its structure and conformation.

• COAT

Hair – Should be short and dense, sleek and glossy in appearance but neither woolly nor silky.

Although self-explanatory, it must be noted that the mature dog’s coat should be hard and smooth to touch, but not soft and wiry.

• COLOUR

Light wheaten to red wheaten. A little white on the chest and toes is permissible, but excessive white hairs here, on belly or above toes is undesirable. A dark muzzle and ears permissible. Excessive black hairs throughout the coat are highly undesirable.

The coat should be comprised of hairs being shaded from light to dark, with the latter at the tips. This gives a broken or wheaten appearance.

Black nosed dogs will often have darker ears and shadings on the muzzle, but this shading should never extend upwards above the eyes.

It is desirable that white markings are kept to a minimum. But to penalise an otherwise good dog for border-line marking flaws does not do a service to the breed.

- **SIZE**

The desirable heights are:

Dogs **63 cm (25 ins) to 69cm (27 ins)**

Bitches **61 cm (24 ins) to 66 cm (26 ins)**

Weight – The desirable weights are:

Dogs **36.5kg (80lbs)**

Bitches **32 kg (70lbs)**

The desirable weight is – mature dog – 36.3kg [80lbs] and mature bitch – 31.8kg [70lbs], with a permissible variation of 2.2kg [5lbs] above and below these weights. The Ridgeback is a large, substantial, but not cumbersome dog, whose survival within its own environment depends upon its agility, speed and perseverance. The overall balance of the dog should be considered when assessing the combined factors of weight and measurement and the aforementioned functional requirements.

- **FAULTS**

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.

- **NOTE**

Male animals should have two apparently normally developed testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

- **CONCLUSION**

The Ridgeback is a handsome, upstanding dog of moderate proportions with all his parts harmonising with each other without exaggerations.

- **REFERENCES**

Hawley
Hutchison's Dog Encyclopaedia
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