BREEDING A VERSATILE POODLE

The Role of Correct Conformation
Form follows function is fundamental to dog breeding. Poodles, like many breeds, are several generations removed from their foundation stock, yet their conformation still should enable them to do the job for which they were bred.

The versatile Pudel, or pudelin, as he is known in his native Germany, is prized for his ability to retrieve waterfowl, as well as serve as an all-around farm dog, performance competitor and companion. To do this work, correct conformation is as important as intelligence, willingness and spirit.

In 2016, as Dennis McCoy was ending his term as president of the Poodle Club of America (PCA), he stepped into the ring at the National Specialty in Salisbury, Maryland, to give what fondly became known as his legacy speech. “I thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as the PCA president,” McCoy says. “And I told them that I wanted to leave them with one thought — that I hoped everyone would ask their handler or breeder where the withers are on a dog.”

To illustrate his point, McCoy turned to one of two enormous white floral topiary Poodles. “The withers are right behind the neck, and the front legs should be straight down beneath them,” he said.

A yardstick dropped from the topiary’s withers touched the elbows. “This is correct,” he explained.

Moving to the second topiary, McCoy demonstrated that the front
legs on this Poodle were “way out in front, under the chin.”

“This is wrong,” McCoy said, as he explained how easy it was to evaluate the two dogs, given that the first one was correct and the second one was just the opposite.

McCoy, of Apex, North Carolina, is a retired professional handler whose career included winning Best in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in 1991 with the Standard Poodle, CH Whisperwind On A Carousel. He also won seven Westminster Group Firsts, five consecutive Non-Sporting Group Firsts from 1996 to 2000, and bred the 2009 Non-Sporting Group winner, CH Random Tristar Affirmation, the top-winning black Poodle of all time. Together with Randy Garren, he’s produced many winners at their Randenn Kennels. Now a sought-after conformation judge, McCoy knows the Poodle standard inside and out.

“We’ve got to start thinking about fronts in our beloved breed, because they are not correct,” he says.

McCoy’s demonstration at the PCA National went viral, and his point that breeders must breed for structure, as well as type, was well-taken.

FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE

In Deland, Florida, Joyce Carelli breeds her Carlyn Standard Poodles for excellence in fieldwork and performance sports, as well as the conformation ring. She acquired her first Standard Poodle in 1980 and competed in obedience. As often happens, obedience led to the conformation ring and breeding.

In the mid-1990s, a friend encouraged her to try fieldwork. Carelli was looking for something fun to do with her bitch, “Shayna.” Fieldwork turned out to be just what Shayna needed, and Carelli found a new sport.

Today, quite a few of the puppies Carelli breeds go to competition homes or are sold as field prospects. When choosing a puppy to keep for her own, Carelli makes her selection at 8 weeks of age based on conformation. “It’s hard to tell which will be a superstar in performance,” she says. “They are too immature, and it’s hard to predict an agility or field star.”

Breeding to the PCA Illustrated Standard, Carelli looks for a square dog with moderate front and rear angles and that is very balanced. Moderation and balance are the physical characteristics needed for the mature dog to succeed and remain sound whatever its career path, she says.

“I want proper tail set,” she adds. “The neck should be moderate, and the elbows underneath the dog. I appreciate an attractive head, with chiseling under the eyes and a beautiful expression, but I don’t want an overly refined head.

“They have to have a chin to retrieve birds,” she continues. “A dog will struggle to carry a 10-pound goose laden with water if the neck is too long and the jaw too slight. He will do it, but it will be a strain.”

Even the Poodle’s coat, which is blown straight and scissored for the show ring, can’t be overlooked if the dog will work in the water. “The standard calls for a coat ‘of naturally harsh texture, dense throughout,’” says Carelli. “There’s a reason for this, as a soft coat gets waterlogged very quickly. A proper coat takes a long time to get wet to the skin.”

As far as movement, “the standard doesn’t call for anything extreme,” she says. “The rear should not be overangulated and swept out far behind the dog, and it must be balanced with the front. Also, the stride should not be short-stepping, as that would be tiring for a dog working in the field.”

Elaborating, she says, “Straighter-fronted dogs with longer necks can throw their legs way out in front. Correct dogs have more moderate movement, and the front legs should extend just to the tip of the nose.”

An incorrect ewe neck can contribute to a poor front, Carelli explains. “Together, these faults can lead to back issues in a working dog. In

“Shayna” (Carlyn Ain’t It A Sin WC) is the first of Joyce Carelli’s Standard Poodles to do fieldwork.
KNOWING WHEN TO EVALUATE A LITTER

Breeders spend countless hours caring for or simply watching their puppies. Inevitably, there are one or two that capture your heart, but take caution and follow the advice of Pat Hastings, an expert puppy evaluator. She advises to not select your “pick puppy” too early — or too late — and to make sure your selection is based on your mind, and not your heart.

Here is why she tells breeders to wait until puppies are 8 weeks old to evaluate a litter:
• The angles will be very similar to those of the dog at maturity
• If the lines are correct, the angles are correct. Look at the three natural balance points — head above the topline, neck in front of the front legs, and rear legs slightly behind the buttocks — to determine if the angles are correct
• Before 8 weeks the puppy’s tissues don’t have enough strength to hold its structure in place
• After 8 weeks the bones grow at different rates, and when one bone grows out of its relationship with another, the angles change
• A puppy may actually look better at 9 to 10 weeks, as it builds muscle to compensate for weakness, but this look may not prove true as the dog matures

addition, their carpal (wrist) joints may break down as too much pressure is put on them.”

Carelli understands the point that McCoy drove home at the Nationals. “A good front is difficult to find and keep,” she says. “I kept a bitch from my last litter just for her front. She has good width between her front legs, she has a prosternum, and her elbows are back under the shoulder blade. She wasn’t the best of the litter in some other attributes, but she has a beautiful front.”

PROPER POODLE STRUCTURE

Pat Hastings of Aloha, Oregon, is a well-known expert and popular seminar speaker on canine structure. Together with her late husband, Bob Hastings, she developed a method for evaluating a litter. Their video, “The Puppy Puzzle,” has helped breeders of many breeds learn to evaluate their puppies.

“I bet you didn't know that I started in Poodles,” Hastings says. “I had Toys and Minis. Standards are my favorite.”

The Hastings were all-breed handlers, and they also whelped litters in at least 26 breeds. “We leased bitches and jumped at the chance to breed,” Hastings recalls. “There is no better way to learn. We evaluated litters for our clients and were almost amused by how many mistakes we made picking puppies.”

The Hastings wanted to truly understand structure, so they turned to an anatomy professor at a local veterinary school. He introduced them to other veterinarians, orthopedic surgeons and dog people.

“Then, we met Dr. Barclay Slocum,” Hastings says. “He was a world-renowned veterinary orthopedic surgeon. We’d evaluate litters at his clinic, and he’d explain to us what we were feeling in each puppy’s structure and how it might affect the dog later on.”

Dr. Slocum called them late one evening and said that he had figured out the solution. “He told us we had to find a structural engineer who had never owned or lived with an animal. That person could look at a dog using only his mind without being influenced by his heart,” she says. “This type of objective person was hard to find. We finally found a university professor who didn’t like dogs, and we offered to pay him for his time.”

The Hastings reasoned that the study of anatomy had become so difficult that most people couldn’t understand it. Basic structure, however, was really very simple. Their theory was: If you don’t breed a dog for the purpose for which you will use it, it will likely get injured.

They helped to advance the concept that dogs have three natural balance points:
• The head should be above the topline
• The neck should be in front of the front legs
• The rear legs should be slightly behind the buttocks

“As shown in the PCA Illustrated Standard, a Poodle should be squarely built with height equal to its length.”
legs, the neck should fall in front of the line,” explains Hastings. “A plumb line dropped from the point of the buttocks should touch the toes of the rear feet.

“These balance points apply to most breeds, including the Poodle, regardless of variety. There are exceptions, however. None of them apply to Pekingese, and the rear balance point does not apply to German Shepherd Dogs, Chows or Affenpinschers.”

The three varieties of Poodle share a breed standard, varying only in size. When looking at a photograph without objects to put the Poodle’s size in context, Hastings says it should be difficult to determine whether the dog is a Toy, Miniature or Standard.

There is a fine line between a Poodle being capable of doing what he was bred to do and being “poodles,” she argues. “A ewe neck may give a dog a flashy, head-up carriage that is a part of breed type, but a ewe-necked Poodle won’t be able to carry a bird and swim. I go to hunt tests, and it’s fascinating to watch. I can point out the dogs that are built to perform, and others that can swim but not well enough.”

A dog with a straight rear won’t be an athletic jumper. “All angles are power sources,” Hastings says. “Straight rears have no power, making the dog prone to crashing into the jump.”

Fronts are shock absorbers, and a straight front has less give than one that is correctly angled. The standard calls for a shoulder blade that is “well laid back and approximately the same length as the upper foreleg.”

“This would place the shoulder blade and the upper foreleg at an approximate 90-degree angle,” she says. “When the dog has a straight front, the angle is greater, and the dog is unable to reach forward with the front legs. In a pet, this won’t present a problem, but for a working dog, it is an issue. When a dog has a straight front, this can damage tissues doing sports, and when a joint loses its integrity, the chance of arthritis is increased.”

The biggest problem that Hastings sees in Poodles today is a straight front with an overangulated rear. “This lack of balance is far from what is intended,” she says. “The breed standard calls for a ‘squarely built dog,’ or at least one ‘approximately’ square. This is challenging, because there are no squares in nature.

“In order for a square dog to move properly, it must be almost perfectly made. A little bit of length adds a whole lot of forgiveness. It’s not wrong to aspire to produce a square Poodle, but it must be built correctly.”

Discussing reach and drive, Hastings says, “Oh yes, ‘TRAD’ — tremendous reach and drive. It is incorrect in every breed. It’s simply a law of physics. If a dog drops a front foot farther forward than its nose, the foot acts as a brake. The cover page of the Illustrated Poodle Standard shows a trotting poodle, and the extended front leg does not go past the tip of the nose.”
ROLE OF CONFORMATION

Joann Neal of Sandstorm Poodles in Lubbock, Texas, knows the importance of conformation in a performance dog. Her Mini, “Betty” (CH OTCH MACH Braylane Betty’s Bein’ Bad TDX), was the first triple champion Miniature Poodle. Betty earned her MACH at age 10 and her TDX at age 12 — proof of her soundness. Since then, Neal has had three other triple champion Miniatures, with another (BIS/BISS GCH MACH Sandstorm X’s in Texas UD TDX VCD3) one-third of the way to earning an OTCH.

All of Neal’s Miniatures go back to Betty, who was bought 27 years ago sight unseen from Judy Bray of Seattle. “I wanted a bold, happy, head-up, tail-up, pretty-moving white Miniature,” Neal says. “Movement and carriage were of utmost importance. When Betty came out of her shipping crate, I just looked at her and cried. I was so happy!”

Neal agrees with Hastings that balance is a challenge in Poodles. Exaggerated rear angulation is a weakness, and such a dog will not hold up in performance sports. “When a dog has a straight shoulder, it must throw its rib cage from side to side as it moves,” Neal says.

“The side picture may be pretty, but on a down and back, the head and tail wag back and forth like counterweights. Sound movement is efficient. It shouldn’t take extra movement to get the dog over the same ground.”

As to injuries, “shoulders cause dogs to retire more than anything else,” Neal says. “We also see bad knees in Minis and Toys that will take them out of competition.”

Neal does her puppy evaluations at 8 weeks, when the puppies are ready to go to their new homes, but concedes she typically has made her choice by that time. “I watch them self-stack as 5-week-old puppies,” she says. “They go out and stand, and everything is beautifully where it is supposed to be if conformation is correct.”

When her puppies are old enough to walk on a lead, Neal takes them out on her driveway and lets them trot around her. “Some can trot smoothly from the earliest age,” she says. “With the ones that you can’t get to trot, there’s often a reason. It may not be comfortable. It’s easier for a puppy to canter than to trot, and the puppies I keep are those that trot willingly from the start, without waddling or bouncing.”

Dennis McCoy, Pat Hastings, Joyce Carelli, and Joann Neal share a passion for Poodles. They agree that the Poodle, as described in the standard, is not a generic show dog with extreme rear angulation and TRAD.

As McCoy says, “It falls to breeders to follow the standard, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their dogs, and work for the betterment of this wonderful breed.”

Purina thanks Pat Forsyth, vice president of the Poodle Club of America Foundation board of directors, for helping us to identify this topic for the Poodle Update.
PPCP PROGRAM RAISES MORE THAN $7 MILLION SINCE 2002

A healthy payday is coming to the 193 parent clubs that participated in the 2017 Purina Parent Club Partnership (PPCP) program. Purina is disbursing the 2017 PPCP earnings of $455,085 this spring, with half going directly to the participating parent clubs and half to the clubs’ fund at the AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF). Since it began in 2002, the PPCP program has raised more than $7 million for canine health research.

The Poodle Club of America (PCA) will receive cumulative PPCP earnings of $7,120 based on its members’ participation in PPCP in 2017. Half of the earnings will go to the parent club, and half will be sent directly to the club’s fund at CHF. A charter member club, PCA has earned $108,794 since the program began.

This year, when clubs use their PPCP funds at CHF to support a CHF research program of their choice, the AKC will match up to $250,000 to CHF research programs through the CHOICE (Canine Health Opportunity to Impact CarE) matching-gift initiative.

PURINA PRO PLAN INTRODUCES FOCUS SMALL BREED SENSITIVE SKIN & STOMACH SALMON & RICE FORMULA

Purina Pro Plan recently launched FOCUS Small Breed Sensitive Skin & Stomach Salmon & Rice Formula, made especially for small-breed adult dogs weighing 20 pounds or less. Formulated with natural prebiotic fiber to promote digestive health, this complete and balanced food also is high in protein, with salmon as the No. 1 ingredient, to meet the needs of highly active small dogs. This food includes antioxidants to help support immune system health, omega-6 fatty acids and zinc to nourish the skin and promote healthy coat, and omega-3 fatty acids to support healthy joints and mobility. It is made without corn, wheat or soy, has no artificial colors or flavors, and no poultry byproduct meal.

PURINA PRO CLUB INTRODUCES RECEIPT SUBMISSION

Purina Pro Club is on a fast track to help members get their Purina Points into their accounts sooner. A new receipt submission program allows you to take a picture of your receipt from purchases of eligible Purina dog foods on your smartphone or scan the receipt into your computer and submit it online. Your Purina Points will show up in your account by the end of the day in most cases if uploaded correctly. Note that July 31, 2018, is the last date to mail in weight circles. Once you start submitting receipts, you will not be able to submit any more weight circles. To get started, click on the link below that will take you to helpful tools — instructions and a video — and then log on to your Pro Club account, register and begin submitting receipts.

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