JUDGING THE PULI
By Barbe Pessina

As with any heavily coated breed, judging the Puli can prove a daunting and challenging task, and the grooming skills of many of our Puli exhibitors today serve to make the job more difficult. The Puli is a medium sized herding dog and the AKC standard emphasizes the words medium and moderate 10 times in the standard for very specific purposes; not the least of which is to avoid extremes of structure, size and substance which would effectively prevent the dog from doing the job he was bred to do for centuries – one that requires endurance and stamina.

The AKC standard emphasizes under General Appearance of the Puli that it is a compact, square appearing, well balanced dog of medium size and that agility combined with soundness of mind and body is of prime importance for the proper fulfillment of their century’s old task. When first viewing a line up of Pulis in the ring you should see a dog of gentle curves and flow that fills your eye; a neck that is of medium length, slightly arched that blends smoothly into the withers; a strong, level back with a moderately short loin and a croup the slopes slightly toward the base of the tail which is carried over and blends into the topline. All gentle curves that emphasize the symmetry of the dog. With the exception of the coat, no portion of the dog should be extreme, and the profile view should be one of a well blended animal.

Over and over we emphasize that this is NOT a breed that you can judge visually. Hands on examination is most important in this breed in order to properly examine and measure correct proportions which are often camouflaged by the heavy coat and the fall of the cords on the front, rear and neck. The visual impression of squareness can be distorted by differences in length or thickness of cords and proportion MUST be measured on the table and not when the dog is moving as the coat falls forward from the neck and front and flies out behind the dog as it moves, sometimes adding inches in extra length. The ideal size in the Puli is 17” for a male and 16” for a bitch, with an inch over or under these measurements acceptable. The Puli is measured from point of shoulder to point of buttock to assess length of body and squareness. Judges must put their hands into the coat to find these proportions.

The head is medium size in proportion to the body with almond eyes that are deep set, rather large and dark brown. The hanging ears are set somewhat higher than the level of the eyes, medium size, V shape and about half the length of the head. We ask that judges not try to assess ear proportions on a fully corded dog as it is not unusual to tear the ear leather when separating cords and I would challenge any judge to actually be able to find the end of the ear leather thru the cords. Rather a hand placed across the top skull can give you a good indication of the set on of the ears as you will be able to feel ears that are too high set. The ear type and placement is an important breed characteristic that distinguishes the Puli from other Hungarian herding breeds, the Pumi and Mudi.

Head proportions in this breed are a challenge. The standard calls for a muzzle that is one-third of the length of the head. The back skull (measured from the occiput to the stop) should equal two-thirds of the total head length. We prefer a strong under jaw with a blunt muzzle and a black nose of good size, but in proportion to the dog. This is the ideal head and one that Puli breeders strive for – but in judging you will find this head type is few and far between. The Puli is neither dished nor down faced, narrow or snipey, but like so many breeds, we are losing under jaw. We want a defined but not abrupt stop. Many heads today have a sliding stop without proper under jaw which changes the head proportions and the eye set. While we don’t want judges to become head hunters in the Puli breed we do encourage you to reward an exceptional head when all other features are equal.

Eyes that are round should be faulted as should an almond shaped eye that is too small.

You will find the Puli has large teeth for his size, with full dentition and scissors bite. The flews and gums are black or slate gray, and it’s not unusual to find black pigment spots on the tongue.

The slightly arched neck should give the impression of elegance and strength and is free of throatiness. The chest is deep
Thank you Judge Mrs. Judith Goodin for this win at the Puli Club of America National Specialty.

Breeder: Sherry Gibson | Owners: Glen VanDerHart and Les Stallings | Handler: Glen VanDerHart
and egg-shaped and should make up two-thirds of the length of the back. The short coupling is of vital importance to the Puli’s ability to perform his given task and again, this must be determined by physical examination on the table. The croup can only be examined when the tail is lifted from the back. Height should be comprised of 45% chest to 55% leg.

The tail is carried over the back and should blend smoothly into the topline.

With a proper shoulder layback there should be a discernable foreback.

Pulis have medium bone, with straight forelegs when viewed from any direction, with strong, flexible pasterns to provide good shock absorption when the dog moves. The foot is round and compact with well arched toes and thick cushioned pads. Pads and nails are black or slate gray.

Front and rear assemblies must be in balance with medium bone, well muscled no preference given to either coat formation. Regardless of coat presentation, the coat MUST be dense and weather resistant on all parts of the body. On a corded dog, the cords can be wide, thin, flat, narrow, ribbon like – all are correct and the formation of the coat is determined to some extent on the balance of outer to undercoat and the amount of curl and coarseness of the coat. All are correct. Size of the cords may vary on different parts of the body.

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**With the exception of the coat,**

**NO PORTION OF THE DOG SHOULD BE EXTREME, and the profile view should be one of a well blended animal.**

Frequently, particularly in young, unseasoned dogs, the tail can act as a barometer of the Puli’s mood and comfort level. When alert it is carried over the back, but when uncertain or resting they can either drop it or carry it low. Young, inexperienced dogs may drop their tail in the ring, but judges should expect to see it carried over their back at least once, and should judge the youngsters on their best tail carriage when they see it. There is no preference for whether the tail is carried to the right, the left or over the back. Our standard does not have any description or language on length of tail, and we ask judges not to pull the tail down to measure it. Some Pulis have what we call a ring tail or pig tail, which is actually a tail with a fused joint and trying to straighten this is not only impossible, but also painful to the dog.

Shoulders are well laid back with elbows well back under the rib cage. Viewed from the side the pasterns should be directly beneath the withers and the top of the withers should be directly above the elbow. and good angulation. The slight slope of the croup enables the dog in achieving good thrust in extension. Stifle and hocks are well bent, and when viewed from behind the rear legs should be strong and straight. Again, the Puli must be examined under the coat to determine this structure.

The coat is the Puli’s crowning glory. Nothing is more impressive than a ring full of beautifully coated Puli. I use the word coated, because in America the Puli may be shown brushed or corded, with time and effort has been put into the coat. This is all part of the cording process and should not be penalized. However, all Pulis regardless of coat presentation should be clean and well groomed.

There are some that take part in Performance Events (Herding and Agility) and the working coat of the Puli should not be penalized, provided a double coat is present.

Only the solid colors of black, rusty black, white and gray are accepted in the AKC Standard. A white spot on the chest
of not more than 2 inches is allowed. There will always be an intermingling of white hairs on the black, rusty black and gray puli, and this is allowed so long as the overall appearance of a solid color is maintained. There should never be indication of a pattern in the coat color.

Gray Pulis are born dark and begin the graying process at various ages. The gray or silver coat may appear rusty or brown tinged due to oxidation, as can a black or rusty black coat. This is natural in the breed and should not be penalized. In order to determine if a gray or silver Puli is a proper color the judge needs to examine the dog all over the body at the skin to insure that a consistent shade of gray is present throughout the dog, rather than a pattern.

White pulis are born white, and should have the required black pigment on their nose, flews, nails and pads. A white Puli may have a minimal intermixture of cream or yellow colored hair; however the overall impression must be that of a solid color. The skin of a white Puli should be as well pigmented as that of a black or gray. An adult Puli coat, regardless of color, will always be weathered.

It takes 4-5 years to get a corded coat to the ground. We ask judges to NOT judge their entry on the length of the dog’s coat, but on the quality of the exhibit and the structure under the coat.

The Puli is a lively, acrobatic dog who moves with quick, agile steps. The working trot should be effortless and economical with the front and rear feet just clearing the ground. High stepping in the front or rear are signs of imbalance and should be penalized. The pads of the hind feet should be clearly visible when going away and should push out strong and straight. The front feet should reach out and pull the ground under them, with no hint of lifting. In motion or standing, the topline should always be level. Many in the breed say that a good moving Puli should resemble a hovercraft going around the as typical Puli movement, and this is incorrect. This kind of Puli agility is unlikely to be seen in the confines of the show ring. A Puli that moves with a lot of up and down movement or bounce in the topline is not covering ground efficiently. In order to properly evaluate Puli gait, the dog should be moved at a moderate speed.

Good temperaments cannot be overemphasized. A Puli should allow a judge to approach and examine them without fear. Please do not speak to the dog (especially a young dog) as you approach them. If you feel the need to say anything, you can hello to the handler. Pulis are very devoted to their owners and are generally focused on their handler. While they may bait and work for their owner, they aren’t going to do it for someone they don’t know. Consideration for young and inexperienced dogs is greatly appreciated by Puli owners. The early ring experiences that judges give them can last a lifetime.

It is required that Pulis be examined on the table to allow a more accurate examination of structure and proportion and to allow the judge to more easily get thru the Puli coat.

This is a natural breed and should be presented that way. While many Puli owners are very talented at grooming they should not appear to be sculptured or over groomed. They should always be clean.

The five most important features that you must evaluate correctly in order to find the best Puli in the ring are:
- Squareness
- Movement
- Topline and Tailset
- Head
- Coat and Color

Anything that deviates from the standard is to be faulted to the extent of the deviation. There are no disqualifications in the AKC standard.

Puli owners and handlers do NOT want:
- Judges to bait the Puli
- Judges to swoop down on the Puli from above or behind
- Judges that DO NOT examine the Puli under the coat

- Judges that want to see the “Puli kick”

Our breeders have worked long and hard to get to where we are today, with structurally sound and happy dogs that frequently have a habit of presenting the judges with some form of comic relief (particularly the youngsters). When they do, laugh and enjoy the day. We do.