

# The Essence of Type

by Cindy Vogels

**E**ssence - *“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 5 - Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier Movement

**T**he final installment of my series of articles on the Essence of Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier type is devoted to movement. This will not be a primer on dog movement as there are excellent books devoted to the subject. I highly recommend: MacDowell Lyon, The Dog in Action, Rachel Paige Elliot, Dogsteps, Gilbert & Brown K-9 Structure and Terminology and Brown, Curtis, Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis.

As an expression of the sum of all parts, movement is an integral part of breed type. In addition to structure, temperament and condition also play major roles in how dogs move. While proper structure cannot be downplayed, too often we only look at bones and forget that it is the muscles and their attachments that contribute to make canine athletes. Often, beautifully structured dogs do not move particularly well because they are lacking in muscle development. On the other hand, sometimes extremely athletic dogs move well, making up for structural weaknesses.

Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier movement is not complicated. Knowledgeable dog fanciers consider side gait first and are willing to forgive minor faults coming and going when side gait is acceptable. So, it’s important to look at movement from the side first.

Ours is a moderate, square breed, so, at the trot, from the side, we should look for reach and drive, but not the tremendous

“opening up” of rectangular sporting dogs. In other words, Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers shouldn’t be built like Golden Retrievers so they shouldn’t move like them either. When fully extended, front feet should reach the nose and there should be equal extension behind. Balance is extremely important for endurance, so neither front nor rear should overpower one another.

*Dogs are the sum of their parts, and it behooves breeders to be aware of the nuances of detail, which create proper breed type. But, while it is necessary to assess the various components comprising the essence, we must always look at the whole dog when seeking that illusive perfection.*

As dogs trot, the rear foot reaches underneath propelling the body forward. There should be good flexion at the hock joint. Ideally, the opposite front leg reaches out equally creating a smooth, effortless gait. When moving correctly, dogs retain their silhouettes, head held high and a bit forward, back level, tail high.

Rear propulsion is a product of a flat croup which creates the requisite high tailset with ample “butt behind,” equal length of first and second thighs, and the angles created by their connection. There should be good flexion at the hock joint. Correct reach is attained by a combination of the equal length of shoulder, and forearm and the angle formed at their junction. Angulation will not be the classic 45 degrees, and in fact, Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers should not have the extreme sweep behind, nor the prominent keel in front commonly seen in many



Sporting and Working breeds.

When dogs lack rear angulation the rear leg does not reach under the dog, so the resulting gait is mincing, covering little ground. This can be easily assessed by watching the front and rear feet meet under the dog while trotting. Ideally, they should come together; the rear foot will not overstep the front, nor will there be a gap between them.

It is common to see overangulation in the rear have a negative

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effect on side gait. If the front assembly is less angulated than the rear (in particular when the forearm is short and poorly angulated), the timing is off so dogs must compensate resulting in a myriad of gait faults where front legs are thrown up or out.

When coming and going, legs should move straight forward. As speed increases, there is a natural tendency for legs to converge on a center line, but this should never be confused with moving close or crossing front or rear. Common faults seen in rear movement are hocks that do not flex and/or point in or out, and feet that point in or out. Coming towards you, front faults include elbowing out, and toes pointing in or out. It should be noted that poor feet (flat with splayed toes) cause a flipping motion of the feet that can be seen from the side and front.

Flowing coat presents an added challenge when assessing Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier movement and breeders must accustom their eyes to see beneath the coat. Have a capable handler move your dogs for you, and if necessary, wet them down in order to assess their gait accurately. I also recommend that you go to the dog show and watch other breeds. Of course, our closest cousins, Kerry Blues, provide good models. But also, try watching Dobermans. Although they are not exactly the same structurally as Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers, they are a square, moderate breed. Another interesting exercise is comparing the English versus the American Cocker Spaniels. The English Cocker standard specifically calls for moderation and directs that they should move at moderate speed. In general, understanding movement in other breeds will enhance your knowledge of proper gait for the Soft Coated Wheaten.

This concludes my series of articles on the Essence of Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier type - Silhouette, Head, Coat/Color, Temperament and Movement. Dogs are the sum of their parts, and it behooves breeders to be aware of the nuances of detail, which create proper breed type. But, while it is necessary to assess the various components comprising the essence, we must always look at the whole dog when seeking that illusive perfection. ♦



Fall Fun! Photo courtesy of Monica Kipp