



THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

By Lisa Dubé Forman, Ballyhara Irish Wolfhounds, reg.

“That of a very tall, heavy, Scotch Deerhound, much more massive, and very majestic-looking; active and fast, perhaps somewhat less so than the present breed of Deerhound; neck thick in comparison to his form and very muscular; body and frame lengthy.” Captain Augustus Graham *“The Irish Wolfhound,”* 1879

Shrouded in the mists of antiquity are the origins of this majestic breed. We know the breed’s origins are from a remote epoch predating Christianity with the hound known in ancient past as the Cú. Translated, this means Irish Wolfdog, Irish Hound or Irish Greyhound. My intent is not to delve into a long narration about the breed’s history which is shrouded in the mists of antiquity. There are excellent breed history sources available both on the web and in print with one particular Internet source standing out. It is an extensive and priceless website, an unofficial archive belonging to Ms. Hilary Jupp, of Sussex, England, and is found at <http://www.irishwolfhounds.org/oddy.htm>. This is not to say that this essay will not wander back in time to bring forth historical details to explain the merits of this breed which are essential to ‘form ever follows function.’ The latter is vital to keep in the forefront of one’s mind when breeding and judging these magnificent animals. For the lack of Form, there could be no ideal fulfillment of Function.

Interestingly, there are non-breed “purists” arguing the Wolfdog breed is not pure, they cite documented evidence from the breed’s resurrection overseen in large part by Captain G.A. Graham, who in 1864 onward, devotedly restored the breed with out-crossings to Great Danes and Scottish Deerhounds. In fact, Graham used as many pure specimens as he could gather in his attempts to bring this breed back from the precipice of extinction.

The Characteristics of a Wolfhound -- Prey Drive

Let us begin with the essential truth, the wolfhound is a HUNTER. Why have I capitalized this word, almost shouting it? I have done so because there exists such a vast misconception about this breed of dog that its venerable history is seriously at risk. It is my opinion that the Irish Wolfhound is one of the most misunderstood of the recognized breeds in the world.

The very definition of a hunter is a dog that is bred for and used in hunting. This is an extremely powerful hunter who as an adult can weigh upwards of 175 pounds but, when properly constructed, is very swift and fleet

of foot. Those uninitiated with the breed are astonished how fast this hunting hound can gallop especially when they sight live game. These dogs in antiquity hunted for their masters, and were not used just to kill wolves but to also bring food to the table. Written references from antiquity, oral traditions and reports were said to include the Irish Elk, one of the largest deer that ever lived, measuring about 7 feet at the shoulders. This species of *Megaloceros Giganteus* supposedly dates back seven thousand years and is extinct. However, my preamble states the Wolfdog predates Christianity, from a remote, nearly forgotten epoch and interestingly, pre-Christian Germanic sagas based on historic events and individuals along with old Norse legends spoke of the Irish Elk dating to the fifth and sixth centuries. The Cú hunted dangerous Boar as well but was legendary for hunting their nemesis and greatest predator of all, the Wolf. These Wolfdog's were so revered, so prized for their hunting and killing prowess they were later kept only by kings or royal blood. Stories were written through the centuries that the Wolfdog was used in Roman times of sport to fight against lions; to attack men on horseback and chariots. This is a hound whose musculature composition; its great mass combined with remarkable swiftness and endurance *over miles* can and will catch and kill with ease.

In today's times, these giant hounds are found in far too many inappropriate settings and have been the recipients of enormous misconceptions. As I have exhibited at dog shows for nearly 30 years I can assure you I have heard countless, incorrect assumptions. Many have the false impression that these hounds are mostly lazy, lumbering behemoths that plod around with no energy and look "perpetually stoned" as they aimlessly stand around or in repose while waiting to go in the ring.

These hunters are absolutely NOT idyllic for every household nor are their instinctual behaviors consistent with a lazy "couch potato." This is a fallacy disseminated by inexperienced owners and "breeders" who are uneducated and are misinforming. In order to raise a healthy, well adjusted "special needs" hunter, they require significant exercise and attention, relatively large fenced running areas, human bonding and interaction, and *noteworthy finances* due to the dog's size and health matters. Proper management policies are required including steady, capable but very sensitive hands to ensure that mishaps do not occur. Please understand, not everyone can handle an Irish Wolfhound nor should they own one. They will surprise you when you least expect it, sometimes with destructive consequences and the owner must be faulted, not the hound.

This is a breed of dog that can and will hunt at any given time, on a moments notice. This is the true character of a Wolfdog. Many will chase cars; while loose many will chase and sometimes kill other domestic animals, and usually will kill wildlife such as deer, rabbits, birds, groundhogs. I have known Wolfdog's to attack large prey such as burros and even horses especially while the animal is lying on the ground or rolling on its back. This is the instinctive nature of a renowned hunter. I can confidently state that I do not nor have I owned a Wolfdog who would allow a Fawn to curl up with him nor would I want to breed this dog if it were to do so as it is completely atypical. Even at dog shows a wolfhound owner must exercise extreme caution when walking by smaller dog breeds as it may only take a split second to reach and grab. Although my hounds are raised with a terrier, I share this personal experience that took place in the resort mountain town where we live. I was walking my wolfhound down the sidewalk on Main Street in front of the numerous shops when suddenly (in a split second) my male darted and grabbed what he thought was a small animal. It was not a live dog but a cast iron statue of a Boston Terrier which held the shop's door open in the warmer seasons. Stunningly fast, it would have been over within seconds if this were a live animal. I had not noticed the statue as perhaps subconsciously I was aware it was a door stop. Nonetheless, even me, a veteran wolfhound breeder/handler of nearly 30 years did not see this coming. The point being that it can happen to anyone, anytime. Another sighthound incident took place recently at a dog show. I sat ringside with my Australian Terrier next to a woman with a smaller, older greyhound (to the best of my knowledge it was not a retired race track placement). My terrier was in my lap and the greyhound rose to greet and inspect my terrier and in a millisecond, the greyhound reached out and grabbed my Aussie's muzzle. There was no skin broken and of course, the Aussie gave the greyhound a verbal lashing, then immediately shook it off as terrier's do best. The dogs were not to blame instead, instances like these serve as valuable examples of prey drive.

Strong prey drive aside, a sound, well-adjusted, typical Wolfhound would **not** initiate an unprovoked attack on another large dog or human. In truth, almost all the Wolfdog's I know personally would, if possible, back away from an aggressor. Still, if aggressively provoked and pushed hard in confined areas by another dog, most

Wolfdog's will defend itself and will do so in a devastating and swift manner. This is contrary to what inexperienced owners and professional handlers believe resulting in their false and misleading characterization. In short, this breed is not a defenseless, harmless giant.

This a natural segue to briefly discuss another unique aspect of their character which is relevant to almost all greyhound and greyhound-like breeds. Over the years, I have repeatedly conveyed to the uninitiated to never permit these breeds to run freely without fencing. Along with the typical requirements and lectures for high, strong fencing, I also describe what may happen if the owners decide on occasion to chance letting such hound off lead. This typically is due to their misguided belief that the hound is trained or they are certain he will return on recall. I describe how these breeds can demonstrate a strange, eerie-like behavior in certain scenarios and it is difficult to describe. Those who have experienced it know full well what I am trying to explain. When one of these breeds are about to take flight (on occasion for no good reason) they acquire a look in their eye and no amount of yelling, pleading, or coaxing them to return will succeed. It is an eerie, faraway look, almost as if they do not know you, one that is haunting, they turn to look at you -- and then they are gone. I will condense a disturbing and memorable incident which involved a wolfhound bitch who ran away, a story that in its entirety, I still think about to this day. This bitch, after exiting her Handler's vehicle, saw an opportunity and rushed straight away through a gate that was mistakenly left open. She took flight, search parties were formed but to no avail. The wolfhound owners engaged the services of a tracking Bloodhound who mysteriously enough even tracked her back to her's and her owner's property. This was especially haunting because on their very large property was her kennel and all her mates, whereas she must have heard the hounds barking, calling out to her but she turned and was never seen again. To this day, her fate is unknown.

I try to amplify that no matter their age, these breeds *can and will* surprise you. To further illustrate, I share a memorable story written by the AKC Gazette Scottish Deerhound columnist Joan Shagan, a longtime Deerhound fancier. She wrote of an incident with her older deerhound, *"I took a lengthy trip to my 55th high school reunion in MA, Malcolm coming with me for company. On the way, I went to spend the night with a high school friend who lives just beside the falls and along the river in Stuyvesant Falls, a fairly isolated and outstandingly beautiful setting which Malcolm and I had visited once before when he was far younger. When we arrived I let Malcolm out of the car. As I expected, he ran around briefly, emptied himself, and then came right back to me. Much later that evening I again let him loose when the sun was almost down and it was raining, I stood on the porch, thinking he wouldn't even go out because he hates rain. To my surprise, he went down the steps and started on the path away from the house, then just kept going and disappeared into the gloom. I was sure he'd be back in no time, but he never came back. My last sight of him had been to note how wobbly his rear had become, aging too fast at almost eight, and so when he did not return I imagined he had either collapsed or become trapped somewhere. It became one of the worst nights of my life. It was cold and wet, but I wandered through the woods calling him. We did drive up and down the road a little, although I was sure he wouldn't have gone that far (but then, I was sure he wouldn't leave in the first place). I gave up at about midnight and went to bed, just trying to doze a little until daylight. I was sure he was dead or dying, and had no idea what I would do other than search for his body..."* This story thankfully had a happy ending as the deerhound was found several miles away and the owner and hound were reunited however, Joan wrote that he'd never be off lead again except behind fences.

The Hunter's Shape, Silhouette, Outline

It is elementary that shape -- others prefer silhouette -- nearly always defines breed type in our hounds. The wolfhound topline is more than an isolated component, it is indistinguishable from type. The greyhound SHAPE is preeminent for the Scotch Deerhound, the Wolf-dog, Borzoi, Whippet, and Italian Greyhound. The amalgamation of the length, shape and curvature of vertebrae of the wolfhound spinal column, conjointly with the hard, smooth muscling encapsulating, supporting the loin area, create the arch over the loin. These, together with the great breadth across the loin and pelvis, the balanced length of the femur, (first thigh) and tibia (second thigh) enable the beautiful, greyhound-like topline. Most technical terms define the topline as the point over the scapula blades (usually referred to as withers) with its thirteen thoracic vertebrae, continuing rearwards on the vertebral column and its seven lumbar vertebrae (loins) and over the three sacral vertebrae. Whereas a beautiful topline begins on the plane of the skull, over the occiput and glides down over a powerful, arched, well-set neck with depth. It continues to flow over the shoulder, the anticlinal vertebrae and begins to

rise gradually at this point past the seventh floating rib on and over arched loins of great breadth, carrying over the croup junction, descending along a broad, thirty degree sloped croup and finally skimming down a long, slightly curved tail. When made correctly, it is a thing of beauty.

A wolfhound's arched loin is not to be compared to an Afghan Hound or Norwegian Elkhound who are compact and well-coupled. Noteworthy, the American, English and Irish, reference the word "long" thirteen times in their wolfhound breed standards and our fore-bearers did so for a reason. Our breed is predicated on, is to have all the hallmarks of the greyhound who was often referred to as the "Long-dog." As is often the case, a happy medium is to be achieved here. A correctly coupled wolfhound is not excessively long-loined, which is common in a light-framed racing hound and is ideal for incredible bursts of speed, albeit short distance. Inevitably, such a long loin when seen on a wolfhound will be accompanied by short-ribbing, they will usually have correct length of body but short length of sternum. The underline is as equally important as the topline in which a correct wolfhound must have ribs extending well-back. Short sternum's, 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 the wolf-killer, as the short-ribbed back and slab-sided hounds lose area for sizable heart and great lung capacity, diminishing 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 which affects respiration.

Long also applies and critically so to the length of leg. Length of leg permits the sighthound locomotion to hunt prey over long distances, speed and height to sight its prey. A short-legged wolfdog is not only uncharacteristic but denies the hound the tools to succeed, without its long running gear the dog most likely cannot chase down prey that typically is taller than them. The length of leg from foot to elbow is longer than the length between the top of the withers to elbow. It is not equal proportions. This allows a deep station to the elbow but not so excessive and round that the dog is built similar to that of a drafting animal with enormous chest cavities. Importantly, the wolfdog nor the other greyhound-like breeds do not fit into the typical dialect of square or rectangular when judges are studying unfamiliar breeds. Greyhound-like breeds are a series of flowing curves with length and height, not low to the ground rectangles or 'cobby' squares.

Herein lies a natural segue into the discussion of a disturbing trend today. After much observation I have observed a number of wolfhound's with significantly flatter to near straight topline which is incredibly incorrect. Such topline is not a minor fault nor is harmless. It deleteriously effects performance. I find it quite distressing that many wolfhounds possess a resemblance to the Ibizan Hound topline, with its level and straight back and slightly arched loin. Even more, some wolfhounds have an apparent resemblance to the Pharaoh Hound with that breed's nearly straight topline.

This is a violation in our greyhound-like breed. Many of the Ibizan and Pharaoh breed characteristics cannot nor should not be applied to the greyhound-like Wolfdog, the greatest canine hunter in history. The wolfhound did not evolve for purposes of hunting hares in the perfect cover and terrain of bush, rocks, culverts and steep inclines such as the Ibizan. Why then are wolfhound topline increasingly resembling an Ibizan Hound when ours is a rough-coated, greyhound-like galloping hound? This departure from our standard also reveals another related, worrying and unattractive issue. I have observed wolfhounds, stacked in a befitting manner who in profile display some shape but when these hounds step off to move, they lose all their contours. They flatten out on the go around with many displaying nearly parallel topline to the ground from the hound's skull plane to the croup junction. Basically, these hounds lower their head to such a degree that the head, neck, shoulders, back and loin are all on the same plane. The lack of a flowing, curvaceous topline and therefore, arched loin, is dysfunctional for the wolfhound. Further, this is evidential of an inflexible topline. You cannot have a galloping hound with an inflexible topline, this is pointedly foolish. If it were a phrase, it would be called an oxymoron.

The Wolf Killer (a phrase frequently used by Mr. Joel Samaha)

The Wolfdog hunts mostly by sight, however they will pick up and track by way of prey scent. These were not dogs that were slipped, released to course prey as some other Sighthounds, e.g. Borzois, Salukis. The Borzoi for instance originally was trained, after slipped, to course the prey sometimes for miles. They were trained to chase the Russian wolf and engage typically by hitting it with their shoulder. Then they were trained to hold it at bay much like your Ridgebacks and Elkhounds until the Huntsmen arrived to kill the wolf with long spears.

In comparison, the Wolfhound was expected to hunt, chase and kill the wolf typically measuring 30 inches. As Graham states in his 1879 essay *The Irish Wolfhound*, "It will be seen that the Deerhound dog had considerable trouble in dispatching the she-wolf, as narrated before, she being inferior in size; so putting the matter on the grounds of simple necessity, we cannot but conclude that the dog should be not less than from 2 to 3 inches taller than the wolf. Now, the usual height of the wolf would range about 30 inches, therefore, we get the height of from 32 to 33 inches in the dog. Also arguing from the skulls, the dog would have stood 32 to 34 inches. We may, therefore, safely deduce that the height of these dogs varied from 32 to 34 inches, and even 35 inches in the dogs, probably from 29 to 31 inches in the bitches. The other dimensions would naturally be about as follows for well-shaped and true-formed dogs. Girth of chest - Dogs, 38 to 44 inches; bitches 32 to 34 inches. Weight in pounds - Dogs 115 to 140; bitches, 90 to 115. Girth of fore-arm - Dogs, 10 to 12 inches; bitches 8½ to 10 inches. Length of head - Dogs, 12½ to 14 inches; bitches, 11 to 12 inches."

In 2012, I wrote an article on topline of the wolfhound published in *The Irish Wolfhound* 2012 annual magazine of the English national wolfhound club in which I included results of a field study. I include these fascinating facts so Reader's can understand the formidability of the wolf, a foe with recorded weights of 190 pounds, 86 kilograms, or more. From the comprehensive field study performed by Polly Brewster in *Howl, One Writer Devotes Herself to the Survival of the American Gray Wolf*, "Wolves can sprint 35 to 40 miles per hour through the snow. Wolves are built for hunting, their bodies perfectly designed for the takedown, with jaws capable of exerting more than 1,000 pounds of pressure per square inch with molars capable of crushing bone and whose canines can hold on to the nose of a moose running 35 miles per hour. They can bound 16 feet in deep snow—that's like jumping the length of a station wagon."

This is an impressive opponent and the Wolfdog was designed to dispatch it. Not just to run it down and hold it at bay but to kill it. Graham writes in his 1879 book, "Strength, stature and fleetness were the points most carefully cultivated -- at any rate, as regards those breeds used in the capture of large and fierce game." The wolfhound is remarkable at combining swiftness (despite their mass albeit not as fast as a Scotch Deerhound as Graham stated in his treatise) covering huge amounts of ground either hunting independently or in pairs. Rarely in packs as the latter would require royal ownership due to the extravagant costs as they were far too costly to feed and maintain for peasants or villagers. This certainly remains true today. As I have maintained, the breed in its infancy stages, long before being prized and owned exclusively by royalty or the wealthy, were relied on to bring food to the table. The people of ancient times did not always partake in regular meals as we do today. They ate when and if food was available hence, most likely their dependency upon such a legendary hunter who also could protect against the powerful Eurasia wolf who certainly must have presented great danger to farms living well beyond the safety of villages.

When loose and hunting, the Wolfdog is capable of loping like a wolf for great distances. It will advance to the gallop, the double suspension gait when it sights prey or the scent indicates prey is very close. There is nothing quite like observing a pack of wolfdog's covering long stretches in the fields first starting at a trot, then quickly advancing into the lope or canter, and finally breaking out into the almighty, devastating double suspension gait for the chase or "run down." In this stage they stretch out and fold, until the time comes to kill. Depending on the size of the prey, one or more may lunge for the rear tendons of the quarry and another may leap on the back of the neck. If hunting alone a single wolfhound most likely will go for the devastating attack on the back of the neck as simply injuring a wolf via its rear tendons may allow the wolf to turn and fight. An injured wolf is more than a formidable opponent. The wolfdog has tremendous hindquarters that propel it upwards and on the prey's back -- envision launching such mass and then the Reader can understand the extent of damage inflicted by either instantaneous breaking of the neck or seriously injuring and bringing the victim to the ground for the final kill. One of the main factors that enable the wolfdog to be a supreme hunter is density and diameter of bones. Such mass and musculature sets it apart from all others.

A Quick Review of the Breed Standard's Preambles

The opening AKC wolfhound breed standard preface (effective 1950) states:

Of great size and commanding appearance, the Irish Wolfhound is remarkable in combining power and swiftness with keen sight. The largest and tallest of the galloping hounds, in

general type he is a rough-coated, Greyhound-like breed; very muscular, strong though gracefully built; movements easy and active; head and neck carried high, the tail carried with an upward sweep with a slight curve towards the extremity. The minimum height and weight of dogs should be 32 inches and 120 pounds; of bitches, 30 inches and 105 pounds; these to apply only to hounds over 18 months of age. Anything below this should be debarred from competition. Great size, including height at shoulder and proportionate length of body, is the desideratum to be aimed at, and it is desired to firmly establish a race that shall average from 32 to 34 inches in dogs, showing the requisite power, activity, courage and symmetry.

The opening preface of the Wolfdog of England Club Standard of Excellence states:

The Irish Wolfhound is the largest and tallest of the galloping hounds, it combines power and swiftness with keen sight and in general appearance is a rough coated greyhound-like breed. Of great size and commanding appearance, very muscular, strongly though gracefully built, movement's easy and active, head and neck carried high, the tail carried low with a slight upward sweep towards the extremity.

Lastly, the opening preface in Ireland's Wolfdog breed standard:

The Irish Wolfhound should not be quite so heavy or massive as the Great Dane, but more so than the Deerhound, which in general type he should otherwise resemble. Of great size and commanding appearance, very muscular, strongly though gracefully built, movements easy and active; head and neck carried high; the tail carried with an upward sweep with a slight curve towards the extremity. The minimum height and weight of dogs should be 31 inches and 120 pounds; of bitches, 28 inches and 90 pounds. Anything below this should be debarred from competition. Great size, including height at shoulder and proportionate length of body, is the desideratum to be aimed at, and it is desired to firmly establish a race that shall average from 32 inches to 34 inches in dogs, showing the requisite power, activity, courage and symmetry.

Notably, the original Breed Standard of 1885 created by Captain Graham is the same as the current Ireland wolfdog breed standard cited above except for a few minor references to eyelids in 1930 and bite in 1979. Another remarkable and significant fact is that the original Wolfdog Breed Standard of 1885, is our American (AKC) breed standard and was only modified ever so slightly, once in 1947, when our club modified the ideal height and weight and in 1950, when the club omitted the comparison and contrast to Great Dane and Deerhound in its preamble. This is rare and noteworthy as there are only a few breeds--those you can count on one hand--still maintained with their original standards (1885), as the forebear's had written them and not modified several times by the breed parent clubs over time. Today, we endeavor under the auspices of our ancestors original intent and visualization, which is essential to the preservation of this most celebrated canine hunter.

The above three prefaces are important for the student to fully appreciate this legendary hunter. It is imperative that we have a hound gracefully built but with great musculature.

Interpretation of a Few Key Points in the Standard

There are, in my opinion, significant misunderstandings about the preambles I have provided. The most clichéd, the two most prone to failures of interpretation are "commanding appearance" and "great size."

Commanding Appearance:

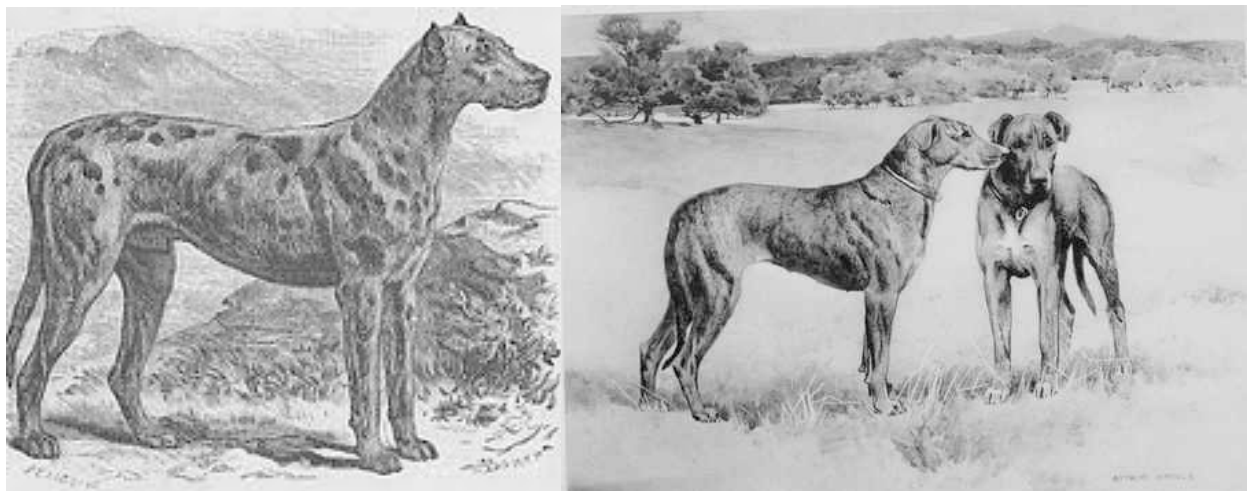
Commanding appearance does NOT come from size. There is an Irish description usually referred to in Irish Draught horses, 'standing over a lot of ground' {sic} and this is my ideal definition of and necessary for 'commanding appearance.' Particularly, while observing the wolfdog, I note how much ground it stands over (covers) but also if the dog owns the ground it stands over. While the dog looks quietly at you, it is confident, comfortable in its own skin. That is a commanding appearance. Please note that I reference to the wolfhound, standing over a lot of ground can only be achieved with the proper shape and length, not square or rectangular but Greyhound-like. Again, the word "long" is cited in the wolfdog standard thirteen times. On a side note, as a

judge I prefer to view the dogs naturally, encouraging the dogs to be walked into show stance rather than stacked and importantly, I prefer the heads to be able to look around versus the death grip most handlers have on their dog's head forcing him to only look straight ahead.

Great Size:

The standard states "of great size." Having just a gigantic dog does not achieve what our forebears intended. Although elementary to some, there is great misunderstanding about this requisite as well. Great size does not mean great height. Yes, you read that correctly. Size does not just come from great height. Let's discuss this contradiction. Great size has an allusion to height. The physical height of the Wolfhound in the original standard of 1885 quoted a desired minimum of 31 inches, today's AKC standard calls for a desired 32 inches. Today we may see a number of Wolfhound's measuring 35 inches or more at the shoulder, many are light-framed, slab sided, less density of bone, the latter similar to that of a Deerhound and so, this is not a dog of great size. We call these "tall drinks of water." At this point, some may be confused because I compare 'tall drinks of water' to deerhounds, clearly stating this is not desirable for the wolfhound and further, I already cited both Ireland's wolfhound and Graham's 1885 breed standards. Both of these declared, "*The Irish Wolfhound should not be quite so heavy or massive as the Great Dane, but more so than the Deerhound, which in general type he should otherwise resemble.*" To quickly explain and to further expedite my doing so, the Reader should be familiar with the original standards of the Great Dane and the Deerhound.

The original Great Dane standard was compiled in 1883. Included are two photos of the late 1800 Great Danes as you can see, they look FAR different from today. They were much shorter legged and massive animals however, not as massive as the Mastiff. The standard read, "*The Great Dane is not so heavy or massive as the Mastiff, nor should he too nearly approach the Greyhound in type...*" Notably, this statement is no longer found in today's AKC Great Dane standard but for my purposes of explanation, it is immeasurably important as they too also referred to the Greyhound. The original Deerhound standard compiled in 1892 states, "*The body and general formation is that of a Greyhound of larger size and bone.*" Today's AKC Deerhound standard states *Typical-a Deerhound should resemble a rough-coated Greyhound of larger size and bone.* Graham and his participants of the wolfhound standard were requiring the wolfhound, in general type, to resemble the shape of a Deerhound and consequently the Greyhound but not the slight of build as either. Lois Thomasson, our modern day wolfhound doyenne eloquently states, "The Greyhound is a wonderful, mystical breed, a prototype of speed to pursue game, and when the Irish Wolfhound is spoken to be Greyhound-like, it equates with long limbs, strong body, tucked belly, arched loins and muscled rear."



Photo's Left: *The Great Dane* (From the *Dog in Health & Disease* by Stonehenge, 1887)
Right: *A History And Description Of The Modern Dogs Of Great Britain And Ireland. (Sporting Division),* by Rawdon Briggs Lee, published 1887

Having explained the misconception to height; here is what I believe the standard along with Graham and his counterparts were idealizing by declaring great size. Great size embodies the sum or mass of the dog. Simply, the diameter, density and length of bone, weight of and length of muscle is incorporated into great size. The

latter being exceptionally important because all four Wolfhound standards; The AKC, The Kennel Club of Britain, the Irish Wolfhound Standard of Ireland and the 1885 Graham standard all called for the same thing: *very muscular*. The very definition of size is: physical magnitude, extent, or bulk: considerable proportions. This leads me to the next common misconception regarding strength.

Great Strength:

People have a false impression that size begets strength. This is an illusion. The venerated Mahatma Gandhi once said, “*Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.*” I certainly agree with Gandhi as I have observed smaller 32 inch bitches chasing down Brush Wolves in the fields. These bitches were indomitable; I describe them as having tremendous spirit. Point aside: I owned a bitch that had a more open shoulder angulation than desired however, at no point did this fault affect her hunting ability or her speed. She had an indomitable spirit and usually was the one leading the pack all the way. She had incredible strength as she was a very large bitch weighing 160 lbs. In short, you may observe a more moderate sized male Wolfhound in the 33-34 inch range that encompasses the very definition of great size with commanding appearance and importantly, exudes great strength. This is a stallion-esque hound.

The desired, ideal wolfhound -- a sighthound -- incorporates long, hard, smooth muscling over long, dense, bone. A colleague of mine has lectured during their presentation on the wolfhound that our hound should have bladed bone and that round bone is that of a Mastiff. I respectfully disagree with this statement. I acknowledge that as anatomy goes, we are instructed there are three types of bone: round, flat and bladed. Interestingly though, there are many orthopedic surgeons and taxidermists who state that all canine bone (shape) is the same. Therefore, it is logical to assume they disagree with the aforementioned indoctrination. I shall defer to these authorities as this very well may be since I've not performed countless orthopedic surgeries nor mounted any canine skins on frames as a taxidermist would do. However, my obvious, logical assertion is that the diameter (width, thickness) of bone changes from breed to breed.

My colleague is a longtime fancier of coursing and although she has enjoyed much lure success over the years, I do not subscribe to her theory about bladed versus round bone. Lure coursing is a sport for sighthounds who run down small game. Please do not misunderstand my inference. A Wolfhound is a coursing hound as is the wolf who is considered a coursing predator. Lure is different. Galloping in lure competitions while chasing a plastic lure (bag) dragged on the ground at various speeds simulating the escape pattern of a Hare for typically 600 to 1000 yards, is **not** corroboration of a flexible, swift, powerful, courageous, endurance hunter tasked with running down and dispatching wolves. This sport of lure is attractive for hounds who have longer, more slender length of necks such as the Whippet and the Greyhound. These breeds represent your original coursers, racers with tremendous bursts of speed over very short distances, with deep chests and narrow waists, the Cheetahs of the canine world. Thus, the shape of their bone is quite bladed and much slighter, which permits bursts of speed without mass density to be an encumbrance. This is the antithesis for the desideratum of our forebears, e.g. Richardson, Graham, Hogan, Everett, Sir John Power, Baker and Shewell.

I refer to this most important testimony from the fourteenth century and forever, when judging wolfdogs, keep this in mind. Graham references that on or about the year 1560, Stanihurst's described Ireland, and he includes a short account of the noble Wolfhound: “Ireland is stored of cows, excellent horses, of hawks, fish and fowl. They are not without wolves and Greyhounds to hunt them bigger of bone and limb than a colt.”

You do not achieve such a hound being described as “Bigger of bone and limb than a colt” with light-framed, bladed bone. Very bladed, lighter bone cannot withstand nor properly support great muscle mass. One or more breeders have stated that their wolfhounds have been clocked racing or coursing 28 miles per hour with a radar gun. In my opinion, this is the result of generations continuously losing mass and bone density, quite possibly more of a bladed effect in the shape of the bone similar to that of a Borzoi. History's multi-century fanciers were exceptionally erudite and frequently cross referenced their knowledge of horses to their knowledge of hounds. In the same vein, here I offer and place significant importance on a relevant explanation of bone from a modern day horse person. Claudia Deffenbaugh writes in *Conformation Analysis*, “Big, solid bones provide strong levers for the muscles to pull against to improve efficiency of motion, thus minimizing the effort of exercise & reduce the likelihood of fatigue, contributing to endurance. May add mass to each leg, and consequently slightly hinder speed at the gallop when flat racing...”

She further states regarding Light-Framed/Fine Boned horses, “Substance of long bones is slight and thin relative to the size & mass of the horse. Especially noticed in the area of the cannon & pastern. Affects the longevity of performance horses. Doesn’t provide ample support for bulky musculature & there is a lack of harmony visually. Theoretically, a lighter frame reduces the weight on the end of the limbs, making it easier to pick up the legs & move freely across the ground. However, with a lot of speed & impact work, light bone suffers concussion injury, leading to bucked shins, splints, & stress fractures. Tendons, ligaments, & muscles have less lever system to pull across to effectively use or develop muscle strength for power & stamina.”{sic}In conclusion, how long do you believe that a light-framed wolfdog would have lasted in a fight with an Eurasian wolf weighing 190 lbs. built for taking down huge game?

There are countless opinions from ages past however, I cite another particularly interesting commentary from the fourteenth century. Since the Greyhound shape is a precursor for our Wolfdog let us take a look at the glorious book, “Greyhounds in America” Volume 1 in which we may have the earliest written Greyhound standard. Edward Duke of York, a notable fancier of the greyhound breed, in “*The Mayster of Game*” (translated from The Middle English) lay words to paper describing the forelegs to be straight and round. I quote, “Shoulders as a Roe Buck, the forelegs straight and round enough but not so the hind legs. The feet straight and round as a cat...”

Our ancestors were caretakers of many of our sighthound breeds. They possessed extensive knowledge of canine, livestock and game anatomy, and I logically assert their knowledge was significantly greater than most of today’s fanciers. The Duke of York, whose pastimes were filled with sporting and hunting pleasures, most likely had kennels with hundreds of hunting hounds and therefore, was considered an expert in canine anatomy, certainly in hunting greyhounds. Consequently, the Greyhound of ancient times had what was considered round enough bone so why do we have breeders deviating and declaring that the wolfhound should have bladed bone?

Reread the standards which describe the differences in the Wolfhound and Deerhound breeds. The diameter of bone is critical in the wolfhound as compared to the Scotch hound. The wolfhound is a killer of large and fierce game. The wolfhound was tasked to kill a predator of equal or greater size unlike the Scotch that were mostly bred to course large Red Deer. Normally, barring any mishaps with a Scotch receiving a deadly blow from the kick of a Red Deer, the risks between hunting a predator and prey can be life or death. Remember, Graham stated in 1879, “It will be seen that the Deerhound dog had considerable trouble in dispatching the she-wolf, as narrated before, she being inferior in size...”

I do not desire bone resembling that of a draft horse, a mastiff or bone shaped like a cylinder. However, bone diameter of a correctly built wolfhound is much greater in width, thickness than what is commonly seen in today’s show rings. Look to the renowned veterans and founding forefathers in our breed who have kept meticulous measurements recording their hounds at various growth stages. Further, Graham’s monologue contained the following desideratum: “Girth of forearm: Dogs, 10 to 12 inches; Bitches 8½ to 10 inches. Concluding the monologue, he writes on Form: That of a very tall, heavy, Scotch Deerhound, much more massive, and very majestic-looking...” Over the years I have seen many wonderful, tall wolfdog’s and I have seen many wonderfully, moderate sized wolfdog’s with correct muscling and density, diameter of bone.

Fill and Station

Yes, with a modicum of pun intended I mean ‘fill and station.’ Although I am not referencing a gas station but rather two intrinsically connected parts of the dog. This subject follows naturally the discussion earlier when I stated, “It is mass and musculature of this dog that sets it apart from all others.” Fill surrounds the bow; the prow, the prosternum. Specifically, the musculature collection surrounding and comprising such area. Throughout this area the hunter must have ample, strong muscling. Please remember muscle moves the bones so without it you can have the perfect skeletal structure and have nothing -- all at the same time. So how does having correct ‘fill’ affect our hunter?

First observe veterinary anatomy drawings of the canine, locate and study the important muscles contained in the front assembly surrounding the sternum, comprising 'fill.' To name a few, we have the deltoids of the acromiodeltoideus, the brachiocephalicus with its cleidobrachialis portion having two divisions being the cervical and mastoid parts, additionally the transverse and descending or deep pectoral muscles and finally the sternomastoideus both left and right combine to create 'fill.'

We cannot disrespect *fill* and *mass* in the hunting hound. Far too often we see dogs without 'fill' and this can be detrimental during a kill. Typically, the cause of this is the front assembly being set too far forward on the skeletal structure or the other simply is lack of abundant, powerful, quality muscling. We do not seek a keel or excessively pronounced sternum. That is completely incorrect such as what we see in the modern Weimaraner with an overdeveloped thrust forward sternum, depicting a keel similarly seen on Dachshunds. A wolfhound's chest is part of the dog's mass and is developed for impact being yet another tool provided to injure the prey. Importantly, it is necessary to prevent injury to the wolfhound's frontal portion of its skeletal structure. When the wolfhound hunts and launches itself on the prey (typically on the backside of the neck) a lack of fill and forechest along with incorrect forequarters (set too far forward) can maim the wolfhound as it hits the prey. If the impact is too jarring the wolfhound may suffer disorientation and depending on the prey it is attempting to kill, this may provide opportunity for the hunted to turn on the hunter. This is accepted doctrine applicable to Sighthounds that hunt large game and is as old as time. It is a familiar and known requirement in Afghan Hounds (an ancient breed themselves) as well as the Northern Scenthound breed, the Norwegian Elkhound that requires 'fill' to protect the dog from injury from impact of hooves.

As we know, the prosternum or point of sternum is the commencement of the hunter's chest. On the hunter, the depth of 'station' with its lengthy sternum, well-sprung ribs extending far back on the trunk provides the hunter capacity for lungs and heart as well as being a shield -- it is the hound's armor. If the hound was hunting and was kicked by an Elk, a slab-sided, short-ribbed, poorly muscled hound would suffer great injury or death. I assert that many wolfhounds possessing correct length of sternum and ribbing, being well-sprung with hard long muscling over the bones of the thoracic limbs could survive an otherwise devastating blow. Fill is unified with the long length of sternum for protection and importantly, accommodate lung capacity required for the hunter's staying power. A short-ribbed back hound will suffer respiratory repercussions no matter how much hunting spirit they possess. Short-ribbed back wolfhounds are simply incorrect and it is my theory that these hounds would have been removed from the breed's master design.

Extremes are not desired. In many cases today there are wolfhounds that possess excessive fill, heavy draft forequarters that limit the hunting ability and the endurance of the hunter. They are overdone, fore and aft. More often than not you will see shorter leg length accompanying the heavy forechest. This is absolutely taboo. Thus in my summarization, without quality and proper muscling the trotting phase of the wolfhound will be severely compromised rendering the hunting dog useless. *Muscling controls the locomotive movements of the hunter.*

The Hound on the Move

Inevitably, all various sighthound breed authorities discuss their breed's ideal locomotion. Many sighthound standards and lectures begin with the desideratum that the breed moves effortlessly, tirelessly, smoothly, powerfully, actively, portraying endurance, etcetera. You have heard all the various adjectives. For me, I wish to remind everyone that the wolfdog is keen-sighted, gracefully but strongly built, head and neck carried high. There are obvious variances in our sighthound breeds however, if they are hunting by sight, their cervical vertebrae joining the vertebral column and scapula placement will typically be higher than almost all other breeds. This higher placement aids in sighting their prey as compared to the wolf whose greatest asset is scent and who usually carries the head hanging, not higher than the level of the back. Irish wolfdogs while gaiting along with the other sighthound hunters of ruminants and small prey, hold their necks on a higher plane. Sighthounds hunting, particularly greyhound-like breeds, trot with head's carried appreciably higher than the horizontal plane. The aforementioned Greyhound booklet eloquently states, "During the hunt, the trotting hound would vary the height of its head depending on the terrain, a higher carriage being required to look over obstructions or to view a more distant horizon, or if game has been spotted at a distance too great to begin a gallop." While sighting prey, hunting or gaiting, we desire a wolfdog who retains their shape on the move.

Because the amalgamation of the length, shape and curvature of vertebrae of the wolfhound spinal column, conjointly with the hard, smooth muscling encapsulating, supporting the loin area create the arch over the loin, so too should this shape they create be carried through in gait. We need forward momentum with long, low, skimming reach. We want to see flexion of the hock carrying downwards through to the rear pads, toes grabbing and flexing, kicking back dirt or grass.

Unfortunately, we also find far too often, the extreme opposite of flattening while in profile and gait. Many fanciers have misconstrued 'head and neck carried high' and we see hounds with 'upright' carriage and construction. Upright carriage is the antithesis of a well-made wolfhound. It is quite unsuitable for an actual killer of dangerous prey and may prove deadly for the wolfhound hunter. One can observe and feel the cervical, scapula placement being set too far forward and high on the skeleton and this is usually accompanied by a weak, thin (no depth) neck. Being upright also has a straightening effect which affects the location of the important prosternum which decreases the 'fill' in between the fore columns. Consequently, hindering the function of the 'fill' which is to protect the forward point of the trunk--to absorb and spread out the force and effect of impact. Most of these upright specimens also lack the requisite muscling of a hunter of large game. Typically they move with a wasteful, up and down movement, rising above and falling below the static--as opposed to having shapely, low skimming, easy forward momentum.

As for coming and going soundness, I have what may be described today as an unorthodox opinion. However, two to four decades ago it was not considered unusual as I have been mentored by some of the best. In my experience, I have observed many wolfhounds who possessed shapely, flexible topline, and effortless, flowing side gait. They had sound low-skimming reach, and wonderful flexing hocks and rear pads but many were somewhat close in the rear. In some, even similar to the following Figure A. In direct comparison, I have observed wolfhounds who lacked shape, who had minimal arch of loin, flat and inflexible topline in which many had straight, squared hocks. However, these wolfhounds were typically restricted in the front with stilted side gait. No fluidity, no grace, not a hint of flexibility but they moved soundly coming and going. While considering this discussion, I caution readers to keep 'cow-hocked or hocky' in perspective as the true definition of cow hocked was originally coined to describe hocks of cows that nearly touched while standing. See Figure B below which is a true representation of a cow hocked horse.

In my opinion, the formerly described wolfhound moving with a somewhat close rear -- though one can still draw a relatively straight line from the center of the rear pads upwards through the point of hock to the ischial tuberosity -- or even with a closer resemblance to Figure A will endure. Whereas the latter straight hocked, shapeless, inflexible hound will not. In summation, I choose type over absolute soundness.

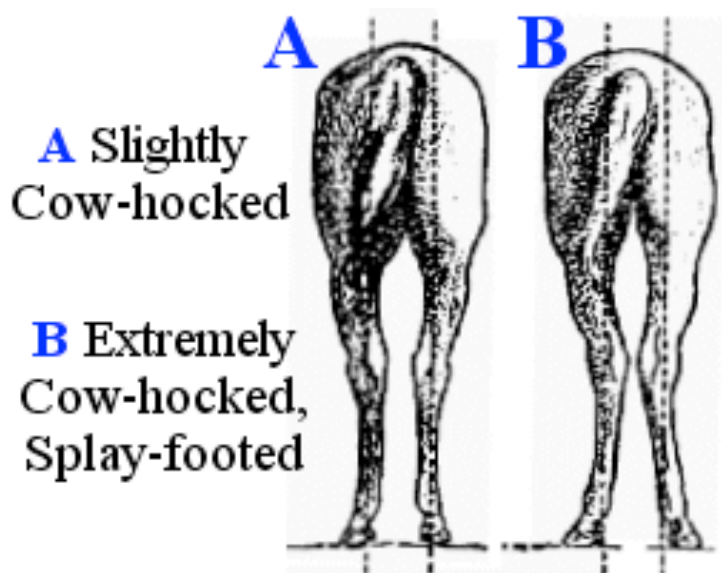


Illustration found on *Rear End Confirmation, An Analysis* by Liz Graves

Concluding with Type and Education

In 1978, Samuel Evans Ewing III of Eagle Farms stated in an interview:

“I think that a great deal of the judging is done by judges who are not knowledgeable of the breed. Seminars might help some, but most of them have no wish to learn. They think that they are adequately prepared to judge wolfhounds...”

He expanded his comments on the need for potentially more strenuous judging qualifications:

“...I have given considerable thought to this in general...not just Irish Wolfhounds. I had a very well respected all-rounder judge tell me not too long ago when I was discussing a particular group of Irish Wolfhounds with him that he found so many different “types” in different breeds these days in his judging. He said he has decided he couldn’t keep up with which type is the desirable or the correct one, and if he was in doubt, try to do with soundness in judging rather than type...I think more of them have a tendency to do that than not. When the question arises as to what is soundness in a particular breed, as long as a dog can move around the ring without falling down that seems to satisfy them. If you don’t know type then you don’t know soundness for that breed either...”

In response to the question if soundness comes from type Mr. Ewing replies,

“...if I had to choose between the two. I would go first to type and then to soundness. I think the soundness is determined somewhat by the type of the animal and its purpose in life.”

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