

A Vet Looks at our Breed Standard and Compares it to the Norfolk Terrier

Currently Being Shown

On the occasion of the Joy Taylor Memorial Lectures on the 15th March 2008 Mrs Lesley Crawley delivered a talk entitled 'Breeding Winning Norfolk Terriers' after Dr Jeff Sampson's lecture on 'The Genetics of Dog Breeding'. It was a memorable day attended by more than a hundred members. In her lecture Mrs Crawley emphasised the attention we need to pay to the Standard when looking at, and breeding, Norfolk Terriers. In this article I will offer a vet's view on why the Standard is what it is, and why judges, breeders, and Norfolk Terrier enthusiasts are advised to keep it in mind at all times, now more than ever. I write this also in the light of recent comments and complaints from judges that 'the breed has changed'.

Mrs Lesley Crawley commenced her part of the proceedings by requesting a show of hands in response to three questions:

- Who has studied and understands the history and function of the Norfolk Terrier?
- Who knows the Breed Standard? And accepts that every single aspect of it is important and not to be ignored?
- Who spends time over pedigrees before selecting dogs and bitches for breeding?

The most hands went up in response to the first question. Fewer hands went up following the second question, and just a smattering went up for the third.

Mrs Crawley then proceeded with a discussion on the Breed Standard, inviting questions as she spoke. She predicated her discussion, however, by bemoaning the loss of the 'herdsman' approach to dog breeding. That is, that way of breeding that considers only the breed as a whole and its long-term future, and not the individual person's ego and desires. Her first

charge was that breeders and others tended to pick and choose parts of the Standard they liked best, or feel are being looked for in the judging ring, while hoping the other parts of the Standard would be OK. And when this way of breeding was repeated frequently enough, she went on, distortions and problems would arise as has been seen in recent years. Bite abnormalities now abound, because it lurks at a level in the breed as a whole (who does not know the frustration of breeding a dog and bitch with good bites, only to find one or more puppies with poor bites?), and the number of Norfolks with temperament problems is significant. She then went on to take each point in the Standard, show these features on actual dogs and on pictures, and explain the reasons why these are in the Standard.

I will look at the same Standard and offer a vet's view on why it is what it is. But before I do that, I need to point out that in 2009, in the wake of the media kerfuffle regarding dog breeding, the Kennel Club changed the wording under 'Eyes' in the Standard from '*Oval shaped and deep-set, dark brown or black. Expression alert, keen, and intelligent*' - to - '*Oval-shaped, dark brown or black. Expression alert, keen, and intelligent*', thereby removing the requirement for 'deep set' eyes. They had the danger of entropion in mind, I presume, which is a problem in other breeds, not in the Norfolk Terrier. Feedback to the KC from the Club's committee has no effect. I will return to the eye point later.

Below I have reproduced the Standard as it currently stands. Under each heading I will analyse what that means in terms of veterinary medicine and surgery.

- **General Appearance** Small, low, keen dog, compact and strong, short back, substance and bone. Honourable scars from fair wear and tear permissible. *When a vet sees a dog like this the immediate impression is gained that this is a dog that one can take anywhere and do anything with.*

This dog is tough, not delicate and easily prone to injury. It can leap from the consultation table without injuring itself. And it is not 'toy' in any way.

- **Characteristics** One of the smallest of terriers. A 'demon' for its size. Lovable disposition, not quarrelsome, hardy constitution. *It is the 'loveable disposition' and 'not quarrelsome' part of the wording that is of interest here. When handling terriers in general, one is always minded that there is a distinct possibility that this dog may bite (of course correct ownership mitigates this possibility, but that is a separate discussion). In many veterinary practices terriers are routinely muzzled. This is, and should not, be a problem in the Norfolk Terrier. The Standard says 'loveable disposition' and is utterly unambiguous about what this means. In her lecture Mrs Lesley Crawley stated clearly that a Norfolk Terrier with a poor temperament is not a Norfolk Terrier, and went as far as naming long-dead Norfolks that you should avoid in your pedigrees. I agree with her. The interim results of our Breed Health Survey has shown a significant number of Norfolk Terriers that have bitten people. Of course one has to consider the individual circumstances and ownership. It is still, however, an important observation. My advice is: if there is any evidence that a dog or bitch has the inclination to bite when it is not required to (for work), do not breed that bitch or go to that dog for stud services. How to manage such a dog is the subject of a separate article.*
- **Temperament** Alert and fearless. *This is a dog that is confident and sure of its position in the world. It is never nervous, and will only switch on its working abilities and 'fearlessness' when appropriate. In the ring, at the moment, we have a couple of winning dogs poor temperaments, who have,*

on occasion, shown off that temperament in the ring – I am pleased to see that these are not being used stud purposes.

- **Head and Skull** Small broad, only slightly rounded with good width between ears. Muzzle wedge-shaped and strong; length of muzzle about one third less than the measurement from the occiput to the bottom of a well-defined stop. *This is a head that has enough space for a good, working brain and an intelligent mind. It is also a head that will have enough space for correct dental occlusion (the bite) and spacious nasal cavities, which allows efficient intake of air. Currently in the show ring there is a tendency towards finer, snippier muzzles in both dogs and bitches. These dogs and bitches look pretty and even ‘toy’, and appeal to some breeders and judges, and are turning up in such numbers that some have begun to assume it to be the norm. The Standard says ‘broad, only slightly rounded with good width between ears’. When these features in the Standard are ignored, and you arrive with Norfolks that are ‘pretty’, please remember that, from a veterinary point of view, the soft tissues inside the head and throat do not necessarily follow the breeding and judging trend. This can lead to symptoms not unlike that associated with the Upper Airway Syndrome.*
- **Eyes** Oval shaped, dark brown or black. Expression alert, keen, and intelligent. *Eye shape has become a problem in the breed. The round eye is being ignored by judges. There is a possibility that judges are not noticing it anymore. The Standard clearly states ‘oval shaped’. There is a very good reason for this. An oval shaped eye will never bulge and is significantly less likely to be damaged in the field/garden. It is a good eye*

for a dog that rummages around in the undergrowth. The bottom line is this: an eye that is round and bulges is more likely to end up with a corneal ulcer and other problems. The incorrect eye shape in the Norfolk Terrier, therefore, has veterinary implications.

- **Ears** Medium size, V-shaped, slightly rounded at tip, dropping forward close to the cheek. *An ear that is held close to cheek is, logically, less prone to injury.*
- **Mouth** Tight-lipped, strong jaw, teeth strong and rather large, perfect scissor bite ie. upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to the jaws. *The Standard says nothing about the number of teeth, but one has to assume that having the correct number of teeth goes without saying. A correct bite has very significant implications for dental health. A set of teeth that occludes correctly is less likely to develop loose teeth and less likely to produce teeth that align poorly. The veterinary implications are numerous. It has become clear that not enough consideration is given to ‘correct mouths’, ie the ‘scissor bite’ (which means like a pair of scissors – that is, upper incisors tightly overlapping lower incisors, with canines correctly placed, and upper and lower premolars in a ‘zig-zag’ relation to each other and never tip to tip). This explains why the problem keeps on popping up all the time, frustrating everybody, and why judges feel they need to mention it (both negatively and positively) in their critiques. As a vet I am not convinced by the ‘you have to look at the whole package’ argument used in excusing incorrect occlusion. A poor bite is a poor bite, and a fault. The mode of inheritance is understood, and it will not take a huge effort and a long*

time to improve the situation. I discussed this fully in the Yearbook 2005-2006, offering breeding solutions and consolations (sometimes a bite is not incorrect, but merely 'untidy' and that that Norfolk can be bred with, etc.). Breeding with 'poor bites' will come back to bite us.

- **Neck** Strong and of medium length. *A dog is led by its head, and with a neck of medium length it can scan the path ahead and the periphery at the same time. This dog is more likely to move correctly and 'stride out' than a dog that has a short neck and is 'stuffy'. In recent years judges appeared to have ignored this feature. The Standard is clear on the issue. A stuffy neck is a fault.*
- **Forequarters** Clean, well laid back shoulder blade, approximating in length to the upper arm. Front legs short, powerful and straight. *A correctly made front assembly is more 'springy' and less inclined to a jarring type injury. This is pure mechanics. The Standard asks for a shoulder blade and upper arm of approximately the same length. When this is present, the shoulder blade lays back sharply, the forearm tucks back, and the elbow sits well under the body. The lower arm is, therefore, upright, longer, and situated well under the body. This is the correct anatomy. This dog will move correctly. Vets refer to this as 'physiological movement.' A dog that is too upright on the forelegs will visit the vet more frequently than a dog with the correct front assembly.*
- **Body** Compact, short back, level topline, well sprung rib. *A short back is a strong back, and less prone to damage, like general strains and disc prolapses. A short back means a short loin – that is, that section of back*

behind the ribs and in front of the hip bone. This is where the strength of back comes from. It must feel sturdy and strong when gripped from side to side, and be not much more than four fingers wide, to be physiologically sound. A dog can have a long back and still look short in the ring, and a dog that looks long in the ring can have a short strong back because this dog has a longer and usually deeper chest. Disc prolapse is not a common problem in the Norfolk, but we need to keep an eye on the matter.

- **Hindquarters** Well muscled; good turn of stifle, hocks well let down and straight when viewed from the rear, great propulsion. *A good turn of stifle and a well let down hock produce a strong, springy hind leg that can drive forward simply by virtue of its lever advantages and design. When viewed from behind this dog's hind legs are completely upright and it shows its pads as it drives off. This is not the case in dogs whose hind legs are upright, or near-upright, when view from the side. These legs resemble table legs, and are prone to injury. A good turn of stifle, and a leg that is upright when viewed from behind, will have the patella (knee-cap) directly over the end of the femur and within the patella groove. This dog has almost no chance of having a luxating patella. When the hind leg is bandy and has even a slightly poor turn of stifle, the chances of having a luxating patella is much greater. A correctly made hind leg will naturally have the 'well-muscled' required by the standard. There has been a lot of creative grooming, in the showring, to give the impression of a correctly made hind leg and good muscling in recent years. Apart from the orthopaedic implications, it produces a hindquarter movement that can be described as 'jaunty' or 'toy'. A Norfolk needs to drive forward and cover a lot of*

ground. This 'jaunty' movement gives the impression that the dog is perky and energetic, but is ultimately not according to the Standard, and can result in an increase in the incidence of luxating patellas for one. A well muscled hind leg is delicious to feel.

- **Feet** Round with thick pads. *This is means a tight and meaty/substantial foot. A dog with the correct foot will automatically be more upright and correct in the metacarpal ('fetlock') region. This same dog will wear down its nails naturally and will seldomly need it claws clipped. This is an old problem in the breed, together with turning outward (valgus deviation) of the foot. The overall effect is that of a weak foot. In extreme cases this can lead to degenerative changes in the joints. Attention needs to be paid to this difficult feature in the breed.*
- **Tail** Docking of tail previously optional
 - a) Medium docked, set level with the topline and carried Erect.
 - b) Tail of moderate length to give a general balance to the Dog, thick at the root and tapering towards the tip, as Straight as possible, carried jauntily, but not excessively gay.
- **Gait/Movement** True, low and driving. Moving straight forward from the shoulder. Good rear angulation and showing great powers of propulsion. Hind legs follow tracks of forelegs, moving smoothly from the hips. Flexing well at stifle and hock. Topline remaining level. *A dog that has a correctly made front and hind assembly, and a short strong loin, will move correctly.*

- **Coat** Hard, wiry, straight, lying close to the body. Longer and rougher on neck and shoulders. Hairs on head and ears short and smooth, except for slight whiskers and eyebrows. Excessive trimming undesirable. *A breeder can be excused for trying to show their dog to its best advantage by means of skilful grooming. What cannot be forgiven, however, is the preponderance of soft coats. These can be made to look very 'good' in the showring, producing that familiar and desirable shape as they move past you. The Standard is clear, however: 'Hard, wiry, straight, lying close to the body'. The correct coat is weather-proof and protective. A soft coat is not.*
- **Colour** All shades of red, wheaten, black and tan or grizzle. White marks or patches undesirable but permissible.
- **Size** Ideal height at withers 25cm (10 inches)
- **Faults** Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog. *This is a serious statement. Apart from preserving the distinctive features of the Norfolk Terrier, there are health and welfare implications.*
- **Note** Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

So, it is clear that the Standard is not there for historical interest only. It is there to preserve the distinguishing features of the breed, as well as preserve its 'fitness for function' and its health and welfare. We have fine examples of the breed currently being shown and winning, and this is heartwarming to see. But we also have fine examples of the breed being ignored by judges (and breeders) in favour of a type that is 'beautiful', but moving further and further away from the Standard. Regularly the best example of the breed is not the one that wins that class, but is placed second, third, or even fourth.