

FROM THE BOBTAIL EXPRESS 1973 OPINION

By Caj Haakansson
WE ALL TALK:

We all talk about:

Old English Sheepdogs and TYPE; especially our own sheepdogs and our very own type. How can that be, when there is only ONE standard written for each recognized breed?!

There is so much talk about the various bobtails being shown, bred from, imported, bought, sold, etc. I don't believe there one single kind of bobtail which isn't being completely taken apart by the so called authorities in the breed and by those who may not yet be recognized as authorities amongst the fanciers, but just as surely know as much-or more. It is extremely interesting to me to learn that as many kennels and breeders as there are all over the world-there are about just as many variations of TYPE within the breed. If it was the meaning of those who once took the working dog they called Old English Colley, Bobtail, Smithfield Dog, Drovers Dog, Old English Sheepdog that this breed should have ANY variation of TYPE they most certainly would have written a standard for all these types. No they took a far from purebred dog, which had proven its fantastic value to the farmers and the shepherds as not only a great sheep-herding & cattle driving dog and wonderful watchdog and companions, but a dog who do all these as good or better than any other dog but also longer and harder cattle drives under the hardest of English conditions. They so decided that as good as these dogs were they must be "saved" and purebred so that more farmer, shepherders and people could get the benefit of using this robust thick-set powerful dog. The ONLY way would be to have ONE standard which would GUIDE the breeders and the buyers of the dogs to work TOWARDS these very clearly specified qualities. It was written in their native language so the anyone who could read also could learn what to look for in a good Bob-Tail. Naturally, some people could interpret better than others and some had a Better "natural eye" for recognizing the qualities once they were presented than others; but the standard was written for the person who could interpret very well and had a very sound mind; because these were people who could be trusted with breeding dogs- the same which was proven in England many hundreds of years before, those who were well educated proved to breed better horses, cattle, birds, rabbits or whatever than those who did not have these qualifications. Therefore, it is very clearly proven to me that people who were well educated in all phases of

purebreeding of animals (flowers or anything) are the ones who, in the past as well as the present, had and/or have the dogs richest in breed characteristics.

Any breed is very lucky if they have a handful of very good brilliant breeders put together all over the world; other than a very few truly strong breeds where more breeders easier can achieve qualities. Even within these very few truly good breeders there is a marked difference of opinion and interpretation of the standard, Therefore somewhat different looking dogs. Slight differences, but NONE when it comes to breed characteristics. We may have more or less of them, but we should ALL have them to quote some degree. When these characteristics are lacking in general all over the world, then the breed really is extremely weak and needs all the support it can get from those who are capable to do good sound breeding to again SAVE the breed! Without the breed characteristics there is no BREED!

All this talk about type, what is type? Well, read the standard! It's simply all the BREED CHARACTERISTICS IN PROPER PROPORTION which makes the dog a member of the "family" he belongs to: in this particular case the Old English Sheepdog or Bobtail which is a somewhat more appropriate name for the dog as the breed is not that old a breed and there are many wonderful sheep and cattle herding breeds; only very few without a tail. There is only one kind that has the name Bobtail since the day the dog was first created without his friendly friend at the rear-the Bobtail! BREED CHARACTERISTICS ALONE DON'T MAKE THE BOBTAIL-THEY MUST BE IN PROPORTIONS!

The type of the created bobtail is one of a MEDIUM SIZED dog at about 22 inches at the shoulders and upwards for males, slightly less for bitches. This certainly DOES MEAN that the PREFERRED size is about 22 inches for MALES! Being a breeder of Bobtails in Sweden, England and the U.S. I have been able to study and work with all the various bloodlines available within the breed in these countries and some other countries as well. From these experiences I have found that MOST dogs are CONSIDERABLY larger than the standard given size. However, it does also state in the standard that on no account should TYPE, CHARACTER OR SYMMETRY be sacrificed on size alone and as there is no upper size limit. I assume this is how the huge dogs became accepted as "correct" in size. To me, it is very clear that the reason for not having a definite limit as to the size was based on the very reason that the breed was created by a few dedicated bobtail-fanciers back

In 1800 who realized that this was a very useful dog and the original material was so limited to number of good useful stock and the stock available was not the very strongest in breed characteristics and had to be “manmade” and therefore how could one limit oneself to just under a specific shoulder height. The main purpose was to have a sound working bobtail and an inch or two one way or the other wouldn't interfere with the quality of the dog; if he was a decent bob-tail. He then would be useful regardless of his size for working as well as reproducing. The very same reason for NO COLOUR or MARKING PREFERENCE WHATSOEVER other than the tan, sable or brown shades on the MATURE dog for which the standard was written. To stay for awhile with the size fir the bobtail I must STRONGLY point out that in NO WAY have the VERY LARGE BOBTAILS have been thought of as the GREAT dogs of their breed. In fact, they were OFTEN referred to as UNTYPICAL FOR THE BREED. Just about every kennel in the past as well as the present do have these dogs and NEED these large dogs for certain qaulities which are easier gained from the sizer dogs, but they should NOT be the MODEL for the breed in the showring! The ONLY time ANY breeder needs something which is UNTYPICAL for the breed is when the breed is in general lacking a specific quality and that quality can only be found in a dog who is VERY GOOD otherwise, but has whatever wrong with him to make him UNTYPEY- in this particular case being extremely oversized.

The facts that carry my strong opinion about what is RIGHT or WRONG regarding size in the bobtail are collected not only for personal experience breedingwise and reading the standard BEFORE the breedings took place, but general education from the “old Timers” in England; most of them no longer with us; plus reading whatever articles, books and material available on breed and not forgetting those great Old Judges that remembered the breed from back in 1800.

One of the fairly old books written by F.T. Barton, M.R.C.V.S. printed in 1912, “our Dogs and All About Them” says regarding the size of the OES: “In height about 22 is regarded as typical” Further Mr. Barton states “In Scotland there is a sheepdog of a somewhat different type, less shaggy in coat, SLIGHTLY SMALLER, narrower in the muzzle, which bearded, whilst the stern is its natural length.” There is NO doubt whatsoever to what breed this other little sheepdog is- it's the wonderful Bearded Collie; a breed I have also been involved with. So much smaller than TODAY'S BOBTAILS!

The late Mr. Arthur Tilley who together with his brother founded the world famous Shepton Kennels in England in 1881 also talks about the smaller bobtail and the larger kind in his book about the breed. He was also founder of the OES- club of

America as you all may know. Mr. Tilley like the bigger bobtail himself, but we are still only talking about a couple of inches larger than the 22 inch dog. In the early 1900 it was made clear that some judges like the larger dog 23-24 inches being VERY large and in the opinions of just about all the authors of OES materials they refer to ENORMOUS dogs and MONSTROUS dogs AS HUGE AS 25" and NEVER over 26" dogs. Today I have in this country time after another had judges refer to my dogs at times won or lost as very SMALL, and yet those dogs were 24-26 at the shoulders! I have had the very same judges praise my other dogs at times when I either won or lost, saying my 28" dogs were normal size or Good size and Correct size! Even Mrs. Jill Keeling of Amberford Kennels in England said in her book "The Old English Sheepdog" that the breed was getting far too big in size and that she certainly bred for the small correct type bobtail. There are very few books written on the OES, but together with the standard and the various materials available on the breed in the past there can be NO doubt in anyone's mind to what SIZE is CORRECT for the bobtail. WHY NOT BREED FOR THAT THEN? Please, dear breeders AND judges, give us back the MEDIUM SIZED bobtail; at least give him a FAIR chance in the showing providing his BREED CHARACTERISTICS and TEMPERAMENT and SOUNDNESS are good enough to call him a BOBTAIL. If the smaller bobtail is not good enough in these respects naturally he should be dismissed, but so should the oversized dog if he is lacking the same-only that he should FIRST of the two leave the ring for being UNTYPICAL in BOTH quality AND SIZE!

It is bad enough that far too many judges at the regular shows don't recognize the correct breed characteristics and the CORRECT size, but when the judges at the SPECIALTIES and the TOP SHOWS in America put up these great huge dogs for BOB, the MODEL for the breed-that hurts! It hurts because it takes so much for the conscientious breeders to get a GOOD representative for the breed (in this breed in particular with all the regular breed problems AND severe degree of H.D., etc.) and then never get looked at mainly because of SIZE being TOO SMALL when standing 24-26 inches at the shoulders! Surely the breed clubs should have a strong function here to help to select approved judges who at least know the breed standard!

The BREED CHARACTERISTICS are, according to the standard, the following details that make a bobtail a bobtail and nothing else! To start with we should be able to tell from a distance if it's a bobtail or not by his BALANCE and OUTLINE and shaggy appearance, REGARDLESS of size color and markings. Once we have recognized his RATHER SHORT and VERY COMPACT body with a FAIRLY LONG neck and the IN PROPORTION LARGE head at one end and the tail-less

stick-set rump with his well angulated hindquarters and low hocks and the VERY IMPORTANT ARCH over the LOIN making him standing LOWER at the FRONT than at the other end, we can so examine the details.

His head should be well made with a rather square shape to it having a capacious and rather squarely formed skull which is somewhat FLAT on top (Returning to Bartons book; it says: "It is necessary to say that the skull should be broad, though Somewhat flat, the jaws deep and strong, and there must be distinct evidence of stop. Nostrils black and broad, the eyes vary in their color; some are dark, others Have the so-called "wall" or "China" eye OR odd eyes being frequent!") and level plains on skull and forface so that the skull does not slope backwards and the forface downwards "Roman nose". The forface should be fairly strong with fairly long STRONG and SQUARE and DEEP jaws and TRUNCATED. In England breeders have for years measured the skull by the width of a man's spread hand and the length of the forface by using the same hand the flat hand's width when all fingers with out the thumb are close together and the length of the forface from the stop to the beginning of the black nose should be equal to that of the width of the hand. Naturally, it all depends on how big the hand is as some people have larger hands and thicker fingers than others, but this is just a basic way to establish the proportions of width and length of the skull and that one of the forface. MOST IMPORTANT is that the head should be of correct shape and in PROPORTION to the MEDIUM SIZED DOG he is suppose to be!

The teeth should according to the breed standard be Strong and Large, evenly placed and LEVEL IN OPPOSITION! If the forface is correct; deep and strong and truncated his teeth should be FLAT ACROSS the front, not V-shaped or round like in a collie or other breeds. There is very much talk about SCISSORS and LEVEL bites, and which is correct, etc. Well the standard certainly does call for a LEVEL bite and for a very specific purpose. The dog is a worker, herding cattle as well as sheep (and a lot more than that.) and to force the unwilling animal into the position he is demanded (or asked) by his master to he has to "nip" the animal on their hocks or thighs or sides or whatever place he may reach. If he had a scissors bite this would tear the animal badly and big risks for infection would occur and do harm to the wool or skin, but the teeth meeting one above the other the dog is mainly "pniching" the herded stock. From expirience the level bite frequently does wear down so much sooner than the scissors bite which doesn't get the same wear at all the stays basically the same for lifetime; unless other easons cause defects. However, even the worn down level mouth is still PERFECTLY useful for his WORK And as far as eating anything but soft foods he certainly doesn't need his possibly worn down front teeth to chew anything as the chewing is done by his large and

broad side teeth which is the SAME on BOTH scissors as well as level bites. To have the strong deep forface one must also have the level mouth and flat across the front as with the scissors bite is very hard, indeed, to maintain the deep strong underjaw as well as the deep strong upper jaw. Enough generations of scissors bite and one has a much snipier forface than the OES standard calls for! At the same token, if one keeps on with nothing but the level bites and the CORRECT strong jaws one will very definitely get a number of undershot dogs. However, in my own way of evaluating things, to me it must be MUCH MORE IMPORTANT to have the CORRECT head and forface and jaws with a scissors bite and a thin snikey forface. With a thin and narrow underjaw; the latte type jaw could NEVER stand the same hard pull and work with large cattle and not too bright sheep. Naturally there is a STRONG preference –the correct level mouth. Personally I don't consider the scissors bite to be much of a fault AS LONG AS THE HEAD IS CORRECT, but I'll take a slightly imperfect mouth (undershot) any time providing the head is CORRECT! Over a WEAK head with a scissors bite! According to the Welsh Corgi Pembroke standard they may have level OR scissors bite is there mentioned FIRST! Nobody may have any personal preference to ANY standard details- they should only be according to that particular breed standard. If we start to borrow a little from one different standard of breed and then a little from another breed, we will soon have lost OUR breed completely. As it is now, the breed is weak enough!

Neck: Fairly long, arched gracefully and well coated with hair. In Barton's book it actually reads "The neck should be short, broad and carried well up." Well, the STANDARD calls for a fairly long which again must be in proportion to the medium sized dog. More important than length is the arch; the ability to carry the head high during work, so that the dog can see his master's signals and the herd over the tall grass. Also when resting the dog should under working conditions lay with his head high overlooking HIS herd and master. To be able to do just that the arch is very important together with his Fairly long neck. Nowhere does it say VERY long neck! Neck adds elegance besides being useful, but rather than a long neck without an arch and hanging along the ground like a bloodhound I prefer the short neck which is carried high and well arched. Anyneck without an arch is ugly-the short one in particular as it makes the dog look like carrying his head right on his shoulders-ugly and wrong! A TOO long neck is a weak neck and not strong enough for work.

Shoulders: a very much discussed part of the dog and so very very misunderstood by many. The standard says: Sloping and narrow at the points, the dog standing lower at the shoulder than at the loin. How many people do not believe the points of the shoulders being the same as the shoulder blades? Well, let's establish it is not! Mrs. Mona Berkowitz's excellent article with fine pictures in the earlier issues of

Bobtail Express showed exactly these differences. The main problem in my opinion regarding the shoulders is as we are dealing with a medium-sized dog with great symmetry and substance and plenty of bone, etc. HOW can we expect a dog to be super thin in boning and free from muscles over just the shoulders yet having the type of construction he is supposed to have. Let's go on to describe the body at the same time, that will help us with the kind of shoulders the standard calls for. Body: rather short and very compact, ribs well sprung and brisket deep and capacious. SLADSIDEDNESS HIGHLY UNDESIRABLE. The loin should be very stout and gently arched, while the hindquarters should be round and muscular and with well-let-down hocks, and the hams densely coated with a thick, long jacket in excess of any other part. Going back once again to Barton's book he said "to be typical must be massive in all proportions, in other words, it must be big boned, broad jointed, deep chested, well sprung ribs." And in another place in his book he says "Compactness of body is an essential point, so that the ribs must be well sprung. Strong loins, gracefully sloping quarters, broad jointed, well placed hocks and small feet liberally padded with hair are all indispensable features. The withers, shoulders, forearms, pasterns and loins as well as the neck are which the connoisseurs pay particular attention. For instance, the neck should be short, broad and carried well up. The loins must be broad, the withers strong and the SHOULDERS and ARMS HEAVILY MUSCLED, with elbows carried close to the side. The club just alluded to in its scale of points, allots twenty per cent for quality of body, loins and hindquarters, whilst fifteen points are given to coat and twenty to legs, neck and shoulders; so that the wisdom of the club in paying attention to matters so necessary for work, is at once obvious."

The most important in any working-type shoulder is layback and ANGULATION of the shoulders. If the bobtail has the good layback (placement of the shoulder blades themselves, so that they are not just "stuck" upon the neck of the dog) and EQUAL length of the shoulder blade and upper arm and of the proper angle 90 degrees (45+45 and tilted from shoulder blades to point of the shoulders) he then also has a good fore-chest which is so important to the combination layback and angulation. The OES should be NARROW at the points of the shoulder which DOESN'T mean the dog should not have good fore-chest! By standing narrow between the points and having a good STRAIGHT front it certainly gives the dog a sound workable front so that by also being PEAR SHAPED with the extra broad and muscular rump he is superbly suited for fast-turn arounds when herding and keeping his herd and single animal in place. How many judges over here don't go for the wide front in the OES and put down the dogs with the proper narrow space between the points of the shoulders. Being narrow there is of far greater importance than the preferred by so many narrow space between the space themselves. The

space between the blades can only be in proportion to the thickness and compactness of the dog. A rectangular or longer dog with not too well raised legs are normally the ones who have the very good layback and the very narrow space between the shoulder blades. The very thick-set and very compact dog standing squarely naturally will have to have a somewhat greater space between the blades and a much more muscular type shoulder as his entire conformation is that thick-set robust kind. His type of muscles are normally the kind which easily build up great muscle mass unless he has the long stringy type muscles which today dominate the breed he isn't that often the very compact thick-set dog anymore but rather a very slabsided and longer kind of dog-still being called a bobtail! Those judges who mainly go for the thin boned shoulder blades with the very space between the blades should, in my opinion, take a good look at the TYPE of dog they are finding these qualities on and ask themselves, are they being fair to the breed? I am not promoting an overly thick and coarse shoulder, but merely point out that a GOOD shoulder in a BOBTAIL is not anything but what the standard is calling for. A heavier boned dog in the shoulder department as well all over the SOUND muscle build up to a NORMAL degree and with the CORRECT layback, angulation, proportions and fore-cast certainly is much more correct and useful worker than the slabsided and thin boned and "elegant" shoulder type with improper construction. A sound shoulder can still be very clean when not being used much for work, but the very same dog when during hard work naturally will build up a certain amount of muscles. There is no doubt that a dog with too short upper arm and having a "hackney type" gait will build up muscles over the shoulders in for a bobtail most incorrect way as the dog is overusing his upper arm and therefore causing an extreme and wrong muscle tone load to his altogether incorrect shoulders. We must be careful in our examination of the shoulders, because the type of muscles and the amount of the same should all be in proportion to the amount of hard work the dog is doing. Today most bobtails are not working dogs and may not get that much exercise of the type that will build up the type of correct muscles that the working dog should have. Too much muscle of a too hard type can be of more harm than good during work as the bobtail isn't just working for a short while, but all day so he better have sound and elastic muscles that will help him carry himself all these hard hours and not cause cramps or lameness if overused. All this is a matter of NORMAL measurements and not one extreme to another. If the dog is built normal for his breed, fed correctly, exercised correctly and in normal health than these pointed out to be found to be normal.

Color: Any shade of gray, grizzle, blue or blue merled, with or without white markings OR IN REVERSE. Any shade of brown or fawn to be considered distinctly

objectionable and not to be encouraged. (The original colors were black and tan, fawn and sable and on occasion, a steel blue dog was found or grizzle.)

There is a tremendous lot of talk about the markings within the breed, more so than the color. As far as CORRECT markings, there none! They are EQUALLY as correct no matter how peculiar they may seem to some people. Some people very often refer to mismarked puppies or dogs; in my opinion and interpretation of the standard there are NO so called mismarked puppies unless born with brown or tan coats! Some sheepdogs have very dark markings on head, front and are dark all over with very little white- on rare occasions all black or blue.

Others have all white heads and fronts and collars; a very popular type of markings amongst many "show people." Then there those with white so called splashes in more or less attractive ways. Barton said in his book regarding markings With reference in color, provided the dog is full of quality, not much attention need to be paid, but any shade of grey, blue grizzle, blue merled with or without white markings are those favoured by the Old English Sheepdog Club, which objects to any shade of brown or sable.

In England there are many splashed dogs being born all the time; the same here in America. Mrs. J. Gould of Rollingsea Kennels in G.B. said whilst visiting US recently she and her club in England had decided to change the standard to read something like this: White head, forequarters and collars and with or without blue markings on head permissible! This to me is the greatest nonsense I have ever heard within the breed as NO ONE is EVER allowed to drastically change ANY breed standard as the standard was written for a dog with a very SPECIFIC purpose. It was also stated by Mrs. Gould that there were no dogs in the past (show dogs that was) that were splashed. This again is untrue as one of the VERY FIRST champions of RECORD in ENGLAND was Champion Walleyed Bob; and he was a splashed dog. I remember Mrs. Mona Berkowitz having a wonderful painting of this particular dog proving his markings!!! Also one of the very famous champion bitches in England Champion Blue Glamour Girl bred and owned by Prospectblue Kennels was splashed on the hip area with heavy white markings going up her hindlegs. Mrs. Gould was showing a dog last year or so who was also slightly, but still splashed. One of the top winning bitches at CRUFTS (the largest show in the world!) 1972 was heavily splashed being put up in several classes as 1st in the keenest of competition by one of England's famous breeder judges whom never has put down any dog for any markings. As recent as mid 60's a male bobtail was winning at least 7 Best in Shows at all breed (no CC) shows and winning at championship shows as well as being splashed! The dog was P. Major; a very much like dog by breeder judges as well as England's top all rounders. Mr. Joe Braddon gave him at least one all breed

Best in Show! England has had several splashed winning dogs in the past as well as recently; up until last year when I last visited over there. Almost ALL bloodlines do produce them to SOME degree and it is all a matter of personal preferences as to what marking one likes on a dog. My old Int.Swedish Norwegian Finnish English and American Champion Bahlams Unnesta Pim; who passed away two years ago being the top sire in the breed at that time after the great all time record holder Ch.Fezziwig Ceiling Zero; was a very dark marked dog and what controversy he did cause when at first entering America. My other top stud dog and top show dog Int. Eng. Swedish Norwegian Finnish and American Champion Bahlams Prospect Shaggy Boy is a dog with plenty of white markings; all white head with large white collar down to shoulder blades and elbows and by many considered too flashy in marking. Both dogs sired plenty of white and plenty of dark and must be recognized as truly GREAT dogs of their breed and anyone denying their qualities on their markings is quite sick! Recently an English breeder judge saw my splashed champion at a show and said it was truly a great dog, one of the very best within the breed, but how unfortunate the dog was carrying too much white. All of these dogs have sired, while being solid body color themselves, some splashed offspring; and the splashed dog himself has sired more solid marked offspring than splashed ones-all depending HOW they were bred as just about all lines do produce these splashed bobtails.