

Sizing up the standards

by Robbie Pattison

Why do people feel compelled to tinker with things? Often we say we do it in the name of progress, or to make improvements, when there is no evidence that any change is needed in the first place. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, as the saying goes.

Purebred dog breeders are among the world's busiest tinkers. One glance at the long list of dog breeds, amazing in its diversity, confirms this. While we're not quite so busy inventing new breeds as we have been in the past, we still can't help messing around with the ones we've got, nor do we always know when to leave well enough alone when it comes to re-writing the standards that describe them.

In early 2000, the FCI put forward a "new Saluki standard." Fortunately, the FCI responded to the worldwide outcry against the proposed changes, and went back to the tried and true 1923 British version, which is very close to the standard recognized by both the American and

The Canadian and American Saluki standards differ only slightly from the original 1923 British version. For the most part, the changes are insignificant, but in one are – size – a comparative reading of the standards tells an interesting story. In 1923, the standard writers decreed, "Height: Should average 23-28 inches at the shoulder, bitches proportionately smaller," while the North America standards state, "Dogs should average in height from 23-28 inches and bitches may be considerably smaller, this being very typical of the breed." For some reason, a size range of 23-28 inches, the height of bitches falling in the lower end of that scale, got opened up to a five-inch spread for dogs, with no lower limit at all indicated for bitches.

In the real world, the height of most Salukis falls somewhere within that already fairly generous 23-to-28-inch allowance. Some go over, very few go under. In the past 40 years or so, I have seen

equipment (and a co-operative dog) is very difficult indeed. I once had a Saluki I could have sworn was no more than 24 inches tall, but when I measured her I found her actual height was closer to 25-1/2 inches. She was very slightly built, and looked tiny compared to her more robust mother and sisters, who were taller, but not by much.

In any event, size is not an issue with Salukis the way it is with many breeds. Occasionally, a breeder or judge might comment that Salukis appear to be getting rather bigger than is desirable but my own experience tells me that trends come and go, and the breed stays pretty much the way it's always been. Back in the early '80s I was showing a dog I had named 'Bruiser' because of his size. When he was young and very fit, he measured out above the 28-inch limit, and he had bone to match his height. At one specialty we attended, there were at least two dogs bigger than he was, including the breed



Canadian Kennel Clubs.

Most members know my view of the ideal breed standard: it should be short, well written and, as Hippocrates advised, do no harm. The 1923 British Saluki standard qualifies reasonably well.

some small Salukis, but only one bitch that looked to be less than 23 inches at the shoulder, and since I saw her just once and didn't measure her, I'm not about to proclaim that she was. Accurately assessing size without the proper measuring

winner. At the same time, there was no shortage of medium-sized or even small Salukis at the shows, dogs that won their share of major prizes. The beauty of a Saluki does not depend on the size of the package.