

# The Golden Retriever: An Illustrated Guide to the Breed

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Golden Retriever Club of America



# Golden Retriever Club of America

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The Judges' Education Committee of the GRCA has various materials available for those wishing to further their understanding of the Golden Retriever. Consult [www.grca.org](http://www.grca.org) for additional information. Some of these materials include:

DVD: *The Golden Retriever*, produced by Rachel Page Elliott for GRCA. Consult [www.grca.org](http://www.grca.org) for order information.

Video/DVD: *The Golden Retriever*, produced by AKC 1991. 20 min. May be purchased from the American Kennel Club.

Booklet: *A Study of the Golden Retriever*. By Marcia R Schlehr. 1994 edition; Softcover; 64 pages, dozens of illustrations, concise text covering all aspects of structure, movement, breed type and character for exhibitors, breeders, and judges. Consult [www.grca.org](http://www.grca.org) for order information.

Booklet: *An Introduction to the Golden Retriever*, 75 page booklet produced by the GRCA General information about the breed, not specifically for judges. \$5.00. It has a bibliography of books on the breed, addresses for further information. Consult [www.grca.org](http://www.grca.org) for order information.

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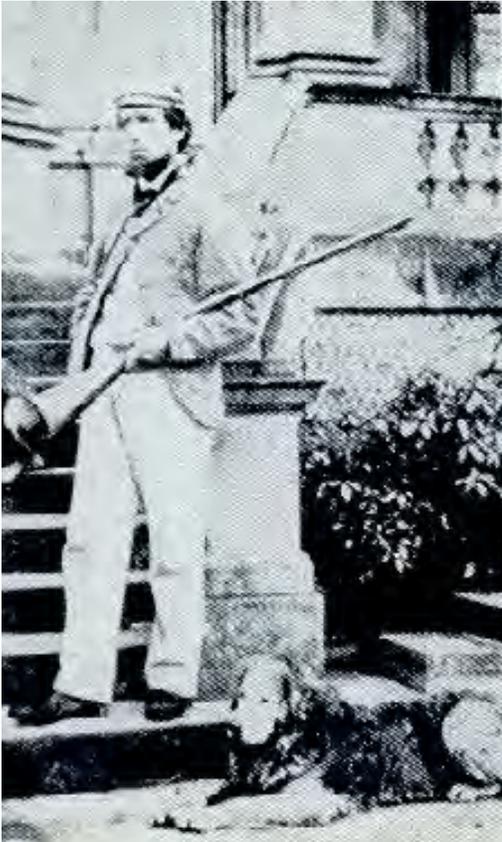
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## A Brief History of the Golden Retriever

In the 1800s in Scotland and England, hunting was both sport and a practical way of obtaining food. Retrievers became popular when the breech-loading shotgun demanded an efficient retrieving dog for both waterfowl and upland game. All retriever breeds can trace back to the water-loving St John's dog of Newfoundland, ancestor of the wavy-coated retriever which contributed to both the Flat-Coat and the Golden.



Nous with gamekeeper at Guisachan

The most complete records of the origin of the Golden Retriever are included in the record book kept from about 1840 until 1890 by Dudley Marjoribanks, first Lord Tweedmouth, at his Guisachan estate in the Scottish Highlands. These records were made public in 1952 by Lord Tweedmouth's great-nephew, the sixth Lord Ilchester. Further information and additional pedigree research was published by Elma Stonex.

In 1865 Dudley Marjoribanks bought "Nous", the single yellow pup in a litter of black wavy-coated retrievers. Photos of Nous show a handsome, sturdy dog with a wavy coat, quite recognizably a Golden. Nous was bred with Belle, a Tweed Water Spaniel, resulting in four yellow pups that became the foundation of the breed. Through several generations of clever breeding, Marjoribanks created a consistent line of exceptional working retrievers. To the main line from Nous and Belle, he added another Tweed Water Spaniel, a couple of black wavy-coated retrievers, and a red setter, retaining primarily the yellow pups. Working ability and retrieving aptitude were paramount, requiring a strong, biddable dog that could withstand cold and cope with the demanding terrain of the Highlands.

The now extinct Tweed Water Spaniel was native to the east coast of southern Scotland, particularly in the area of the Tweed River near Berwick, and was used both to retrieve game and to assist fishermen. The Tweed spaniels were "light liver" in color, with a fairly short, close-curved coat only slightly feathered. "Liver" at that time could be used to describe anything from dark brown to light sandy color. Stanley O'Neill, the Flat-Coat historian, described them as more retriever than spaniel in appearance.



Culham Brass delivers to game-keeper's hand (UK, circa 1908)

Some of the Tweedmouth retrievers were given to friends and relatives, but the strain remained largely unknown until after 1900. The winner of the first field trial for retrievers, in 1904, was sired by a Tweedmouth dog. A few "yellow retrievers" were registered with the Kennel Club as "Retrievers (Wavy or Flat-Coated)", but did not appear in dog shows until 1908, in classes for Flat-Coats "of any other color". One of the earliest exhibitors, Mrs. W. M. Charlesworth, was nearly single-handedly responsible for recognition of the "Goldens" in their own right, in 1913.



BIS Am. Can. Ch Speedwell Pluto

While some Goldens were brought to North America between before either the American Kennel Club or the Canadian Kennel Club officially recognized the breed, the first Golden was registered by the AKC in 1925. But the real foundation sire of the Golden Retriever here was Am. Can. Ch. Speedwell Pluto, whelped in 1929 in England and imported by Col. Samuel Magoffin (Rockhaven Kennels) to British Columbia. Through further importations and family connections, Goldens became established before World War II in several areas of the USA, and after the War, grew steadily in popularity, with a pronounced surge of registrations in the 1970s.

While the Golden's kindly expression and distinctive "double" golden coat are appealing, his natural qualities of amiable temperament, trainability, willingness, useful size, and sturdy physique have equipped him for a variety of practical uses in addition to that of personal hunting dog; among them, guide dog for the blind, assistance/service dog, Search and Rescue, and tracking and scenting specialist. In organized dog sports the breed is widely popular in Obedience Trials (the first three Obedience Trial Champions were Goldens), Hunting Tests and Agility. Registrations of Goldens have remained in the "top ten" of all breeds for years, attesting to their popularity as companion as well as a worker.



Goldens from the Rockhaven Kennels (mid/late 1930's)

# AKC Breed Standard for the Golden Retriever

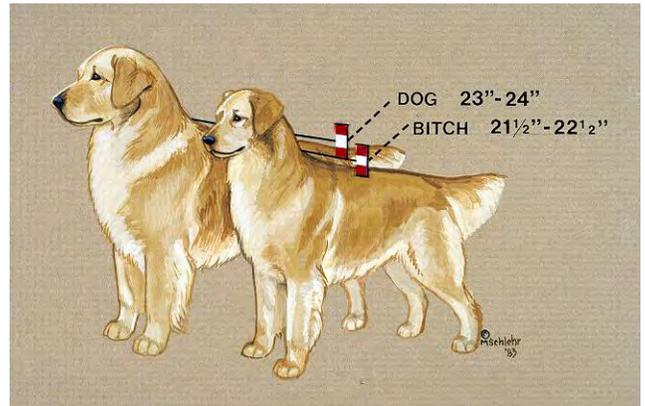
## General Appearance



A symmetrical, powerful, active dog, sound and well put together, not clumsy nor long in the leg, displaying a kindly expression and possessing a personality that is eager, alert and self-confident. Primarily a hunting dog, he should be shown in hard working condition. Overall appearance, balance, gait and purpose to be given more emphasis than any of his component parts. **Faults**-Any departure from the described ideal shall be considered faulty to the degree to which it interferes with the breed's purpose or is contrary to breed character.

## Size, Proportion, Substance

Males 23-24 inches in height at withers; females 21½-22½ inches. Dogs up to one inch above or below standard size should be proportionately penalized. Deviation in height of more than one inch from the standard shall *disqualify*. Length from breastbone to point of buttocks slightly greater than height at withers in ratio of 12:11. Weight for dogs 65-75 pounds; bitches 55-65 pounds.



## Head

Broad in skull, slightly arched laterally and longitudinally without prominence of frontal bones (forehead) or occipital bones. *Stop* well defined but not abrupt. *Foreface* deep and wide, nearly as long as skull. **Muzzle** straight in profile, blending smooth and strongly into skull; when viewed in profile or from above, slightly deeper and wider at stop than at tip. No heaviness in flews. Removal of whiskers is permitted but not preferred. **Eyes** friendly and intelligent in expression, medium large with dark, close-fitting rims, set well apart and reasonably deep in sockets. Color preferably dark brown; medium brown acceptable. Slant eyes and narrow, triangular eyes detract from correct expression and are to be faulted. No white or haw visible when looking straight ahead. Dogs showing evidence of functional abnormality of eyelids or eyelashes (such as, but not limited to, trichiasis, entropion, ectropion, or



distichiasis) are to be excused from the ring. **Ears** rather short with front edge attached well behind and just above the eye and falling close to cheek. When pulled forward, tip of ear should just cover the eye. Low, hound-like ear set to be faulted. **Nose** black or brownish black, though fading to a lighter shade in cold weather not serious. Pink nose or one seriously lacking in pigmentation to be faulted. **Teeth** scissors bite, in which the outer side of the lower incisors touches the inner side of the upper incisors. Undershot or overshot bite is a *disqualification*. Misalignment of teeth (irregular placement of incisors) or a level bite (incisors meet each other edge to edge) is undesirable, but not to be confused with undershot or overshot. Full dentition. Obvious gaps are serious faults.

## Neck, Topline, Body

Neck medium long, merging gradually into well laid back shoulders, giving sturdy, muscular appearance. No throatiness. **Backline** strong and level from withers to slightly sloping croup, whether standing or moving. Sloping backline, roach or sway back, flat or steep croup to be faulted. **Body** well balanced, short coupled, deep through the chest. **Chest** between forelegs at least as wide as a man's closed hand including thumb, with well developed forechest. Brisket extends to elbow. **Ribs** long and well sprung but not barrel shaped, extending well towards hindquarters. **Loin** short, muscular, wide and deep, with very little tuck-up. Slab-sidedness, narrow chest, lack of depth in brisket, excessive tuck-up to be faulted. **Tail** well set on, thick and muscular at the base, following the natural line of the croup. Tail bones extend to, but not below, the point of hock. Carried with merry action, level or with some moderate upward curve; never curled over back nor between legs.



## Forequarters

Muscular, well coordinated with hindquarters and capable of free movement. **Shoulder blades** long and well laid back with upper tips fairly close together at withers. **Upper arms** appear about the same length as the blades, setting the elbows back beneath the upper tip of the blades, close to the ribs without looseness. **Legs**, viewed from the front, straight with good bone, but not to the point of coarseness. **Pasterns** short and strong, sloping slightly with no suggestion of weakness. Dewclaws on forelegs may be removed, but are normally left on. **Feet** medium size, round, compact, and well knuckled, with thick pads. Excess hair may be trimmed to show natural size and contour. Splayed or hare feet to be faulted.

## Hindquarters

Broad and strongly muscled. Profile of croup slopes slightly; the pelvic bone slopes at a slightly greater angle (approximately 30 degrees from horizontal). In a natural stance, the femur joins the pelvis at approximately a 90-degree angle; **stifles** well bent; **hocks** well let down with short, strong **rear pasterns**. **Feet** as in front. **Legs** straight when viewed from rear. Cow-hocks, spread hocks, and sickle hocks to be faulted.

## Coat

Dense and water-repellent with good undercoat. Outer coat firm and resilient, neither coarse nor silky, lying close to body; may be straight or wavy. Untrimmed natural ruff; moderate feathering on back of forelegs and on underbody; heavier feathering on front of neck, back of thighs and underside of tail. Coat on head, paws, and front of legs is short and even. Excessive length, open coats, and limp, soft coats are very undesirable. Feet may be trimmed and stray hairs neatened, but the natural appearance of coat or outline should not be altered by cutting or clipping.

## Color

Rich, lustrous golden of various shades. Feathering may be lighter than rest of coat. With the exception of graying or whitening of face or body due to age, any white marking, other than a few white hairs on the chest, should be penalized according to its extent. Allowable light shadings are not to be confused with white markings. Predominant body color which is either extremely pale or extremely dark is undesirable. Some latitude should be given to the light puppy whose coloring shows promise of deepening with maturity. Any noticeable area of black or other off-color hair is a serious fault.



## Gait



When trotting, gait is free, smooth, powerful and well coordinated, showing good reach. Viewed from any position, legs turn neither in nor out, nor do feet cross or interfere with each other. As speed increases, feet tend to converge toward center line of balance. It is recommended that dogs be shown on a loose lead to reflect true gait.

## Temperament

Friendly, reliable, and trustworthy. Quarrelsomeness or hostility towards other dogs or people in normal situations, or an unwarranted show of timidity or nervousness, is not in keeping with Golden Retriever character. Such actions should be penalized according to their significance.

## **Disqualifications**

Deviation in height of more than one inch from standard either way.

Undershot or overshot bite.

Approved October 13, 1981

Reformatted August 18, 1990

## Judging the Golden Retriever

The Golden Retriever is one of the most popular and versatile of all breeds. The breed performs as a pet, show dog, performance competition dog, service dog, search and rescue dog, detector dog, dog guide but was developed primarily as a hunting companion. It is a dog of normal canine structure with sufficient size, strength and stamina to function as a retriever on both land and in the water but small enough to be pulled from the water and fit in a blind or duck boat. Retrievers are dogs of moderation, with a muscular, athletic appearance; strong, medium long, muscular necks; weather-proof, water-resistant and protective coats; strong well-arched, webbed feet with useful nails and a well set on tail, useful in balance for movement and as a swimming aid.



### **Key points for consideration**

- The Golden Retriever should not be judged as a generic show dog, or with undue emphasis on presentation, showy attitude or abundant coat, which are mere glamour points.
- Important considerations are suitability for function as an athletic, working gundog with overall balance, condition, and muscle tone, a correct, firm resilient coat texture and a dense undercoat providing a waterproof jacket.
- Judges should not focus on pieces or parts of the dog, whether correct or faulty, but consider over-all appearance, balance, gait and fitness for purpose.
- This is a hands-on breed, requiring the use of hands to assess the structure underneath the coat as artful grooming can disguise faults of structure upon visual examination. A more accurate assessment of structure can be made by a careful examination with the hands.
- Judges should not mistake excessive speed or extreme "reach and drive" for correct gait. Correct movement should be easy, smooth, ground-covering and efficient, allowing a Golden to work all day in the field. Goldens should be shown at a moderate working trot on a loose lead.
- Golden temperament should be eager, alert and self-confident and not constantly "turned on" or busy in nature.
- Judges should at some point observe this breed free-standing, in a natural stance, from various angles.

### **General Appearance**

The General Appearance section of the Golden Retriever breed standard is extremely important in establishing priorities in judging the breed. Golden Retriever type can be further refined by focusing on the breed essentials of purpose, breed character and temperament, size and proportion, head, coat and color. One of the joys of this breed is the variety of styles seen in the breed, but any variations must always be assessed in consideration of the breed standard. This is a hands-on breed, requiring careful

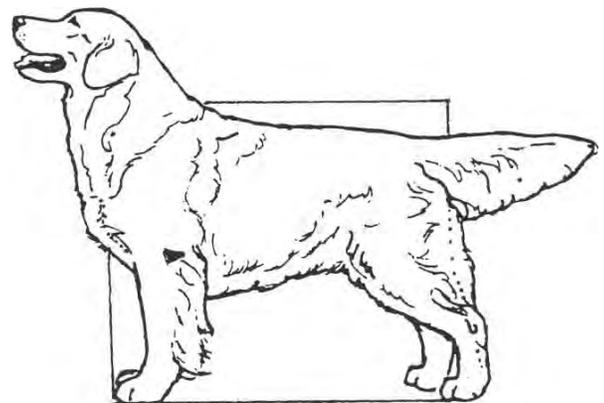
examination under the coat for structural reference points in order to adequately assess qualities that may be altered by creative grooming or obscured by excessive coat. Judges should ensure they place hands under the coat to feel for the forechest, tip of shoulder blades, length of upper arm, depth of body to the elbows, tight fitting elbows, good length and spring of rib, short, deep loin, bend of stifle, hindquarter muscle mass and correct tail set and length.



## Size, Proportion and Substance

The judge's initial impression of the Golden Retriever should be a dog of moderation and over-all balance. There is a **disqualification** for size, with no exemption for puppies. The standard has a disqualification for deviation in height more than one inch over or under the prescribed size range. Many puppies do not reach the minimum size by six months of age and judges should not hesitate to measure suspected over-sized or under-sized exhibits.

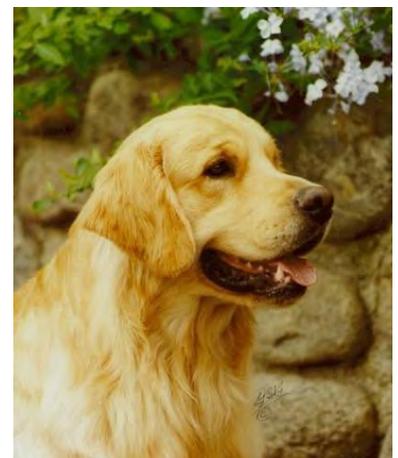
The standard calls for a proportion ratio of 11:12 based on the height from withers to ground and length from prosternum to seat bone. To the average eye, this is only slightly off square. The distance from withers to elbow and elbow to ground should be approximately equal. Many Goldens today are lacking the correct proportions and appear long and lower to the ground than what the standard requires. Length in the body should come from a well developed rib cage which extends well back, as the Golden should be relatively short-coupled and not long in loin.



## Head

The head is one of the hallmarks of the breed. Correct head structure is important to the retrieving function of the breed, relating to vision, scenting and carrying of the game. The head should be clean cut with a broad, slightly arched skull and a definite stop. The skull and the deep, wide, slightly tapering muzzle have nearly parallel planes, with the muzzle nearly as long as the skull. Strong muzzles and back-skulls are necessary for carrying heavy game, as a large goose can weigh 10 to 12 pounds.

Full dentition is preferred, with a scissors bite. Undershot or overshot mouths are a **disqualification**. It is necessary to examine the side teeth for obvious gaps in dentition, but it is not necessary to count teeth.



The expression should be warm, intelligent and friendly, ideally highlighted with black pigment on the nose, eye rims and lips. The medium large, dark brown eye should be an open almond shape, with tight, dark rims. Correct eye placement is from entering the eye. Any dog showing a functional abnormality of the eyelids or eyelashes, for whatever reason, should be excused from the ring. This can include excessive tearing, swelling, difference in appearance between the eyes, etc.

The nose should be of good size with large, open nostrils suitable for scenting. Preferably black, many Golden noses will fade with age or season. As long as there is a dark perimeter to the nose, it is not a Dudley nose, which is to be faulted. Ears should be rather short, soft and flexible, reaching only to the inner corner of the same-side eye. The forward edge of the ear should be set well behind and just above eye level when at rest. The head should be examined with the ears in a relaxed position. Alert ears can be considered more when assessing the Golden's expression but a Golden should not be expected to constantly "show ears". Please note that removal of whiskers is optional and not preferred in a hunting breed.

Head faults include narrow back-skulls, insufficient length and depth of muzzle, excessive flews, lack of adequate stop, poorly set and/or shaped eyes, large or low set ears, and misalignment of incisors.

### **Neck, Topline and Body**

The body of the Golden should not appear coarse or overdone but well-conditioned and athletic with moderate substance. The chest should reach to the elbows and should be broad with a well developed forechest that is well-filled beneath the prosternum. The neck is "medium long, merging gradually into well laid back shoulder, giving a sturdy, muscular appearance." The neck needs to be strong and well-muscled, with sufficient length for the dog to pick up and carry a bird with ease. The backline is strong and level from withers to slightly sloping croup, whether standing or moving. A sloping, setter-like topline is undesirable. There is little tuck-up and the loin is short, broad and muscular.

The tail does not come directly off the back but follows the natural line of the croup. It should be noticeably thicker at the base than at the tip and the bone length should reach to the hock joint. The function of the tail is to act as a rudder both in the water and on land, not as a sail. As such, the tail should be carried with a merry action, level with the back or with a slight upward curve. It should never be over the back or between the legs.

### **Forequarters and Hindquarters:**

The front and hind quarters should appear equally balanced, well muscled and capable of free, easy movement. The standard is clear in requiring well laid back, long shoulder blades with an upper arm of equal length and good return, so the elbows are placed directly beneath the upper tips of the shoulder blades. Short, upright upper arms which place the legs too far forward are a problem in the breed.

The straight front legs should have strong, moderate bone with tight, compact, well-knuckled feet. Remember the correct equal proportions between withers to elbow and elbow to ground. Pasterns should appear strong and slightly sloping for adequate shock absorption. Dewclaws are normally left on but may be removed.

Hindquarters must be strong, broad and well muscled. Judges should examine the muscling in the thighs for conditioning. Stifles should be well-bent but not over-angulated, with strong, short rear pasterns. The rear legs should be straight when viewed from behind, with no evidence of cow-hocks or sickle hocks.

### Coat and Color:

Color is probably one of the most common variants seen in the breed. The standard specifies "lustrous golden of various shades" which allows a broad range of color, ranging from cream to a coppery gold, with allowable lighter feathering. This variation in color is one of the breed's attractions. Extremes of light and dark of the predominant body color are considered undesirable. Many Golden Retrievers begin to grey as early as four to five years of age and graying of the head and body due to age is not to be penalized. Incorrect white markings that are to be faulted usually appear on the toes, chest or head. Any noticeable areas of black or off-color hair should be faulted.



Much more important than color in any assessment of the coat, is the **texture**. It must be firm, resilient, dense, and water-repellent with a good undercoat and lying close to the body. It may be either **straight or wavy!** Often coats with a slight wave have a more correct texture. Soft, limp, silky coats absorb water and lack the protective qualities of a correct coat. Excessive body coat and furnishings are not in keeping with the function of the breed as a hunting dog and should be faulted. On land,

excessive coat can get caught on brush and will tend to pick up all manner of debris that can take hours to brush out of the coat. In the water, excessive coat, especially soft coat, will absorb a considerable amount of water, making it more work for the dog to swim. The dog will tire much more easily as a result of dragging all that extra weight around.

The standard specifies "The natural appearance of coat or outline should not be altered by cutting or clipping, other than the trimming of the feet and neatening of stray hairs". Excessive grooming often creates an incorrect "open" coat rather than the correct, protective coat which sheds debris and water.

### Gait

The Golden should be moved on a **loose leash** at a moderate speed and exhibit a smooth, free, powerful, well-coordinated gait with a tendency



to converge (both front and rear) as speed increases. The head should not be held high or pulled up on a tight lead. In order to maintain kinetic balance, the Golden will lower its head and thus allow for easier reach in front and more efficient movement. The backline should remain level and the tail carriage should be level or with some upward curve, but never up over the back or between the legs. Current movement problems in the breed include short, choppy strides, overdone reach and drive, where the feet are lifted too high off the ground for efficient ground-covering motion, a lack of convergence, especially in the front, all of which can result in an incorrect roaching over the loin or an undesirable bounce in the topline.

## **Temperament**

Eager, alert, self-confident, friendly, reliable, trustworthy. The temperament of the Golden Retriever is renowned. There should be no tolerance for any display of hostility or aggressiveness towards other dogs or people or any undue timidity or nervousness. Goldens should not always be “turned on” in the ring. They should be relaxed and accepting of what is going on around them, not constantly looking for bait or exhibiting excitable behavior.

## **Presentation**

The Golden Retriever should be presented as a natural, athletic, hunting dog. Excessive baiting, stringing up the neck and front by the collar or by a tight leash when moving should not be tolerated by judges. Coats should lie flat as a water-proof jacket and not be overly prepared through the use of products or excessive fluffing with blow dryers. Any evidence of alteration of the coat, which does not allow the judge to access its correct texture, should be severely penalized, as should trimming or scissoring of the coat beyond the allowances made in the standard for neatening ears and feet. Any evidence of alteration of the natural color of the coat or nose should be dealt with according to AKC regulations concerning the use of foreign substances.

Primarily a hunting dog .....

Compiled by the Golden Retriever Club of America Judges' Education Committee.



## Breed Character and Temperament

### Temperament

*Friendly, reliable, and trustworthy. Quarrelsomeness or hostility toward other dogs or people in normal situations, or an unwarranted show of timidity or nervousness, is not in keeping with Golden Retriever character. Such actions should be penalized according to their significance.*

**Comment:** Proper temperament is absolutely essential, and one of the hallmarks of the breed. Expression should be indicative of intelligence, adaptability, and nobility. Under General Appearance, the Golden's personality is described as "eager, alert and self-confident". This responsiveness and high level of trainability make it the versatile dog it is today, whether family companion, hunting dog, service dog or competition dog in conformation, obedience, rally, agility, tracking or in the field. In the ring, the Golden must demonstrate qualities such as calm awareness, acceptance, and readiness to comply with the handler's wishes along with compatibility and tolerance of other dogs.



While many qualities of temperament cannot be assessed in the ring, the AKC and the breed standard are quite firm on the matter of certain actions warranting penalty. Dogs which attack must be disqualified; dogs threatening any person are to be sent from the ring forthwith; and proper notation made in the judge's book. Dogs which attack another dog should also be excused. Dogs which evidence unwarranted hostility or aggressiveness towards other dogs must be penalized, even to the extent of being sent out; they should not usually receive any award, and certainly not championship points. There should be zero tolerance for this type of behavior in this breed.

While puppies and novices may be somewhat unsure in an unfamiliar situation, qualities such as excitability, nervousness, shyness, fearfulness, aggressiveness in the sense of hostility, or senseless hyperactivity are all definitely undesirable. The judge must be encouraged to leave unplaced, to excuse from the ring or even to disqualify under the AKC regulations, any Golden Retrievers which demonstrate serious faults of temperament.



The Golden Retriever is beloved as a family companion largely due to its friendly, trustworthy and tolerant nature. Temperament must always be a foremost consideration in this breed.



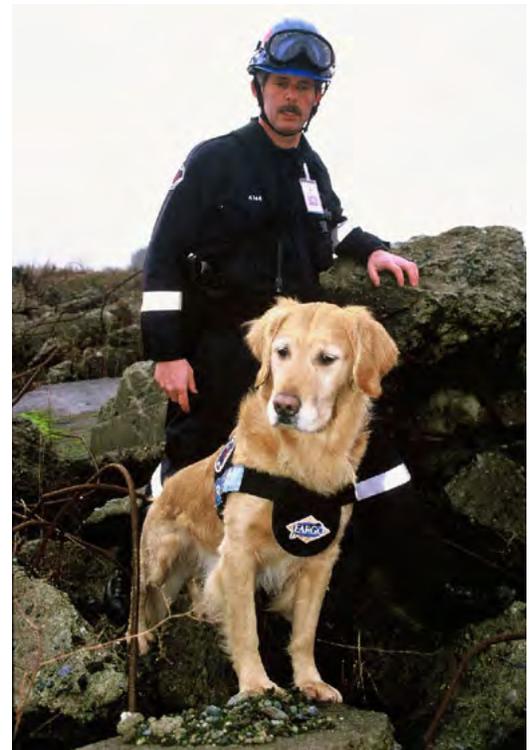
## Function and Purpose

The requirements of the breed standard regarding size, structure, coat and temperament are dictated by the demands made on retrievers in the field. The Golden Retriever was developed in Scotland and England in the late 19th Century as a practical dog to be used in retrieving shot game such as upland game birds, waterfowl, and, on occasion, small game such as hare. As a gentleman's gun-dog developed for the British style of organized shooting, qualities of steadiness, intelligence, trainability, and proper temperament were highly valued. Stamina, strength and athleticism, along with a practical, protective coat, were essential for the terrain and climate in which the dogs were used. In early years the dogs were also sometimes used in tracking wounded deer. Later, the Golden and other retriever breeds were also used to find and flush upland game birds for the gun in the manner of a spaniel, in addition to their retrieving duties.



The breed's normal canine structure along with moderate size and substance, has proven the Golden Retriever adaptable for its original function as a hunting companion in many varying areas of the world, from the craggy mountains and broad moors and lakes of their homeland, to the farmlands and prairies, the bays and marshes of North America.

One must always keep in mind that even though any individual dog may not actually be used for such work in our modern world, it should demonstrate in the show ring or in the home all the qualities useful for work as a retriever, and the characteristics that distinguish the dog as a **Golden Retriever**. These qualities and characteristics also fit it for other types of work, such as service dog for the handicapped, guide dog for the blind, tracking/search dog, and other scenting specialists, as well as being intelligent, trainable, and sociable companions. The versatility of the breed is seen in their success in many areas of competition, from the show ring to obedience, agility, rally, tracking, hunt tests, and field trials. Golden Retrievers include a number of Dual Champions and even a Triple Champion among their ranks.





**Stamina**

**Strength**

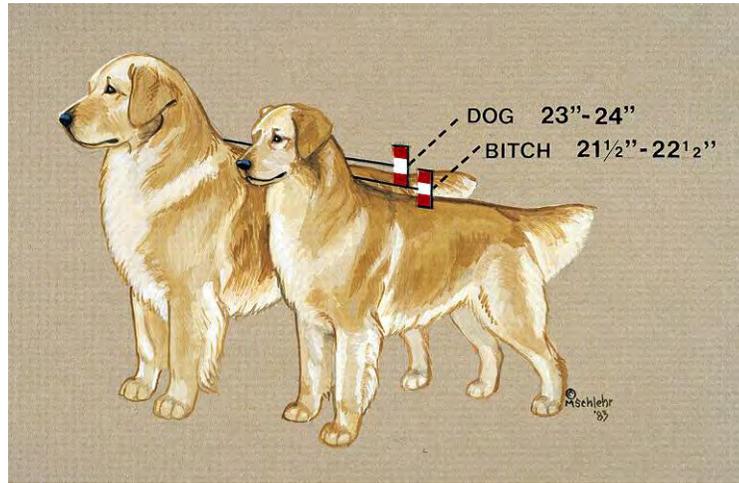
**Athleticism**

**Agility**



## Size, Proportion, Substance:

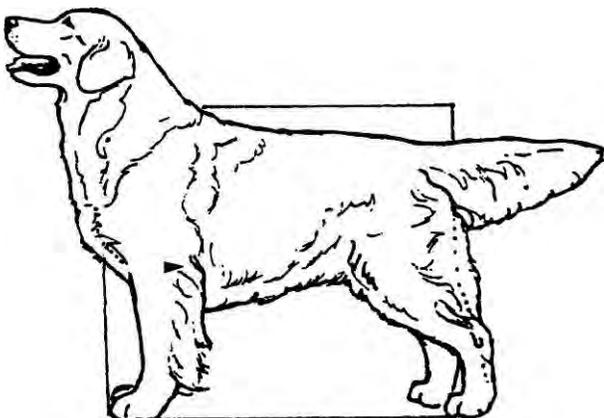
*Males 23-24 inches in height at withers; females 21 ½ - 22 ½ inches. Dogs up to one inch above or below standard size should be proportionately penalized. Deviation in height of more than one inch from the standard shall disqualify.*



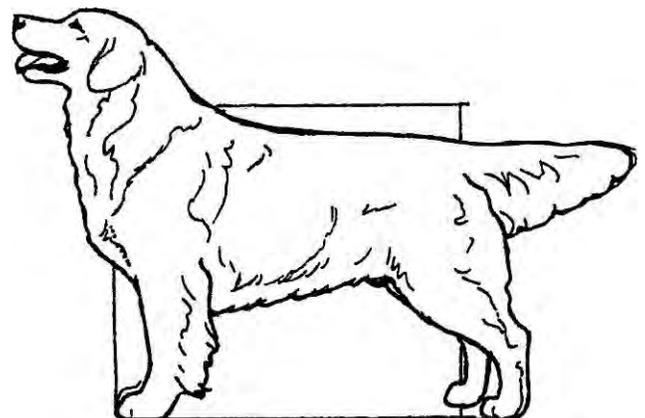
*Length from breastbone to point of buttocks slightly greater than height at withers in ratio of 12: 11. Weight for dogs 65-75 pounds; bitches, 55-65 pounds.*

**Comment:** A retriever must be strong and large enough to perform effectively, yet small enough to be practical in boat or blind, and easily transportable. Moderation in build contributes to endurance for long hours of work. The Standard allows a range adequate for all intended uses and functions of the breed. Cloddiness and massiveness detract from the agility and suppleness needed, as well as from endurance, and are just as undesirable as delicacy or over-refinement. The overall proportions are **slightly** longer than tall. Either a leggy appearance or a short leg/long body is incorrect. The distance from withers to elbow and elbow to ground should be approximately equal.

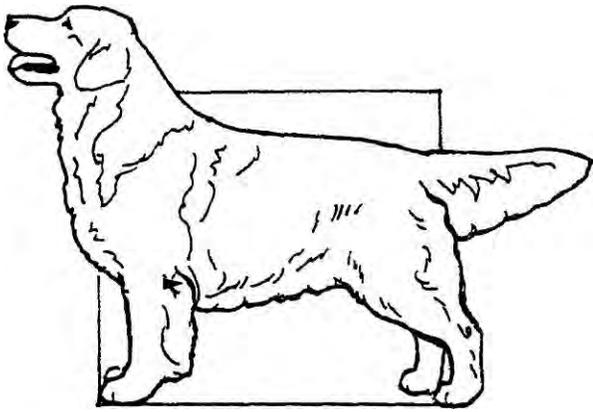
Keep in mind that even though the Standard allows a variance of one inch beyond the ideal size range, that dogs and bitches outside the ideal are less desirable even if "measuring in" and dogs at the limits are to be penalized proportionately.



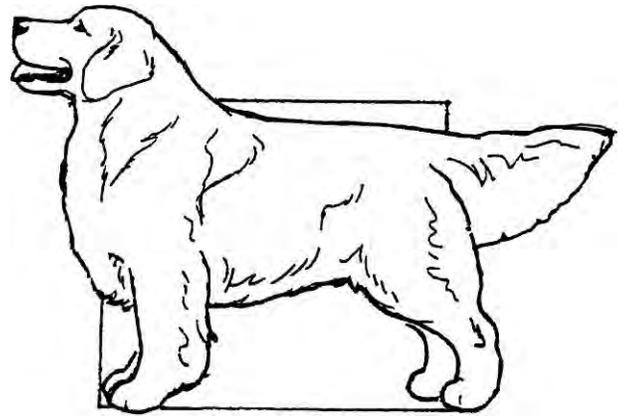
**Proper proportions**



**Long bodied**

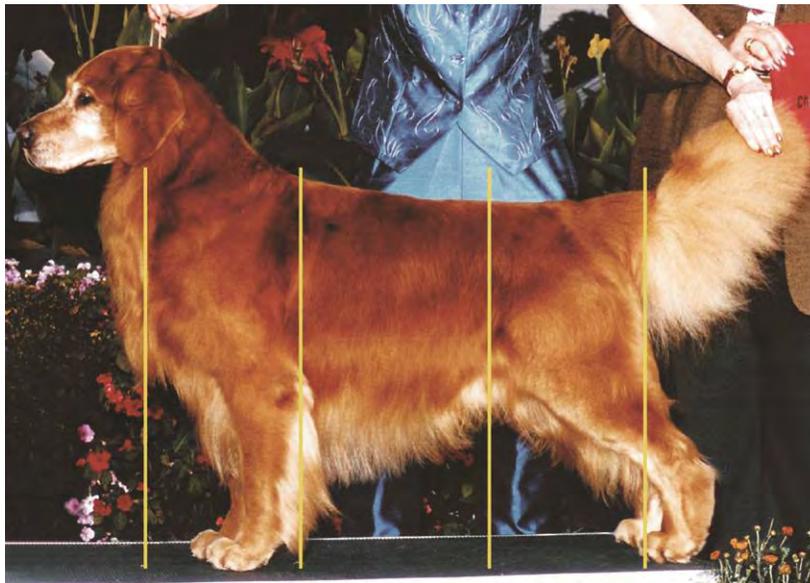


**Short legged**



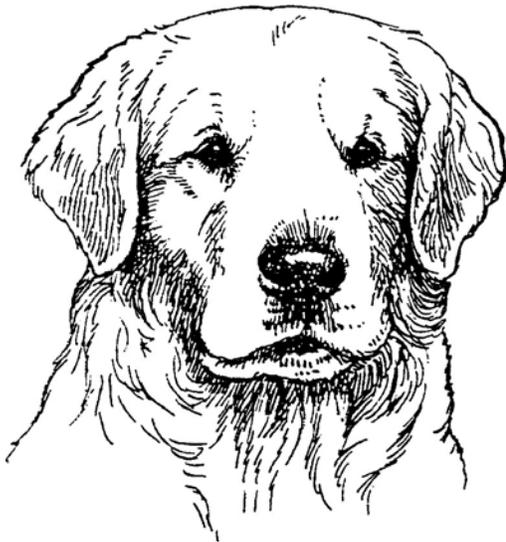
**Overdone, cloddy**

A properly constructed, proportioned and angulated dog will divide nearly into "thirds" - one third front assembly, one third middle-piece, one third rear assembly.



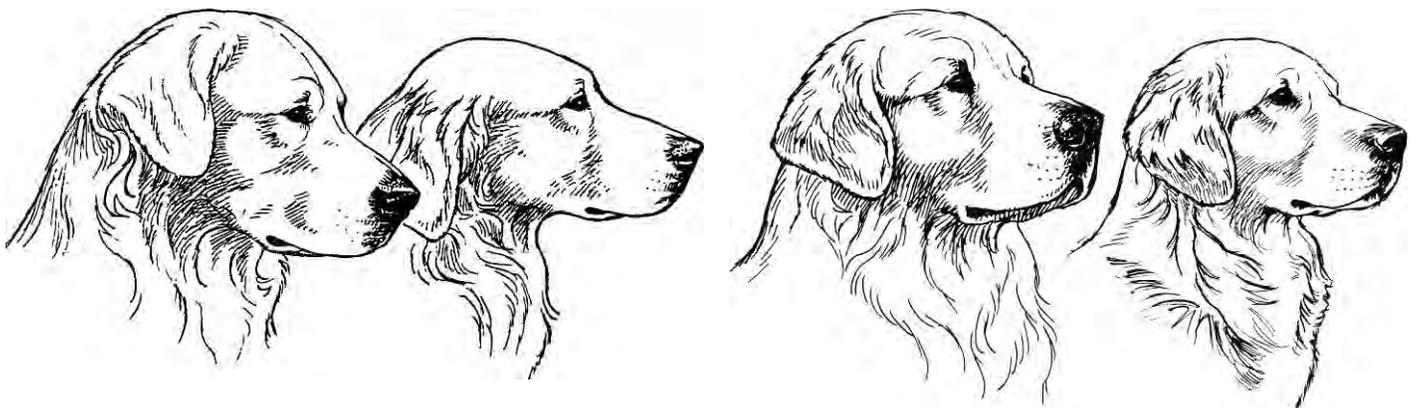
## Head

*Broad in skull, slightly arched laterally and longitudinally without prominence of frontal bones (forehead) or occipital bones. Stop well defined but not abrupt. Foreface deep and wide, nearly as long as skull. Muzzle straight in profile, blending smoothly and strongly into skull; when viewed in profile or from above, slightly deeper and wider at stop than at tip. No heaviness in flews. Removal of whiskers is permitted but not preferred.*



**Comment:** The Golden's head, clean-cut, strongly made but without exaggeration, reflects the sturdiness, balance, workmanlike qualities, and the intelligent, kindly, responsive nature typical of the true Golden. As the carrying of game is a prime function of the retriever, proper construction of muzzle and skull is imperative, as is musculature of the neck and head. For ease in scenting and breathing, breadth and depth of foreface and skull, and large open nostrils allow free passage of air. Clean lips (no flews) are less likely to collect feathers, and allow a more efficient pick-up. Weak or receding under jaw is undesirable.

The head should be examined with the ears in a relaxed position. Alert ears can be considered more when assessing the Golden's expression but a Golden should not be expected to constantly "show ears". Please note that removal of whiskers is optional and not preferred in a hunting breed.



Gender should be evident in the appearance of the head. The nasal plane should be straight and nearly parallel with the skull.

**Eyes** friendly and intelligent in expression, medium large with dark, close fitting rims, set well apart and reasonably deep in sockets. Color preferably dark brown; medium brown acceptable. Slant eyes and narrow, triangular eyes detract from correct expression and are to be faulted. No white or haw visible when looking straight ahead Dogs showing evidence of functional abnormality of eyelids or eyelashes (such as, but not limited to, trichiasis, entropion, ectropion, or distichiasis) are to be excused from the ring.



**Comment:** Retrievers, which need to mark the fall of game as well as be observant of their handler and their surroundings, need eyes set for both frontal and peripheral vision. Close-fitting eyelids are less likely to collect field debris, and offer best protection to the eyes. Eye problems of any sort are detrimental to the well-being of the dog. Round, spaniel-type eyes are more subject to injury, and often give a weak, vacuous expression. Too-small or deeply set eyes are also undesirable. While the standard does not specify an eye shape, it should be oval or similar to an almond in the shell.



**Good eye   Slanted, triangular   Large, round**

**Ears** rather short with front edge attached well behind and just above the eye and falling close to cheek. When pulled forward, tip of ear should just cover the eye. Low, hound-like ear set to be faulted.

**Comment:** A working retriever needs the ear canals protected from water, wind, and field debris by an ear flap that covers and protects the ear canal, is cleanly set, and somewhat mobile in order to focus hearing on the handler's commands at a distance. A low-set ear more easily admits water when swimming. Properly set and carried ears contribute greatly to the Golden's expression, but it is not necessary for the Golden to "show ears" more than very briefly in order to determine whether the ears are properly carried at attention, with the inner edge of the flap close to the head. Large, heavy ears are objectionable. Ears that are held tightly back may be indicative of anxiety or nervousness.



**Ear too large   Lowset, heavy   Too small; flyaway**

*Nose black or brownish black, though fading to a lighter shade in cold weather not serious. Pink nose or one seriously lacking in pigmentation to be faulted.*

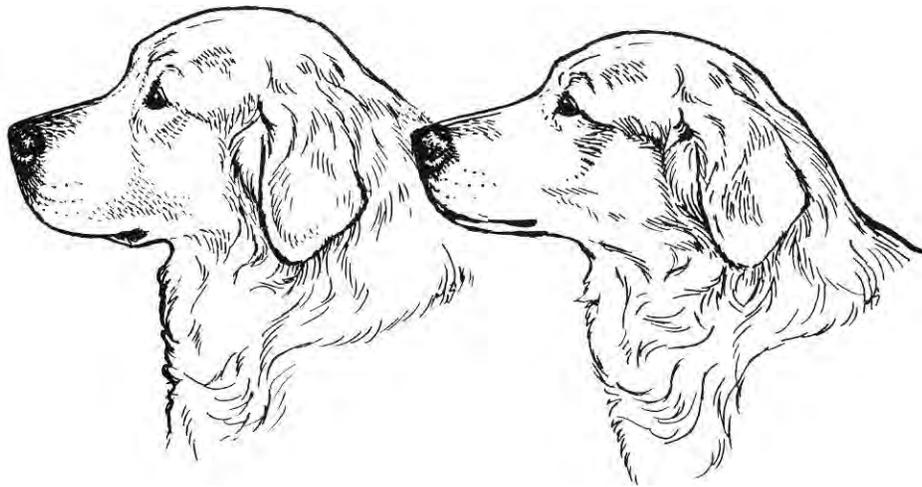
**Comment:** Large, well-opened nostrils are desired for easy air passage. Color should indicate basically black skin pigment, even if faded (as often happens in winter). Liver is undesirable: pink or light brown indicate serious lack of pigmentation, subject to damage from sunlight as well as being esthetically unattractive.

### Good Male Heads and Expression



### Good Female Heads and Expression





The standard allows for variation but breed function must always be taken into consideration as to the acceptable degree of variation.



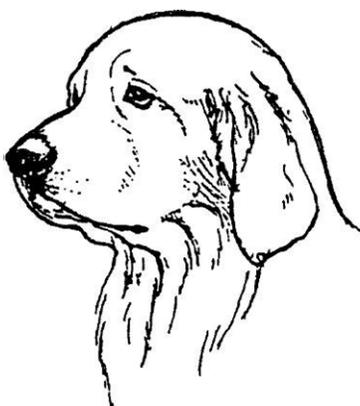
Slanted eyes, big ears,  
weak under the eyes



Flying ears, cheeky,  
weak conical muzzle



No stop, weak underjaw,  
pointed nose, poor ears



Loose eyes, heavy flews,  
roman nose, hound ears



Overdone; domed skull with  
wrinkles, stop too pronounced,



Plain, common head,  
lacks quality

## Dentition

**Teeth:** *scissors bite, in which the outer side of the lower incisors touches the inner side of the upper incisors. Undershot or overshot bite is a disqualification. Misalignment of teeth (irregular placement of incisors) or a level bite (incisors meet each other edge to edge) is undesirable, but not to be confused with undershot or overshot. Full dentition. Obvious gaps are serious faults.*

**Comment:** A retriever's mouth is essential to its function and purpose. A normal scissors bite and normal dentition is strongly desired. Minor irregularities or a level bite are less desirable but may be considered relatively minor, depending on the individual case, if proper function is not compromised. Broken or damaged teeth from field use are not faulty. While a single missing first premolar is a very minor fault, obvious gaps due to missing teeth, particularly the large premolars and molars, do detract :from optimum ability to pick up, hold, and carry and may weaken the jaw structure, hence must considered seriously. The judge must look at the entire mouth, not just the front teeth.

**Overshot and undershot bites are disqualifications.**

### DESIRABLE BITE

#### Scissors



### DISQUALIFYING FAULTS

#### Undershot

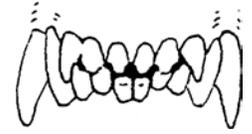


#### Overshot



### UNDESIRABLE

#### Even / Level

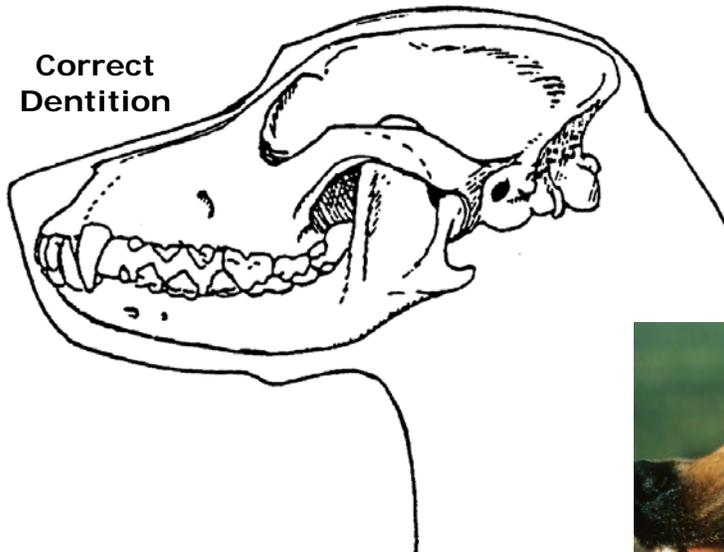


#### Misaligned lower incisors



#### Severe misalignment

#### Correct Dentition



Example of an obvious gap in lower jaw dentition, as compared to full dentition.

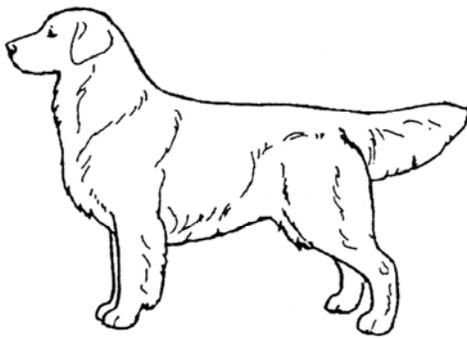


## Neck, Topline and Body

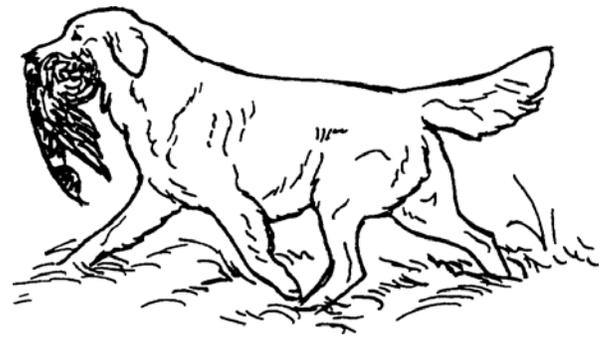
**Neck** medium long, merging gradually into well laid back shoulders, giving sturdy, muscular appearance. No throatiness.

*Back line strong and level from withers to slightly sloping croup, whether standing or moving. Sloping back line, roach or sway back, flat or steep croup to be faulted.*

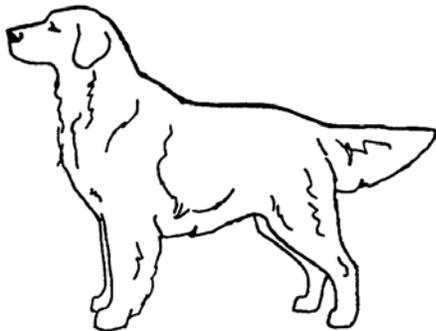
**Comment:** The neck is medium in length; long enough for ease in movement and in picking up game; short enough and quite muscular for carrying ability and strength. It runs well back and smoothly into the withers and the shoulders, indicating good mechanical support. A long, upright neck is not correct, no matter how "elegant". The strong, supple back is level in stance or in movement, without bouncing, whipping, or rolling. The topline should be level, whether standing or moving.



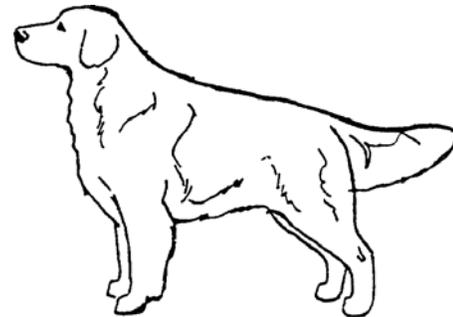
**Good topline**



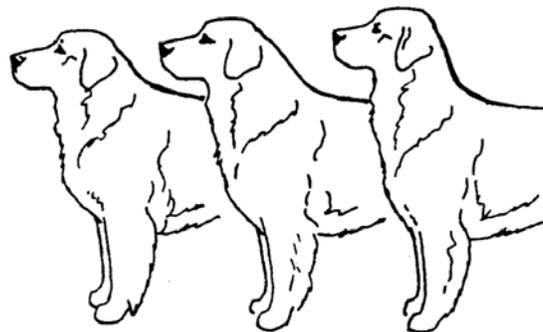
**Very good topline and tail carriage**



**Faulty  
Lumpy topline**



**Incorrect  
Sloping Topline**



**Short neck                      Good neck                      Weak, upright neck**

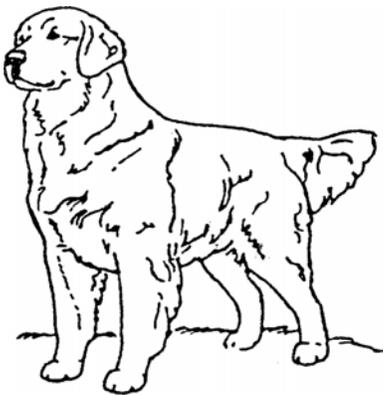


A strong muscular neck blending into a correct front assembly and supported by a strong backline with good spring of rib is critical to function. This goose weighs about 17 pounds and the dog must exert considerable effort to carry this weight while swimming and running to complete the retrieve. These examples show lovely blend of neck into shoulders with strong, level toplines.

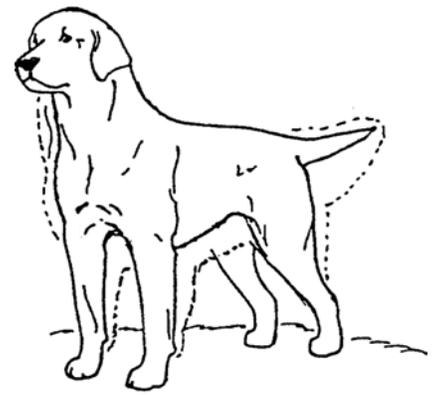
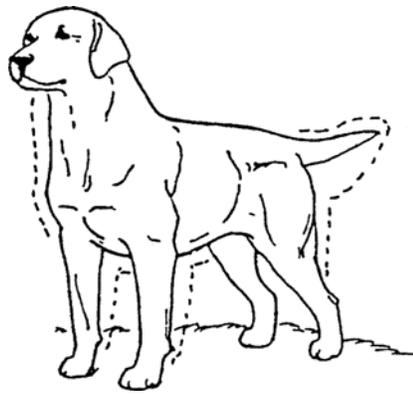


**Body** well balanced, short coupled, deep through the chest. Chest between forelegs at least as wide as a man's closed hand including thumb, with well developed forechest. Brisket extends to elbow. Ribs long and well sprung but not barrel shaped, extending well towards hindquarters. Loin short, muscular, wide and deep, with very little tuck-up. Slab-sidedness, narrow chest, lack of depth in brisket, excessive tuck-up to be faulted

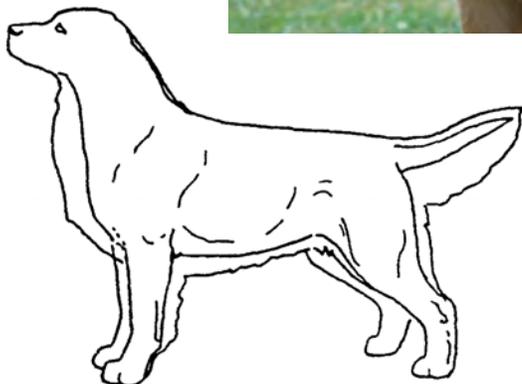
**Comment:** The Standard's demands as to essential body qualities are explicit, although too often ignored or overlooked. The ribcage is deep, long, and capacious (including the back ribs) as suits a swimming dog needing buoyancy as well as heart and lung room. A hand placed on the prosternum and run down the front of the chest and between the front legs should find a well-filled front not unlike the bow of a rowboat. Dense coat and heavy ruff can disguise various faults; examination with the hands is essential. Absence of forechest, slab-sides, narrowness, and lack of depth, are major faults and must be severely penalized.. Weak coupling (thin or narrow loin, "wasp-waisted" appearance, long weak or sagging loin) is also a *serious fault of both type and soundness*.



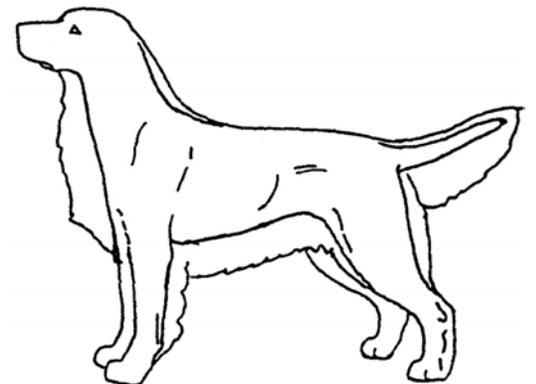
**Good body, chest, ribs**



**Lacking chest & ribs;  
weedy body**



**Coat may  
deceive the eye!**

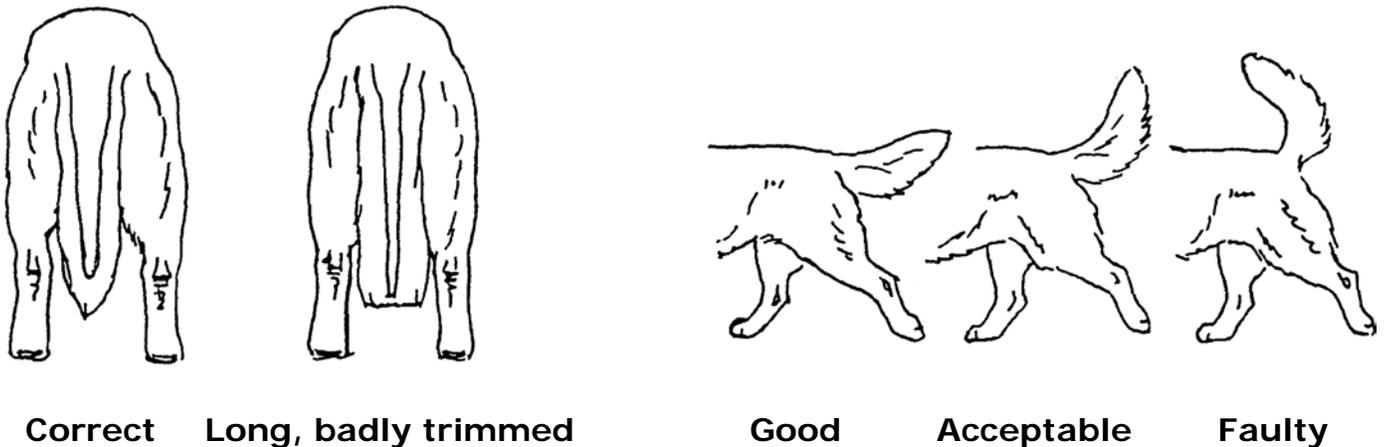


## Tail

**Tail:** well set on, thick and muscular at the base, following the natural line of the croup. Tail bones extend to, but not below, the point of hock. Carried with merry action, level or with some moderate upward curve; never curled over back nor between legs.

**Comment:** A proper tail and carriage are essential to complete the picture of a sound, typical Golden. The tail is a continuation of the spine and an essential part of the breed's function, not just an ornament. It is useful as an aid in balancing in movement, in swimming, and in expression of the dog's "body language". Its carriage can indicate emotion and temperament.

The tail should be thick and muscular at the base to act as a rudder when retrieving in the water and as a balancing aid on land. Correct length is important to function and the tail should never be curled or have a ring at the tip. When relaxed, the tail will hang straight down or with a slight upward curve. Ideal carriage when moving is level off the back or with a slight upward curve.



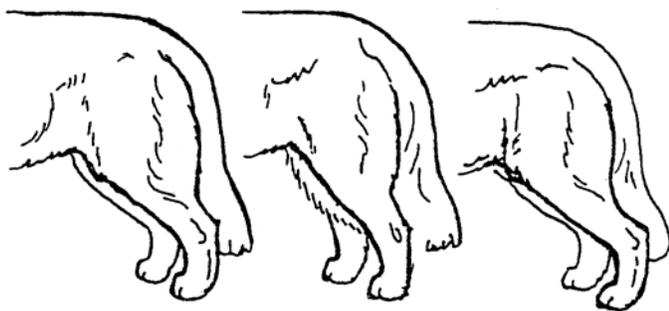
Ideal tail carriage when moving



## Hindquarters

*Broad and strongly muscled. Profile of croup slopes slightly; the pelvic bone slopes at a slightly greater angle (approximately 30 degrees from horizontal). In a natural stance, the femur joins the pelvis at approximately a 90 degree angle; stifles well bent; hocks well let down with short, strong rear pasterns. Feet as in front. Legs straight when viewed from rear. Cow hocks, spread hocks, and sickle hocks to be faulted*

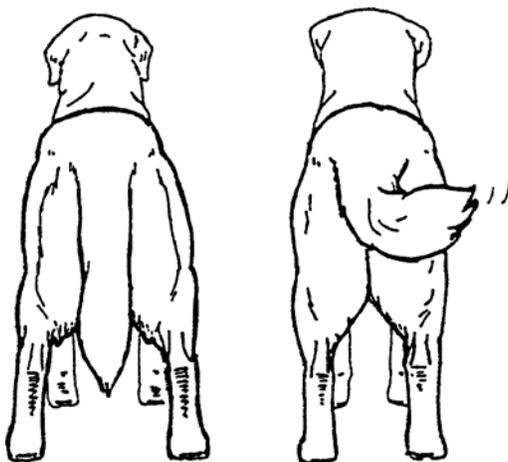
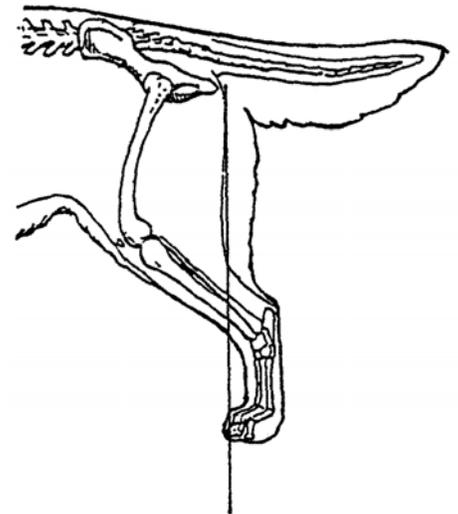
**Comment:** Ease and efficiency in all movement, not just a show-ring trot, are achieved by proper coordination, balance, and muscling of the skeletal structure. The desired angulation of the rear gives scope and freedom of movement, and optimum muscular development for the power necessary to this working dog. Extremes of angulation are not desirable, as this creates a lack of balance and a loss of effectiveness in function. In natural stance, a line dropped from the point of buttock should touch or intersect the rear toes. Well-developed firm musculature throughout is essential, and can scarcely be overdone.



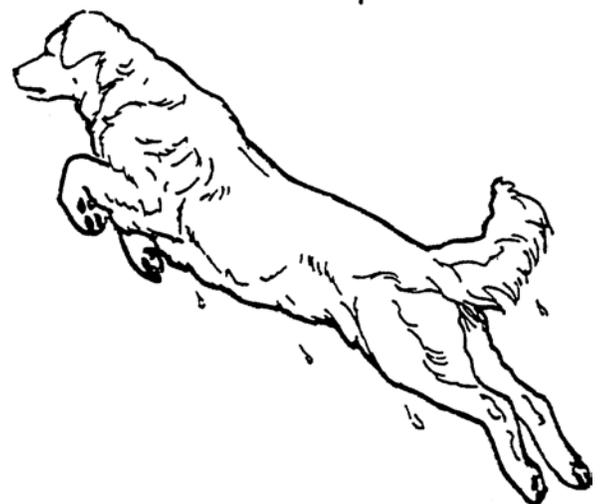
**Good**

**Lacks  
angulation**

**Over-  
angulated**



**Good**



**Hindquarters produce power**

These examples show good angulation and balance between front and rear allowing for good coordination and ease and efficiency of movement. Correct angulation will place the front legs well under the body close to the rib cage, with the point of the elbow in line with the tip of the scapula (shoulder blade). While the bones of the shoulder blade, upper arm and elbow joints overlap at the joints, the external appearance of the length of shoulder blade and the length of the upper arm should appear approximately equal. Correct layback of shoulder will also contribute to the appearance of correct length and set of the moderately long and muscular neck.



The rear should not be over-angulated with excessive length of the lower thigh which would place the toes well behind the perpendicular line drawn down from the pin bone (ischial tuberosity). There should be the appearance of good width and muscling across the thigh.



When the major components of the forequarters and hindquarters are correct and balanced, dog will be able to open its angles wide, to move with strides of equal length and maximum efficiency.



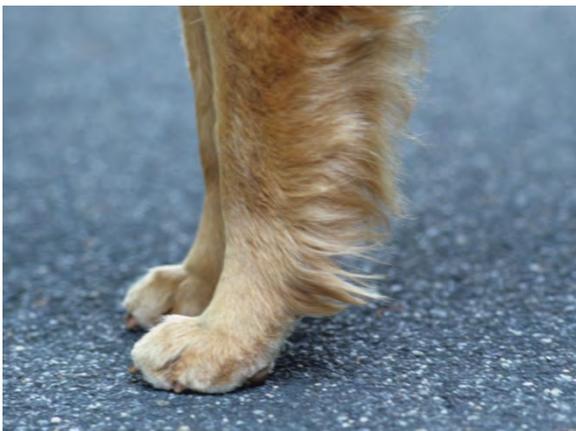
## Feet

**Feet:** *medium size, round, compact, and well knuckled, with thick pads. Excess hair may be trimmed to show natural size and contour. Splayed or hare feet to be faulted*

Comment: Feet are essential to the working retriever. They must be large enough and strong for traction and weight bearing, showing sturdy, tightly-held toes, durable thick pads, and useful nails that help grip on uneven terrain. Tiny feet with poorly developed side toes, thin flat feet, or soft, splayed feet are very undesirable. While clever trimming may improve the appearance of poor feet, the judge is well advised to examine with more than a glance. Pasterns should slope enough for shock absorption and nails should be long enough to aid the dog in gripping.



Correct feet



Good feet



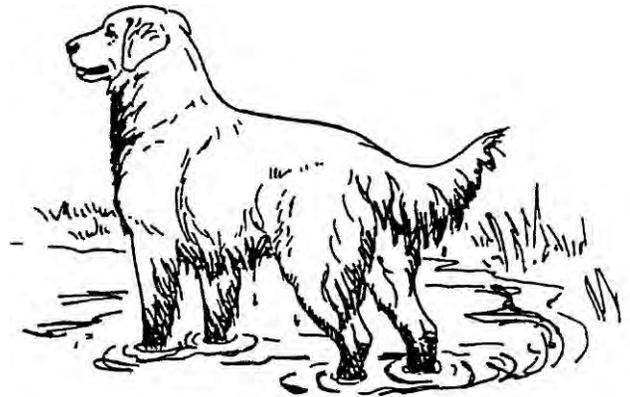
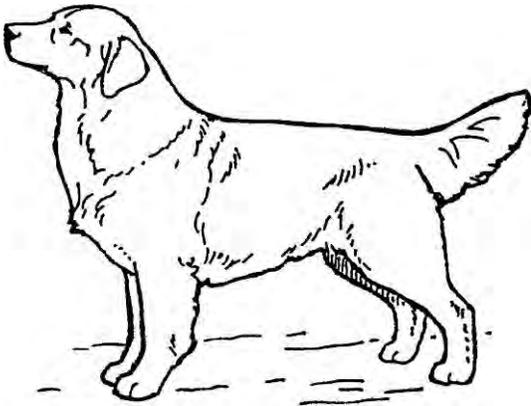
Weak, thin feet, toeing out

## Coat

*Dense and water-repellent with good undercoat. Outer coat firm and resilient, neither coarse nor silky, lying close to body; may be straight or wavy. Untrimmed natural ruff; moderate feathering on back of forelegs and on underbody; heavier feathering on front of neck, back of thighs and underside of tail. Coat on head, paws, and front of legs is short and even. Excessive length, open coats, and limp, soft coats are very undesirable. Feet may be trimmed and stray hairs neatened, but the natural appearance of coat or outline should not be altered by cutting or clipping.*

**Comment:** Practicality and serviceability are of first consideration: this includes resistance to cold and moisture, and protection from field hazards, without interfering with activity and without carrying excess water, mud, burrs, and debris. Proper texture and weather-resistant qualities also mean a coat that is largely self-cleaning and easily maintained. Normal shedding and seasonal cycles are not faulty in an otherwise correct coat.

In a proper coat the topcoat is firm in texture, neither silky nor wiry, lying so as to follow the contours of the body surface, and never groomed to stand off from the body or legs. Feathering forms a "drip edge" that helps to channel water away from the body, and protects legs, chest, neck, tail and underbody from harsh vegetation, ice, and other hazards.



The topcoat may be straight or wavy **without preference**. A coat of proper texture, lying in flat waves, is absolutely not to be penalized. Some "break" at the ruff, on the shoulders, or on hips is typical and acceptable. A curly coat forming ringlets, or a stand-off "open" coat, is faulty.

The undercoat is dense, with excellent insulating qualities. The undercoat "fills out" the topcoat, creating insulating airspace, and the tips of the longer hairs of the topcoat do not stand off but lie so as to follow the general contours of the body and present a weather-resistant surface rather in the same way as a bird's feathers do.

The amount and length of coat are secondary to the correct texture and fit of the coat. Extremely objectionable are: fluffy, soft, absorbent coats; limp silky coats; open coats lacking undercoat; hair which stands off from the body or legs like a Chow Chow (whether naturally or by grooming); or excessive length of coat or feathering which would prove impractical for field and water work.



A Golden Retriever can be a wet partner in the field! Correct coat texture with good undercoat will enable the dog to stay dry next to the skin, repel debris and be damp dry very quickly.



Acceptable wavy coat showing good texture



This female has an excellent coat with moderate wave and feathering



A workman-like dog with a moderate, close-fitting, resilient coat

## Color

*Rich, lustrous golden of various shades. Feathering may be lighter than rest of coat. With the exception of graying or whitening of face or body due to age, any white marking, other than a few white hairs on the chest, should be penalized according to its extent. Allowable light shadings are not to be confused with white markings. Predominant body color which is either extremely pale or extremely dark is undesirable. Some latitude should be given to the light puppy whose coloring shows promise of deepening with maturity. Any noticeable area of black or other off-color hair is a serious fault.*

**Comment:** Color is essential in defining the breed as "Golden". The Standard includes a range, from pale gold through deep reddish gold, as the predominant body color. "Golden" requires a brilliance of hue that is definitely yellow or reddish-yellow, not dull tan, brown, or flat cream. Lighter shadings on the underbody, "pants" and tail, in varying degrees, are quite typical and acceptable. White markings on head or toes, or a noticeable patch of white on the chest are not desirable (but are of lesser importance than structural and temperamental characteristics).



Acceptable range of color in the Golden Retriever

Dogs whose body color is predominantly cream or off-white, or dark setter-red, are not truly "golden" and should be judged accordingly.



Graying or whitening due to age **is not** to be penalized.

The light-coated puppy which shows proper color on the ears will generally be that shade at maturity and so may be given some latitude in judging.



Black shadings or spots, or areas of other off-color, while having no effect on function or performance, are anomalies that are to be considered a serious fault in the show ring.



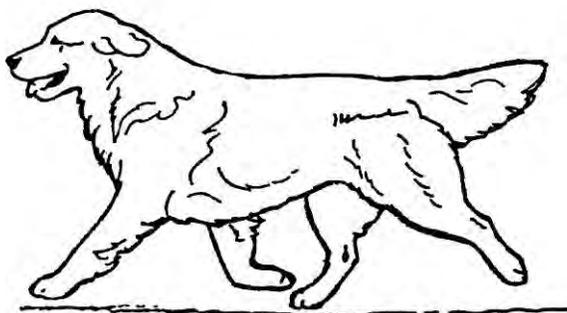
Two dogs showing the wide range of color within the breed. While extremes of color are undesirable, color is only one of many considerations when judging the Golden Retriever. The purpose of the breed, the importance of sound structure and movement, correct size and proportion, head type, body development, coat texture and overall condition are all significant considerations in assessing this breed.

## Gait

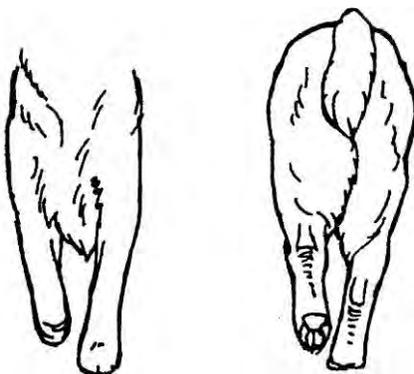
*When trotting, gait is free, smooth, powerful and well coordinated, showing good reach. Viewed from any position, legs turn neither in nor out, nor do feet cross or interfere with each other. As speed increases, feet tend to converge toward center line of balance. It is recommended that dogs be shown on a loose lead to reflect true gait.*

**Comment:** As in other qualities, extremes in gait are not desired. The Golden should demonstrate a balanced level trot on a **loose lead**, maintaining a strong, level, "working back", freedom and ease of movement, coordination and good foot timing. The dog should be allowed to carry his head forward in a natural manner. The retriever is not a trotting specialist and exaggerated "reach and drive" are not called for. The retriever's working gaits include canter, gallop and walk (as well as swimming), with the ability to cover all sorts of terrain. Dogs should be moved at a moderate speed which best demonstrates the dog's efficiency of movement, without excessive speed, a tight lead or any interference by the handler

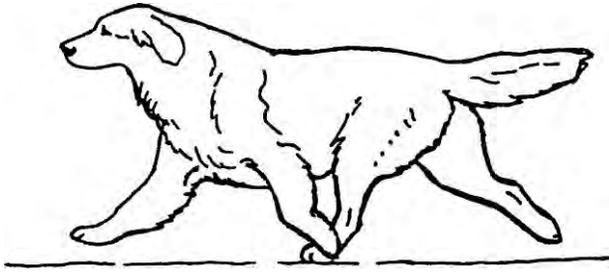
**Good: balanced, coordinated**



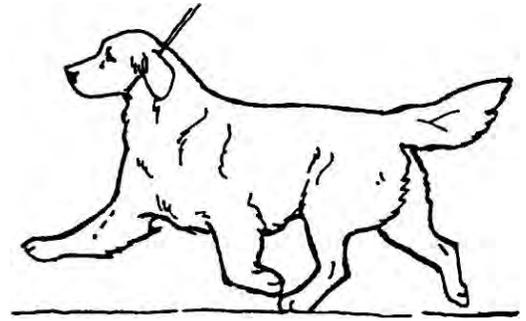
Correct coming and going, showing straight columns of support with proper convergence



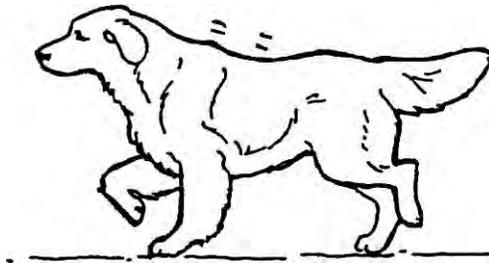
**Movement Faults:**



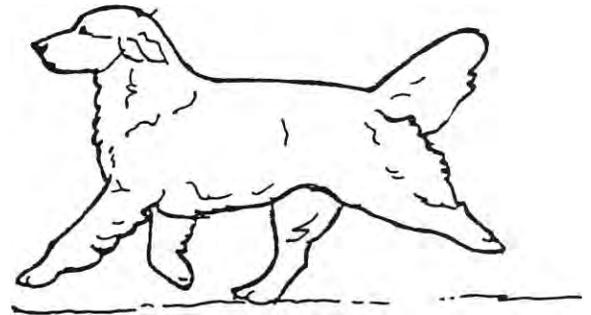
**Overreaching, overextended**



**Tight lead; padding; not coordinated**



**Loose; bouncing topline**



**Poor foot-timing, unbalanced, overextended in rear**

## Presentation and Grooming

The breed standard clearly states that the Golden Retriever should be presented in a natural manner in keeping with the breed's purpose.

- *Primarily a hunting dog, he should be shown in hard working condition.*
- *Outer coat firm and resilient, neither coarse nor silky, lying close to body; may be straight or wavy. Untrimmed natural ruff; ...*
- *Feet may be trimmed and stray hairs neatened, but the natural appearance of coat or outline should not be altered by cutting or clipping.*

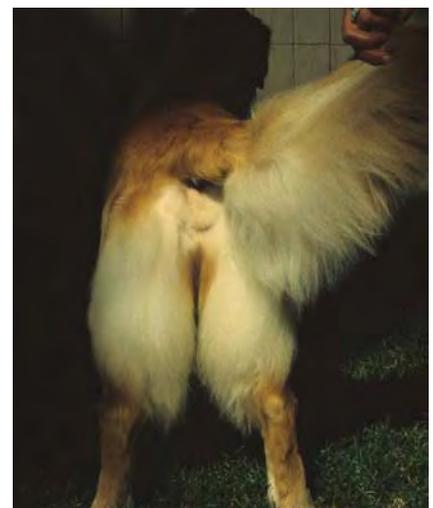
Please keep in mind that the Golden Retriever is first a functional sporting dog before it becomes a show dog. Basic structure, suitability for purpose, and breed character are essentials that must never be overlooked in favor of superficial prettiness and mere showmanship.

**Grooming:** The Golden with an ideal coat, properly maintained, will require little more than the trimming of stray hairs. The dog should be clean and well brushed. In practice, the long hair on the feet is scissored to show the natural size and shape of the feet, and it is allowable to *discreetly* neatened unruly or bunchy areas of coat while maintaining a natural appearance. The Golden's coat should **never** appear to have been clipped, stripped, cut or stylized. The Golden is neither setter nor spaniel, and is not to be trimmed closely under the throat or around the anus or tail base. Ear flaps may be neatened but should maintain a natural appearance without evidence of severe scissoring. The use of clippers on the face, feet, ears, or anywhere else on a Golden for show preparation is completely improper.

The trimming of whiskers is optional, and neither the presence nor the absence of whiskers is to be faulted. The natural, untrimmed ruff (especially pronounced in males) is not to be faulted, but obvious shaping or cutting should be faulted.



Excessive trimming affects the expression and soft natural appearance of the breed, as seen in these two examples. The one on the left is neatly trimmed and the other is overdone.



The base of the tail and vent area of this Golden are inappropriately trimmed.

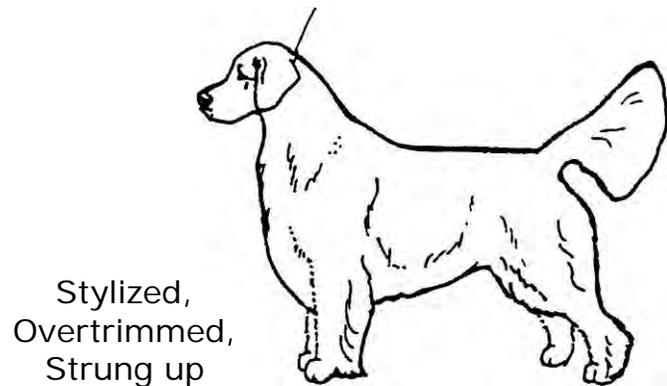
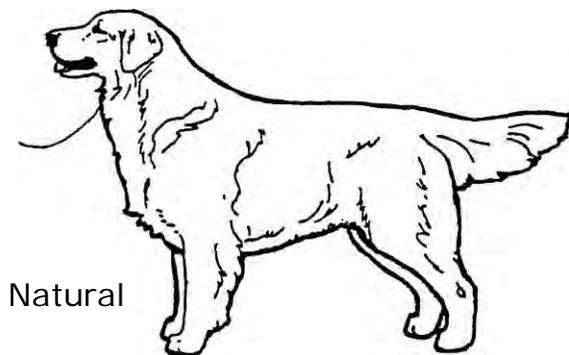
The use of mousse, styling gels, lacquer, powder, or any other foreign substance evidenced in the coat in the show ring is grounds for excusal under AKC dog show rules. Use of any type of coloring material is completely unacceptable. The practice of back-combing or doctoring the coat on legs or body to "build substance" or make the coat stand off is incorrect and must be penalized, as should blow drying the coat into an incorrect open coat.

One must be able to properly assess the correct coat texture and ensure that it will act as a protective, waterproof jacket, keeping the dog dry near the skin, as seen in the photo below.



**Presentation:** A working retriever should be expected to easily handle any type of footing and gaiting pattern normally encountered in the show ring, and do so without the "assistance" of a continually tight lead. If the true gait of the dog is to be judged, the dog must be observed moving for some distance on a **loose lead**. It is necessary and useful to observe the dog "coming and going", and it is also essential to see the dog moving at a working trot from the side. This is a moderate gait and excessive speed should not be tolerated.

Standing, the dog may be positioned by the handler for the judge's examination. The dog should stand squarely without being stretched or strung up. Head and tail should not be positioned or held unnaturally. The dog should also be observed at some time walked into a natural stance without being touched by the handler. If bait (food or toy) is used, it should never interfere with another dog. The handler should be prepared to show the dog's bite, and the complete dentition; or the judge may lift the dog's lips to look at the teeth.



## How to Measure Correctly

The AKC standard for the Golden Retriever states: Males 23-24 inches in height at withers; females 21 1/2-22 1/2 inches. Dogs up to one inch above or below standard size should be proportionately penalized. Deviation in height of more than one inch from the standard shall disqualify.

There is NO exemption from the size requirements for puppies.

We encourage judges to measure any Golden Retriever in competition whose size creates uncertainty, whether at the upper or lower limit of the allowable size range. Dogs that are outside of the desirable size range but within the disqualification limits are to be proportionately penalized.

To measure a dog that appears to be **below the lower limit** of the size requirements of the standard, the wicket should be set at 22 inches for males or 20 1/2 inches for females. Check both sides of the wicket with a measuring tape to ensure it is set correctly and verify this with the exhibitor.

The dog must be set up standing squarely in a natural position on a flat surface. The dog's head should be held in a comfortable and natural position, not dropped down or held up high by the collar. The hair can be parted if necessary to get an accurate measurement at the highest point of the withers.

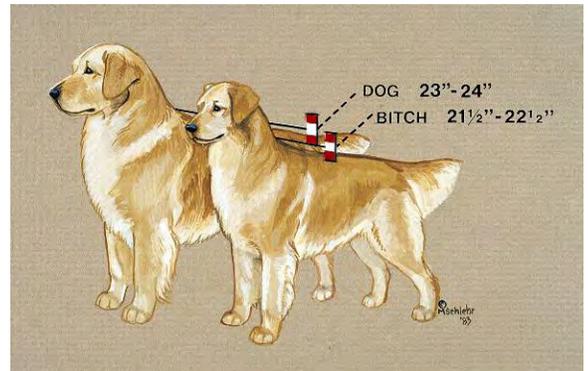


Bring the wicket over the back of the dog to the highest point of the withers, which you have marked with your fingers. If the dog is under the standard the legs of the wicket will touch the ground on both sides. If the dog is within the standard, the legs of the wicket will not touch the ground.

To measure a dog that appears to be **above the upper limit** allowed by the breed standard, set the wicket at 25 inches for males or 23 1/2 inches for females.

Check both sides of the wicket with a measuring tape to ensure it is correct and verify this with the exhibitor.

The dog must be set up in a natural position on a flat surface. Bring the wicket over the back of the dog to the withers, which you have marked with your fingers. If the dog is over the standard, the legs of the wicket will not touch the ground on both sides. If the dog is within the standard, the legs of the wicket will touch the ground.



## In Ring Hands-On Examination

The Golden Retriever is a coated breed and structure must be verified by a thorough, hands-on examination.

The AKC standard states: Over-all appearance, balance, gait and purpose to be given more emphasis than any of his component parts. To gain an overall impression of each dog, begin your initial assessment by viewing the dog standing. This gives the opportunity to consider size, correct proportion in the head (foreface nearly as long as skull), length of neck, level topline, body depth, correct body proportions of height to length, (a ratio of 11:12 measured from withers to ground and from breastbone to buttocks) and length of leg.

Approaching from the front, view the head and expression, width of chest, straightness of the front legs, amount of bone and check for round, compact feet.

Feel for breadth and slight arch of back skull and examine the head proportions. Check ear length (reaches to the inside corner of the same side eye) and set. Look for a dark eye, correctly shaped and placed. This is also a good time to check for dark pigment on the eye rims, nose and lips.



Examine the bite and dentition by gently lifting the lips in front, then on both sides of the mouth. The breed standard requires full dentition and prefers a scissors bite, with undershot or overshot being disqualifications. It is not necessary to open the mouth and count teeth but check for obvious gaps in the dentition.

Moving to the side, run your hand down the neck, feeling for arch and correct length, continuing to the withers. Check for correct layback and approximately equal bone lengths of scapula and humerus.

Run your hand down the front to feel for a well-developed forechest, correct width of chest and depth of brisket, any of which may be disguised by a full natural ruff, or by excessive trimming and sculpting.

Check that the elbows are well set back, close to the ribs and feel under the coat to ensure that the brisket extends to the elbows.



Check for correct spring of rib, level topline, correct length of loin, proper weight and condition.

Examine for correct bend of stifle, which can be disguised by excessive coat.

Examine tail set and tail length (to reach the hock joint). Check the inner thigh for muscling and condition.



Check that the rear legs are strong and straight and that the rear feet are round and compact.

Viewing the dog from the rear may also reveal additional detail about the fit of the blend of neck into shoulders, the fit of the elbows and the correct spring of rib.

Check for a firm, dense coat, lying close to the body and for good undercoat. The outer thigh area or along the back, just above the tail, are good places to check coat and undercoat.

Stand back and once again view the overall picture the dog presents and decide if the hands on confirms the correct structure and balance.