



The American Lhasa Apso Club



*The Lhasa Apso
Illustrated Guide*



Prepared by
The American Lhasa Apso Club
Breed Standard Committee

The American Lhasa Apso Club Illustrated Guide to the Standard

The Lhasa Apso standard is an attempt to define an ideal specimen and is a descriptive guide by which a Lhasa Apso should be judged. The standard is not designed for the person who has never seen a Lhasa Apso but is meant as a description for those who are familiar with the breed and dogs in general. It is important, therefore, to offer this guide as a more in-depth study of the unique qualities that set the Lhasa Apso apart from other breeds and, at the same time, emphasize the characteristics that cause the Lhasa Apso to be representative of the breed.



CHARACTER - GAY AND ASSERTIVE, BUT CHARY OF STRANGERS.

Originating in the lonely and isolated reaches of the Himalayan mountains, Lhasa Apsos reflect their Tibetan heritage in many characteristic ways. Relatively unchanged for hundreds of years, these sturdy little mountain dogs are fastidious by nature and are guardians, especially within their domain.

When looking his best, the Lhasa Apso exhibits a regal attitude. He is seldom a pet but rather a companion, often a clown, but never a fool.



Lhasa exhibiting its regal attitude



Lhasa playing in the snow

Historically in Tibet, his primary function was that of a guardian inside Buddhist monasteries and homes of Tibetan nobility, where his intelligence, acute hearing and natural instinct for being able to identify friend from stranger made him well-suited for this role.

The Lhasa Apso temperament is unique. His rather independent and stubborn nature requires patient understanding, and he resists harsh or strict discipline. He is rather calm and deliberate, although chary (suspicious) of strangers, a direct reflection of his long-standing heritage of seclusion in Tibet.

The Lhasa Apso does not change loyalties easily and is less protective away from his home environment. Slow to mature, he does not reach his prime until well into his third or fourth year. He ages gracefully and keeps a youthful appearance and attitude well into his teens.

SIZE - VARIABLE, BUT ABOUT 10 INCHES OR 11 INCHES AT SHOULDER FOR DOGS, BITCHES SLIGHTLY SMALLER.

The height of the Lhasa Apso is variable. The use of the word “about” allows variation, ideally between 10 and 11 inches. “Bitches slightly smaller” refers as much to those feminine characteristics which distinguish bitches easily from males rather than simply to height.

The standard’s request for a Lhasa Apso of 10 or 11 inches at the shoulder suggests a dog whose bone is in proportion to his height and weight. There should be no hint of coarseness, massive bone or body. The Lhasa is agile and capable of maneuvering, reflecting his origin as a breed accustomed to the mountainous and rugged terrain of Tibet.



Correct bone for the average size dog



Too heavy boned

The Lhasa Apso is a dog of moderation. Not only is height a factor, but consideration must also be given to weight, proportion and length of body, for these all contribute to the final picture of overall balance. A Lhasa Apso in proper weight and condition will be of good hard flesh, well muscled and neither too fat nor too thin, although a tendency toward leanness is not uncommon in the young dog since the Lhasa Apso is slow to mature.

COLOR - ALL COLORS EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE WITH OR WITHOUT DARK TIPS TO THE EARS AND BEARD.



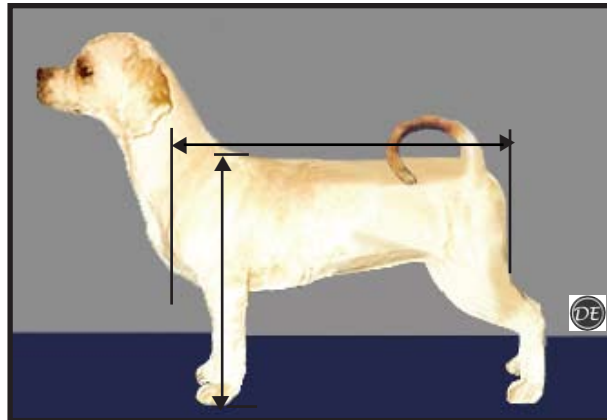
The standard specifically states that no color preference is to be given.



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.

When viewed from the side, the Lhasa Apso silhouette is that of a well-balanced dog, possessing a level backline without exaggeration of body parts. Body length is measured specifically from point of shoulders to point of buttocks and should be longer than the height at withers. The overall picture should be rectangular in profile.

Point of shoulders to point of buttocks longer than the height at withers.



The overall picture should be rectangular in profile.

A properly balanced rectangular profile



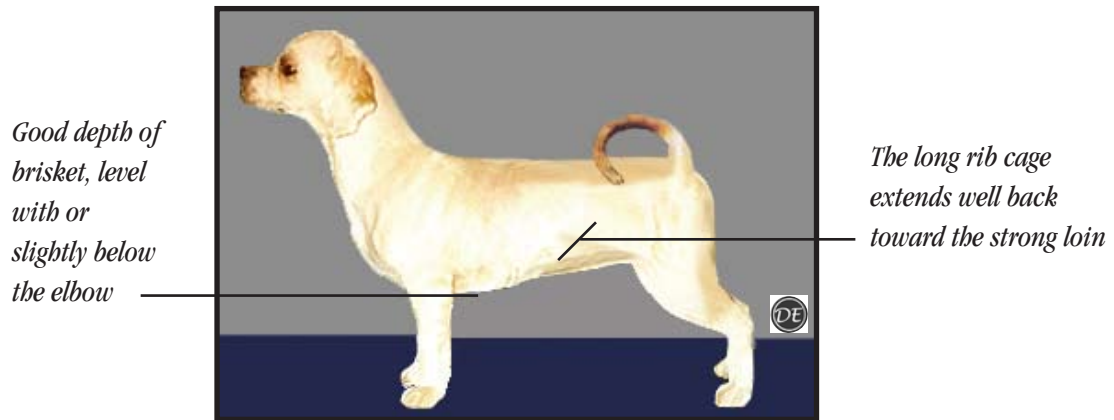
Excessive back length is undesirable



The Lhasa is not a square dog

The standard's request for "well-ribbed up" is often misconstrued as a request for a full, rounded or barrel-shaped rib cage. This is not the correct meaning of well-ribbed up. Rather, this expression is used to describe a long rib that extends well back toward the loin area. This long rib tends to less curvature than a shorter rib, creating a somewhat flatter side to the body and allowing for a good depth of brisket.

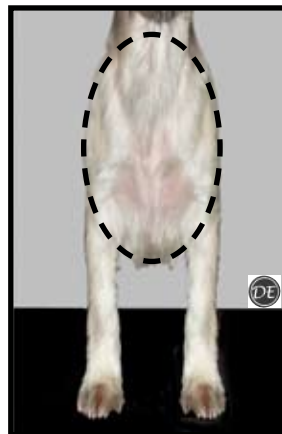
A strong well-muscled loin of moderate length, a long rib cage and a level backline are essential for efficient movement.



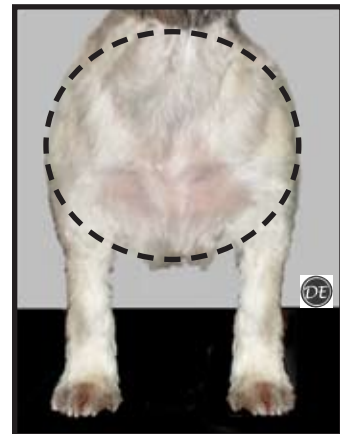
Viewed from the front, the rib cage is oval in shape.



Correct oval-shape



Slab-sided



Barrel-shaped

At the trot the gait is smooth and free-flowing. The legs move parallel, coming and going, with a tendency to converge as the dog increases speed.



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



Strong, well developed rear 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; going away, the pads of the rear feet give evidence of good follow through, without exaggerated kickup.

Although not mentioned in the Standard, a level backline is desirable, both standing and moving.

The neck is strong and well-proportioned, rising smoothly from the shoulders and carrying the head with an air of assertiveness. As the Lhasa Apso moves and increases speed, there is a tendency for the head to be extended slightly toward the line of travel.



Side gait without coat, showing good reach and drive



Side gate with coat

*Balance can be affected by both coat length and the surface on which the dog stands.
In the two photos below, note how the balance appears to change.*



These two pictures are actually of the same dog, taken on a concrete surface and in the grass.

COAT - HEAVY, STRAIGHT, HARD, NOT WOOLY NOR SILKY, OF GOOD LENGTH, AND VERY DENSE.

One of the most distinguishing features of the Lhasa Apso is the beautiful cloak of hair, parted in the middle and draping to each side from head to tail. "Heavy," "straight," and "hard" are words that bring to mind a definite visual as well as tactile connotation. Heavy implies not light or fine or flyaway; strong resilient hair with a moderate amount of undercoat is desirable. When lifted out from the body, it will fall immediately back and blend in with the rest of the coat. Heavy hair must be hard in texture, so that when it is rubbed between the fingers, individual hairs will be felt. Straightness (or lack of it) is apparent at a glance. To assess heaviness and hardness of coat, one must touch it. Although hard, the coat should not be wiry or rough to the touch.

The adjectives "wooly" or "silky" are self explanatory and are not typical of the breed. "Of good length" denotes ample length, substantial but not exaggerated. Length must be adequate for the purpose of protection, notwithstanding ease of maintenance, yet give the appearance of luxurious beauty in the show ring.

Historically, the good headfall and well-feathered feet and legs requested in our standard protected this small dog against extreme temperatures and the rough terrain of his native land. Because of their late-blooming maturity, the Lhasa Apso may be two or three years of age before the adult coat reaches the ground. Excessive trimming, and/or sculpturing is to be discouraged.



Hair, close-up. When rubbed between the fingers, individual hairs will be felt.



*The coat must be adequate for the purpose of protection.....
(young adult)*



The luxurious beauty and headfall of this Lhasa marks him as a very mature adult.

**MOUTH AND MUZZLE - THE PREFERRED BITE IS EITHER LEVEL OR SLIGHTLY UNDERSHOT.
MUZZLE OF MEDIUM LENGTH; A SQUARE MUZZLE IS OBJECTIONABLE.**

The preferred bite is either level or slightly undershot. A reverse scissors bite is the ideal undershot bite. A scissors bite or an undershot bite with teeth visible when the mouth is closed is not desirable. Adequate width of the lower jaw, with a full complement of incisors contributes to proper expression.



Level bite, side view

CORRECT



Level bite, front view



Reverse scissor bite, side view

CORRECT

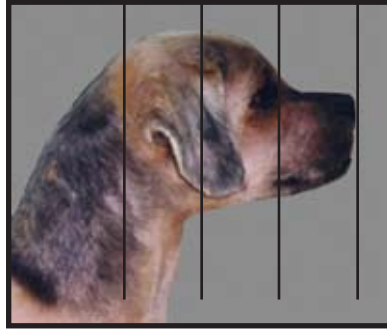


Reverse scissor bite, front view

The muzzle is level and of medium length, with a desired one to two ratio (1:2) of muzzle to skull. The muzzle is neither turned up nor is down-faced. The planes of the muzzle and skull are parallel when viewed in profile.



A correct muzzle length



Same correct head



An incorrect 1:3 ratio

HEAD - HEAVY HEAD FURNISHINGS WITH GOOD FALL OVER EYES, GOOD WHISKERS AND BEARD; SKULL NARROW, FALLING AWAY BEHIND THE 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.

The Lhasa Apso head is very important. The distinct expression is enhanced by the standard's request for heavy head furnishings which includes muzzle furnishings and beard, with length and density in proportion to the head fall. When being shown, the long headfall over the eyes is commonly brushed to the sides, enabling the dog to see better. Artificial means, such as bands and/or barrettes to hold back the hair are not allowed in the conformation ring.



Bands and/or barrettes are not allowed in the conformation ring.



The skull shape is narrow and although not quite flat, it is not domed or apple-shaped. Well-placed ears, at eye level, will accentuate the narrow head. An ear set that is higher than eye level can mislead one into assuming the skull is broad.

To understand the term “falling away behind the eyes” correctly, one must be able to appraise the width of skull without the illusion of breadth created by heavy head furnishings. When examining the head, gently push the hair toward the back of the skull and feel the zygomatic arch (cheek bone). It should be only slightly curved, not prominent.

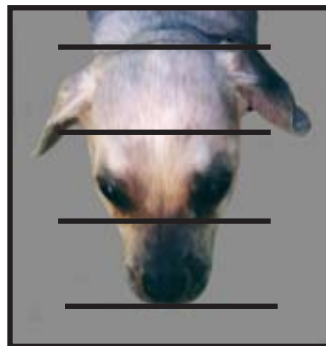


The same dog, viewed from the front and above, showing correct skull



Broad backskull and high set ear

Correct skull from above, showing the breakdown of the 1:2 ratio



The Lhasa is straight of foreface; neither roman nosed nor dish faced. The length from the outer tip of the nose to eye is roughly one-third the total length from the tip of nose to back of skull or occiput, and can be expressed as a one to two ratio (1:2). The muzzle meets the backskull at a moderate angle forming a shallow stop.

The standard's request for "nose black" eliminates any possibility of self color liver pigment being correct. Full depth of pigmentation is essential to good expression and requires dark pigment on eye rims and lips.



Straight foreface and correct stop



Domed skull, deep stop incorrect, often accompanied by too short a muzzle as well

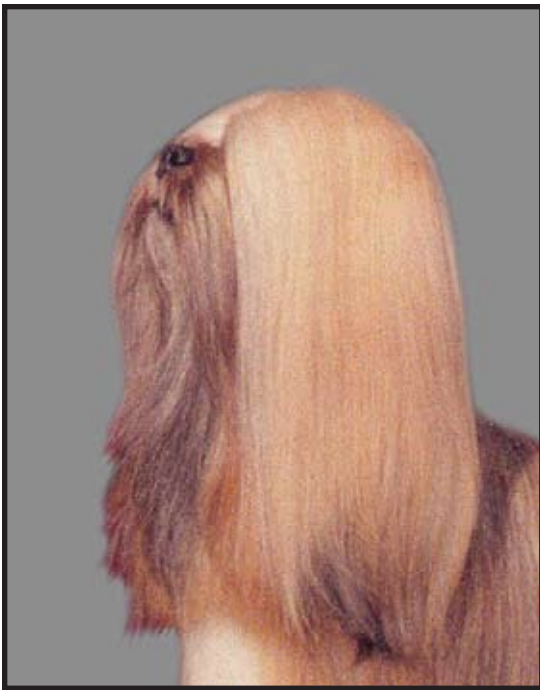
A comparison of the head of the Lhasa Apso and the Shih Tzu shows the obvious diversity in the two head styles.



*Lhasa Apso head in profile
showing correct shallow stop*



*Shih Tzu head in profile
showing correct pronounced stop*



Lhasa head in coat



Shih Tzu head in coat

Lhasa Apso Head - Standard

SKULL NARROW, FALLING AWAY BEHIND THE 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.



Lhasa Apso head - frontal view

Shih Tzu Head - Standard

HEAD - ROUND, BROAD, WIDE BETWEEN EYES, ITS SIZE *IN BALANCE* WITH THE OVERALL SIZE OF THE DOG BEING NEITHER TOO LARGE OR TOO SMALL



Shih Tzu head - frontal view



Lhasa head in coat



Shih Tzu head in coat

EYES - DARK BROWN, NEITHER VERY LARGE AND FULL, NOR VERY SMALL AND SUNK.

The darkness of the eye and its medium size help give the Lhasa Apso the desired softness of expression. The eye is frontally placed, oval in shape, and should not be prominent. Ideally, the iris should fill the eye with no white showing when the dog is looking straight ahead..



The dark medium-sized eye is oval in shape and frontally placed.



A round eye is incorrect.



White showing around the eye or a "ringed" eye is incorrect. (Teeth showing is undesirable)

EARS - PENDANT, HEAVILY FEATHERED.

The ears of the Lhasa Apso are pendant, hanging close to the head, and are heavily feathered. Ears that are placed well back on the skull and ideally set near eye level, will complement the standard's request for a narrow skull.



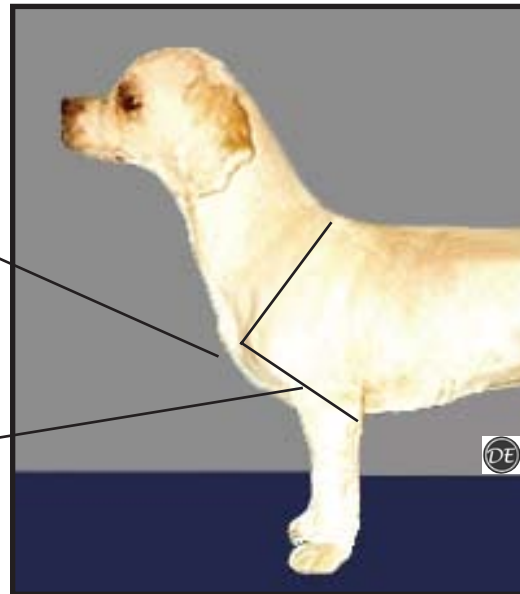
Well-placed ears will complement a narrow skull

LEGS - FORELEGS STRAIGHT, BOTH FORELEGS AND HIND LEGS HEAVILY FURNISHED WITH HAIR.

There should be no discussion of the front legs without mention of the shoulder assembly. The lengths, from withers to point of shoulder and point of shoulder to elbow are equal. Proper shoulder placement is essential for support and balance, with smooth transition from neck to backline. The prosternum is prominent. From elbow to pastern the leg should appear straight when viewed from the front. The feet may, however, turn out slightly. The pasterns are slightly let down.

Prominent prosternum

Measurements from withers to point of shoulder, point of shoulder to elbow, should be equal



Correct straight front leg

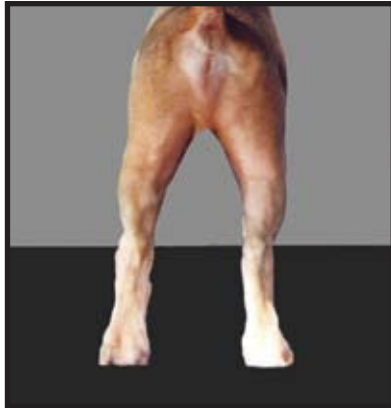


Badly bowed front leg and toeing out



The rear construction of the Lhasa Apso is that of a normal canine structure, with adequate angulation and placement, hocks perpendicular to the ground and slightly behind the point of buttocks.

Hocks slightly behind the buttocks. Well developed rear assembly.

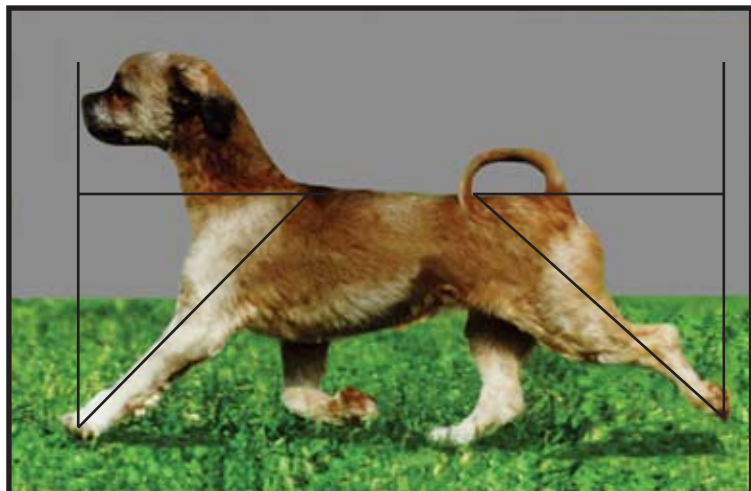


Hocks perpendicular to the ground



Cowhocked - very poor rear

The front and rear angulation should be in balance, providing well matched reach and drive.



FEET - WELL-FEATHERED, SHOULD BE ROUND AND CATLIKE, WITH GOOD PADS.

The feet are well-rounded with thick pads. They are heavily furnished with hair between the toes. The hair may be trimmed for neatness. Dew claws may be removed.



Good foot, (round, catlike with firm pads), pastern slightly let down



Poor foot and weak pastern



A study of what you "see" under the hair.

**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.**



Tail carried well over the back in a screw

The Lhasa Apso has a tail set sufficiently high to enable the tail to be carried well over the back, but carriage of tail may be dependent on attitude as well as structure. In the standard, reference is made to "a low carriage of stern is a serious fault." This means that when the dog is moving, the tail should be up and carried well over the back. When a Lhasa Apso is standing or otherwise bored, he often drops his tail. It should be noted that the tail is not always carried in a screw, but is often carried well over the back in a curl, lying to the side. A kink is not uncommon in the Lhasa Apso's tail. The tail should be well-feathered with long hair.



*Tail carried well over the back in a curl,
lying to one side*

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For updated information, check our website at: www.lhasaapso.org.

NOTES



*A woman from the Tibetan Refugee Camp in Kathmandu with her very typey Lhasa Apso.
Photo courtesy Barbara Ratledge, September 1975*

