

Dog Judging and X-rays

By Dr. Dan Buchwald

I was attending radiology classes at vet school when I first had the chance to see a VHS tape (that's how long ago it was...) by respected dog authority Rachel Page Elliot. The tape was about the dynamics of canine gait and used a technique that employed X-rays to produce a film rather than a single still picture.

It was fascinating to see the canine structure in actual motion and to see the coordinated movement of the bones as a dog trotted on a treadmill while his gait was recorded continuously.

As the film progressed, my feelings were a bit different, and with all due respect to the huge contribution of Mrs. Elliot to the sport of dogs, I did not think that the film was stirring me in the right direction. On top of that I also felt that the excessive exposure of the dogs to the X-rays was harmful and that the harm outweighed the benefits of the experiment.

Please, don't crucify me for disagreeing with that particular line of Mrs. Elliot's work. I'd like to present in the next paragraphs a more conservative and accurate approach that I hope will give some food for thought.

I believe that the very essence of dog judging is the result of a fine blend of art and science. These ingredients have to be perfectly balanced in a judge's mind in order to produce sound results. Excess of one will come at the expense of the other.

In order to maintain the proper balance in judging dogs one must realize that what is being evaluated is, in many cases, the surface or so called exterior of the animal. To do that properly, X-rays and other imaging techniques will not help. On the contrary, they will absolutely hinder and generate confusion.

The most glaring example of this is the description of eye shapes in the different breeds. Some are circular, others are almond shaped, others are triangular, and so forth. Obviously, all these animals have perfectly aspheric eyes if we were to go past the surface. Nonetheless the shape of the eyes as described in different standards refer to the shape created by the upper and lower eyelids when the eyes are open and the dog is fully alert. Even though this is a very obvious statement, it exemplifies the importance of evaluating the exterior of the dog.

Another example of the concept is the fact that many dogs have, on a head profile, parallel planes between muzzle and skull. When those same heads are examined on an X ray, they are anything but parallel.

A very important piece of structure addressed by Mrs. Elliot is the discovery that the scapula does not ever lay at a 45 degree angle with the horizontal, neither is the humerus in a 90 degree angle with the scapula. That statement does not exclude the fact that the shoulders can, and often do lay at a 45- degree angle with the horizontal and the upper arm can, indeed form a 90-degree angle with the shoulder. Please notice the different in nomenclature. I absolutely differentiate the scapula from the shoulders and the humerus from the upper arm. The scapula and the humerus are the bones that along with muscles, tendons and ligaments and skin form the

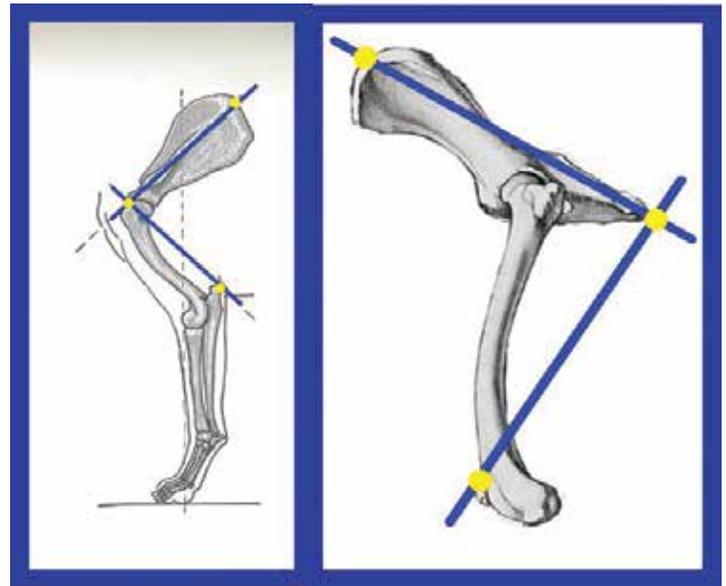
assembly that determines the front angulation.

When you are judging dogs' fronts, you try to establish the point at the withers that will determine the tip of the shoulder, next the point of the shoulder is assessed, and thirdly the elbow will determine 3 points. The lines connecting these 3 points will determine an angle that, ideally, in many breeds should be close to 90 degrees. With a bit of training and some "eye for dogs," this can be obtained with ease.

Now to be absolutely precise and correct, angles are mathematical parameters that are determined by the intersection of two straight lines. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Bones on the other hand are not straight. The parameters used to evaluate angles start with finding specific points, determining the connecting straight lines and evaluating the manner in which they intersect – those are the angles you are looking for. You can find them on the dog's surface and not on an X-ray.

Please let me underline that the correct point to determine the bottom point of the upper arm is the elbow, which is a part of the ulna, a bone of the forearm. If you are trying to evaluate the front angulation by using the humerus, you are not using the proper landmarks and will draw incorrect conclusions.

The questionability of X-rays gets even clearer when we take a look at the rear angulation. The croup does have some close relationship with the major bones that structure it - the ilium, ischium, and pubis, or simply the pelvic bone. The first point that determines rear angulation is the protuberance of the hipbone, next is the rearmost projection of the hipbone and third is the knee joint. The drawing below clearly shows that that angle barely acknowledges the presence of the femur, yet for judging purposes the rear angle, as we define it, can very well be in balance with the front angle and be 90 degrees too.



The positioning of the actual bones do have an impact accessing the angles and overall canine conformation, there is no doubt about it. However they are not the exact parameters to evaluate dogs properly.

Please let me be redundant and stress this point one more time: Angulation, as defined for dog judging, is evaluated on the exterior of the dog by determining the key landmark points of structure, the straight lines those points generate, and the resulting angles that arise from their intersection.

A great book to learn more about angles and balance as well as the fundamentals of movement is the original Dog Steps by Mrs. Rachel Page Elliot. That book, along with Lyons's The Dog in Action, is a great source to expand our knowledge in the basics of canine conformation and evaluation.

X-rays and MRIs are very useful methods of evaluating anatomical structures and the pathological changes they may suffer in veterinary medicine. However, as tools for perfecting dog judging, they have little or no importance. They focus on different parameters and ultimately generate the misconception that a scientific tool may replace the balance between art and science of dog judging.

About the author:

Dan Buchwald is a graduate of the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Along with his mother Agnes Buchwald and family, he founded the internationally famed Hexastar Kennels in 1973. Over 150 Boxer champions have been finished under the Hexastar banner. Of those, more than twenty attained International FCI championships and six others American AKC championships. Dan obtained his Brazilian Kennel



Club's all-breeds judge's license in 1988; the youngest ever at that time to attain those credentials. His assignments have taken him all over South America and into the United States. In '89 at the Kennel Review's Invitational Tournament of Champions; in '91, he judged at the New Jersey Boxer Club (dogs and intersex competition), So. New York Beagle Club at Westchester K.C., Trenton K.C. (Toy Group), Sussex Hills K.C. (Sporting Group), and the New Brunswick K.C. (Herding Group). He has also judged numerous sweepstakes, as well as the Futurity at the American Boxer Club twice.

Since moving to America over 20 years ago, Dan has pursued a successful career in professional handling and started selectively breeding Boxers while mentoring other co-owners under the Avalon kennel name. Even though retired from actively breeding, Dan takes huge pride of being the breeder of the first ever Boxer to go WB/BOW from the BBE class at the American Boxer

Club National.

Dan is the author and illustrator of *The Boxer Blueprint*. He is an award-winning sculptor and is the illustrator for *The Brazilian Kennel Club Official Book of Standards* and *The Brazilian Kennel Club Conformation Book for Judges*. As a speaker, he has presented seminars to the Connecticut Dog Judges Association, Princeton Dog Judges Association, New Jersey Boxer Club, and Sacramento Valley Boxer Club as well as to the Cotswold Boxer Club and Whales Boxer Club in the UK. He has been a repeated guest speaker at several judges and breeders seminars at the American Boxer Club Nationals and other parent clubs abroad. He is the author of many articles in the late *Boxer Review*, *Dog News*, *Showstight*, and the *Canine Chronicle* as well as several dog magazines abroad.