

The Four W's

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What is the standard? What type are you showing? What are the judges placing? What effect does this have on the future of our breed?

The following are excerpts from the Miniature Pinscher breed standard, coupled with some general observations and comments garnered from judges and a few humble opinions of my own. We'll discuss more of the standard in future columns.

Let's start with gait. The "hackney-like" action of the Min Pin is one of its most outstanding features. It is not something that can be taught, as it is a natural and genetic feature of the breed. A correct hackney-like gait must show a definite bend or break at the wrist-pastern joint. It is important to observe the Miniature Pinscher in side gait, as well as coming and going. The gait must be accomplished without the elbows flailing outward or the front legs pinched in with corresponding outward flailing of the feet. Moving toward you, the dog's legs should be lifted straight and true.

When viewing the entry in the show ring, the judge must look beyond great side movement. Describing incorrect movement, judges have used phrases such as "windmilling" in the front, "crab-walking," crossing over front and back, or having a "knit-and-purl" gait when coming straight at the judge or moving away. Incorrect movement is a clear sign that something else is out of sync in structure such as length of leg, shoulder layback or angulation. It is important that judges not get blown away by high-stepping side movement when the dog travels like a drunk driver on the down and backs. This is not to be confused with the handler who strings up the dog so high on the lead that the dog has no opportunity to drive with its rear and reach out in front because it is forced to walk on its toes. Min Pins do not need to heel at your side. They should be allowed to move out ahead on the lead, reaching out and driving forth as they are guided around the ring. The movement of this breed cannot be judged when they are constantly being popped at the end of the lead and lifted off their front feet. A common complaint of judges is that a dog "never had four on the floor." One particular judge referred to the Miniature Pinscher as arrogance at the end of the lead." I agree. To watch a properly moving Min Pin going around the ring or across your backyard, with head and tail up, chest out, and driving off the rear and reaching out in front in an effortless flow of movement is enough to put your heart in your throat.

Next, look at size, proportion and substance: Since the standard allows a 21/2-inch spread between the smallest (10 inches) and largest (121/2 inches) allowed size, a judge should look for the Miniature Pinscher showing proper breed type, soundness and temperament, as long as it is within the size limit allowed.

It should have well-sprung ribs tapering to a narrower hip, thus giving a "V" shape when viewed from above. The dog should be balanced and in proportion, being neither coarse or cobby, showing little in length of neck or leg, nor in our quest for elegance should they be tubular or long as a freight train.

The standard is written as the guideline and blueprint for our breed to be judged by and for breeders to strive for.

In a class of five, if one dog meets the standard and the other four could be called "long and tubular with a knit and purl gait," does the fact that they are in the majority make them correct? No! And this is where the judges have to pay attention to the standard. If in a spelling test, four out of five children spelled the word standard incorrectly, would you change the spelling of the word to suit them? I think not.