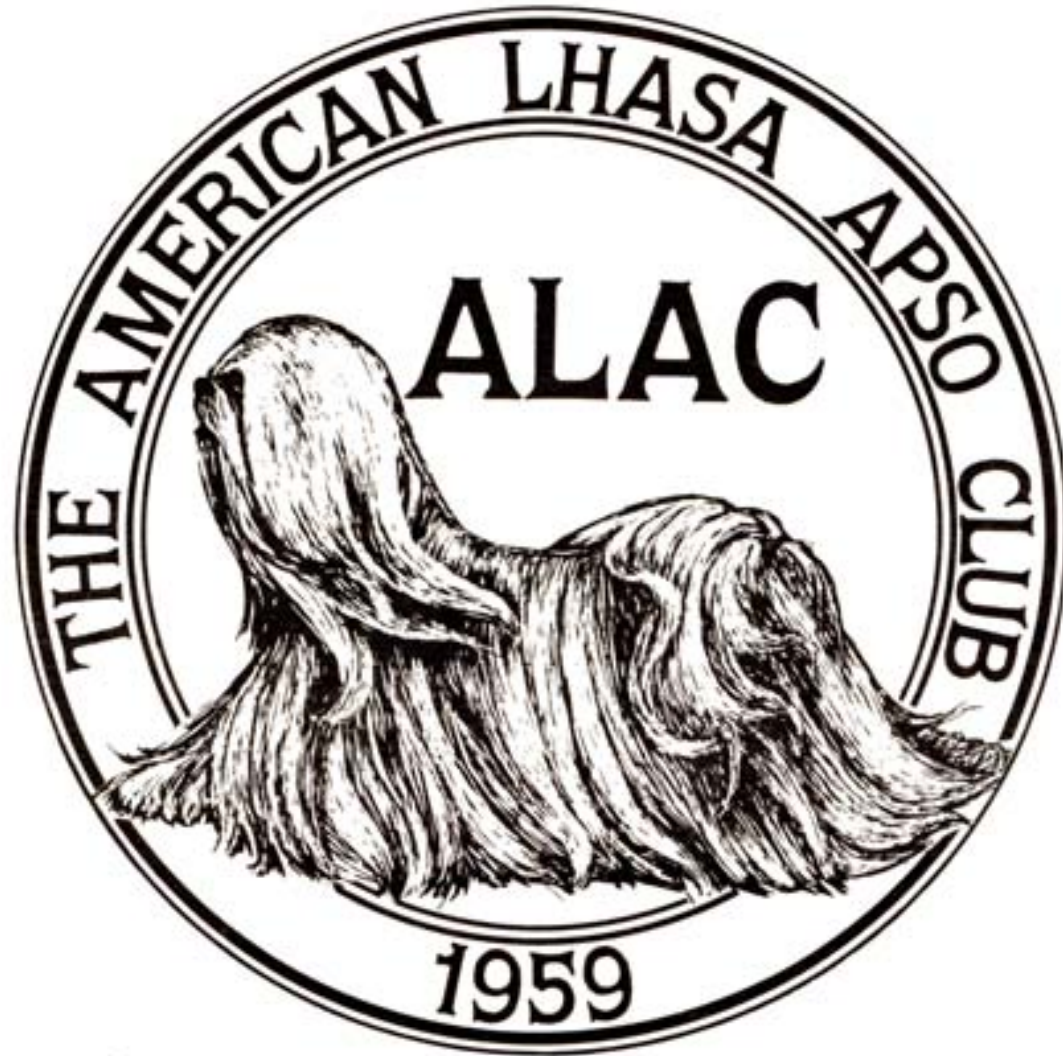




The Lhasa Apso Judges' Study Guide

**Written and produced by the
American Lhasa Apso Club
Judges Education and
Breed Standard Committees.**



Presented by
The American Lhasa Apso Club



The Lhasa Apso

The Lhasa Apso is a Tibetan breed of ancient origins, dating back to at least 800 AD when Buddhism first took root in this remote Himalayan country.

Over the centuries, the form and function of the Lhasa Apso have been shaped by the challenging environment of Tibet and the unique culture of the Tibetan people.





The Lhasa Apso Geography

Tibet is an isolated country in Central Asia -- often called The Roof of the World.



Surrounded by many of the highest mountains in the world, Tibet is a rugged country of narrow valleys, high mountain passes and arid plateaus.

Mt. Everest straddles the border between Tibet and Nepal.



The Lhasa Apso

The altitude of the Tibetan Plateau is extreme. The capital city of Lhasa is a low spot at roughly 12,000 feet.

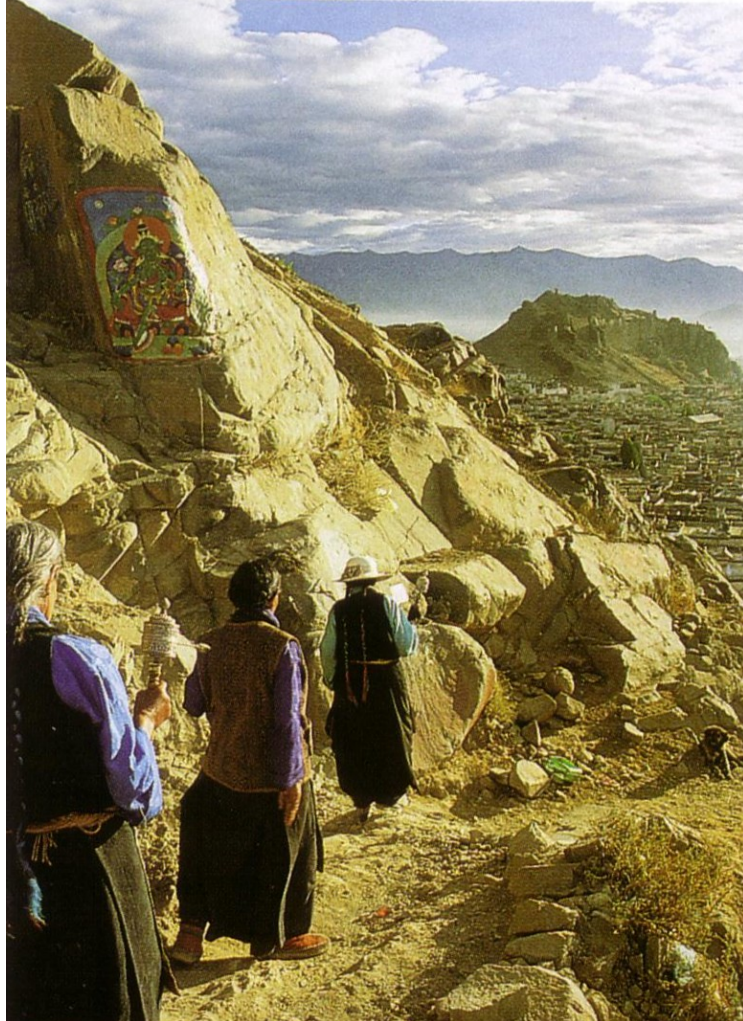


The Dalai Lama's Potala Palace in Lhasa.



The Lhasa Apso

Geography and Climate



The narrow mountain passes, used for centuries by Buddhist pilgrims and trade caravans, climb as high as 16,000 feet.

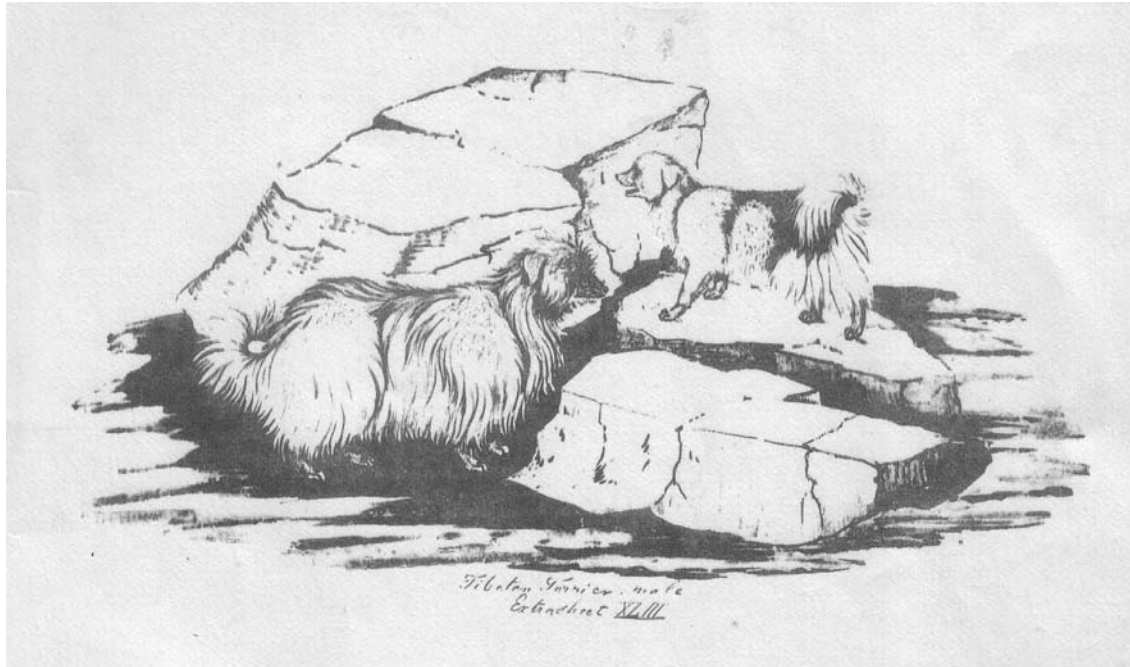
Besides the rugged terrain, dogs in Tibet must adapt to a harsh, dry climate that can go from searing heat and blinding sunlight during the day to bitter, blustery cold at night.

This photograph depicts a mountain path near Shigatse. Note the small dog at the far right.



The Lhasa Apso

History - Early Description of Tibetan Dogs



"Tame dogs abound and are much praised by the men for guarding their flocks and herds and houses, and by the women for petting. For the former purpose the Tibetan Mastiff is used...the ladies dogs are Poodles or Terriers, many of which are pretty and have long hair."

B. H. Hodgson, Notice on the Mammals of Tibet, 1842



The Lhasa Apso History



Traditional Tibetan Flag



Detail from a Tibetan Rug

Tibetans consider the mythical Snow Lion, pictured to the left, to be a special protector of their country.

"If the snow-lion stays in the mountains, it is a snow-lion; if it comes down to the valleys, it becomes a dog."

This old Tibetan saying reflects the close cultural link between the Snow Lion and the Lhasa Apso. The Tibetan name for the breed, "Apso Seng-kyi" translates, loosely, to "bearded lion dog."

As a living representation of the Snow Lion, the Lhasa Apso gained favor among the Tibetan nobility and Buddhist temple communities, particularly near Lhasa, as an interior watch dog and steadfast companion.



The Lhasa Apso History

**To this day,
the Lhasa Apso
remains
a special companion
and protector,
a
guardian by
nature,
especially
in his own
domain.**





The Lhasa Apso Tibetan Breeds Comparison

Tibetan breeds share certain common characteristics that have developed over the centuries as adaptations to the extremes of the environment.



*Left:
1930's Lhasa Apso
imported to Great
Britain*



*Right:
1930's
Tibetan
Spaniel*



*Left:
1920's corded
Tibetan Terrier
photographed
in Lhasa*



*Right:
1920's
Tibetan
Mastiff*



The Lhasa Apso

Tibetan Breeds Comparison

- The coats of all Tibetan breeds, short or long, are weather proof and very dense. Tails and ears lay close to the body for warmth, reducing the risk of frostbite. The tails, carried well over the backs, provide added protection from harmful sunlight.
- In Tibetan Mastiffs and Lhasas the feet are round and described as large or cat-like, ensuring good traction in snow and on steep slopes with rocky or icy terrain.
- To avoid injuries caused by the wind, the eyes in Tibetan dogs are never large nor protruding. In both Lhasas and Tibetan Terriers, the headfall shelters the face from the sun and the wind.
- No matter the size or the purpose, all Tibetan breeds reflect their ancient heritage as high altitude, mountain dogs...nothing is inefficient... nor overdone... nor exaggerated.



The Lhasa Apso

The Lhasa Apso Arrives In the U.S.



One of the first Lhasa Apsos gifted to C. Suydam Cutting by the 13th Dalai Lama in the 1930's.

Cutting was a world traveler and friend of President Roosevelt who developed a special interest in Tibet prior to World War II.



Helen Cutting, Suydam's wife, was the first American woman to visit Lhasa. They returned from Tibet in 1937 with two Lhasa Apsos that helped establish the breed in the United States.

Photo courtesy of the Newark Museum



The Lhasa Apso

History - Important Imports from Tibet

The last two dogs given to the Cuttings arrived in the United States in 1949, just prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

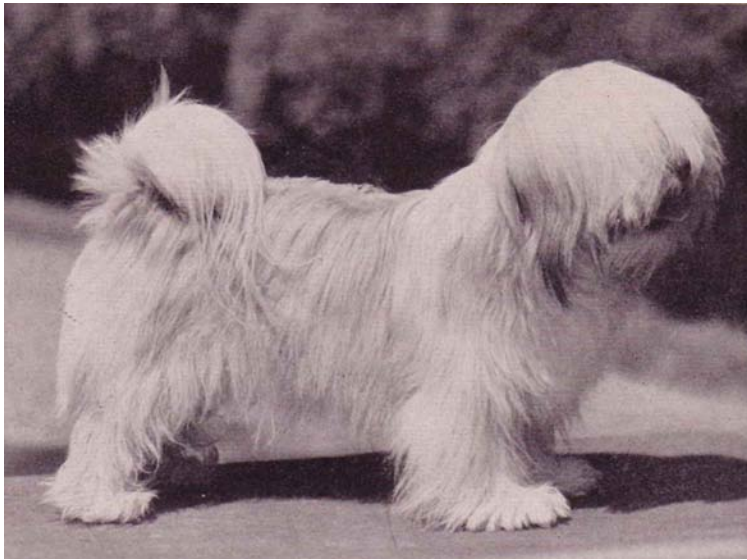
Bred by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, these dogs (pictured in short clips not long after their arrival) are considered to be of superior type, exemplifying the moderation and lack of exaggeration that are hallmarks of the breed both then and now. Along with other imports from Asia and Great Britain, the Cutting's dogs became the foundation for the breed in this country.





The Lhasa Apso History

Past



1942 AKC Complete Dog Book

Present



2006 ALAC Illustrated Guide

Ever since these little Tibetan dogs first appeared in the West, Lhasa breeders have worked to conserve breed type and the essential hardiness of this mountain breed. Comparing old photos to new, you can see that while coat care has vastly improved, the overall balance of quality specimens of the breed has not changed.



The Lhasa Apso Standard

Character: Gay and assertive, but chary of strangers.

Size: Variable, but about 10 or 11 inches at shoulder for dogs, bitches slightly smaller.

Color: All colors equally acceptable with or without dark tips to ears and beard.

Body Shape: The length from point of shoulders to point of buttocks longer than height at withers, well-ribbed up, strong loin, well-developed quarters and thighs.

Coat: Heavy, straight, hard, not woolly or silky, of good length, and very dense.

Mouth and Muzzle: The preferred bite is either level or slightly undershot. Muzzle of medium length; a square muzzle is objectionable.

Head: Heavy head furnishings with good fall over eyes, good whiskers and beard, skull narrow, falling away behind eyes in a marked degree, not quite flat, but not domed or apple-shaped; straight foreface of fair length. Nose black, the length from tip of nose to eye to be roughly about one-third of the total length from nose to back of skull.

Eyes: Dark brown, neither very large and full, nor very small and sunk.

Ears: Pendant, heavily feathered.

Legs: Forelegs straight; both forelegs and hind legs heavily furnished with hair.

Feet: Well-feathered; should be round and catlike, with good pads.

Tail and Carriage: Well-feathered, should be carried well over back in a screw; there may be a kink at the end. A low carriage of stern is a serious fault.



The Lhasa Apso

Five important areas
to consider when evaluating
the breed:

- Balance
- Head
- Structure & Movement
- Coat
- Temperament





The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



The Lhasa Apso standard describes a moderate, small dog with no hint of coarseness nor massive bone.

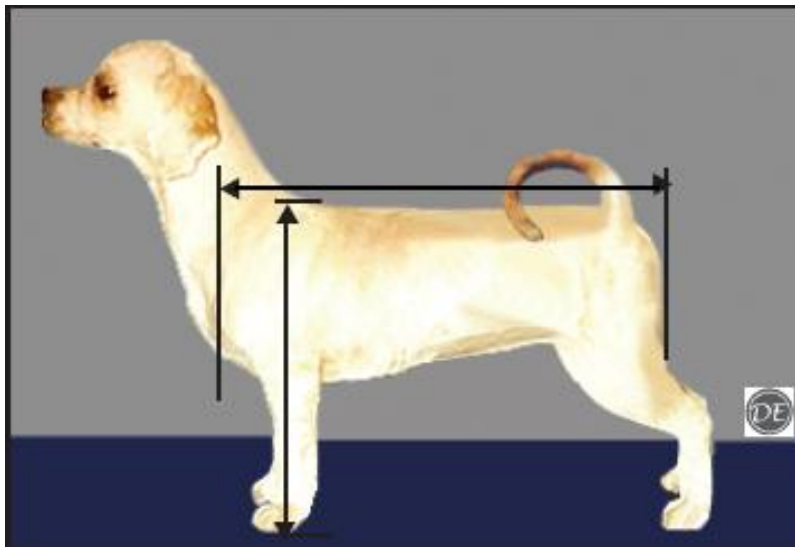
The height of the Lhasa Apso is variable. The use of the word "about" allows variation, ideally between 10 and 11 inches at the shoulder. "Bitches slightly smaller" refers to those feminine characteristics which distinguish females easily from males in addition to being a reference to height.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline

The Lhasa Apso silhouette is that of a well-balanced rectangular dog, possessing a level backline, without exaggeration of any body part.



Body length, measured from point of shoulder to point of buttock, should be roughly one-third longer than the height at the withers. This means the Lhasa Apso is neither excessively long nor noticeably short in body; he is rectangular, never square.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline

Although there is no reference to neck in the standard, the neck should be strong and well proportioned, rising smoothly from the shoulders and carrying the head with an air of assertiveness as befits a sure-footed mountain breed.



As the Lhasa Apso moves forward at the trot and increases speed, there is a tendency for the head to extend slightly toward the line of travel.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline



Reflecting his mountain heritage, the Lhasa Apso is, above all, a dog of moderation. The word moderate precludes exaggeration of any one part over the other. Not only is height a factor but consideration must be given to weight and overall proportion.

Balance in the Lhasa Apso should reflect a harmony of body parts in a pleasing relationship to one another with no one part standing out. The relationship of length of leg to length of body, along with the placement, length, and carriage of neck and tail, all contribute to correct balance.



The Lhasa Apso

Balance and Outline

Think about balance again as you look at these two photos. These pictures are of the same dog, taken on the same day. One picture shows the dog on a hard surface and the other on grass.

As you can see, the surface on which you view a Lhasa can make a significant difference in your assessment of balance.





The Lhasa Apso Head



One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Lhasa is his head. The typical expression, framed by the heavy head furnishings, has been likened to that of an "old soul."

Because of the Lhasa's head furnishings, a first glance can be deceptive. Careful examination is a must!



The Lhasa Apso Skull

The skull should be narrow – neither domed nor apple-shaped but not quite flat. Ears set at eye level will compliment the narrow skull. An ear placement above eye level can lead to the false assumption that the skull itself is broad.



To correctly understand the phrase "falling away behind the eyes to a marked degree," one must evaluate the narrowness of skull without the illusion of width created by the headfall. Gently push the hair towards the back of the skull. There should be no bulging or broadness behind the eyes. The zygomatic arch (or cheek bone) should be only slightly curved, not prominent. The muzzle meets the backskull at a moderate angle forming a shallow stop.



The Lhasa Apso Skull

The length from tip of the nose to the back of the skull should be a ratio of 1/3 muzzle to 2/3 skull.

The standard's call for the nose to be black eliminates any possibility that liver pigment is correct. Full depth of black pigment on the nose and eye rims and lips is essential to good expression.





The Lhasa Apso Muzzle

At one-third of the total length of the head, the muzzle will be of medium length with a strong but not prominent lower jaw. The standard states that a square muzzle is objectionable. However, a snipey, weak look to the muzzle is also undesirable.



The foreface of the Lhasa is straight; not turned up nor down-faced. The muzzle meets the backskull at a moderate angle forming a shallow stop.

The planes of the muzzle and the skull are parallel when viewed in profile.





The Lhasa Apso Bite

The bite of the Lhasa Apso should not interfere with nor distract from correct expression.

The preferred bite is either level or slightly undershot. A reverse scissors bite with adequate width of lower jaw and a full complement of incisors, is the ideal that breeders strive for. A scissors bite and an undershot bite where the teeth show when the mouth is closed are not desirable.

**“Level or
slightly
undershot”**



Level bite



Reverse scissor bite





The Lhasa Apso Eyes

We think of the eyes as a mirror to the soul and a Lhasa's eyes are indeed crucial to correct expression.

To quote the standard, the eye is "dark brown, neither very large and full, nor very small and sunk".

In dogs with correct expression, the eyes will be frontally placed, oval or almond in shape...not round...and never protruding.



In order to achieve the desired softness of expression, the Lhasa eye must be medium size and dark. Ideally, the iris should fill the eye with no white showing when the dog looks straight ahead.



The Lhasa Apso Expression

In summary, factors contributing to typical Lhasa expression include:



- **Balanced head of 1/3 muzzle to 2/3 skull**
- **Straight foreface**
- **Narrow skull**
- **Medium-sized, oval, dark brown eyes**
- **Deep black pigment promoting the desired softness of expression**
- **A correct bite**
- **A strong not prominent lower jaw**
- **Heavy head furnishings**



The Lhasa Apso Structure

The breed standard for the Lhasa Apso has changed little since it was first approved by the AKC in the 1930's.



Unlike more recent standards, the original writers of our standard did not describe certain basic elements of structure and movement for this unique breed.



Today's breeders assume that anything not mentioned in the standard should default to basic canine structure and movement.

This being the case, the Lhasa is a normally structured dog with strengths and weaknesses in structure and movement as you would find in a majority of other breeds.

Keep in mind that the origin of the Lhasa is the mountainous country of Tibet. The Lhasa, in response to the demands of the environment, is a surprisingly sturdy dog with moderate bone, neither massive nor flimsy.



The Lhasa Apso Structure

The standard is specific in a few areas.



The Lhasa is:

- Longer than tall,
- Well ribbed up and
- Possesses a strong loin.

As discussed earlier, longer than tall connotes a dog that is agile and athletic, not overdone, with the agility and strength one expects in a small mountain breed.

"Well ribbed up" means that the Lhasa possesses a long, moderately sprung rib cage. The term should never be confused with "barrel chested" in this breed. Rather, the expression describes a long ribcage that extends well back toward the loin allowing for increased lung capacity essential for survival in the Himalayas. The rib itself is long and slightly curved, resulting in a flatter side and a deeper brisket...again allowing for the sort of lung expansion needed at high altitudes.



The Lhasa Apso

Structure

The loin should be strong, of moderate length and very muscular, to provide the impulsion and agility needed to cover uneven terrain.

When viewed from the front, the ribcage is oval in shape. The brisket is level with or slightly below the elbow and there is a prominent pro-sternum.

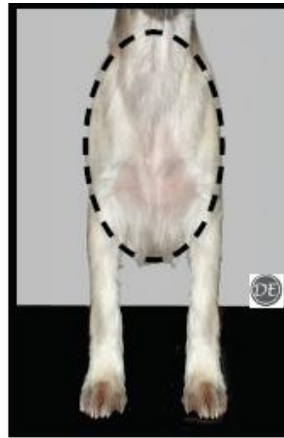


Long rib cage

Strong
loin



Correct
Oval ribcage



Not slab sided



Not barrel-chested



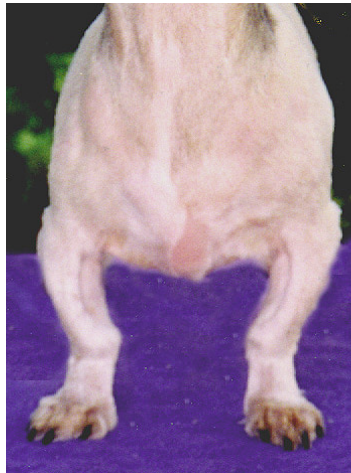
The Lhasa Apso Structure

From elbow to pastern the foreleg should appear straight when viewed from the front. The feet may, however, turn out slightly. The pasterns are slightly let down.

The rear construction of the Lhasa Apso defaults to normal canine structure with strong and well-developed musculing. The hocks are well let down and perpendicular to the ground, slightly behind the point of buttocks.



**Forelegs
Straight**



**Very
bowed**



**Well
Developed
Rear
Quarters**



**Cow
hocks,
poor
muscle
tone**



The Lhasa Apso Structure

Proper shoulder placement is essential for good balance, with a smooth transition from neck to backline. The lengths from withers to point of shoulder and point of shoulder to elbow are equal.



Front and rear angulation should be about equal with balanced reach and drive.



The Lhasa in proper condition will be well muscled, of good hard flesh, and neither too fat nor too thin. The breed is slow to mature, however, and young Lhasas will frequently be on the lean side.

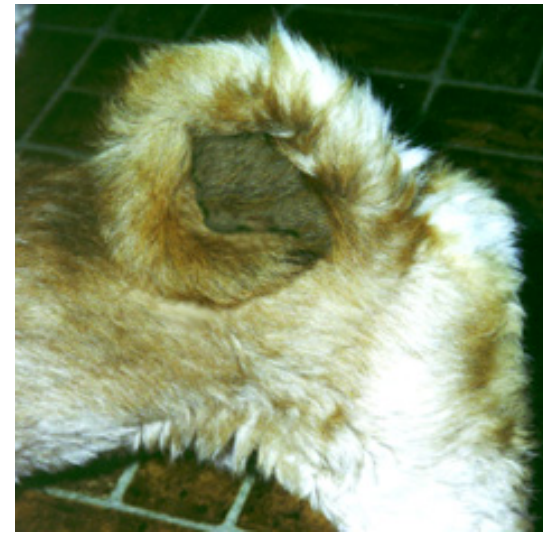


The Lhasa Apso Structure-Tails

The Lhasa Apso tail is to be carried well over the back in a curl with the hair draping to the side. The tail is set sufficiently high to enable the dog to carry it well over the back. It should **ALWAYS** be over the back when the dog is moving but may drop when the dog is standing still and relaxed.



Correct screw tail





The Lhasa Apso Movement

At the trot, the Lhasa should be the picture of efficiency and grace, using a smooth free-flowing gait with no wasted action. The legs move parallel, coming and going, with a tendency to converge as the dog increases speed. The side gait should show good reach and drive. Although not mentioned in the standard, a level backline on the move is desirable.





The Lhasa Apso Movement

The front foot contacts the ground well forward with no tendency toward hackney or exaggerated lift.





The Lhasa Apso Movement



Strong, well-developed quarters with a moderately angled croup provide good drive. The rear legs should reach under the body and push out well behind, carrying the body forward in balance with the front. You should be able to see the pads of the rear feet as the dog goes away without exaggerated kick up.



The Lhasa Apso Coat

The Lhasa's coat is certainly one of the most distinguishing characteristics of this breed. Parted in the middle from head to tail, the coat should look like a beautiful cloak of hair draping the distinctive silhouette. It should also be natural looking...excessive trimming and sculpturing is discouraged.



The ideal Lhasa coat is described in the Standard as "heavy, straight, hard, NOT woolly or silky". Proper Lhasa hair is strong and resilient, not light nor fine nor flyaway.

"Very Dense" implies that the Lhasa should have a moderate amount of undercoat, in other words, a double coat.



The Lhasa Apso Coat Texture



While length of coat is desirable for a mature, finished look in the adult Lhasa, texture of coat is most important.

Lhasa hairs are hard, straight, and described as almost human. On close examination, individual hairs can be seen, and each strand can be individually felt when rubbed between your fingers. The coat will be hard to the touch but it should not feel rough or wiry.

To evaluate heaviness and density of the coat, lift it gently and release - on an adult Lhasa it should fall back and blend with the rest of the coat. Note that the earliest maturing part of the coat will be over the shoulder. The slowest maturing part of the coat will be in the middle of the back.



The Lhasa Apso Coat Furnishings

The standard calls for:

- Good headfall
- Good whiskers and beard
- Well feathered tail, legs and feet

These are all necessary to help the Lhasa survive the wind and cold and rugged terrain of Tibet.

The well feathered tail carried over the back adds protection against the intense sunlight of the Lhasa's native environment. Kinks at the end of the tail are present at birth. They are not faulted by today's breeders.

When being shown, the long headfall over the eyes of the Lhasa is often brushed to the side to let the dog see better. Bands or barrettes to hold the hair back are not allowed in the conformation ring.





The Lhasa Apso Coat Color

The standard revision in 1978 recognized the importance of all colors being equal within the breed.



Many Lhasas possess dark tips to the ears and beard; however there is no preference given to those with dark tips.





The Lhasa Apso Coat and Maturity

Slow to mature, the adult Lhasa coat may take two to three years to reach the ground. Puppy coats will be softer in texture, but evidence of correct straight, hard coat can be seen by six months of age usually breaking at the withers.



Typical headfall on a young Lhasa.



Eight month old puppy



A mature Lhasa in full coat.



The Lhasa Apso Temperament



The Lhasa Apso's temperament is unique. The standard says "gay and assertive but chary of strangers".

Independent by nature, Lhasa Apsos are lively and fun-loving while also sensitive to the environment, watchful and intelligent. Above all, they are guardians, especially within their own domain.

This temperament can be traced back to the Lhasa's Tibetan heritage and it is valued by today's breeders.

The term "chary of strangers" implies a dog that is suspicious but never shy nor aggressive. Most Lhasas are comfortable being examined on the table but the approach should be confident and direct, never hasty. Remember their vision is limited by the heavy head furnishings over their eyes.



The Lhasa Apso Examination

When examining a Lhasa Apso, always approach the table head on. Do not approach from the side as the headfall prevents the dog from seeing where you are. Begin the exam by reaching under, not over, the head and then move your hands to either side of the skull. From there, gently push back the head fall to evaluate the head and expression. Part the lips to see the bite or ask for the handler to show you the bite. Do not pull up on the whiskers to reveal the bite.



From the front, check the prosternum, shape of ribcage and the forelegs. Shoulder angulation and front assembly can be evaluated from the front or from the side. Moving to the side of the dog, check the coat texture by rubbing a section of shoulder hair between your fingers, feeling for individual strands. On adult Lhasas with longer coats, lift a section of hair just behind the shoulder and drop it to evaluate "heavy." Still at the side, check the overall proportion of the dog and length of ribcage. Lift the tail to evaluate the backline and muscle in the loin. Replace the tail and complete the exam of the hindquarters.



The Lhasa Apso Examination



Once the table exam is complete, Lhasas often shake when they are put down on the floor. Exhibitors may take a moment to brush hair into place when this happens. Some handlers also take a moment to brush the hair away from the eyes so the dog can see where he is going.

Because the breed is chary of strangers, we do not expect dogs to make eye contact with the judge at the end of the down and back.

Please don't re-examine a Lhasa on the floor but rather ask the handler to return the dog to the table.



The Lhasa Apso



...always **REGAL** when looking his best



The Lhasa Apso

**Seldom a pet,
Rather a companion**



Often a clown, but never a fool



The Lhasa Apso



*That's
all
Folks...*