

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 2 - Head

In the last issue of Benchmarks, I wrote about the importance of understanding the essence of Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier breed type. That article addressed what I consider to be the most important aspect of the essence - silhouette. The next component I will discuss is head.

The Soft Coated Wheaten head is not very complicated or dependent upon nuance of



Correct head planes, top skull and muzzle are also equal in length.

detail. Yet lately, I find heads to be lacking in breed character. The standard is quite specific regarding head qualities, but ours is a coated breed, so the conscientious breeder must be sure that their dogs’ heads are correctly made, and not just giving the

correct impression through clever grooming.

In profile, the head should be rectangular in shape and be in balance with the body. In this case, rectangular should be interpreted as considerably longer than deep. The original Irish standard called for the head to be “long.” Therefore, it must never appear like a squarish box. Balance is an individual perception, but if a head appears too small for the body, it probably is. Rarely are overly large heads a problem.



Correct head planes on a clipped Wheaten.

Skull and muzzle should present the appearance of two equal rectangles. The width of the skull should **not** be as wide as the average span of a man’s hand from thumb to middle finger and should be rectangular not square but rather longer than wide. The muzzle should be the same length as the skull and taper only moderately caused by chiseling under the eyes. The two head planes (nose to stop and brow to occiput) should be parallel. Of late, I have seen many heads that fall short in this area. We are getting overly coarse and bumpy skulls that fall away causing broken head planes. Prominent zygomatic arches (bony protuberances on the sides of the head) have always been a problem, but now we are also seeing over-developed cheek muscles.

It is a combination of proper skull con-

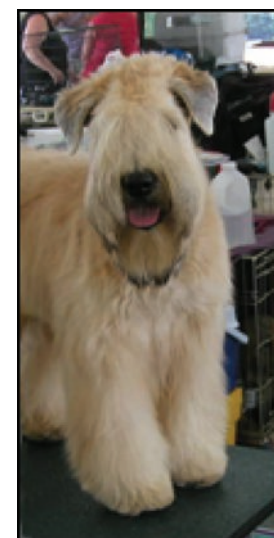
struction, eye placement, ear size and



Ears correctly placed and well set on head. They are also of proper size.

placement, and nose that give the Wheaten its characteristic expression.

Ears are probably the single most distinguishing



Poorly constructed ears, low-set and drifting away from the head.

characteristic of a Wheaten head as they, more than anything else, structurally separate us from our Kerry Blue cousins. The standard describes them as being “small to medium” in size and “breaking level with the skull” “the inside edge of the ear lying next to the cheek and pointing to the

continued on page 38

continued from page 37

ground rather than to the eye.” They should be pointed, not rounded - not too heavy in leather, but not so light as to be fly-away. Far too often there is a tendency for ears to flair away from the skull - pointing at 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock rather than the correct 6 o'clock. It should be noted that although the standard says the ears break “level with the skull,” a more apt description would be that they *appear* to break level with the skull. Because the hair on the head adds height to the appearance of the skull, properly set ears actually sit just above the level of the skull. Conscientious



More poorly set and badly carried ears.

gluing of puppy ears during teething will help insure the proper set. It should be



Ears over-sized and low set. Tip of ear should not reach below outside corner of eye.

noted that ears often have a tendency to “relax” with age, so ears on older dogs may not be carried as tight to the head or have as crisp a fold as the youngsters. Ear size continues to be a problem. Ideally, the tip of the ear should not fall below the outside corner of the eye. Ears can be too small, but large ears are seen far too often.”

Although they are only partially indicated under the coat, details of proper Wheaten

eyes should not be overlooked. The size and shape of the eyes are an indication of proper skull construction. They should be “medium in size....set fairly wide apart.”



Beautiful almond shaped eye of a warm brown hue. Note nose large for size of dog!

Eyes are protected under the brow created by the proper moderate stop. “Almond shaped,” they should be set somewhat obliquely in the skull. There should be no tendency towards an “oriental” expression; but round, large eyes set too close together are incorrect, and should be shunned. Eye color is sometimes misunderstood. The original standard called for eyes to be hazel, but it meant the color of a hazelnut - a warm brown. There should be no hint of gold or amber, but “darker the better” is not correct either. Eyes must be surrounded by black rims and when the mascara extends beyond it is generally a sign of strong pigment.

A large black nose is a hallmark of the breed and lends much to correct Wheaten expression. Because there is often no correlation between pigment and the tendency towards

a winter nose (a normally black nose which has faded during the winter months), in assessing pigment, it is necessary to look at eye rims and overall skin hue. Dilute pigmentation should be avoided, but dogs with otherwise good pigment shouldn't be faulted for a winter nose.

Scottie breeder/ judge Jerry Roszman refers to the Terriers' teeth as their “toolbox.” Back in the early days of our breed we struggled with undershot jaws and misplaced lower incisors. As the width and length of our muzzles improved, so did bites. Now,

I'm seeing more short snikey muzzles and correspondingly, an alarming number of bad bites. This problem must be addressed by breeders. The bad bites are indicative of incorrect head conformation, and aside from being ascetically unattractive, can pose functional problems as well.

There are few distinctions that define Soft Coated Wheatens, separating them from their Irish cousins. Head characteristics are some of the most important, so they cannot be over-emphasized. The breed as a whole is falling short in proper head construction and breeders must take heed to remedy this situation ♦