

# **My Impression of the Norfolk Terrier Over the Last Decade**

**\*\*\* from the writer of 'Vet's View'\*\*\***

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I am a veterinary surgeon trained at Onderstepoort, South Africa, a well-funded veterinary school that was/is the pride of the nation. There, in the middle of nowhere on the Highveld north of Pretoria, we had the opportunity to work with ample clinical material, as well as handle and assess many animals, the likes and numbers of which can only be dreamed of by current students and new graduates anywhere in the world. We had rooms full of hanging carcasses for dissection, huge boxes of bones to keep at home, and a final year working as almost fully-fledged vets. We were given the responsibility of calving, getting young cattle ready for market, and running a milking parlour. We were ready to step into jobs as capable veterinary surgeons ready to work on our own. Those were the days.

Amongst the myriad of necessary (and, arguably, unnecessary) skills honed, we learnt to get our 'eye in' at the earliest opportunity so that we could diagnose the subtlest of lamenesses and movement problems in horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, dogs, and other species. Animals were paraded, on demand, to and fro past us, and even as an individual student, we could request a horse with or without a problem be brought out to us. Part of our curriculum was to attend the huge Pretoria Agricultural Show and try our hand at judging. Prizes were involved, and there was healthy competition between the 'city' and 'country' students.

But behind this glowing picture of a veterinary scientific idyll are the subtexts of Afrikaner Suprematism and pride, Apartheid, black African stable 'boys' and groundsman beholden to pimply white students and academic/clinical staff. And the University of Pretoria itself, a site of remarkable modernity which concealed much that was bad. A stones-throw from our

Faculty of Veterinary Science was a research facility whose reason for existence was to manufacture race-specific chemical and biological warfare weapons. We did not know about the existence of this place (neither did the rest of the world), nor did we know that some of our tutors worked there. But these matters are for a different day.

I grew up with German Shepherds, Boerboels, Bull Mastiffs, Old English Sheepdogs, Keeshonde, and a variety of cross-breeds, big and small. We always had many dogs and cats around the house. I was whelping bitches in the yard when I was ten years old. Our house was right by a large dairy farm, and day after day, from when I was a toddler, I watched cows getting milked by hand, move, and calve. I also remember the day the first milk machines arrived, all glittery and new.

I found myself in the presence of a large number of Norfolk Terriers (and they were indeed large numbers in those days) for the first time in the Spring of 2005. We'd had Mouse (Tomomayo Tiger Bright: *Cracknor Call the Tune X Allright Big Game*) for around three years, and were nervously showing her puppy Gog (Tomogog Bright Cuff: *Tomomayo Tiger Bright X Richell Off the Cuff*) for the first time. All my veterinary knowledge and experience counted for nothing as I found myself thoroughly seduced by the breed's appealing appearance and demeanour. There were these solid little dogs, not 'toy' in the least, who strutted with enthusiasm, with only the occasional one that sidled along, a short distance behind their handler. I was not a vet on my day off, but a gushing and inveterate fan of the breed. I still get goosebumps when I think back to that moment.

But it was not long after that, however, that I started to apply my training to what I was witnessing in the show ring, and amongst our own dogs at home.

By the year 2006 I was persuaded, together with Gail Simpson, Juliet Knight and Cherry Stones, onto the committee of the Norfolk Terrier Club of Great Britain. Joy Taylor had just

recently died, Elisabeth Matell had started editing the Newsletter and the Yearbook, and Cracknor Cause Celebre had just won Best in Show at Crufts the year before.

This is a report on my view, as a veterinary surgeon keen on dogs of all kinds, on the conformation, movement, health, and other aspects of the Norfolk Terrier, over the last decade or so. For obvious reasons I will not mention any Norfolks in particular. By its very nature this article will be about areas where the breed can be improved, and must please be seen fully in context of a breed that is healthy and robust, without physical exaggerations, and one we should be immensely proud of.

When I cast my mind back, I see a picture of the sun streaming into the venue (Roade), much chatter, Gilean White being very kind and open to us, and Rita Mitchell's laughter filling the room. And much taping of ears. Ears were obviously a problem. There was no shame in arriving at a show with ears taped and 'copydexed', and advice on the problem being handed about freely. Judges often folded the ears down before stepping back and having another look. And, bizarrely, it was the left ear flap that was misbehaving mostly! Do others remember that? It is with deep pleasure that I can report that that problem appears to, largely, have gone from the show ring. A resounding breeding success.

Now about the eye. The Standard of the Norfolk Terrier states: 'Oval-shaped, dark brown or black'. At the start of this period under discussion we saw the occasional round eye (especially in the bitches) and the isolated light-coloured eye, with the iris itself responsible for the effect rather than the eyelids (although pale eyelids was also a consideration).

Currently we are seeing eyes that are more round and 'full' than the Standard allows, to the point that it seems to be a feature ignored by judges. This affects the expression profoundly and has noteworthy health implications. An eye that is round and full is more vulnerable to damage (ulceration) than an eye that is correct for the breed. The correct eye in a Norfolk

produces an expression that attracts the old-fashioned descriptions ‘varminty’, a little ‘wild and mischievous’, ‘alert’ and ‘keen’. The round eye, on the other hand, is more likely to contribute to the appearance of being ‘toy’, ‘sweet’, or ‘pretty’ (not to be confused with ‘feminine’), descriptions not desired in the breed.

The next feature I wish to discuss is one in which there has been little or no significant improvement over the last decade, and one in which there may never be. It is the ‘fetlock’ joint. Dogs don’t actually have fetlocks; it is a term borrowed from the world of large animals, but useful to describe that part of the leg. The ‘fetlock’ in the dog is the metacarpophalangeal joint of the front leg, and the metatarsophalangeal joint of the hind leg. In other words, the ‘foot’. In most Norfolk Terriers the fetlock, especially the front fetlock appears weak and ‘flat’. It is so ‘normalised’ that when one sees a more correct foot it is quite startling. Some describe this as ‘cat feet’, a longed-for feature. The weak fetlock gives the impression that they are flat footed, as opposed to upright on their toes. We have become used to this feature. There are several consolations, though: it has produced no significant health problems; it has produced negligible numbers of *varus* and *vulgas* deviations (that is, when the foot turns outward or inward) causing well-known health and issues, and the ‘movement’ has, largely, not suffered. The reason this feature is going to be very hard to breed out are: it is genetically and anatomically probably linked to the breeds *behind* the Norfolk Terrier, rather than the founder Norfolks themselves; and it has never/rarely been seen as a breeding aim to eliminate, as far as I know.

Mrs Liz Cartledge, in her report on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Club Championship Show, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2004, writes: *‘I was concerned about mouths today. I had wry, undershot and level bites as well as crowded, uneven teeth and narrow underjaws. It is important for a working terrier to have the tools to do the job for which they were intended so please consider this fault as a serious one when breeding.’* In the Yearbook of 2005-2006, I

produced a lengthy veterinary view on the matter, offering breeding and other solutions. It might just be possible to assert that there has been an improvement in 'bites' generally, with fewer of the more serious manifestations (wry bites, cross bites, small teeth and small jaws) presented in the show ring. This is good news! Frustratingly, however, sires and dams with correct bites can still now produce offspring with poor mouths in the litter. This tells us that the problems is lurking below the surface, and that some breeders are still adopting the 'let's try it and see' approach, hoping for the best. There is also still some confusion about what a 'scissor bite' is. A 'scissor bite' is a bite that is *like a scissor*, and verging on being 'tight' or even level. The correct bite is not the same as a marginally undershot bite (which can look really 'good') with the premolars almost touching tip to tip.

Liz Cartledge also stated in 2004: *'I had a few 'toy Norfolks' with tiny teeth and little snikey faces, in size altogether too small with very light bone. They may be the smallest breed in the terrier group but they must be strong, sturdy with good bone and substance for their size.'*

Around five years ago there was a worrying number of bitches in the ring with 'snikey' jaws. They are fewer now. This problem of too little bone has also improved in my view (more good news), with only the occasional Norfolk now presenting with too little bone in the show ring. This is why they are more noticeable now. As far as size is concerned, Mrs Cartledge was right. Amongst the dogs especially, one would like to see a strong, well put-together boy, holding himself proudly and 'butch', strutting into the ring, and covering a lot of ground. They must be of the desired size, yes, but not have 'small' be the absolute first thing you notice about them as they walk into the ring. I remember still, in the parade of winners in the Norfolk ring at Crufts several years ago, how the dog was smaller than the bitch. This is not ideal.

But there is also, in the breed, the old problem of being 'too big' and 'too long' for the Standard, and we still see breeders struggling with this unfortunately. It could just be,

however, that, due to the influence of particular stud dogs, there has been an improvement. Perhaps this is good news. The ‘problem’ goes back to the breeds behind the founder Norfolks, so may be ever present. This means that breeding short-backed Norfolks might have to be an ongoing project.

The Breed Standard says ‘Lovable disposition, not quarrelsome, ...’ Over the last few years we have had a handful of incidents reported to the Club where a Norfolk has bitten. These situations are very difficult to assess because it is necessary that one has the full picture of what happened. This is based on anecdote and *just a few reports*, and watching individual dogs and bitches in the ring, it might be possible to argue that temperament is an issue we must consider in our breeding plans. We *must* believe (in the show ring, and at home) that when a Norfolk Terrier presents with a poor temperament that it is not, indeed, a Norfolk Terrier at all. And that when a report comes in of a biting incident, we are in full possession of the facts around the case.

We also know that when the name of a particular Norfolk appears in a pedigree (it goes way back), we must heed the temperament of the puppies more than at other times.

We now get to the point where we have to consider ‘movement and gait’ in the breed. I write this with ‘did you see the movement today, it was shocking’, ‘the hind movement in the winner was atrocious, did you see it?’, ‘did you see how wide in front that one was?’, and so on, ringing in my ears.

I will approach the matter of movement and gait with ‘BCM/Body Centre-of-Mass’ in mind, and my professional hat on. This is a term that comes from the horse world, and is defined as thus: The BCM position determines the distribution of load on the limbs, which in turn determines the standing position and movement. It is perhaps better described, for our purposes, as ‘Balance’. ‘Balance’ is what we hope to see in the dog when moving and

standing, and which judges of farm animals hope to see and appraise when they walk into the ring. When one has one's 'eye in', 'balance' is a feature instantly visible in the Norfolk Terrier. They cover the ground effectively, wasting no energy, and almost seem to float so 'light' they are on their feet.

The 'balance' is determined by the skeletal structure of the dog. In other words, how the dog is 'put together'. I am not going to write a paper on how function is crystallised in the anatomy of the short-limbed terrier because that is too big a subject for here. I will, however, discuss how the pursuit of a particular show shape that contradicts the Breed Standard, and what is a well-balanced short-legged terrier. I cannot say that there is a concerted tendency in this direction (as we have seen in the conformational exaggerations in other breeds, I emphasise) over the last decade or so, but can say there is a to-and-fro towards and back from this particular shape (in profile) and the ideal for a small terrier. This tendency has been consistent with the influence of some kennels, breeding for a type rather than type, sets of judging decisions, the impact of a handful of stud dogs and dams, and judicious grooming. It can be argued that this shape has become the desired shape for many.

One of the features I noticed when I first saw a big line-up of Norfolks all those years ago – because it was so startling – was the low hocks on some of the winning examples, and what an appealing and beautiful picture they made as they moved, especially when they also overreached with their forelegs. These Norfolks were also very lively in the ring and showed well.

Logically, however, I knew that these dogs would be hard pressed for a good 'turn of stifle' and may even be short of muscle on the upper part of their hind legs (M. Quadriceps and M. Biceps Femoris), and have long fibrous calf muscles (M. Gastrocnemius) above those hocks. This was indeed the case when I ran my hands over them. These dogs lacked substance in their hind legs but were groomed in such a way that it looked like their hinds were well-

muscled and that they had well-angled stifles. Being such small terriers, I knew also (professionally), that there would be little clinical consequence other than a tendency towards luxating patellas in the most extreme examples, and a kind of subtle subluxation of the hip joints that does not necessarily produce any clinical symptoms at all (because of the size of terrier). Various degrees of this manifestation, this lack of ‘substance’ in the hind leg, can still be seen in the ring now. There is a direct correlation between hocks that are (too) low, weak turn of stifle, and lack of substance in the upper hind leg. It is a problem of degree, and an eye must be kept on it.

The next thing I noticed in some Norfolks was a kind of jaunty, sweet way of moving, lifting their front legs just that little bit higher than was needed for effective travel. It made a very appealing picture especially when they pulled ahead of their handlers, raising their heads high, almost waving at the crowds. From an anatomical point of view these dogs appeared to extend/straighten their *elbow* joints almost completely as they reached forward in their keenness to get ahead, with forearms that presented as a little short and not sufficiently under the body. This was because there was insufficient flexion available to the *shoulder* joint because the shoulder was too upright (this shoulder lacks ‘lay back’). This was usually associated with a front limb that was altogether too upright, giving many of these Norfolks a ‘stuffy in the neck’ appearance.

To summarise the above discussion: a certain desire for low hocks will produce hind legs that lack ‘substance’ and a guaranteed tendency towards luxating patellas in the more extreme cases – it is a problem of degree; and a shoulder with insufficient ‘layback’ might produce a foreleg gait that is exaggerated, a waste of energy, and, with its upright shoulders, and a dog that appears to be going faster than it actually is.



In 2004 Liz Cartledge also stated in a critique: '*Some of what I said in 1988 still applies – there were some poor fronts then and now ...*' It is reasonable to assert that, to a degree, the same applies now. The situation has improved little, if at all. This is a difficult 'problem', but does not necessarily affect the health and mobility of the unemployed Norfolk Terrier. 'Poor fronts' refers to something that is polygenetic and deeply embedded in the breed. This is why it must be argued that judges do not reward 'wide' or 'poor' fronts, *and keep at it*. On the other hand it is rare to see Norfolks show Valgus and Varus Deviations, ie. when the front feet turn out or in, respectively. This is definitely a plus in our breed, being a short-legged terrier.

With all of the above in mind, I would still maintain that the Norfolk Terrier is the best of all terrier breeds. They are healthy and robust, and the epitome of moderation. They are not plagued with exaggerations.

They are unlike other dogs. They are little people, gracing our lives with their presence, and will menace vermin when put to work. There is nothing like a Norfolk Terrier.