



HOUNDS

Toplines & Underlines

PART 3 • THE CONCLUSION

by Lisa Dubé Forman

In Part One of this article we discussed the importance of the greyhound and its genre breeds flexible, curvaceous lines as compared to the Ibizan Hound. Moreover, how one achieves such beautiful, greyhound-like topline. Part One's lesson was the elementary principle that this species propulsion systems require the greyhound shape (topline) as an essential component in conveyance. Further, without their unique shapes, including the fascinating Ibizan Hound, they'd be indistinguishable from other breeds entirely. In Part Two, we began our journey in the Middle and Greater Middle East with two desert breeds, the Saluki and Afghan Hound, then ventured into sub-Saharan Africa to review the all-purpose Basenji, finally turning our attention north to Scandinavia and its Norwegian Elkhound. As I mentioned, these breeds even today are vital contributors to their masters and their survival skills are dependent on their form, their topline. Consider that the Tazi, Babar, Laghar and Kosa (all regional names for Afghan Hounds depending on the Afghanistan province) still hunt meat, such as hare, mountain sheep and deer for the tribes.

On the African continent, the Basenji remains an indispensable part of life for many Bush and DR Congo Tribes as he is a hunting tool in their arsenal. Native Basenji are not pets or companions. These tribespeople live uncertain lives with arduous, dangerous, day-to-day struggles. If their Basenjies lacked typical shape and razor-like reflexes inhibiting performance, therefore failing in its purpose, the dog would be dead. It is as simple as that. Part Two's lesson was uncomplicated. These hounds we reviewed are essential to the native people's lives as crucial weapons. Now, I move on to Part Three to review three hounds and then conclude this topic.

Here we begin with our group's smallest hunting hound, the Dachshund, German for "Badger Dog." It is obvious the Dachshund has a distinctive build which makes him ideally suited for 'below-ground work' and 'beating the bushes.' What's more, they too need limberness, with a topline that is not utterly flat. Even this courageous, sometimes rash little hunter is required to have a powerful, short, slightly arched loin. Today though, what concerns many seasoned fanciers is the

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FIGURE 1 • DACHSHUND
PHOTO BY ANDRA O'CONNELL

commonplace trend of flat or worse, a perceptible depression over the loin. I speculate that when well-versed fanciers compare the breed's blueprint to many of today's specimens, there is an overwhelming feeling I think is best expressed by a famous movie line, "What we've got here is a failure to commu-



FIGURE 2 • DACHSHUND IN CONTRACTION PHASE
PHOTO BY ANDRA O'CONNELL

nicate." Why is this happening? If one looks in the *World Encyclopedia of Dogs* by Ferelith Hamilton, the illustration of the Dachshund skeleton clearly depicts the back in the straightest possible line to the short, very slightly arched loin. The illustrated skeleton does not sink or denote depression of any kind. On the contrary, the skeletal vertebral column rises ever so slightly in the lumbar (low back) region, which coupled with the hard, smooth muscling encapsulating and supporting the loin area, create this arch. I want to address a fallacy regarding skeletons, whether they may be on paper or reconstructed by a taxidermist or curators. I have heard this fallacy one or more

times and recently again during a wolfhound Powerpoint lecture I was presenting. A breed fancier retorted that skeletons could not be reliable because the skeletons arranged shapes or drawings were subjected to the whim of the arranger or artist. My response is twofold. Regarding the cited skeletal illustration, Mrs. Ferelith Hamilton's (later known as Somerfield) *World Encyclopedia of Dogs* volume is 600-plus pages replete with photographs and illustrations, and is accepted throughout the world as the authoritative example on dog breeds. Mrs. Somerfield's life history is impressive. Originally from terriers, she is a world-renowned dog breeder, enthusiast, published author and Editor of the U.K. Dog World News from 1967 to 1986. She is one of only 5 U.K. judges approved for Best of Group competitions for all ten groups of the Federation Cynologique Internationale (FCI) dog shows. As well as presiding over Crufts 1990 Best in Show, she is recognized as one of the world's dog authorities. How would she have benefited from modifying any skeletal illustrations, especially of the Dachshund? Second, to my knowledge, the dorsal and lumbar spine vertebral shapes do not allow for someone preparing the skeleton to reinvent the canine contours. The thoracic vertebrae usually referred as T1 (caudal to the first rib heads) and T13 to the last rib head, these include the differently shaped anticlinal vertebrae, and the lumbar vertebrae, L1-L7, unite with one another specifically allowing for intervertebral disk space. In other words, you can't make them fit or mold them differently with the intent to modify the resulting outline of the canine spinous process. This breed provides a different look at compulsory loin flexibility so I reached out to Mrs. Andra O'Connell, a fellow sighthound judge and longtime Dachshund and Afghan Hound fancier to comment on flat, inflexible topline. "The Dachshund needs a flexible loin in order to be able to move in a tunnel/den situation. They are supposed to be able to rest on their keel and still have free movement of the front legs to dig. The dirt is tossed under the body and then behind them. The breed does not have to have as much flexibility to run like a sighthound would, but that flexibility is essentially underground. Flexibility in the den is compromised with a totally flat topline." This is useful simplification that the topline and an arch of loin is important even in the smallest of our hunting hounds. The photographs illustrate an absolutely lovely male who honors its breed standard and the other, one of my favorite photos, demonstrates an anatomically correct Dachshund running. As you see, even this small hunting package can use its flexible topline on the run.

The Basset Hound is a trailing, agile, endurance hound. Twice as long as tall, this massive, long, low trailing hound is supposed to be agile and sturdy. He must have a strong trunk, as the trunk is the suspension bridge between the thoracic and pelvic limbs which convey the hound's structure for miles and miles. This cannot be done with a pinched waist, a flaccid loin. The croup junction, the pelvic limbs must be well-rounded and full as compared to equal width of the withers to achieve functional locomotion. After a period, any slackness in this hound's

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**FIGURE 3 • BASSET HOUND AT 2 YEARS OF AGE
PHOTO BY BETSY & SCOTT DEANS**

topline construction most likely will render him useless as his topline, his shape, is the component for conveyance. Mr. Leonard Skolnick, Basset Hound authority stated, "...His heavy structure requires excellent movement and the expected features of the movement are not far different from any other hunting dog built for endurance." This is particularly insightful because hounds are the oldest hunting breeds; almost all are designed for endurance, e.g. the Irish Wolfhound, and an incorrectly coupled hunting hound will simply not persevere. Some years past I spent time with Mrs. Betsy Deans, who with her husband Scott are both AKC Judges of the renowned Foxglen Basset Hounds with 28 years of breeding history. Mrs. Deans was extremely knowledgeable and practical in her discourse on the Basset, so in preparation for this article, I reached out to her to discuss disturbing trends in the basset shape today. The area of concern related to this article is the slightly convex loin area being observed instead of the basset blueprint of straight and level topline free from any tendency to sag. She and I discussed at length this perturbing issue in the loin area, pinched waists (top and underline) and I requested she contribute to this important conversation we've been having. Both Betsy and Scott teamed up and wrote a Basset Hound commentary that will aid aspiring basset judges but also serves as a wake-up call for current fanciers. Besides their teachings on topline and silhouette, I felt it equally important to share the other thoughts they included on the breed's welfare, lack of mentoring and the resulting damage caused by breed novices. "The standard states, 'The Basset Hound possesses those characteristics...to follow a trail over and through difficult terrain...a short-legged dog, heavier in bone, size considered, than any other breed of dog and while its movement is deliberate, it is in no sense clumsy...capable of great endurance in the field...' Webster's dictionary states the definition of agile as being 'able to move quickly and easily.' The topline is straight, level, and free from any tendency to sag or roach, which are faults.' The tail should be set in continuation of the spine. Checking the standards for the achondroplastic breeds the topline is described

with one or more of the following: straight, level, firm, strong, and long. A lack of level topline is a certain indication of an improperly balanced dog. You should evaluate the basset for balance, type, and soundness. 'Balance is the pleasing harmonious and well blending-in of an animal's parts and features, resulting in a final, composite effect of total symmetry' as defined by Harold Spira in his book, *Canine Terminology*. A basset can be balanced yet not correct. Some balanced hounds have a short, choppy stride resulting in an overworked, tired animal. They appear to go nowhere fast, extending neither front nor rear. Remember the basset is built for endurance and must be agile yet sturdy. View the silhouette for proportion. The head should be in proportion to the body. The neck is of length and well-arched. Forelegs are short, powerful, heavily boned with wrinkled skin. In order for the basset to have a proper wrap-around front, the forelegs should have equal crook and set close in directly under the deep chest. Paws are massive and equally inclined slightly outward. It is preferred the body be approximately 2:1 ratio length to height (at withers). Not stated in the standard, but also preferred, there should be 90 degree angles front and rear. The standard calls for well let-down stifles and short hocks. The author Mr. Harold Spira defined soundness to be the 'reference to construction, both physical and mental, that enables a dog to carry out duties for which it was originally designed.' In short, a sound dog will do his job with the least



**FIGURE 4 • SAME BASSET HOUND AT 10.5 YEARS IN GAIT
PHOTO BY SCOTT & BETSY DEANS**

amount of effort. A hands-on examination should confirm a prominent prosternum and a smooth shoulder assembly with front legs set close in and directly under the deepest part of the chest for support. Feel for an elongated, smooth, and well-sprung ribcage extending well back. The animal should be well let-down in rear with good muscle tone. Dogs with lack of muscle tone cannot function properly and endure in the field. Lateral movement is a determining factor whether the dog really uses all he possesses. The basset topline should remain level in movement. Refer to the photo of the same basset moving at age ten. A 'bouncing' topline is a waste of motion and energy which reduces endurance. Note whether the front and rear angulation is equal. The front reach should create a long stride

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and equal the rear drive. Dogs short in upper arm with poor angulation will have a short stride, however they may be balanced if the rear is also poorly angulated but, remember, the shoulder should be laid back so that the weight of the dog is properly supported allowing the dog to reach in front. The well angulated rear and short hocks allow drive for agility.

“Type is often confused with style in the basset. Breed type is the description of the basset as written in the official standard. There is no variation. Style varies according to each breeder’s interpretation of the various elements of breed type; i.e. excess bone or skin, a sad expression, a long, low body. The overemphasis of type traits (especially with novices) often lead to exaggeration at the expense of soundness. There are numerous faults specified in the standard. Many faults are considered minor faults; i.e. lighter eye pigment, absence of haw, slightly broad skull, and flanged ribs. These faults do not affect the health or well-being of the animal. Major faults are those which impede the animal’s ability to perform. For example, saggy topline, steepness in shoulder, fiddle fronts, out at elbows, weak or down in pasterns, cow hocks, and soft splayed feet are all major faults. It’s the topic of conversation at every dog show you have nowadays. Where do you think your breed stands today in terms of quality? Is the quality declining? Perhaps it’s just evolution of the sport. We no longer use the hounds to hunt our daily meals. Instead, most of them enjoy the couch, an occasional lure course, or a weekend of conformation shows or field trials. So would it not be logical that those qualities once depended upon for survival be allowed to slowly weaken? Many bassets with major faults or disqualifications are still being shown to their championship. Like many other breeds, some breeders are so eager to have that ROM title or add another champion to their credit; they too will occasionally slip one in the ring. Nowadays the emphasis seems mostly to be on the record not on the gene pool. Have we forgotten the reason the sport came about first – to evaluate breeding stock? You see it at every National. Look around the show ring and suddenly you realize you don’t recognize over half the people attending the show! Who are all these new people? You glance through the show catalog and breed magazine and dogs are advertised under kennel prefixes you’ve never heard before. You look at the wins advertised and wonder why they advertised that photo. It takes 10 great photos to counter one bad photo. Then you remind yourself, they were just ecstatic for the win and wanted to brag but they don’t realize the photo is revealing major faults on their dog; the lack of forechest, a sagging topline, lack of angle in the rear. Then you see it in small print at the bottom of the ad, ‘Available for Stud,’ and you think to yourself, why? We have novices teaching novices! The word ‘novice’ is not necessarily pertaining to tenure in the breed. We no longer have the large breeding kennels that existed in the 1950s through to the 1980s. Much of the knowledge acquired with all those years of experience failed to be passed down or has fallen aside. Today’s economy no longer allows many breeders the luxury of a large breeding kennel. It used to be one of the hard and fast rules of this sport was if you were going to be in it seriously, you cou-



FIGURE 5 • RHODESIAN RIDGEBACK
PHOTO BY ALICIA HANNA

pled with a well-established mentor or two and learned it from the ground up—from grooming to breeding and everything in between. Mentors gave you the knowledge you couldn’t pick up in the ring or by watching another exhibitor groom their dog. They pulled out their ‘breeding bible’ that contained pages and pages of multiple generations of dogs. You learned the significant importance of the pedigree and how much valuable information it held. The mentors taught you how to read their ‘recipes’ and once you showed promise of understanding the pedigrees, they taught you how to write your own recipe—to cultivate your own bloodline. They taught you how to line breed. Today, breeders tend to breed in ‘clicks’. They will breed to the dog doing the most winning or they breed to their inner circle of friends. People think line breeding is when the dam and sire have at least one common dog anywhere in the four generation pedigree! I heard one breeder say, ‘The reason I bred to that dog was that one of my dogs was in the fifth generation.’ Oh really? In other words, what power or influence does this ‘fifth generation’ dog bring to the forefront? They are more interested in, ‘just getting a dog I can win with.’ By the time they finish that dog’s championship, they are ready to breed it so they will have another dog to show. Give them a little knowledge and they know everything. A good breeding program is well-planned in advance. As with any breeding, much consideration should be given to whom those puppies will be bred and the possibilities of breeding two, three, four or more generations beyond. A wise mentor once said, ‘You plan every breeding as if it were your last.’ Many of the large kennels had two bloodlines. One example of this was Margaret Walton. She was able to control her own gene pool. Our kennel and breeding program is based on this theory. This has allowed us to ‘outcross’ with full knowledge of the gene pool. We have had better knowledge of possible health and construction issues thereby allowing better predictability of offspring. We achieve a consistency of desired traits and have a better knowledge of traits we bring into the pedigree. We are still working on our ‘recipe’ and although our dogs are often described as a bit elegant, we can ‘ice the cake’ in one breeding. Meaning, we can improve the style in one breeding. We want to perfect the recipe first!”

Now we move on to the silhouette of a large, dual sight and scent hound from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Rhodesian Ridgeback.

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FIGURE 6 • RIDGEBACK IN GAIT
PHOTO BY WINNING IMAGE, TOM WEIGAND

This hound's shape and contours has experienced some controversy as of late with some fanciers and judges commenting that the breed is getting too long in body. These people are disinclined towards an overly long Ridgeback trunk as they feel the hound loses endurance and athleticism. The reasoning is that the hound gains speed with length but will not wear well, he will not go the distance. This certainly could be a concern as the ridgeback blueprint envisaged a hound who is designed for great endurance, who tracked and held lions at bay. Known since the late 1800s as the "Lion Dog" he has a natural tendency to track and bay but they do not kill lions. They have enormous courage and protective instincts and were very successful because of their unique fearless quality which seems to have been instilled in them from their ancestors, the original Khoi dogs from the late 1600s who also passed on the distinctive ridge -- the trademark of today's breed. Despite these valid concerns over losing endurance, the Ridgebacks that appear too long in body are most likely excessively long in the loin. This is usually accompanied by short-ribbed back cages. Many ridgeback fanciers misinterpret the breed standard statement "...capable of great endurance with a fair (good) amount of speed" producing specimens who are long loined and many tend to be steep in the thorax. As discussed previously in Part One, the underline is as equally important as the topline to sighthounds. These hunting hounds must have ribs extending well-back. Short sternums and short-ribbing, usually result in a sharp cutup to the belly which not only is unattractive but is debilitating. A steep thorax and its shortcomings weaken, not empower, these hunters, as the short-ribbed back and slab-sided hounds lose area for sizable heart and great lung capacity, which diminishes stamina. Above all, a long rib cage is armor, shielding the hounds internal organs from harm as well as providing area volume for a strongly muscled diaphragm affecting respiration. In addition, a long loin will prevent this hound from turning quickly to dodge and maneuver, avoiding slashing claws or being stampeded. To conclude, a correctly coupled ridgeback

is not long-loined, which is common in light-framed racing hounds and ideal for incredibly fast speed, albeit short distances. The ridgeback hound trunk is slightly longer than tall requiring $\frac{2}{3}$ thorax and $\frac{1}{3}$ loin. As far as the topline, it begins over the occiput flowing down over an elegant crest of neck in one smooth sleek line. It travels over the withers onto a firm, level back with a muscular loin slightly arched. In this context, I invited Mrs. Alicia Hanna of Kimani Rhodesian Ridgebacks to discuss this topic. Mrs. Hanna has extensive experience having established Kimani Rhodesian Ridgebacks in 1963 and has since traveled to South Africa and abroad studying, judging and lecturing on the breed. "The topline is not a static, straight line, but rather a blend of curves and a gradual melding of many lines. It should flow kinetically, from the arch of the neck to the rise of the withers, past that very slight indentation at the back of the withers, and over the back

proper, to the correct slope of the croup. Toplines are not tabletops. Still some breeders and judges equate a straight back with a strong dog, forgetting that dogs built for a degree of speed, and especially those with a sighthound heritage require a flexible, supple back. This line is key to defining type. Selecting for rigidity between the point of the shoulder and the point of the hip, as many judges mistakenly do, is actually an impediment to functionality. You need only look to the world's fastest mammal for confirmation of this: There is not a cheetah in the world with a flat, short back. This is not to say that roached or sway backs are correct on a Ridgeback. A slack back results from a midsection that is too long -- specifically, an overly long loin without sufficient angles of the shoulder and pelvis to give it support. The current thinking voiced by many judges is that the Rhodesian Ridgeback should be faulted if the dog appears long. The only length which should be faulted is excessive length of loin. Misperceptions negatively affect dog types, especially in this instance when the Rhodesian Ridgeback Standard requires the dog to be 'slightly longer than tall,' and 'capable of great endurance.' Ultimately, it is the most ground covered with the least amount of wasted effort that gives endurance to the running dog."

It is my sincere desire, as well as my contributors, to cultivate knowledge in the uninitiated and to inspire old-hands who are fanciers or judges of our hound breeds. I hope that you have enjoyed and appreciated the contributions of the many breed authorities included in this learning or in some cases, refresher experience. Sometimes we all need a refresher course in breed anatomy to reinvigorate our spirits and enthusiasm to go out and do the best we can in our sport. It is inevitable and unavoidable that we as humans learn everyday. We all process new information, however the dissimilarities between us is how we use and apply this information, for better or for worse. Speaking for all of us who have contributed here, it is our sincerest hope that our efforts will make a difference.