

# Leonberger

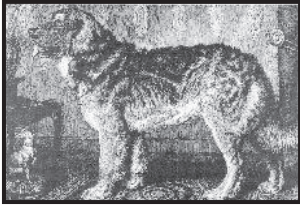
**ILLUSTRATED BREED STANDARD**



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# History of the Leonberger Breed



The early history of the Leonberger breed revolves around Heinrich Essig (1809-1887) a successful businessman, politician, alderman and prominent citizen of Leonberg, a town outside Stuttgart in southern Germany. A well-known animal trader, he bred and sold many dogs over a period of 50 years. His dogs were known throughout Europe for their stable, affable temperaments, soundness, vigor, aesthetic balance, harmonic proportions and imposing size. They were exported by Essig to the United States, Canada and as far away as Japan. At Essig's death, his nephew took over the breeding of the dogs and refined the Leonberger, creating a breed that was consistently representative of the tawny colored, black masked dogs that characterize the Leonberger today. Albert Kull, president of one of the early breed clubs was also a popular artist with an eye for detail. He developed the first Leonberger standard in 1895, forming the foundation for all subsequent Leonberger standards. Kull's work did much to establish the credibility of the breed, helping the Leonberger to flourish.

During WWI, the Leonberger was all but obliterated, but in 1922 two businessmen from Leonberg, Karl Stadelmann and Otto Josenhans, revived the breed. Through their breeding cooperative, enough dogs were produced to provide foundation stock to several new kennels. Stadelmann created the first Leonberger Studbook, which continues uninterrupted to this day.

Despite the devastation of WWII, Leonbergers were bred and shown in Reich-sponsored events. In 1948, the current German Leonberger Club replaced the club that had represented the breed throughout the era. Under the guidance of Robert Beutelspacher, the first modern standard and breeding regulations were written for the breed. In 1975, the German Club brought Leonberger breed clubs from the major European nations together and founded the International Union of Leonberger Clubs.

The Leonberger Club of America was founded in 1985 to protect and promote the breed in North America. The LCA was granted associate membership in the International Leonberger Union in 1990 and became a full member in 1996. The Union now meets annually in Leonberg with other clubs from around the world to discuss the health and future of the breed.

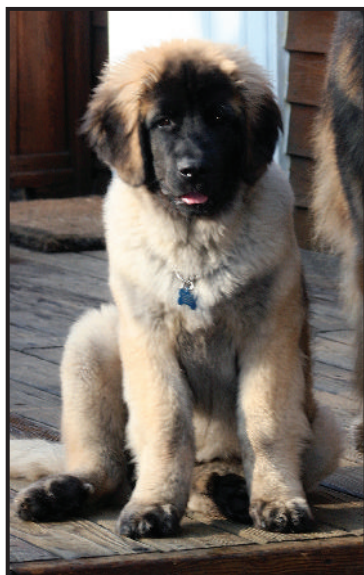
A carefully managed breeding program with rigorous breeding regulations and an independent Registry was maintained by the LCA from 1985 to 2007 when the breed was accepted into the AKC, with full recognition as part of the AKC Working Group coming in 2010.

The Standard contained in this book was originally approved by the AKC Board of Directors in October 2009, with updates approved in 2016. It is the official AKC Standard for the Leonberger breed and has been written following AKC guidelines, while maintaining the breed's true-to-type look as defined in its land of origin.

# The Official AKC Breed Standard for the Leonberger

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The Illustrated Standard Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the much-appreciated contributions to this book by the many American and European Leonberger fanciers who provided photographs and information and the drawings of artists Rahel Schale and Jeanne Flora.



## 5 Major Characteristics of Leonberger Type Defined

**General Presence** - Vigilant, calm, confident yet with a quite lively temperament, good size and appropriate dimorphic features.

**Outline** - Despite double coat, a balanced, correct outline is clearly visible with good balance of body to legs and strong bone.

**Head** - Strong, wide, yet still rectangular head shape with parallel planes, a moderate stop, black mask, with a sweet expression.

**Coat** - Straight to slight wave, double, correct color, not sculpted with ample feathering on legs/breeches. Mature males carry a mane as do some females.

**Movement** - Balanced, powerful, free and elastic.



# General Appearance

The Leonberger is a large, sociable working dog, muscular yet elegant, with a proud head carriage. The breed is distinguished by its black mask, substantial bone, balanced build, and double coat. Adult males are particularly powerful and strong and carry a lion-like mane on the neck and chest. Bitches are unmistakably feminine. The Leonberger is a dimorphic breed; a dog or a bitch easily discernible as such. Although imposing in size, the Leonberger is graceful in motion.

Natural appearance is essential to Leonberger type. The breed is to be shown with no trimming, sculpting or other alterations. True to the breed's origins as a multipurpose family, farm and draft dog, today's Leonberger excels as a versatile working dog and devoted family companion. Intelligent and lively, friendly yet vigilant, the Leonberger is attentive and self-assured in all situations.



Leonbergers are a dimorphic breed!

# Size, Proportion, Substance

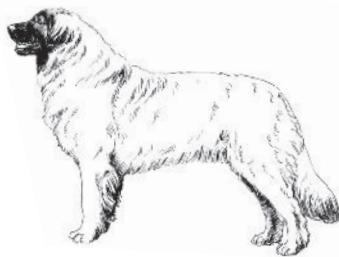


**Size:** An adult male is 28 to 31-1/2 inches in height (30 inches preferred). An adult female is 25-1/2 inches to 29-1/2 inches, (27-1/2 inches preferred). Weight is in proportion to the overall size and structure. When proportion, substance, and balance are present, a slight deviation above standard is tolerated.

**Proportion:** Height to length of body is 9:10. Height is measured at the withers; body length is measured from point of shoulder to point of buttock. The depth of chest is 50 percent of the height; brisket reaches to elbow. The angulation of front and rear quarters is in balance. Overall balance and proportion are as important as height.

**Substance:** Strong bone in proportion to size of the body, well-muscled.





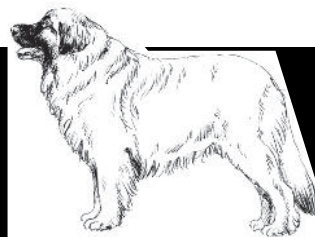
*Long Body*



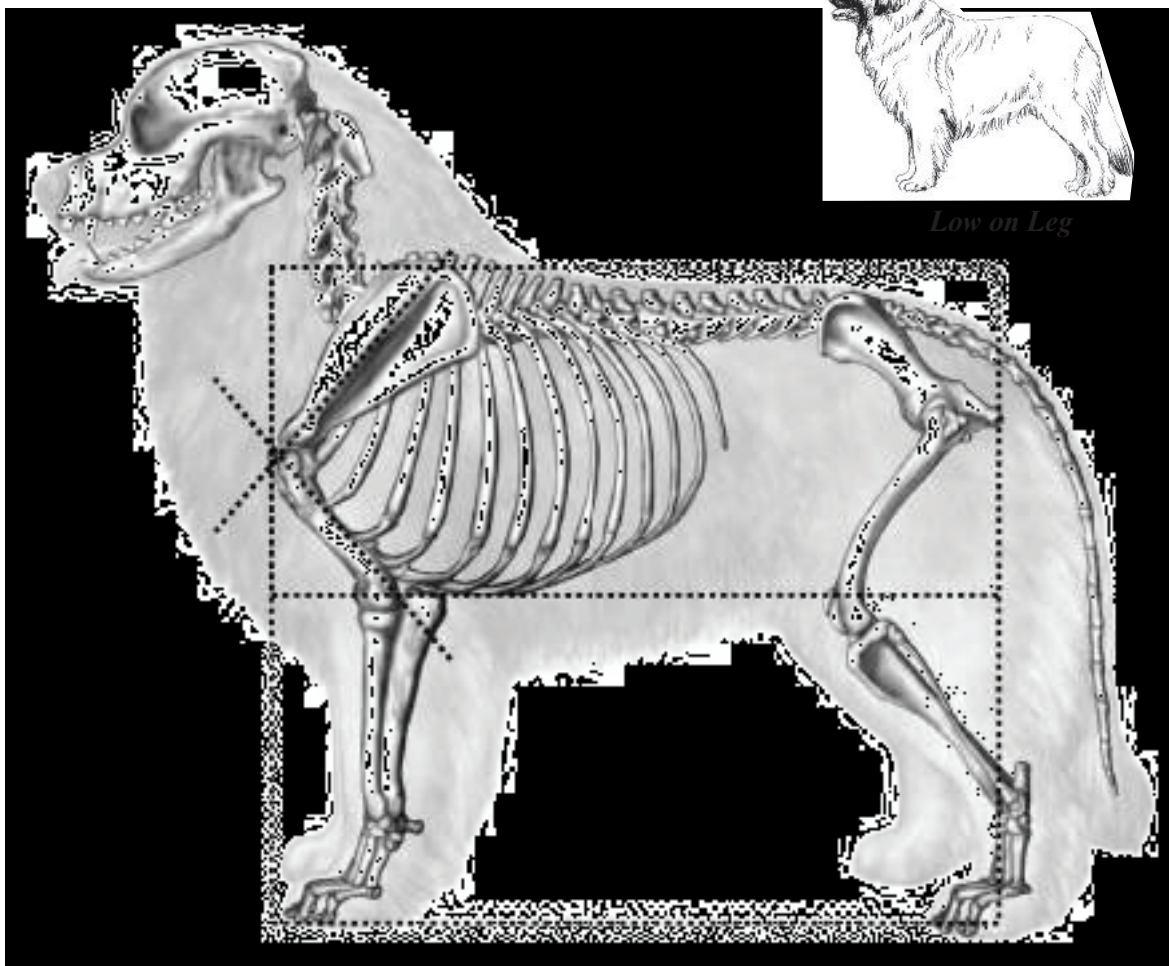
*Short Body - Square Dog*



*Too High on Leg*



*Low on Leg*



**Correct 50/50 Proportions of the Leonberger**

# Head

The head, in its entirety, is deeper than it is broad, rectangular shaped, with no wrinkles. The length of muzzle to length of backskull is equal. Cheeks are only slightly developed. The male head is strong and masculine, while the female head always expresses femininity.



## NOTE

The head is rectangular with the muzzle and skull each forming their own proportionate rectangles. It is not cheeky, square, triangular or snipey.

**As with everything else about a Leonberger, the head is moderate!**

## NOTE

A soft, sweet expression, enhanced by dark brown eyes, is a hallmark of the breed.

**Disqualification:**  
**Complete lack of mask.**





## Examples of Good Masks and Expression



**Expression/Mask:** Good-natured, soft, and intelligent expression. Face is covered with a full black mask that extends from the nose up to and over the eyes. A lesser mask is acceptable, but not desirable.

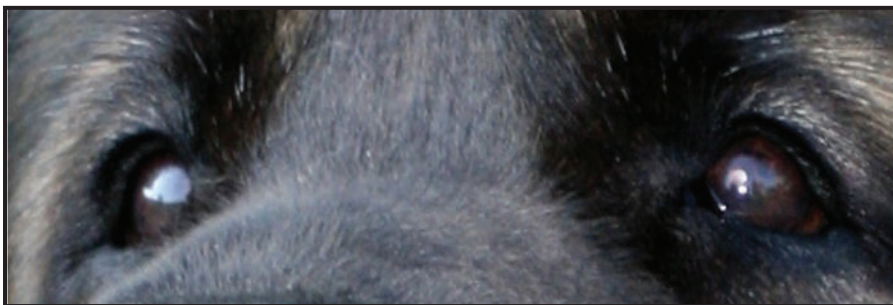


*Broken or Weak  
Mask Accepted*

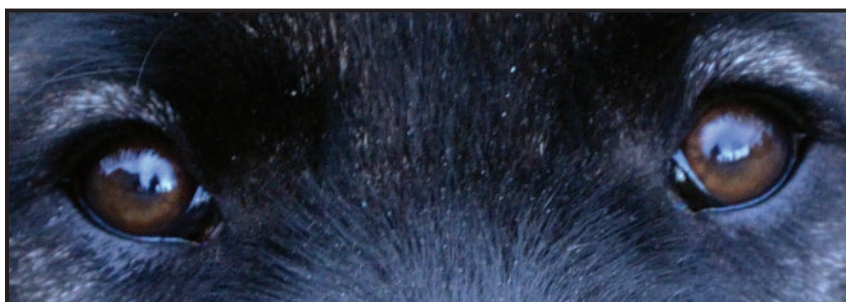


*Graying Mask  
Accepted*

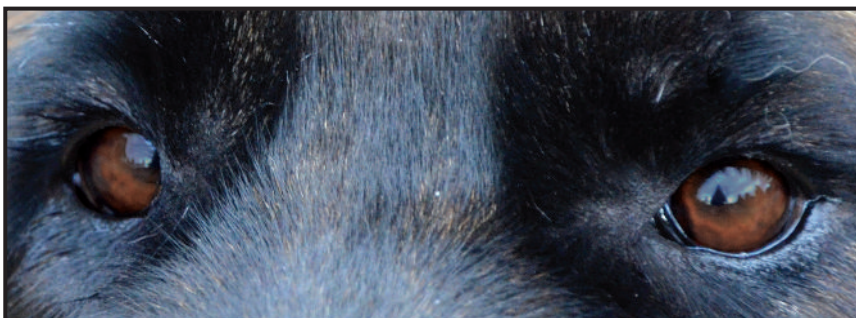
**Eyes:** Dark brown is preferred over light brown. Eyes are medium size, oval to almond shaped, neither deep-set nor protruding. Eyelids are close fitting, not showing any haw or sclera.



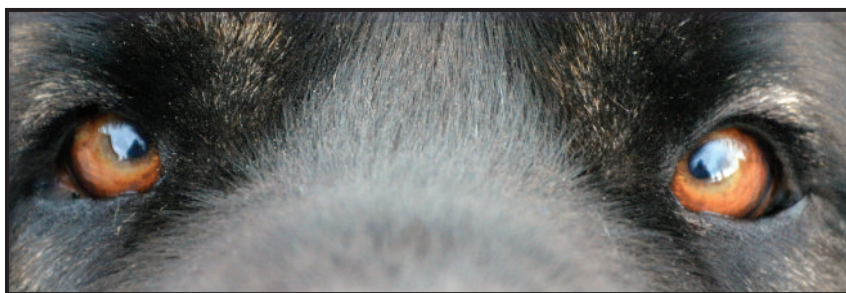
*Dark Brown*



*Medium Dark Brown*



*Medium Brown*



*Light Brown*



**Ears:** When alert, ears are level with top of skull and set slightly forward. They are of medium size, triangular, fleshy, hanging flat and close to the head. Tips are level with corners of the mouth.



*Set Too Low*



*Too Small - Short*

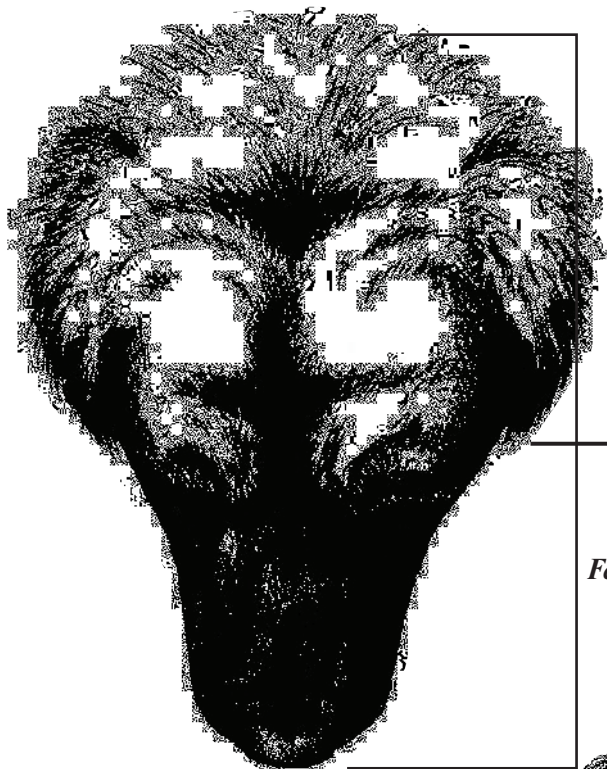


*Too Large - Long*



*Set Too High*





*Female Head*

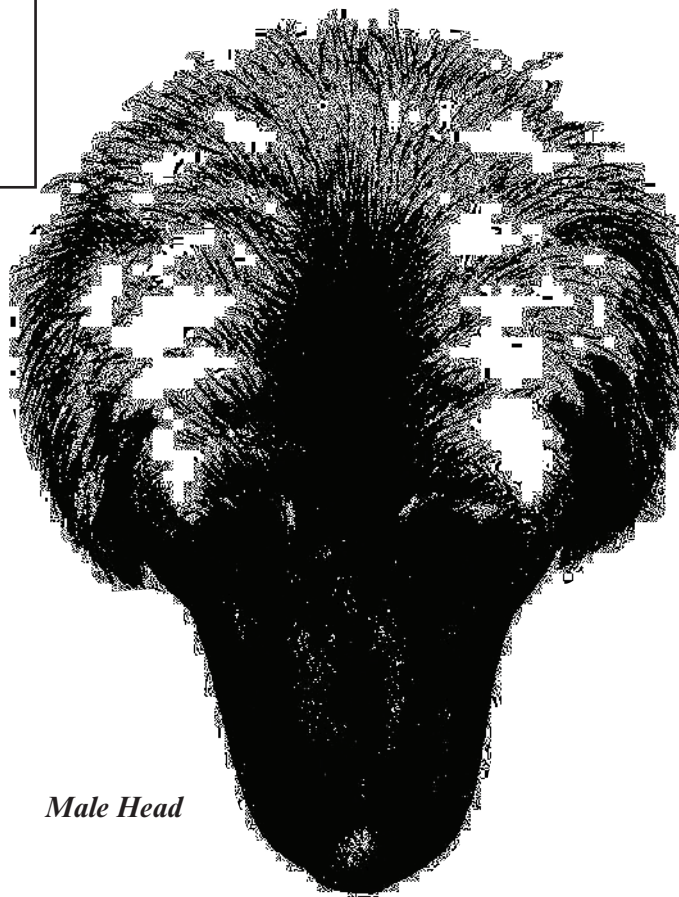
**Skull:** As seen from the front and in profile, backskull is slightly arched. Skull is slightly longer than wide and the width of backskull is only slightly broader than it is at the eyes.

**NOTE**

Length of muzzle to length of backskull is approximately equal.

**Stop:** Clearly recognizable and moderately defined.

**Muzzle:** Nasal bridge of even breadth, never running to a point, level or slightly arched (Roman nose); never dipped. The jaw remains broad and strong between the canines.



*Male Head*

**Planes:** As seen from the side, the planes of muzzle and backskull are parallel.

**Nose:** Large with clearly outlined nostrils, always black.



**NOTE**

The heads of adolescent dogs are immature with underdeveloped stops and skulls and should not be penalized for this in the show ring.





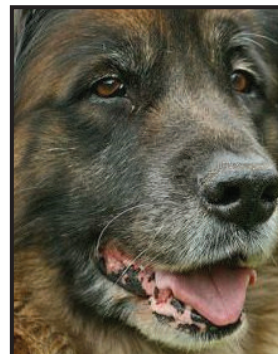


**Lips:** Tight, corners closed and dry, outer lips black in color. Some de-pigmentation due to aging is acceptable.

**Serious Fault: Drooling or wet mouth.**

**NOTE**

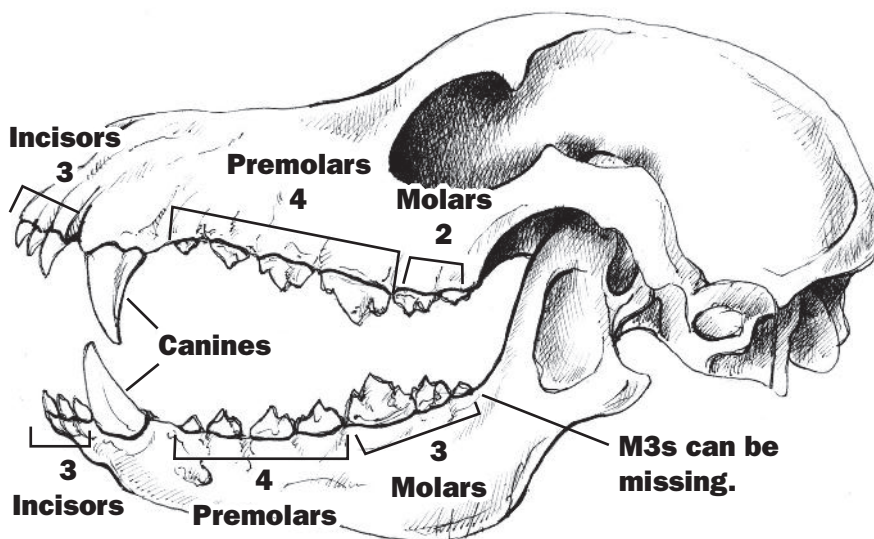
Tight flews, a distinguishing feature of the breed, provide for the required dry mouth with no drooling.



*Showing signs of de-pigmentation*



# Teeth



Complete dentition of 42 teeth (20 upper, 22 lower), strong, meeting in a correct scissors bite, lower incisors touching inside of upper incisors. A level bite is accepted.

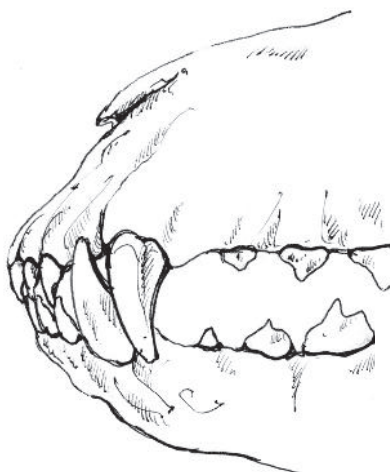
**Disqualification:**  
**More than one missing tooth other than M3s.**



*Under-Shot Bite*  
*Incorrect*



*Over-Shot Bite*  
*Incorrect*



*Correct Scissors Bite*



*Level Bite*  
*Tolerated*

# Neck, Topline, Body



**Neck:** Muscular, well set on shoulders, blends smoothly into withers, of sufficient length to allow for proud head carriage. No dewlap.

**Topline:** Withers set above a firm level back that flows into a gently sloping croup. Rump not higher than withers.

**Body:** Chest is broad, roomy, and deep, reaching at least to the level of the elbows, pronounced pro-sternum.

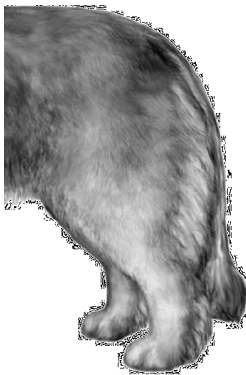
**Ribs:** Well-sprung, oval.

**Underline:** Only slightly tucked up.

**Loin:** Broad, compact, strong, well-muscled.

**Croup:** Broad, relatively long, gently sloped, flowing smoothly into root of tail.





*Correct  
Tail Carriage  
while Standing*

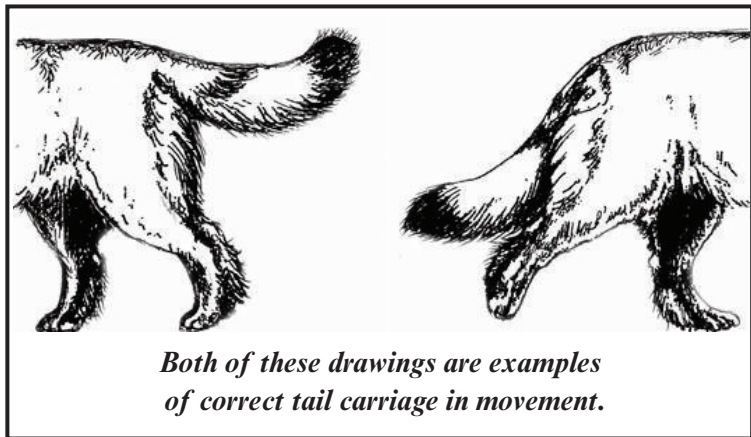
**Tail:** While standing relaxed, tail hangs straight down with the last vertebrae reaching to or below the hock.



**Tail in Movement:** In movement, tail is carried no higher than the level of the back, with a curve up at the end permitted. An exuberant tail carriage, though higher than ideal, should not be confused with a high, incorrectly placed tail.



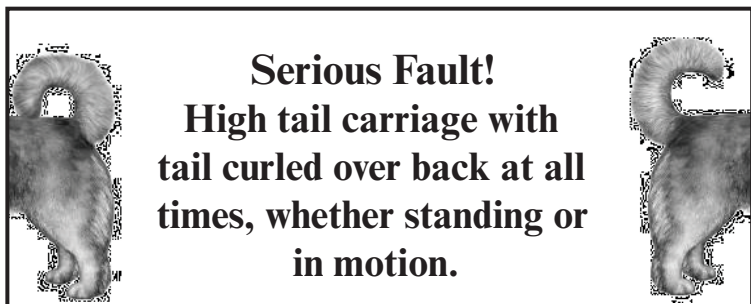
*Correct  
but with Hook*



*Both of these drawings are examples  
of correct tail carriage in movement.*



*Correct  
but Short*



**Serious Fault!**  
**High tail carriage with  
tail curled over back at all  
times, whether standing or  
in motion.**



# Forequarters

**Shoulder:** Well laid-back and well-muscled.

**Angulation:** The shoulder meets the upper arm at slightly greater than a right angle. Shoulder and upper arm about equal in length.

**Elbows:** Close to body, neither in nor out.



**Forelegs:** Substantial bone, muscular, straight and parallel to each other.

**Pasterns:** Strong, firm and straight when viewed from front, slightly sloping when viewed from side.

**Dewclaws:** Usually present.

**Feet:** Turn neither in nor out, rounded, tight, toes well arched (cat foot).

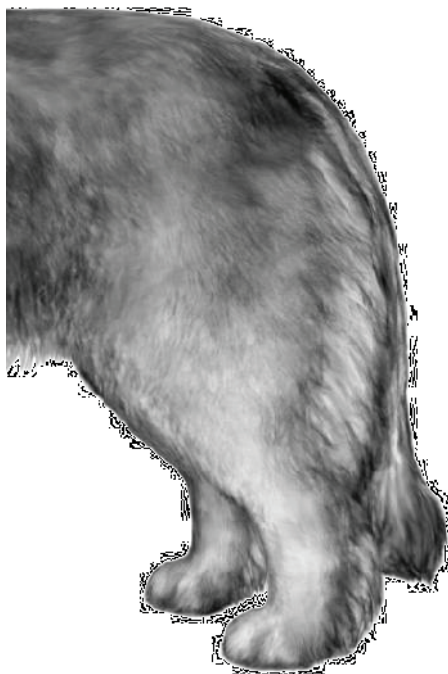


*Correct Pasterns  
from the side*



*Correct  
Tight "Cat Foot"*

# Hindquarters



**Rear Assembly:** Powerful, muscular with substantial bone.

**Angulation:** In balance with forequarters.

**Legs:** Viewed from the rear, the legs are straight and parallel, with stifles and paws turned neither in nor out, placed widely enough apart to match a properly built body.

**Thighs:** Upper and lower of equal length, slanting and strongly muscled.

**Stifles:** Angle clearly defined.

**Hocks:** Substantial bone with a distinct angle between lower thigh and rear pastern; well let down.

**Dewclaws:** Rear dewclaws may be present.

**Feet:** Turned neither in nor out, and may be slightly elongated. Toes arched.

# Coat

Leonbergers have a medium to long, water resistant, double coat on the body and short fine hair on the muzzle and front of limbs. Outer coat is medium-soft to coarse and lies flat. It is straight, with some generalized wave permitted. Mature males carry a mane, which extends over neck and chest. The male coat is typically longer than the female coat. The undercoat is soft and dense, although it may be less so in summer months or warmer climates. In spite of the double coat, the outline of the body is always recognizable. Leonbergers have some ear feathering and ample feathering on fore and rear legs. Tail is very well furnished.

## Examples of Correct Coats and Colors



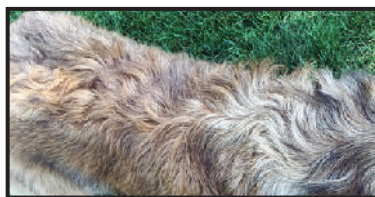


Leonbergers are to be presented with no sculpting, scissoring, trimming of whiskers, or any other alterations whatsoever, except for neatening of the feet.

**NOTE**

**Fault!**  
**Parted or curly coat.**

Strong waviness is often seen in adolescent dogs that have yet to grow their mature coats.



## Color

Coat colors are lion-yellow, golden to red and red-brown, sand colored (cream, pale yellow) and all combinations thereof, always with a black mask. All colors may have black tips (some with long black tips) on the outer coat, but black must not be the basic color. Dark coat colors are accompanied by a lighter colored undercoat and feathering of front and hind legs, that blend harmoniously with the basic body coloring. A small, unobtrusive stripe or white patch on the chest and some white hairs on toes is tolerated.



# Disqualifying Colors



*Black and Tan*



*Brown*



*Too Much White*



*Silver - Gray*

## NOTE



The long black tips of the outer guard hairs can give the impression of a black dog. Push the outer coat back and check to see if the black tips of the outer guard hairs cover a lighter undercoat. If so, this is acceptable.

## Disqualifications:

**Any color other than those listed on page 21.**

**White hair on chest that exceeds 5 inches in width.**

**White extending beyond toes.**

# Gait



*Correct Movement  
Coming and Going*

The Leonberger has a ground-covering, even and balanced gait. The stride is powerful, free and fluid, with good reach and strong drive, giving the impression of effortless power.

In motion, the Leonberger maintains a level topline.

Viewed from the front and from behind, forelegs and hind legs travel straight. As the dog's speed increases, the legs tend to converge toward the centerline.





**NOTE: Correct movement is essential for an athletic, multi-purpose dog.**



# Temperament

The gentle character and even temperament of the Leonberger is of utmost importance for fulfilling their role as a family companion. The Leonberger is confident, with a steady, playful demeanor. The breed is willing to please and possesses a good capacity for learning.

**Serious Fault! Quarrelsomeness or hostility towards people or dogs in normal situations; unwarranted show of timidity or nervousness.**



One hundred years ago, Joseph Oberthur remarked on the Leonberger in the book, "Le Chien", "Whatever his origin may be, this majestic dog ... is an excellent protector, very gentle with children and people ... and is never grumpy or aggressive. His size is more than sufficient to enforce respect." The Leonberger, first and foremost, is a confident, agreeable family dog!







## **Faults:**

Any deviation from these specifications is a fault. In determining whether a fault is minor, serious, or major, these two factors should be used as a guide:

**Deviation:** The extent to which it deviates from the standard; and

**Impact:** The extent to which such deviation would actually affect the Leonberger's phenotype or ability to fulfill its role as a family companion, and working dog.

## **Disqualifications:**

**Mask:** Complete lack of mask.

**Teeth:** More than one missing tooth other than M3s.

**Color:** Any coat color other than those listed. White hair on chest exceeding 5 inches in width, white extending beyond toes.



# The Leonberger At A Glance

**GENERAL APPEARANCE:** Large, muscular, elegant, working dog with a balanced build. A dog or bitch is easily discernible as such.

**HEAD:** Rectangular shaped with slightly arched crown, muzzle and skull are rectangular and planes parallel; defined by a moderate stop. Face is covered with a black mask that extends to and over the eyes.

**EYES:** Dark brown, medium in size, almond to oval-shaped.

**BITE/TEETH:** Scissors with full dentition preferred. One missing tooth other than M3s allowed.

**EARS:** Medium sized, triangular, fleshy, hanging flat, reaching corners of mouth.

**NECK:** Muscular, of sufficient length to allow for proud head carriage.

**FOREQUARTERS:** Well laid back, forelegs straight, well boned, strong pasterns.

**FEET:** Front feet rounded, tight, toes well arched. Rear feet may be slightly elongated.

**TEMPERAMENT:** Gentle, self-assured, calm, a reliable family companion.



**COAT:** Medium to long, double coat, straight preferred, slight wave permitted. Body outline is recognizable. Mature males carry a mane. Distinctive feathering on ears, front legs and breeches.

**COLOR:** Lion yellow, golden to red and red-brown, sand colored. All colors may have black tips.

**HEIGHT:** Males 28 to 31.5 inches; Females 25.5 to 29.5 inches. Weight in proportion to size.

**BODY:** Broad, deep chest reaching elbow, pronounced pro-sternum, ribs well sprung, oval. Neck blends smoothly into firm, level topline.

**EXPRESSION:** Good natured, soft and intelligent.

**CROUP:** Long, gently sloping.

**TAIL:** Sufficient length to reach hock. Bushy. Carried straight down when relaxed. When gaiting, carried preferably no higher than level of the back.

**HINDQUARTERS:** Muscular, well boned, stifle and hock clearly angulated, legs parallel, hocks well let down.

**UNDERLINE:** Only slightly tucked.

**GAIT:** Powerful and balanced, light on its feet and graceful in motion.

As type includes coat, **NO ALTERATIONS TO COAT** are allowed. Neatening of toes permitted.



## **The Leonberger Club of America**

The AKC Parent Club  
for the Leonberger Breed in the USA

[www.LeonbergerClubofAmerica.com](http://www.LeonbergerClubofAmerica.com)

