

Judging the Golden Retriever



The Golden Retriever is one of the most popular and versatile of all breeds. The breed performs as a pet, show dog, performance competition dog, service dog, search and rescue dog, detector dog, dog guide but was developed primarily as a hunting companion. It is a dog of normal canine structure with sufficient size, strength and stamina to function as a retriever on both land and in the water but small enough to be pulled from the water and fit in a blind or duck boat. Retrievers are dogs of moderation, with a muscular, athletic appearance; strong, medium long, muscular necks; weather-proof, water-resistant and protective coats; strong well-arched, webbed feet with useful nails and a well set on tail, useful in balance for movement and as a swimming aid.

Key points for consideration

- *The Golden Retriever should not be judged as a generic show dog, or with undue emphasis on presentation, showy attitude or abundant coat, which are mere glamour points.*
- *Important considerations are suitability for function as an athletic, working gundog with overall balance, condition, and muscle tone, a correct, firm resilient coat texture and a dense undercoat providing a waterproof jacket.*
- *Judges should not focus on pieces or parts of the dog, whether correct or faulty, but consider over-all appearance, balance, gait and fitness for purpose.*
- *This is a hands-on breed, requiring the use of hands to assess the structure underneath the coat as artful grooming can disguise faults of structure upon visual examination. A more accurate assessment of structure can be made by a careful examination with the hands.*

- *Judges should not mistake excessive speed or extreme "reach and drive" for correct gait. Correct movement should be easy, smooth, ground-covering and efficient, allowing a Golden to work all day in the field. Golden should be shown at a moderate working trot on a loose lead.*
- *Golden temperament should be eager, alert and self-confident and not constantly "turned on" or busy in nature.*
- *Judges should at some point observe this breed free-standing, in a natural stance, from various angles.*



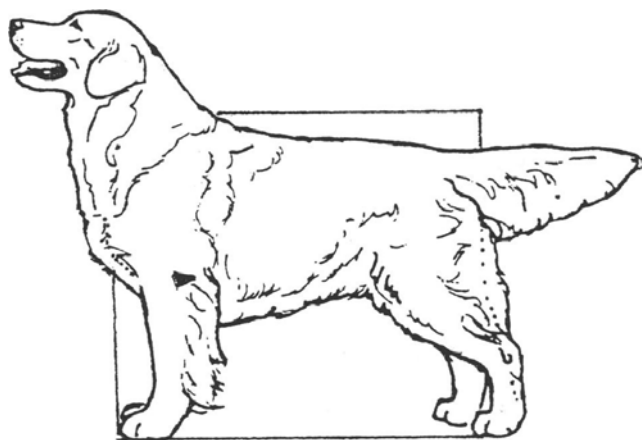
General Appearance

The General Appearance section of the Golden Retriever breed standard is extremely important in establishing priorities in judging the breed. Golden Retriever type can be further refined by focusing on the breed essentials of purpose, breed character and temperament, size and proportion, head, coat and color. One of the joys of this breed is the variety of styles seen in the breed, but any variations must always be assessed in consideration of the breed standard. This is a hands-on breed, requiring careful examination under the coat for structural reference points in order to adequately assess qualities that may be altered by creative grooming or obscured by excessive coat. Judges should ensure they place hands under the coat to feel for the forechest, tip of shoulder blades, length of upper arm, depth of body to the elbows, tight fitting elbows, good length and spring of rib, short, deep loin, bend of stifle, hindquarter muscle mass and correct tail set and length.

Size, Proportion and Substance

The judge's initial impression of the Golden Retriever should be a dog of moderation and over-all balance. There is a **disqualification** for size, with no exemption for puppies. The standard has a disqualification for deviation in height more than one inch over or under the prescribed size range. Many puppies do not reach the minimum size by six months of age and judges should not hesitate to measure suspected over-sized or under-sized exhibits.

The standard calls for a proportion ratio of 11:12 based on the height from withers to ground and length from prosternum to seat bone. To the average eye, this is only slightly off square. The distance from withers to elbow and elbow to



ground should be approximately equal. Many Golden Retrievers today are lacking the correct proportions and appear long and lower to the ground than what the standard requires. Length in the body should come from a well developed rib cage which extends well back, as the Golden should be relatively short-coupled and not long in loin.

Head

The head is one of the hallmarks of the breed. Correct head structure is important to the retrieving function of the breed, relating to vision, scenting and carrying of the game. The head should be clean cut with a broad, slightly arched skull and a definite stop. The skull and the deep, wide, slightly tapering muzzle have nearly parallel planes, with the muzzle nearly as long as the skull. Strong muzzles and back-skulls are necessary for carrying heavy game, as a large goose can weigh 10 to 12 pounds.

Full dentition is preferred, with a scissors bite.

Undershot or overshot mouths are a **disqualification**. It is necessary to examine the side teeth for obvious gaps in dentition, but it is not necessary to count teeth.

The expression should be warm, intelligent and friendly, ideally highlighted with black pigment on the nose, eye rims and lips. The medium large, dark brown eye should be an open almond shape, with tight, dark rims. Correct eye placement is important for direct and peripheral vision and tight fitting eye rims prevent debris from entering the eye. Any dog showing a functional abnormality of the



eyelids or eyelashes, for whatever reason, should be excused from the ring. This can include excessive tearing, swelling, difference in appearance between the eyes, etc.

The nose should be of good size with large, open nostrils suitable for scenting. Preferably black, many Golden noses will fade with age or season. As long as there is a dark perimeter to the nose, it is not a Dudley nose, which is to be faulted. Ears should be rather short, soft and flexible, reaching only to the inner corner of the same-side eye. The forward edge of the ear should be set well behind and just above eye level when at rest. The head should be examined with the ears in a relaxed position. Alert ears can be considered more when assessing the Golden's expression but a Golden should not be expected to constantly "show ears". Please note that removal of whiskers is optional and not preferred in a hunting breed.

Head faults include narrow back-skulls, insufficient length and depth of muzzle, excessive flews, lack of adequate stop, poorly set and/or shaped eyes, large or low set ears, and misalignment of incisors.

Neck, Topline and Body

The body of the Golden should not appear coarse or overdone but well-conditioned and athletic with moderate substance. The chest should reach to the elbows and should be broad with a well developed forechest that is well-filled

beneath the prosternum. The neck is “medium long, merging gradually into well laid back shoulder, giving a sturdy, muscular ppearance.” The neck needs to be strong and well-muscled, with sufficient length for the dog to pick up and carry a bird with ease. The backline is strong and level from withers to slightly sloping croup, whether standing or moving. A sloping, setter-like topline is undesirable. There is little tuck-up and the loin is short, broad and muscular.

The tail does not come directly off the back but follows the natural line of the croup. It should be noticeably thicker at the base than at the tip and the bone length should reach to the hock joint. The function of the tail is to act as a rudder both in the water and on land, not as a sail. As such, the tail should be carried with a merry action, level with the back or with a slight upward curve. It should never be over the back or between the legs.

Forequarters and Hindquarters:

The front and hind quarters should appear equally balanced, well muscled and capable of free, easy movement. The standard is clear in requiring well laid back, long shoulder blades with an upper arm of equal length and good return, so the elbows are placed directly beneath the upper tips of the shoulder blades. Short, upright upper arms which place the legs too far forward are a problem in the breed.

The straight front legs should have strong, moderate bone with tight, compact, well-knuckled feet. Remember the correct equal proportions between withers to elbow and elbow to ground. Pasterns should appear strong and slightly sloping for adequate shock absorption. Dewclaws are normally left on but may be removed.

Hindquarters must be strong, broad and well muscled. Judges should examine the muscling in the thighs for conditioning. Stifles should be well-bent but not over-angulated, with strong, short rear pasterns. The rear legs should be straight when viewed from behind, with no evidence of cow-hocks or sickle hocks.

Coat and Color:

Color is probably one of the most common variants seen in the breed. The standard specifies “lustrous golden of various shades” which allows a broad range of color, ranging from cream to a coppery gold, with allowable lighter feathering. This variation in color is one

of the breed’s attractions. Extremes of light and dark of the predominant body color are considered undesirable. Many Golden Retrievers begin to grey as early as four to five years of age and graying of the head and body due to age is not to be penalized. Incorrect white markings that are to be faulted usually appear on the toes, chest or head. Any noticeable areas of black or off-color hair should be faulted.

Much more important than color in any assessment of the coat, is the **texture**. It must be firm, resilient, dense, and water-repellent with a good undercoat and lying close to the body. It may be either **straight or wavy!** Often coats



with a slight wave have a more correct texture. Soft, limp, silky coats absorb water and lack the protective qualities of a correct coat. Excessive body coat and furnishings are not in keeping with the function of the breed as a hunting dog and should be faulted. On land, excessive coat can get caught on brush and will tend to pick up all manner of debris that can take hours to brush out of the coat. In the water, excessive coat, especially soft coat, will absorb a considerable amount of water, making it more work for the dog to swim. The dog will tire much more easily as a result of dragging all that extra weight around.



The standard specifies “The natural appearance of coat or outline should not be altered by cutting or clipping, other than the trimming of the feet and neatening of stray hairs”. Excessive grooming often creates an incorrect “open” coat rather than the correct, protective coat which sheds debris and water.

Gait



The Golden should be moved on a **loose leash** at a moderate speed and exhibit a smooth, free, powerful, well-coordinated gait with a tendency to converge (both front and rear) as speed increases. The head should not be held high or pulled up on a tight lead. In order to maintain kinetic balance, the Golden will lower its head and thus allow for easier reach in front and more efficient movement. The backline should remain level and the tail carriage should be level or with some upward curve, but never up over the back or between the legs. Current movement problems in the breed include short, choppy strides, overdone reach and drive, where the feet are lifted too high off the ground for efficient ground-covering motion, a lack of convergence, especially in the front, all of which can result in an incorrect roaching over the loin or an undesirable bounce in the topline.

Temperament

Eager, alert, self-confident, friendly, reliable, trustworthy. The temperament of the Golden Retriever is renowned. There should be no tolerance for any display of hostility or aggressiveness towards other dogs or people or

any undue timidity or nervousness. Golden should not always be “turned on” in the ring. They should be relaxed and accepting of what is going on around them, not constantly looking for bait or exhibiting excitable behavior.

Presentation

The Golden Retriever should be presented as a natural, athletic, hunting dog. Excessive baiting, stringing up the neck and front by the collar or by a tight leash when moving should not be tolerated by judges. Coats should lie flat as a water-proof jacket and not be overly prepared through the use of products or excessive fluffing with blow dryers. Any evidence of alteration of the coat, which does not allow the judge to access its correct texture should be severely penalized, as should trimming or scissoring of the coat beyond the allowances made in the standard for neatening ears and feet. Any evidence of alteration of the natural color of the coat or nose should be dealt with according to AKC regulations concerning the use of foreign substances.

Primarily a hunting dog



Compiled by the Golden Retriever Club of America Judges' Education Committee for the A.K.C.

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