

A Practical Guide to Judging Irish Terriers

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The best dog judges all have one thing in common — the ability to identify breed type with the first look at a dog. The goal of this presentation is to guide you along the correct path to doing this with Irish Terriers. Discussion will focus on the outline, head, coat, movement and temperament that define breed type in Irish Terriers. With only two minutes per dog, judging a large entry of any rare breed is a big challenge. Let's step into the ring and show you how to best use your time.

Set up your entry and take your time carefully studying them in profile.



Close your eyes and picture the canine image that comes to mind when you read these words from a breed standard:

“built on lines of speed with a graceful, racing outline.”

Does a sighthound come to mind?

The description definitely fits, but this is the description from the General Appearance section of the Irish Terrier Standard.

“Built on lines of speed with a graceful racing outline”



Harold Spira in his book *“Canine Terminology”* defines racy as being streamlined and having an elegant appearance, resembling a thoroughbred horse in construction.

The opposite to cobby or cloddy, the Irish Terrier should be built on lines of speed.

The Irish Terrier is not a red wire-haired fox terrier.

An Irish Terrier has a raciness of build and great freedom of action that does not exist in a good fox terrier where cobbiness is highly desirable.

A short back is not characteristic of the Irish Terrier and is extremely objectionable.

Built on Lines of Speed

- Moderately long back – short back extremely objectionable
- Well-ribbed – fairly sprung, deep rather than round, reaching to the level of the elbow
- Chest deep and muscular, neither full nor wide
- Short loin well tucked up and slightly arched

Ask any veteran Irish Terrier breeder to use one word to describe the breed's appearance and he or she will say "racy" even though this word does not appear in the standard.

The visualization of "racy" is key to a vision of Irish Terrier breed type -- moderately long back; well ribbed with a fairly sprung deep rib cage that reaches the elbow of the dog, a well defined tuck-up and a short loin.

Racy is not a direct function of length. A longer dog is not racier when the length comes from an excessively long loin and not the rib cage.

The shorter ribbed, long-loined dogs lack the well-defined tuck-up.



Outlines you will see in the ring





Racy outline – moderately long

Ribs fairly sprung – deep rather than round

Chest deep and muscular, neither full or round

Chest long, well-tucked up

Proper angulation with shoulders sloping well into back

Hocks near the ground and stifles moderately bent



Square outline that is more like that of other long-legged terrier breeds

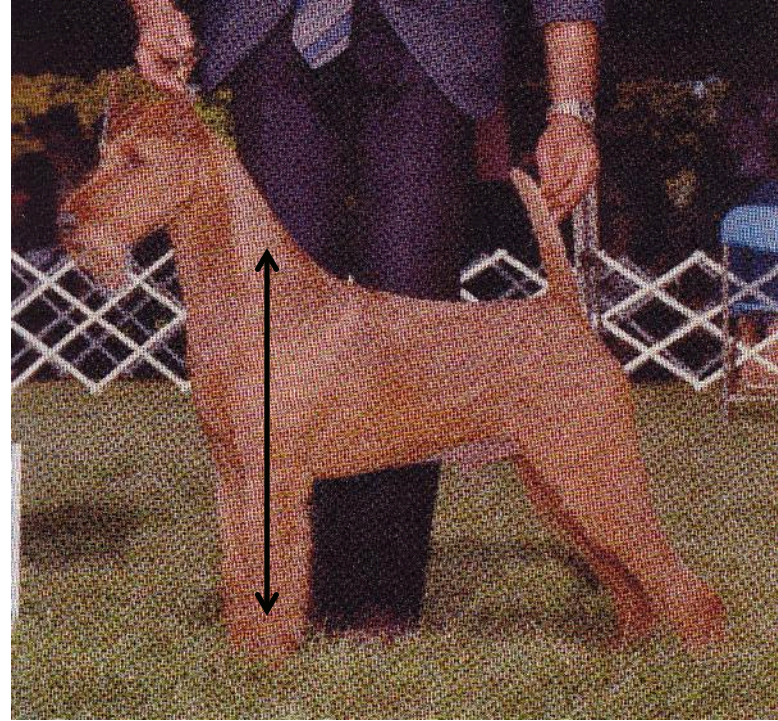
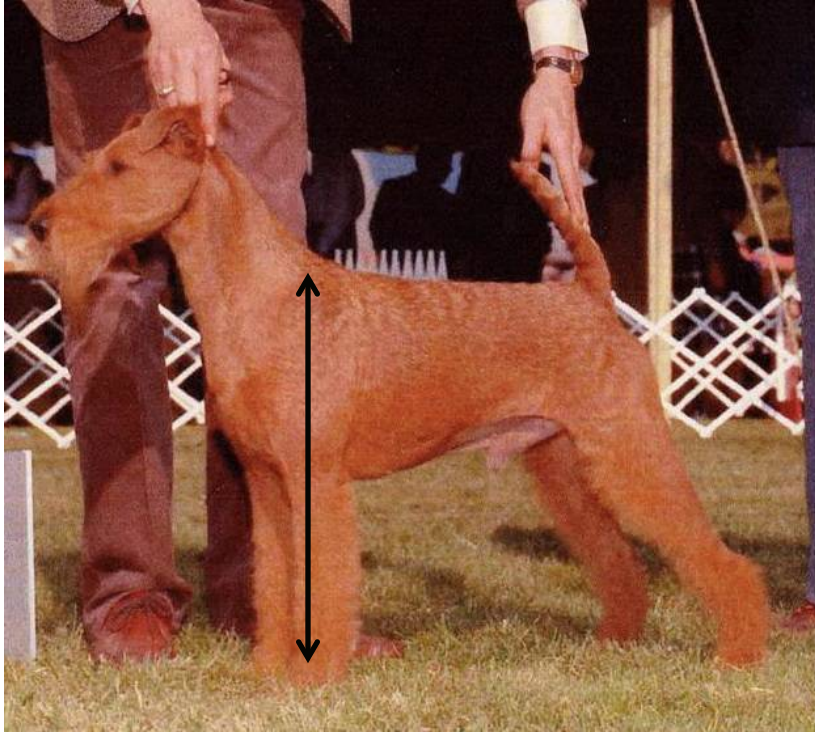


Square outline again with excess bone,
weight and furnishings



Refined -- has body length but with too much leg
Lacks bend of stifle and shoulder layback

Which has a better outline?



Left is better – built on lines of speed with a better shoulder and well defined tuck up

Which has a better outline?



Right is better – another example of a graceful racing outline built on lines of speed with a better shoulder and strong topline

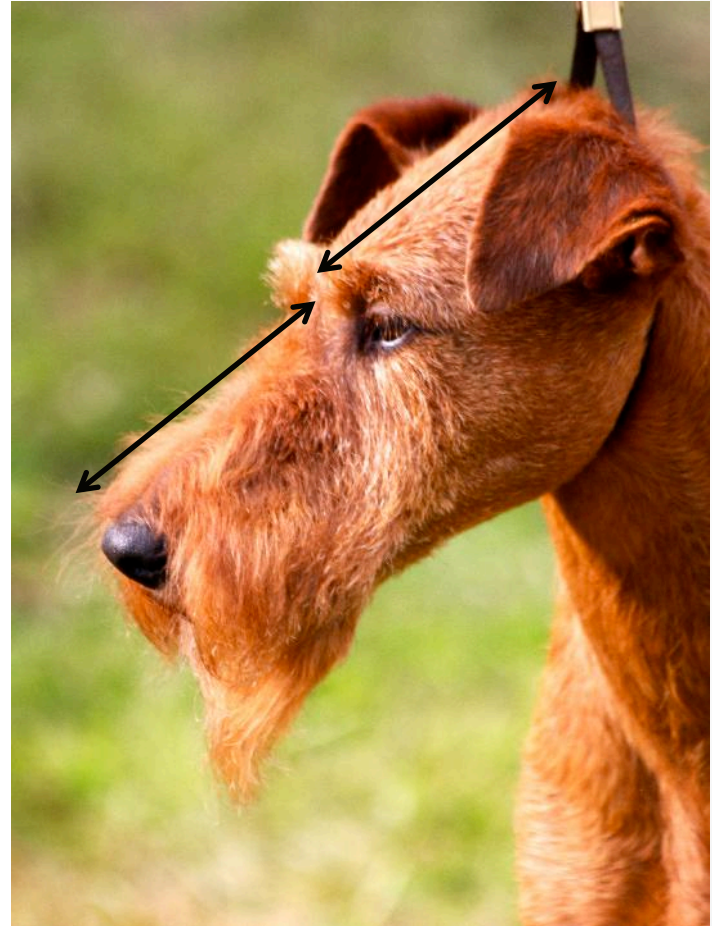
Now that you've completed looking for dogs with the breed defining racing outline, it's time to get your hands on the dogs.

Confidently approach from the front.

Remember the breed's watchdog heritage – in general the dogs are aloof to strangers. Attractive headpieces will stand out – long heads with properly balanced skulls.

Long balanced head

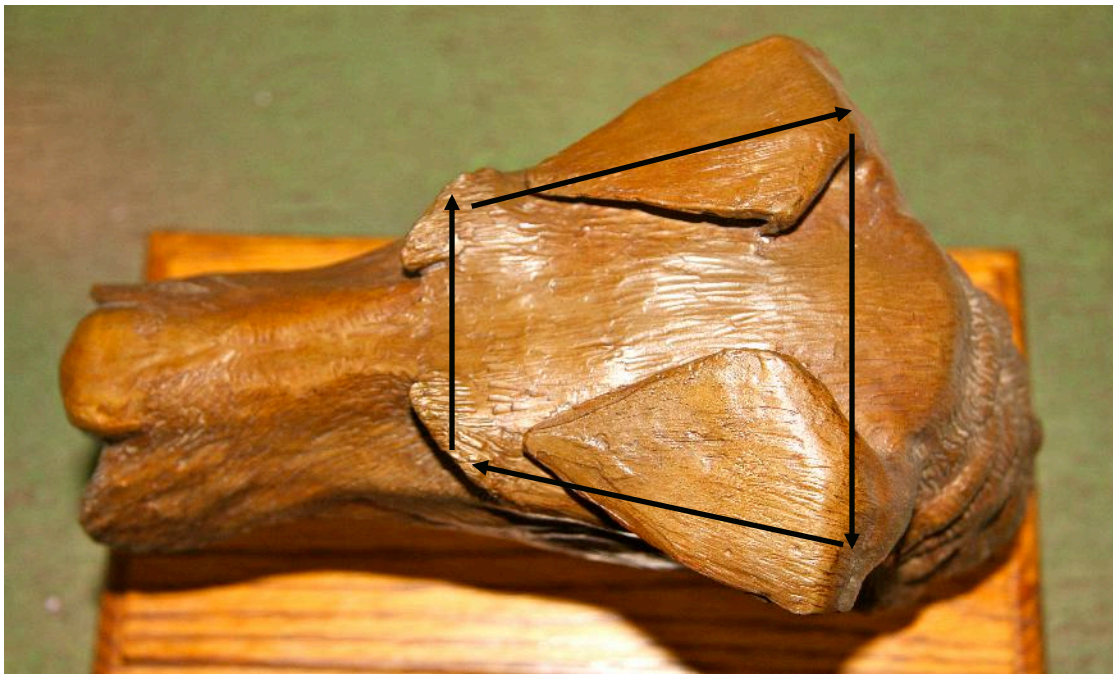
Foreface & skull from occiput to stop approximately equal in length
Stop hardly noticeable



The forehead should be approximately the same length as the skull measured from the occiput to the stop. The stop is hardly noticeable.

You'll also see some exaggerated foreheads and noticeably short foreheads that seriously disturb the balance of the head.

Skull is flat & slightly wedge-shaped
No bony lumps behind the eye
Chiseling below the eye is delicate



You do not want overly narrow heads which are tubular and often exhibit a pronounced dome or bumpy, bony formations just behind the eyes.

The foreface should not appear to fall away below the eyes – the chiseling is delicate.

Strong muzzle –
scissors or level bite
Long balanced head
& clean in cheek
Strong brow protects
small dark eyes
Good bone
underneath eyes
Light eye is serious
fault



Ears set high well above skull level
Tips fall over & approach eye corners
Finishing touch to keen expression



Expression plays a major role in defining type in Irish terriers. It has been described as keen and wicked, intense, hard bitten, and the varminty look of devil-may-care.

Some judges describe it as “the dog looked right through me.”

The distinctive ear set adds the finishing touch to the keen expression. They are set high, well above the level of the skull, with the tips falling over and approaching the eye corners. Because the ears are set so high on the head, there is an illusion of the skull being rather narrow between the ears. A dead ear, hound-like in appearance must be severely penalized.

As you continue to examine your entry, you'll see a difference in necks and shoulder construction. The correct dogs have a shoulder placed far enough back that in profile you'll see a bit of the breastbone in front.



The same dog will have an elegant neck of fair length.

You'll notice some dogs have excessive coat built up to create the illusion of good laybacks and level toplines.

Soft toplines are a serious fault.

The Irish Terrier Breed Standard is very clear on this point: The back must be strong and straight, free from an appearance of slackness or 'dip' behind the shoulders.

As your hands go over the body feel for the last floating rib so you can determine the ratio of rib to loin.

It should be a 2/3 rib to 1/3 loin proportion of the overall length of the dog from shoulder to hip. Proper rib to loin proportion is of the utmost importance to endurance and movement and serve a working Irish Terrier well. The long rib cage protects the vital organs and a short loin efficiently transmits the drive of the rear quarters forward along the spine.

A very slightly arched short loin keeps the spine from bouncing when the dog moves and the topline remains level.

The long-loined Irish terriers are not efficient workers. As they move, their bodies sway from side to side and the topline bounces.

Level hips & hightail set
Moderately bent stifles



The hindquarters include level hips, a high tail set (but not higher than the withers) and moderately bent stifles.

Dogs with a steep pelvis exhibit low tail sets and can be straight in the stifle.

Tails should be carried high.

As you inspect the coats of your entries, remember the role a correct coat plays in defining Irish Terrier breed type.

As a hard working farm dog, working and hunting in the bush in cold and damp weather, the Irish Terrier required a tight fitting, weather-resistant coat with an undercoat of softer hair to trap body heat.

The coat should be dense and wiry with a distinct broken appearance.

Furnishings on the legs and face should be of similar quality to that found on the body. Ears can be a darker color.

Dense, wiry broken coat hugs body.
Tight fitting weather-resistant jacket.
Single and wavy coats undesirable
Curly & kinky coats most objectionable
Furnishings similar texture to jacket.



A broken coat requires hair that grows in a arc forcing the tip back into the body of the dog, keeping the coat snug to the body. The variation in the amount of curvature causes variation in the appearance of the break in the individual coats. Dogs with a more pronounced curve in the hair take on the break in the surface of the coat more quickly and in shorter hair.

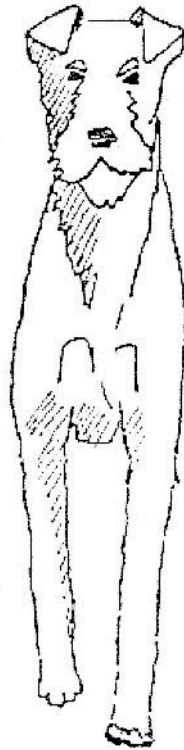
Those with less curvature will appear to have almost no break until the coat is longer.

Although the Irish coat includes a dense undercoat of finer, softer hair, a profuse goat-like beard is undesirable and legs should also be free of feather.

Each hair is dual colored displaying a red tip with a wheaten or golden shaft. As the coat grows longer the shaft color is more visible. A coat is called broken because the proper jacket hugs the body tightly yet breaks at certain lengths to reveal the dual color nature of the hairs.

It's time to move the dogs. You're looking for dogs that cover the ground without effort with good reach and drive. Both fore and hind legs should move straight forward when traveling. At a faster gait, the legs and will naturally converge toward the dog's centerline. Any waving or paddling motion wastes energy, affects endurance and is undesirable.

Legs move straight forward
Converge at a faster gait



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Correct Movement



Take a long look at the dog moving in profile. It's your best gauge of a properly constructed Irish Terrier. Moving in profile is where many dogs get into trouble with toplines that buckle either due to mismatched front and rear leg length or front extension that fails to match rear drive.

Dogs with straight shoulders will exhibit reduced reach which forces them to compensate by moving their front legs in a semi-circular arch to stay suspended until the force created by the hindquarters is expended.

This inefficient front movement increases the impact on the front shoulders and legs, thus wasting the drive created by the hindquarters. You will see an up-and-down motion at the withers.

On the other hand, a dog with well laid-back shoulders will reach the ground directly underneath his nose, moving his legs straightforward in a parallel track, enabling him to stay in suspension until the drive created by the hindquarters is expended. A dog with the correct moderately bent stifles will exhibit good rear extension. The head will extend to facilitate movement.

The topline and hips will remain level with no bounce. Irish Terriers should move with a moderately long stride, a flowing movement, as though the joints were on ball bearings and meshing perfectly. The movement is fluid, not jerky or choppy, but graceful and relaxed. There should be no sign of laxness, rather a firm stride giving a strong impression of forward momentum.

Irish Terriers should be moved at a moderate speed. If a handler is running to keep up with a dog, the pace is too fast.

Let's spar some dogs!

Letting the dogs “face off” against each other in the ring, on lead and in a controlled fashion, allows them to demonstrate boldness of character. When Irish Terriers are allowed to look eye to eye in the show ring, the full beauty of the breed springs forward. The good ones rise up on their toes, beautifully extend their necks and slam tails forward – ears button down on heads and small dark eyes flash the breed's characteristic fire.

When sparring keep dogs at reasonable
distance apart
Control your ring



Sparring is not about dogs out of control. It's about dogs standing their ground, alertly prepared for challengers.

- Keep your show ring under your control.
- Instruct handlers not to spar dogs until you request it.
- Set the dogs up at a reasonable distance apart – three feet or more.
- Do not let handlers move their dogs in closer and go nose to nose.

During sparring an Irish Terrier should never back away from another dog. But don't be surprised if the young class dogs are more interested in playing with each other than sparring. Also, after you spar dogs, their "blood is up" and they will not exhibit their best movement.

You're looking for assertive dogs that show fire and animation in the ring.

An Irish Terrier should not fear other dogs, strange people or strange places. You can't put up a dog that stands or moves with its tail between its legs.

Likewise, do not tolerate or reward aggressive behavior.

The Irish Terrier Club of America encourages the proper use of sparring. It allows dogs to show themselves, providing an excellent opportunity to fully evaluate and appreciate attitude, expression and the breed defining “graceful racing outline” described in the Breed Standard.

Reward Dogs Bearing Gifts

- Built on lines of speed with graceful racing outline
- Correct head and shoulders together
- Keen expression
- Broken coat
- Excellent drive & extension
- Fire and animation
- Moderate Size

The graceful racing outline defines the breed. Reward dogs that are built on lines of speed. Remember, dogs with soft toplines are a serious issue in the breed. When Mother Nature encounters a long and balanced Irish Terrier head, she has a tendency to straighten up the shoulder to help support it.

Breeders strive to combine the correct head with a well laid back shoulder to give the dog both a racy outline and optimal front extension. When you find the correct head and shoulder together reward the dog.

Reward the dogs with breed defining keen wicked expression – small dark eyes and distinctive high ear set.

Reward the Irish Terriers that have the tight-fitting weather resistant broken coats a working farm dog needs.

Reward the dogs with excellent drive and extension that can do the work they were bred to do.

The Irish Terrier is good tempered, spirited and game. Reward the dogs that show fire and animation. When you find an 18 inch Irish Terrier in your entry that lives up to the breed standard, reward it. If you don't have a quality 18 inch Irish Terrier in your entry, look for moderately-sized dogs and bitches.

18 inch dog and bitch



What to look for quickly

1. Racy:

Moderately long – bitches may be longer

Ribs fairly sprung – deep rather than round

Chest deep and muscular, neither full nor wide

Chest long, well-tucked up

Shoulders sloping well into back

Hocks near the ground and stifles moderately bent

2. Characteristic head:

Slightly wedge shaped with flat skull

3. Characteristic coat:

Dense & wiry in texture having a broken appearance

4. Correct Size

On behalf of the Irish Terrier Club of America, I thank the following individuals for their contributions to this study guide:

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