

The Essence of Type

by Cindy Vogels

Essence - “the intrinsic nature of something; the quality which determines something’s character” (Oxford University Press)

The essence of breed type can be defined as how the various parts of a dog come together with the requisite temperament to make a breed unique.

Part 1 - Silhouette

I consider silhouette to be the most important element of breed type because, when you look at a dog, your eye is first drawn to a dog’s shape and balance. In general, shape + balance = correct silhouette; The Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier standard is pretty clear on correct proportions, and breeders must consider silhouette a priority.

The first sentence of our standard says dogs are to be “square in outline.” - equal in length and height. This can only be achieved when the measurement from the furthest most projection of the shoulder (point of shoulder) to the furthest most projection of the rear (point of buttocks) equals the distance from the withers (union of the shoulder blade and the first and second thoracic vertebrae) to the ground (terra firma).

A level topline and high tailset finish off the picture. Ideally, the highest point of the withers will be higher than the level of the topline, and the well-angulated dog will have the point of shoulder in front of the neck and the point of buttocks out beyond the tail. Please note that high withers are created by long, sloping shoulder blades, and high tailsets are achieved by flat croups (the muscular area above and around the set-on).

When looking at the body of a Soft Coated Wheaten it is of the utmost importance that the length of body is achieved by a strong, *short* loin (the distance from the last rib to the pelvis) coupled with a *long* ribcage. Long ribcages provide the needed lung and heart capacity and short loins aid in efficient gait. This is a difficult relationship to maintain, but must be sought after by breeders. While many standards allow for more length in bitches, this is a point that bears no scientific merit. Longer loins are extremely detrimental and gender cannot be used as an excuse. Short loined bitches are perfectly capable of carrying healthy litters of puppies.

As far as overall balance goes, keep in mind that we are looking for a pleasing symmetrical appearance. The standard says that the head is “well balanced and in proportion to the body. Rectangular in appearance.” Neck is to be “medium in length.” “Back strong and level.” Shoulders are “well laid back” and hind-quarters are “well developed with well bent stifles.” An unwritten rule of thumb makes the length of head roughly equal to the length of the neck and the distance from withers to tail. Dogs who are moderately, but *equally* angulated front and rear will present a balanced picture.



LONGER THAN TALL.

What is not addressed in the standard is leg proportion. However, in most square and even off-square breeds, the distance from the withers to the elbow should equal the distance from the elbow to ground.

There are an alarming number of Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers that are not square in outline and out of balance. Nature is a great moderator, and like the afore mentioned difficulty in maintaining short loins, it is exceedingly difficult to maintain length of leg (the distance from the elbow to the ground). With alarming regularity we are now seeing dogs who are short on leg, long in loin - or worse - both. Annie Clark often refers to the “drag of a breed.” By this she means the undesirable ancestral characteristics that haunt every breed. For the Soft Coated Wheaten



TALLER THAN LONG

Terrier the drags include, among other things, the short legs of the Glen of Imaal and Staffordshire Bull Terriers, which figure into the early development of the Soft Coated Wheaten.

As shorter legs and long loins become a trend, they threaten to change the outline of the breed in general. We become accustomed to seeing this low and/or long outline and it risks becoming acceptable. As breed enthusiasts, we must never let this happen to Soft Coated Wheatens. The Kerry Blue standard is more explicit than ours as the first paragraph states, “a low-slung Kerry is not typical.” But, we can take a lesson from our cousin and also eschew short-legged Wheatens.

It can be argued that there is a difference between dogs who are “square,” and those that *appear* to be square. While the standard says the dogs are square, coat does affect their outlines. A square dog with an over abundance of coat, front and/or rear, can appear off square. Likewise, coat can obscure proper length of leg, too. Care must be taken to trim the lower legs to the



SQUARE

elbow, shortening the coat at the elbow. However, no amount of clever grooming can fool the savvy judge, and breeders must assess their dogs’ proportions and breed for the ideal.

There is no other point that speaks to the whole dog as much as outline. Therefore, breeders must pay close attention to this aspect and never compromise. Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers are long-legged Terriers and always must appear so. Any other leg proportions speak to a different class of dogs and must be shunned.

This is the first in a series of articles describing the essence of Soft Coated Wheaten type. Definitions have been taken from Harold Spira’s [Canine Terminology](#) (Harper Row), which I highly recommend as a reference◆