# WHAT'S BENEATH THE HAIR?

## Knowing The Poodle Standard and "The Reason Why"

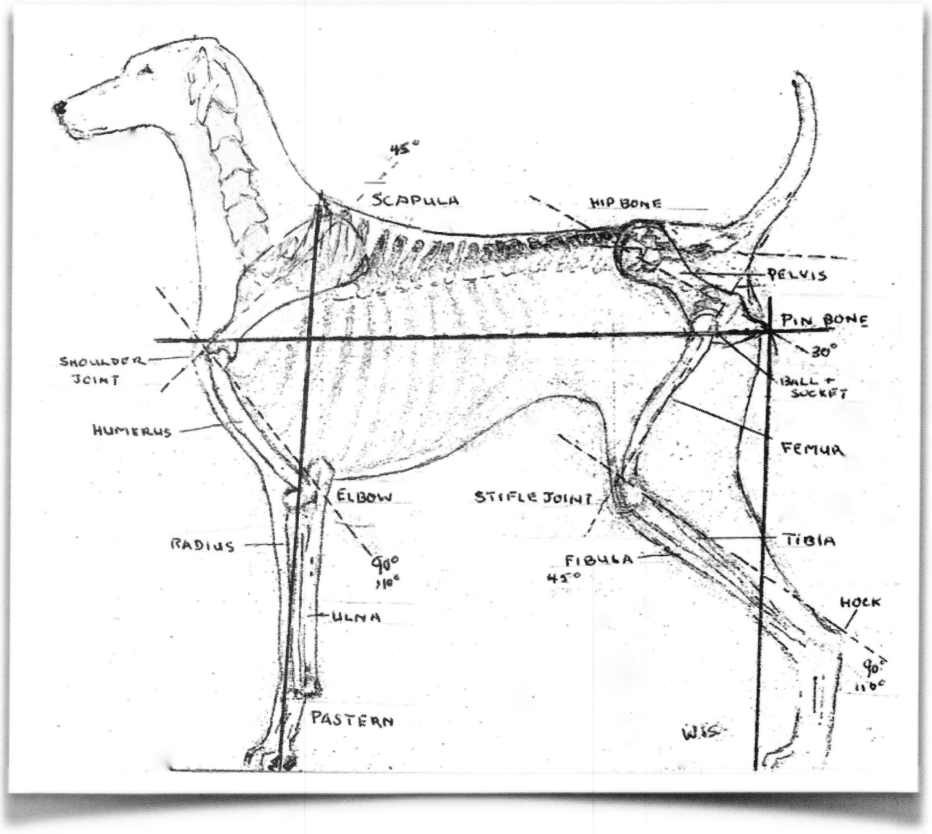
By Wendell Sammet, Ale Kai Poodles

Unless you know what takes place under the skin and coat of the dog when he is standing or moving, and the forces he is overcoming, you will have difficulty in understanding the desired conformation of the Poodle required by the standard.

We know that the breed standard asks for certain features; however, we are not always sure of just what these are because the standard does not provide an explicit description or illustration. Many people have no idea as to why the feature was originally desired. It is one thing to recognize a feature, and another to understand its purpose. We quickly recognize a foot and its form, but we do not know the reason for that foot shape.

One breeder or judge can be compared to a mechanic, by assembling parts to make the acceptable picture. Another breeder or judge can be compared to an engineer, assembling parts from an illustrated booklet not caring as to why. The mechanic knows the purpose for each part as to where it is placed, and knows the effect that any change will influence the whole structure.

We have created the dog by our choice of his ancestors and made him big or small, tall or short, long hair or short haired. Our domestic animals are handicapped by the fact that we choose parts and preserve the bad along with good. Wild animals are complete specimens and have been fortunate due to Mother Nature's selection process known as the "survival of the fittest."




**Hidden Features that Contribute to Conformation**

There are two kinds of conformation; stationary, or static, conformation and functional, or kinetic, conformation. The two may be separated, but it usually results in a loss to one with the glorification of the other. The picture of one must remain constant; therefore, they must be one and the same. Correct conformation not only creates a beautiful picture, it enables the figure to work efficiently.

**Angulation**

Angles are formed by lines and planes and in the case of the dog, his body and working parts. These angles conform to the desired pattern as a whole. Angulation refers to the forehand and rear hand assemblies within themselves and with the plane in which the dog stands in a typical stance.

**Balance**

Balance is symmetry, symmetrical in appearance. It describes harmony and well-

proportioned parts, blending together to make the well-balanced total picture. All parts should be joined together without lumps, bumps and dips.

Discovering the standard's, or blueprint's, intention can only be accomplished by the hand that possesses a basic knowledge of structure. Is his neck long enough to carry his head high? Does the dog have the desired angle of the shoulder? Is his chest deep enough with the correct spring of rib? Is his back level? These are questions you will ask which can only be answered with your hands, by touch. As we proceed, you will learn "why and what for" information associated with the structural illustrations.

Keep foremost in mind that a Poodle's profuse coat covers completely two-thirds of his body, front pasterns, hocks, hip bones, and tail, making it difficult to evaluate his correct conformation. Additionally, on the puppy the body, neck, thorax, ribcage, and the assembly of the shoulder blade and upper arm are covered with a larger amount of hair in a proper puppy clip.

**Let Us Begin: Facing The Poodle**

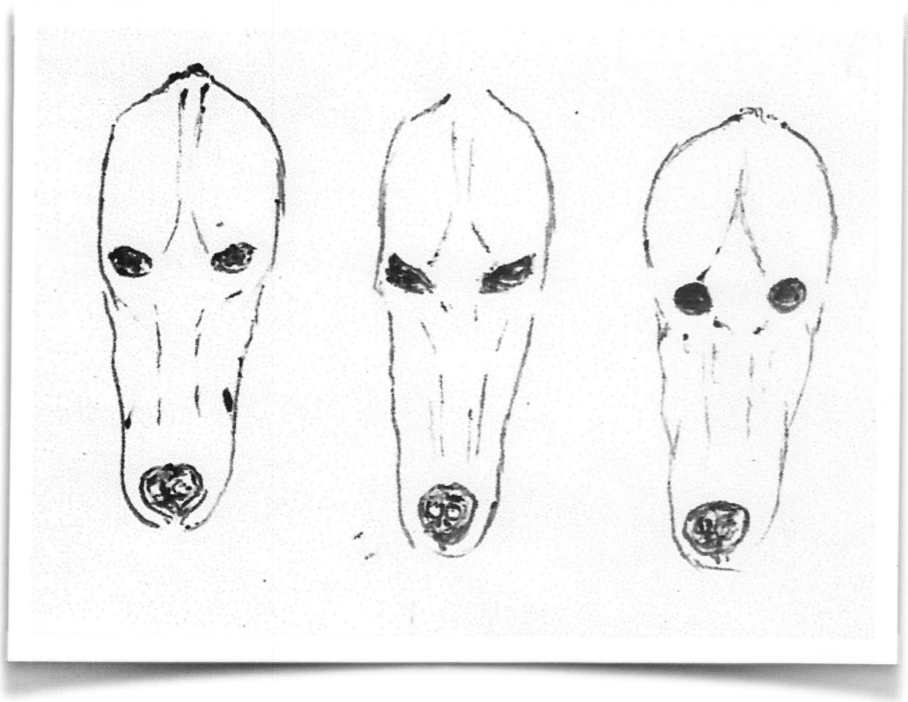
Your first impression, while looking at the head, should be of a long, lean head with a well-built muzzle, accompanied by the correct, dark, lustrous oval eyes, placed obliquely and set far enough apart to create the Poodle's alert, intelligent expression. The oval eye is related to the position of the eye socket placement and the moderately rounded skull, flat cheek bones and muscle, and a slight but definite stop. An almond eye only is faulty when it is highly pointed in both corners of the eye rim and it is placed too obliquely, taking away the alert expression. The eye shape is related to the eye socket, and placement in a narrow skull with too-flat cheeks and a weak stop is not to be mistaken for an oval eye. Round, protruding, large and light eyes are a major fault.

A fully rounded skull, overly developed cheek bones, and abrupt stop with pronounced frontal bones take away from an otherwise alert, intelligent expression.

A fine specimen of the Poodle head, with small variations, includes length and strength of the muzzle, robust chin, the width and shape of the backskull, the indentation of the stop, and the shape and placement of the oval eyes and a slight chiseling underneath. The correct head with an alert, intelligent expression does not "go out of style." You should have no question as to a Poodle's sex, either being feminine (bitchy) or masculine (doggy). They must have their sexual variations.

Parts of the Poodle head can be evaluated visually, but you must judge the parts hidden by hair with your hands. Don't be intimidated by the fancy coiffures and excess hair. Presentation can be very deceiving, and you must discover what lies underneath.

With your left hand holding the chin, examine the bite. A scissor bite is preferred, and undershot, overshot and wry mouths are major faults. Place both palms of your hands on the cheekbones identifying a slightly rounded and muscular curve, not flat or bulging. At the same time, run your fingers backwards following the curve to the end, comparing this length to the length of the muzzle, which should be equal. Be



brave as this can be done without too much disturbance to the topknot. At this location, place your thumb in the junction between the eyes of the frontal bone (brow) that forms a slight stop, not deep, abrupt or elongated. This slight stop varies in impressions and allows the eyes to be placed forward for good frontal vision.

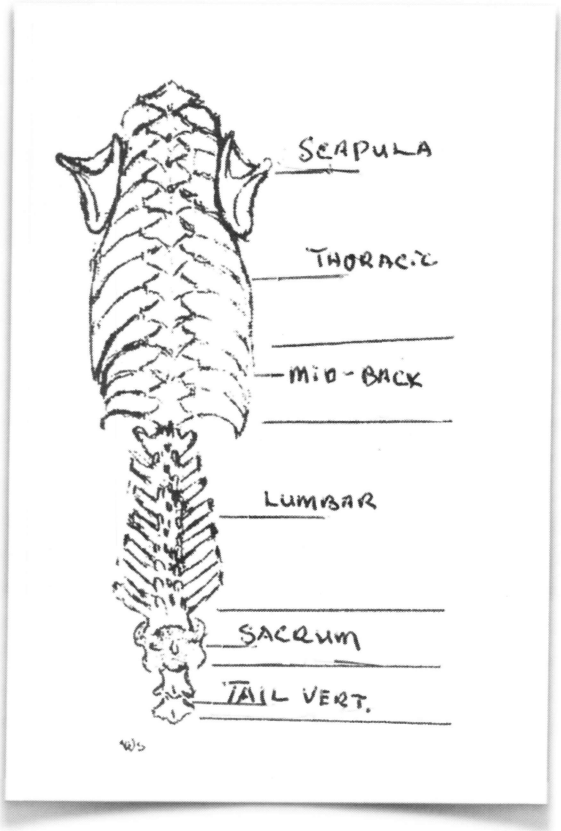
Locate the ear set by grasping it with your hand. The ears hang close to the head and are set on just below eye level. The ear leather is long, fairly wide and thick. The ear fringe should not be of excessive length. When feeling a small, incorrect ear placed high above the eye level, it will be short, pointed, lacking feathering and feel small and thin. The correct, heavily feathered ears frame the face like a picture.

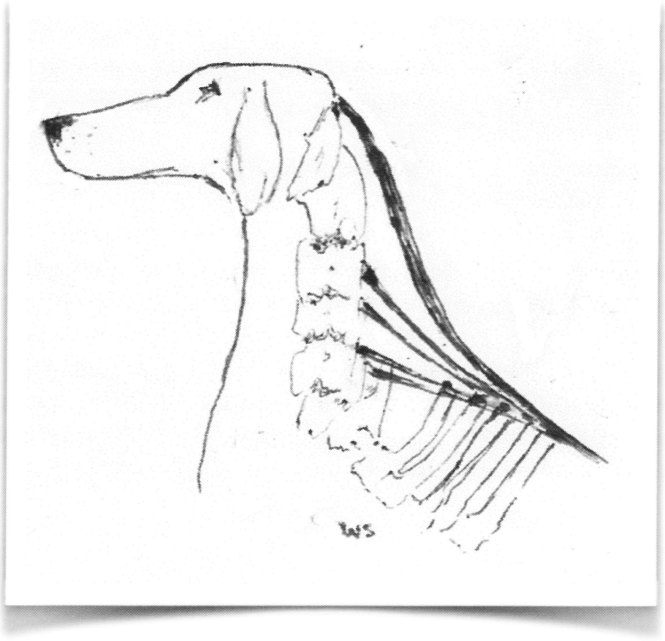
The portion of the head most visual is the muzzle and it should appear long, straight and fine. It must be solid, without lippiness, neither snipy or broad. The chin should be definite enough to preclude snippiness. A lack of under jaw accompanies a sharper shaped muzzle and is a major fault. The top of the muzzle should be flat extending from the stop to the end of the nose. If the skull and muzzle are not on parallel planes, the dog is "down faced." Also pay attention to faulty Roman noses.

After you have studied the head and made your decision as to whether it is correct or not, stand back and look down at the Poodle's legs. Are they straight and parallel, neither broad or narrow, with the proper amount of bone density, long and fine, not round or wide for his size and gender? Beginning with the palm of your left hand, slide down the forechest feeling for the slight protrusion, the sternum. Continue sliding your hand further under the chest noting the width between the legs, ideally the width of a hand. Too narrow a space (less the span of a hand) is a narrow front; too broad a cavity contributes to a wide front, both of which affect the gait coming and going away.

Now look down at the Poodle's feet. His feet are of high importance. The forequarters, combined with the legs and feet carry over half the dog's body weight. Good feet are a "must" as they serve as cushions for absorbing shock, as brakes for stopping, for traction to start, and as a base for support. Are the feet exposed and facing forward, turning neither in or out? If they are not exposed, pick one up and examine it. If covered with hair, brush back the hair and examine them. The correct foot is small with the two center toes slightly longer than the outside toes, making it oval in shape. The well-arched toes are cushioned with thick, firm pads for strength and comfort. Their appearance should not be a too tight terrier or cat foot, nor elongated like a hare foot. Paper or splay feet are a major fault. The Poodle's origin as a retriever dictated his foot was of this shape to effortlessly perform his work in the muddy marshes and rough terrain.

Standing up, move to the side and slide both palms over the sides of the desired heart-shaped ribcage which should have a smooth, flat section (one through the fourth ribs) that the scapula rides over easily. Barrel or rounded ribcages produce wide fronts with poor movement, "out-at-the-elbows"





and loaded shoulders. Typically, faulty, slab-sided, narrow ribs frequently have tucked-in elbows with feet turning out so that the dog can balance himself. The spring of rib is evaluated at the center of the rib, either narrow, barreled or the preferred well-sprung. The ribcage with well-sprung ribs supplies sufficient space for the vital organs, heart and lungs. After examining the ribcage continue feeling for the depth of chest with the lowest point being even with the elbow as it gradually flows back to the tuck-up.

**Neck**

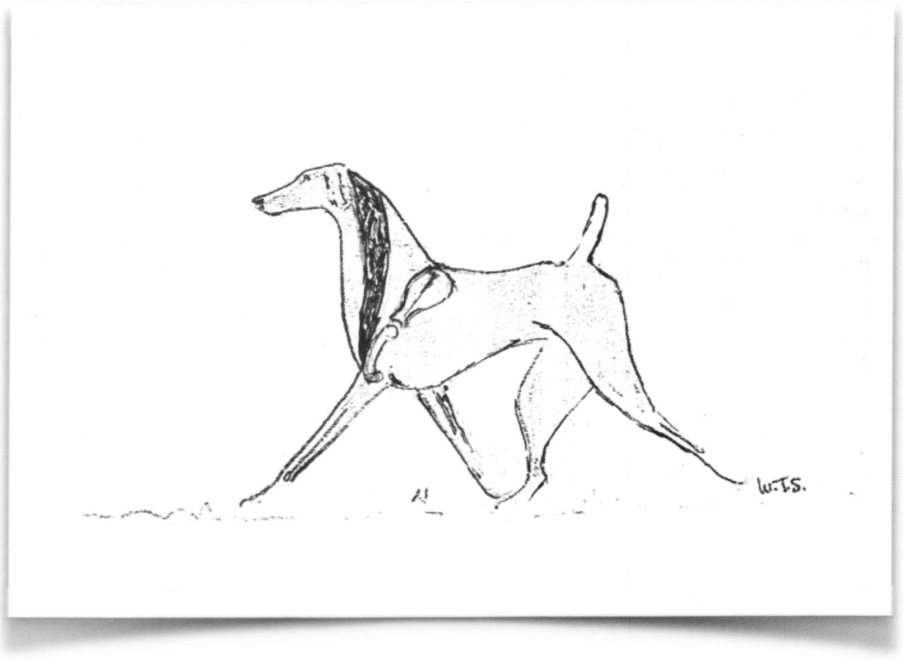
The Poodle's neck is hidden by hair, making it difficult to evaluate; therefore you must use your hand to examine it, creating a mental picture. The Poodle's neck adds not only elegance to his appearance, but its length and strength accept responsibilities. The union of the neck and head exert significant influence on a Poodle's equilibrium and aids his center of gravity while turning, or during side-to-side movement, and while raising and lowering of the head. With the help of the muscles and ligaments, the neck also assists in the extension of the forearm.

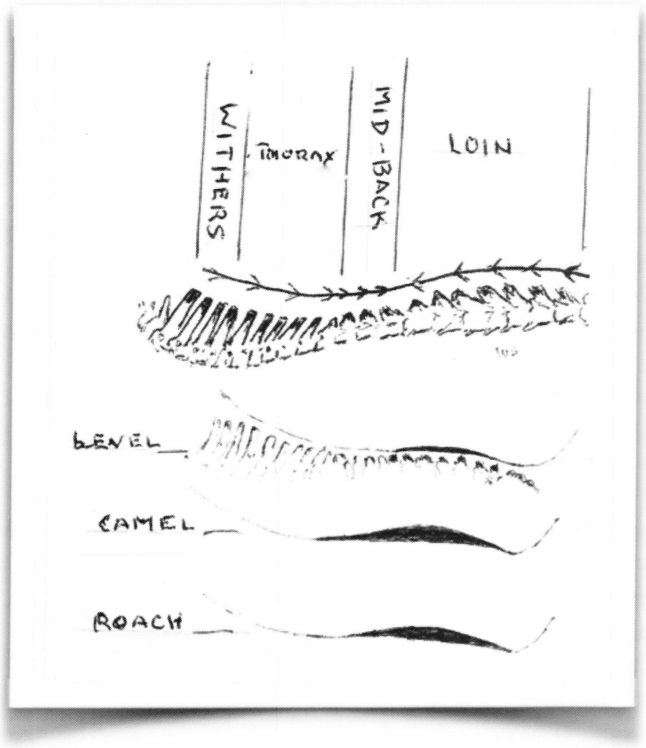
Move to the side to observe the neck structure, cup your hand at the smooth withers at the base of the neck, referred to as the "blending." Do not be afraid to slide your hand gradually up the neck to the occiput, feeling for its shape. The neck's upper topline shows a definite curvature or arch, termed the crest. The "poll" is the area where the neck joins the skull. This crested, arched neck indicates strong ligaments and muscle. If it curves inward (the opposite of an arch) and is concave, then it lacks power and energy and is described as an "ewe neck." The ewe or concave neck is a major fault indicating weakness of the ligaments. Too long a neck implies a lack of strength, too short a neck illustrates stuffiness, but the appearance of either fault are indicative of weak ligaments.

The cervical ligament is one of the most important factors in the function of the neck. It is a unique ligament composed of two parts. The first part is a strong, stretchable cord joined at the occiput of the skull running down the back of the neck attaching itself to the fourth dorsal vertebrae. The second part hangs down from the cervical ligament as a fan-like structure radiating out and affixed to the four cervical vertebrae below the poll. This portion of the ligament controls the position of the head and integrates with the third vertebrae to provide the basic strength to the forward reach of the dog's front leg.

The neck also has a very large, long, slender muscle termed the Brachiocephalicus, which originates at the poll at the base of the skull to the upper arm which carries the leg forward creating reach. There are numerous muscles in this action, but they mainly act in accordance with the principle shown in the illustration below.

To examine the Poodle's level back, place the palm of your right hand on the loin of the dog. Slowly move your hand forward, feeling a slight rise, neither sloping and roaching. The slight rise is not to be confused with the camel or roach back. While moving forward, you will feel a slight hollow at the mid-back just behind where the scapula joins the neck. This is the transition point from the neck to the back.






Beneath the smooth and level back is the spinal column consisting of 13 individual vertebrae that help to carry body weight. The vertebrae articulate with each other creating this proper, smooth and level back, and their size, shape and angles will depend on what region of the spinal column they are located.

**Contents of the Forequarters**

The forequarters structure consists of the desired 45-degree angled scapula blades, or shoulder, joined to the humerus or upper arm. The humerus is approximately the same length as the scapula blade, forming a 90-degree angle at the point of shoulder. The radius and ulna bones, or forearms, meet at the elbow and when viewed from the front are straight and parallel. When viewed from the side, the highest point of the scapula is directly over the elbow and the rear pad of the foot.

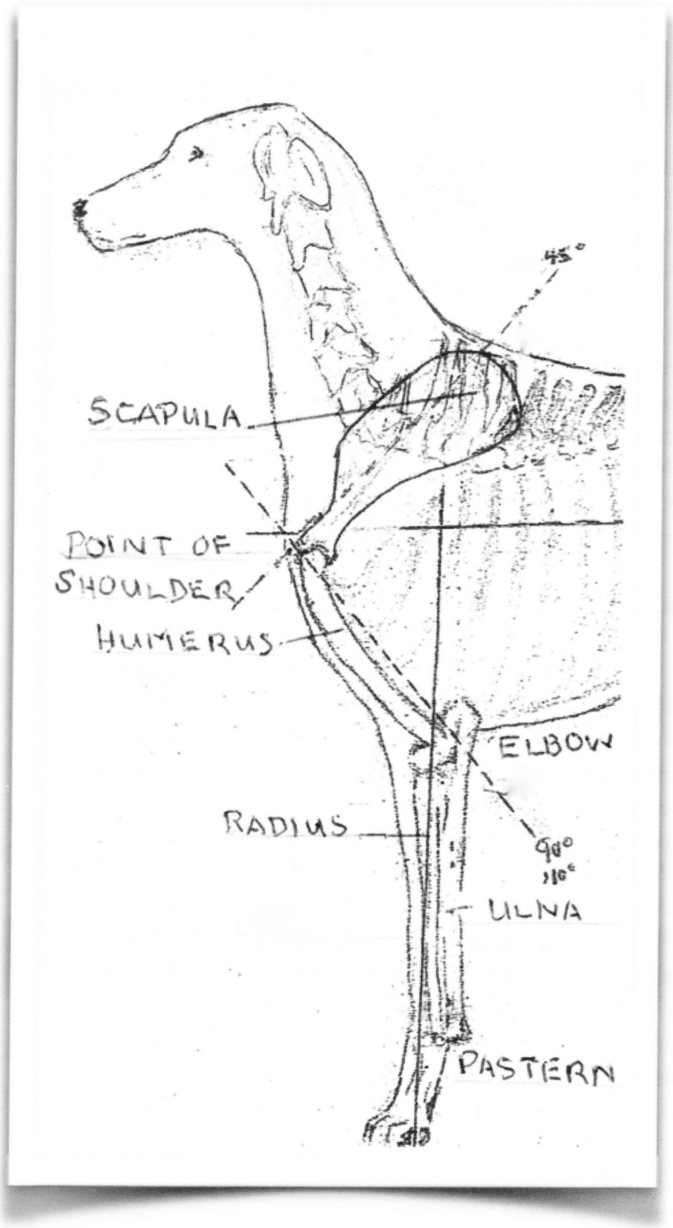
**Discovering the Shoulder Assembly — The Scapula & Humerus**

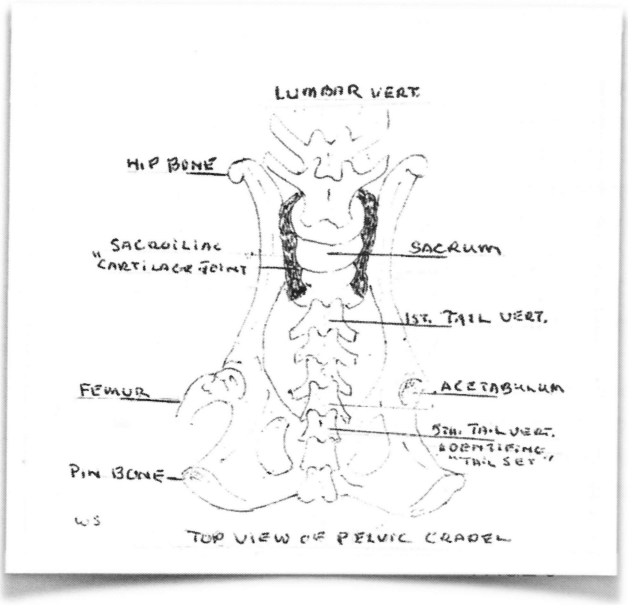
To examine the shoulder assembly thoroughly, "dig in"! Don't just run your hands over the coat. Place your hand on the withers, feeling for the broad, flat, triangular shape with a ridge that travels through the center the of the scapula called the spine. The spine identifies the angle of the shoulder blade; a 45-degree angle is preferred. Other various degrees of angles up to 60-degrees (an upright and straight shoulder) all influence front reach. The shoulder blade is the only large bone of the dog that is not connected to the body by a joint. It is attached to the one through four of the thoracic spinous process by muscle mass and ligaments. The inner surface of the shoulder blade is smooth and glides over the thoracic rib cage. This preferred angle of 45-degrees from the horizontal line ends at the point of shoulder.

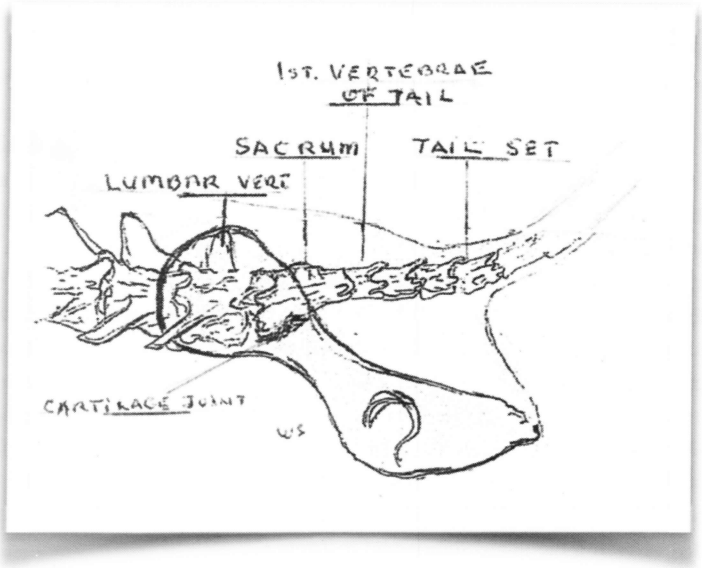
The dog's body is composed of two parts. The forequarters and the hindquarters, both depending on each other for overall balance and outline. The dog's hindquarters are assembled for the purpose of power and propulsion to the forequarters.

**Contents of the Hindquarters**

Hindquarters consist of the pelvic girdle with well-bent stifles and hocks that are well let down. The femur and stifle join with two bones, the tibia and fibula, which then unite at the short, straight hock. The back feet are round and compact with elastic pads and arched toes. Not to be overlooked is the hidden pelvic girdle made up of



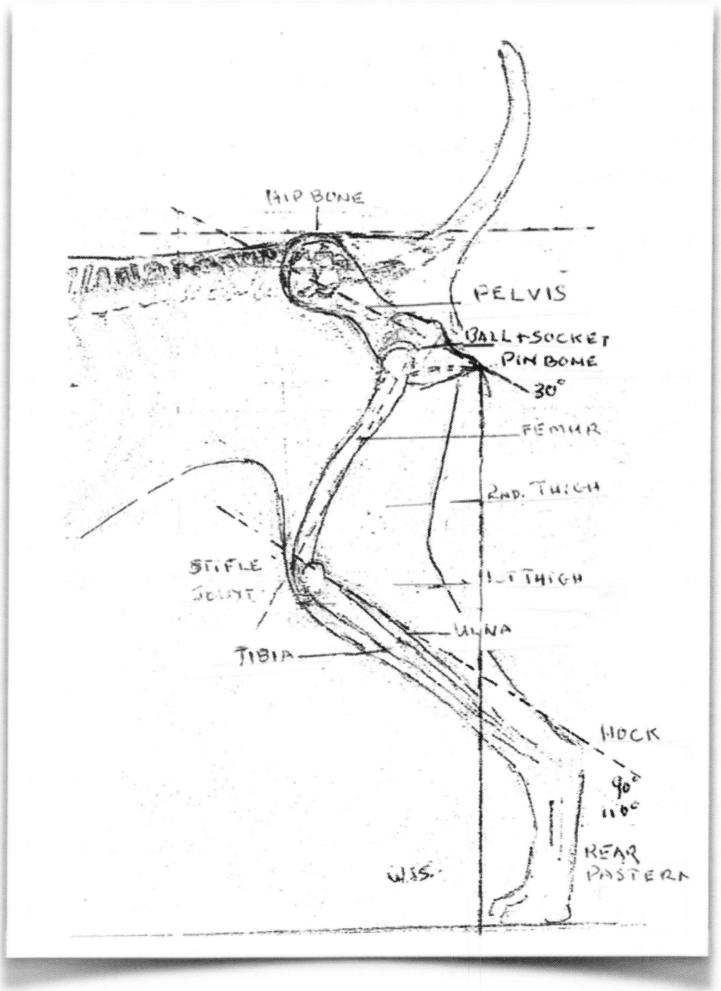



several fused bones joined by three fused vertebrae, the sacrum which is attached to the spinal column. These fused vertebrae are a culmination of the lumbar section. The sacrum fused with the first two or three coccygeal vertebrae determine the tail set, and slanted or flat, these will govern the set on of the tail.

The Poodle's desired hindquarters construction in a static position is a 30-degree angle of the pelvic bone to the ischial tuberosity or pin bone. The long, curved bone of the femur, attached to the hip socket by a ball and socket, terminates at the stifle joint, creating the preferred 45-degree angle to the horizon. The lower leg's equal length tibia and fibula meet the femur, articulating at the stifle joint. This setting creates the preferred 90-110 degree angle we refer to as a well-bent stifle, and when joined to a short, straight hock that is perpendicular to the ground, the rear feet are naturally positioned just under the pin bone. Straight stifles or stifles of more than 110 degrees lack sufficient width of upper and lower thighs and are accompanied by high hocks. They also are deficient in ability to transmit power and propulsion to the forequarters. Conversely, the well bent but not exaggerated stifle formed by the femur provides maximum area for muscling and is a powerful, flexible hinge allowing for the strong drive and snap of the rear pasterns.

Place your hand just below the tuck-up and slowly slide it down the outline of the rear leg to discover the stifle joint. During the examination, take notice of the hock (metatarsus) covered with hair. Obvious faults are sickle or slanted under or hocks that are not perpendicular. A sickle hock slanting forward and under will put the foot too far forward and conversely, the hock that extends too far back also sets the foot out of the best possible position. Incorrectly positioned feet may be due to faulty hindquarter construction with over-angulated and excessively long rear leg bones that extend the rear feet too far out behind the pin bones. Further, a high hock



is typical of a straight stifle. When viewed from the back, hocks turning inwards, also known as "cow hocked," are a major fault.

The hindquarters are difficult to evaluate due to hard, broad muscle and other parts that are covered with hair. To determine the angle of the pelvis first locate the hip bone at the upper point of the iliac crest which is usually hidden by the hair of the Poodle's rosette. Then, with the other hand locate the pin bone just below the tail. Visually draw an imaginary line between the two points which should create the preferred 30-degree angle of the pelvis which importantly, provides rear drive. A steep, 45-degree pelvis is too low effecting the static stance and restricts rear drive. A low tail set is a major fault.

Place the palm of your hand over the broad, hard muscled loin which is located beneath the croup. You will feel a slight rise caused by hard muscles covering the seven lumbar vertebrae. The rise over the loin not to be confused with a camel or roach back. The lumbar portion of the loin attached to the spinal column is convex dorsally receiving a curve as it slopes toward the pelvis. Adjoined by the three fused sacrum vertebrae and the first 3 or 4 coccygeal (tail) vertebrae forming the croup, which may have a slight curve, identifying the tail set. An important feature of the loin structure is to transfer force to the rest of the body thus allowing the dog's ability for motion and travel.

## Where, Oh Where, Have They Gone?

*Q. Where have the beautiful shaped heads with dark, oval eyes set far enough apart to create an alert, intelligent expression gone?*
A. There are many heads lacking chiseling, too narrow a skull, snippy muzzles and lacking in chin.

*Q. Where has the correct head and neck carriage disappeared to with the head carried proudly?*
A. Too many improperly set necks with specimens demonstrating excessive reach beyond the nose.

*Q. Where has the straightforward, light springy action gone?*
A. We see too similar an appearance of a German Shepherd's movement in profile at race car speed, called the "flying trot." The body is lowered and is accompanied by tremendous reach in front and exaggerated hindquarters.

*Q. Where has the correct structure of overall balance disappeared to?*
A. Commonly we see extreme sculpted shapes from scissoring, clipping and other various styles of coiffures, with hair covering more than half of the body and head, disguising the anatomy.

*Q. Where has the proper tail set gone?*
A. Faulty pelvic structure results in too high, too low, too flat, curled and curved tails that create a handle.

*Q. Where has the well-bent stifle disappeared too?*
A. Exaggerated, overangulated hindquarters extending the rear feet far behind the pin bone do not allow for properly angled stifles. On the other hand, too straight of stifle lacks sufficient width of first and second thighs.

*Q. Where has the correct placement of the front leg and elbow gone?*
A. Too far forward and open angled shoulders causing the front feet to be placed under the ear sets have now replaced the elbow under the backside of the scapulas.

*Q. Where has breed type disappeared too?*
A. It has disappeared due to all of the above.

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**Acknowledgments**

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*Wendell Sammet has spent over a 70 years in purebred dogs. As a teenager, he trained a Dalmatian in obedience, and in 1950 he began breeding them. He finished and bred many champions, but soon found himself in the breed in which he has truly made his mark, Poodles, establishing a breeding program under the Alekai banner with Mrs. Henry Kaiser. Through the decades, he has prided himself in breeding for health, temperament and breed type. Alekai Poodles bred by Mrs. Kaiser and Ale Kai Poodles bred by Mr. Sammet have counted among the top winners and producers decade after decade. Along the way, he has always found time to serve as a mentor for newcomers to the breed and the sport, as well as an advisor to his peers and in roles for both the Poodle Club of America and the Dalmatian Club of America. Mr. Sammet is also a veteran of World War II, having fought at the Battle of the Bulge and being held as a POW for six months.*