

– BREED PRIORITIES – CHIHUAHUAS

By Nikki Riggsbee

This discussion is not intended to promote fault or part judging. One should always evaluate a whole dog as a package. One develops and improves his picture of excellence by deciding what to emphasize for each breed. They say that evaluating dogs is a matter of what you will forgive. Having priorities can help with that process.

The Chihuahua is the smallest AKC breed, not to exceed six pounds. It is twenty-second most popular, based on the last year's registration statistics, the fifth most popular toy breed. It has two coats types, smooth and long, and the dogs are shown as separate varieties based on coat. The Chihuahua is certainly one of the best-known breeds, the star of film and commercials.

We found twenty-one Chihuahua breeder-judges who were invited to complete our breed priority survey. Sixteen finished surveys were returned, one partially completed, and two others offered comments instead. The experts have been in the breed an average of over thirty years and have judged them for almost thirteen years, on average. Such longevity in their breed has been unusual among the breeds we have surveyed; nearly a third of the group has had this breed for over forty years. About half have judged the Chihuahua national specialty, and most have judged other Chihuahua specialties.

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Virtues

The breeder-judges were asked to rank a list of positive characteristics from the breed standard. Below is the list in sequence by the average rank, from most important to the least important.

1. Well-balanced little dog
2. Level topline
3. Well-rounded, "apple dome" skull
4. Large, erect type ears
4. (Tie) Terrier-like temperament
6. Good reach in front equal to the drive from the rear
7. Muzzle moderately short, slightly pointed
8. Level or scissors bite
9. Eyes full and luminous
10. Straight forelegs
11. Forelegs set well under body
12. Saucy expression
13. Ribs well-sprung
14. Tail carried sickle up or out or in a loop over the back
15. Chestiness
16. Shorter body in males

The greatest agreement was on "Well-balanced little dog" (1st) closely followed by "Shorter body in males" (16th). Next was "Level topline" (2nd). This result follows the pattern of having the greatest agreement on the most and least important ranked virtues.

Over sixty percent concurred on "Ribs well-sprung" (13th), "Tail carried sickle up or out or in a loop over the back" (14th), and "Chestiness" (15th). The only other feature with a majority was "Good reach in front equal to the drive from the rear" (6th), confirming that toy dogs should be able to move.

Several virtues had half of the experts agree, but often a definite plurality had another opinion. "Well-rounded, "apple dome" skull" (3rd) was put about midpoint by half, but nearly forty percent valued it highly. A similar distribution was found with "Large, erect type ears" (tied at 4th) and "Straight forelegs" (10th)

"Terrier-like temperament" (tied at 4th) had half place it in the top quartile, but nearly forty percent put it much lower. "Level or scissors bite" (8th) had a similar split. "Muzzle moderately short, slightly pointed" (7th) was ranked all over.

"Well-balanced little dog" (1st) was more than three points ahead of the second-place virtue, emphasizing its importance. There is a two point gap between the averages of "Ribs well-sprung" (13th) and "Tail carriage" (14th), definitely locating the last three at the bottom.

Some averages were quite close. One more survey would break the tie at fourth between "Temperament" and "Ears." Very close behind these two was "Reach and drive" (6th). Also close were "Muzzle" (7th) and "Bite" (8th).

Faults

The survey also included a list of faults for the experts to prior-

itize. Below is that list, ranked from the most serious fault to the least serious.

1. Mouth faults (overshot, undershot, wry)
2. Lacking the "apple dome" skull
3. Ears not erect (tipping)
4. Backline not level as dog moves
5. Timid
6. Hackneyed gait
7. Topline not level (sloping or soft)
8. Protruding eyes
9. Shoulders down or low
10. More than "slightly off-square"
11. Lack of rear angulation
12. Hocks turning "out or in"
13. Tail carried down below level of back
14. Hollow forechest (lack of chestiness)
15. Feet with toes spread
16. Lack of undercoat in Long Coats

The greatest agreement, with over ninety percent, was on "Lack of undercoat in Long Coats" (16th) emphasizing that amount of coat is not important when judging. The next closest, with seventy-five percent, was "Mouth faults (overshot, undershot, wry)" (1st).

The smallest majorities concurred on "Lacking the 'apple dome' skull" (2nd), "Ears not erect (tipping)" (3rd), "Shoulders down or low" (9th), "Hollow forechest (lack of chestiness)" (14th), "and "Feet with toes spread" (15th).

Bi-polar results occurred on some of the other faults. "Backline not level as dog moves" (4th) was ranked highly by almost half, with a similar number putting it at the next level. "Hackneyed gait" (6th) was quite important for more than a third, but almost half put it at midpoint. "Topline not level (sloping or soft)" (7th) was below average on half the surveys, but above average on almost as many.

"More than 'slightly off-square'" (10th) was in the second quartile for a third, towards the bottom for another third, and the rest were all over. "Lack of rear angulation" (11th) was placed around the middle by almost half, but a similar group put it distinctly lower. "Tail carriage" (13th) also had differences of opinions. "Protruding eyes" (8th) was placed all over.

Additional input could change the relative sequence of the faults. "Ears not erect" (3rd) and "Backline not level moving" (4th) were less than a tenth of a point apart, as were "Protruding eyes" (8th) and "Shoulders down or low" (10th), and also "Hocks out or in" (12th) and "Tail carriage" (13th).

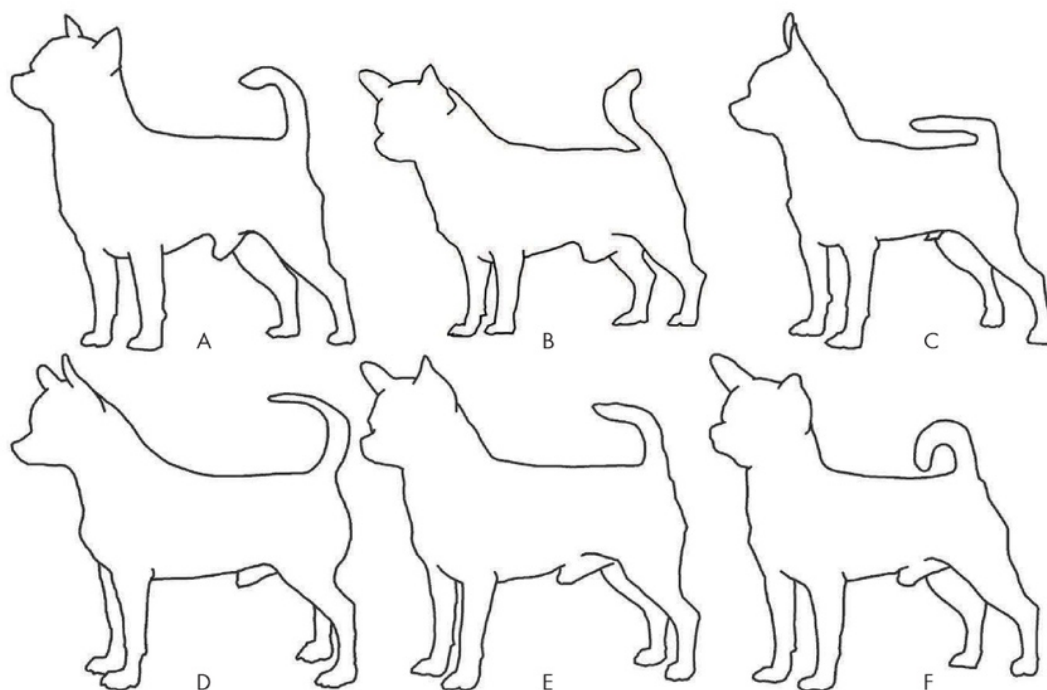
Last place "Lack of undercoat in Long Coats" was nearly three points lower than "Feet with toes spread" (15th), emphasizing its lesser importance.

In comparing relative features on the two lists, some were ranked similarly, while others were not. In similar positions on both lists were topline, apple-domed skull, ears, temperament, movement, eyes, tail carriage, and chestiness. Mouth faults were important as faults, but less so as the correct bite - level or scissors.

Chihuahua Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



Outlines

The survey also included outlines of six dogs and six bitches. The breeder-judges placed each group first through fourth, and then selected Best of Breed. The outlines were made from photos of actual dogs, so none is perfect or ideal. The variation in tails was mostly due to handlers' holding the tails in different positions. All outlines were made from Smooth Coated dogs.

Before reading the experts' choices, decide which dog and which bitch you think are best, and which is Best of Breed.

With the best average placement among the boys, top male was Chihuahua "E." Comments on "E" included "most balanced overall, no glaring faults, good angulation," "correct tail," "slightly longer than tall, matching angulation front and rear, correct tail," "nice dog," and "well-proportioned."

The Chihuahua dog with the next best average placement was dog "F." Those who favored "F" noted "better head," "ear size, shorter back, apple domed head," "correct proportions, proper breed type," "good balance, front set under, good rear angulation," and "overall balanced, type, ear set."

The Chihuahua bitch with the highest average placement was bitch "W." Judges who liked her said "front legs under," "slightly deeper chest, slightly longer back," "solid bitch with good ear size and set; good topline and neck" and "balanced, great head and ears, good tailset."

Second place bitch based on average placement was Chihuahua "V." Experts who put her first said "best overall balance – ears, tail set, angulation, topline all good" and "head looks best" and "head looks best, adequate angulation, nice balance."

The Best of Breed Chihuahua would depend on the criteria used. Bitch "W" had the best average placement and the most first placements of all twelve. Dog "A," who was third in average placement among the dogs, was placed first more often than any male and was selected BOB more often than any other outline by the experts. So you decide.

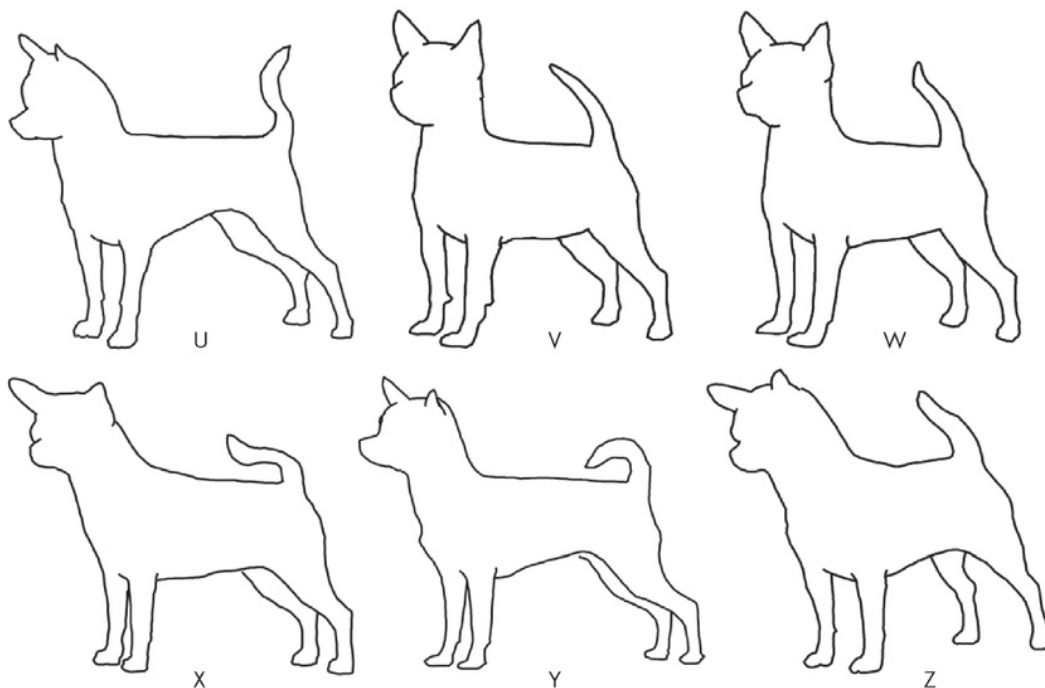
All the dogs except "C" and "D" were placed first by at least two breeder-judges. Dogs "E" and "F" were never out of the ribbons. Dog "B" was out of the ribbons on twelve surveys, and "C" unplaced on eleven.

All of the bitches were placed first at least once except for bitch

Chihuahua Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



“U.” Bitch “W” was first on over half of the surveys and was never out of the ribbons. Interestingly, only two breeder-judges named her Best of Breed. Bitch “Y” was unplaced on fourteen surveys and bitch “U” on thirteen.

Comments

- If the Chihuahua is not over six pounds, size shouldn't be a deciding factor.
- Mouth faults were added to the standard because judges were ignoring mouth faults, not that they should be considered a worse fault than others.
- A Chihuahua should be a sound dog before any “type or style” qualities are considered.
- Ears and eyes are getting too small. Ear set is often too low and sometimes hooded.
- Balance and moderation are important.
- There is no difference between the dog and bitch except for allowing more length of back on the bitch.
- The breed is losing moderation, a word mentioned several times in the standard. Too many have exaggerated heads, muzzles too short and blunt, and ears too small.
- After soundness, judge on type.
- Ears should not be set high or round-tipped.
- Long Coated Chihuahuas have double, not single coats.
- Eyes should show no white.
- Muzzle length is not as important as angle; it shouldn't be up or down.
- The eyes can be larger than the nose leather.
- Hocks should be directly under the butt.
- There should be no tuck-up.
- On Long Coats, it doesn't matter how much coat so long as it has long coat in the required places.

*Nikki Riggsbee is approved to judge all Sporting, Hound, and Working breeds and eleven breeds in other groups. She has been active in both all-breed and specialty clubs. She is an award-winning author of four books and multiple articles, including the **Breed Priorities** series.*

She began showing dogs in 1980 with Norwegian Elkhounds and Great Danes. Under the affix McEmn, she has owned and bred over thirty champions, with many more produced from her dogs. In addition to conformation, Nikki has also exhibited and titled Great Danes in obedience. Her website is www.mcemn.com.