

KEY TO THE STANDARD

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The neck, a part of the body not always thought of in terms of power, is described as "very strong" with the nape being "very muscular." The Saint Bernard neck should never seem stringy, but should feel as though it were "full"...perhaps packed with some heavy, firm material that also had some "give" to it. In short, it should be loaded with muscle. This paragraph also cautions about developing an excess of dewlap (the loose skin under the neck).

The shoulders are very muscular and powerful. The blades are broad and sloping. The angle of slope generally accepted for maximum efficiency is 45 degrees. The withers are strongly pronounced.

Built in this manner, the imposing head will be the first part of the dog to attract your attention-the powerful withers second.

The St. Bernard chest is not just well arched, it is VERY well-arched, a clue to the importance placed on it. In spite of the fact that the arch will be very noticeable, it should not give a "pouter pigeon" appearance. Too much is as bad as not enough. The chest is also described as being only moderately deep and not falling below the elbow, suggesting that lung room, which in a Saint must be great, will have to be gained in some other way...such as rib spring.

The back (meaning from behind the withers all the way to the rump) should be very broad, and perfectly straight as far as the haunches (over the hips). From there, the croup drops off gently, being neither flat nor steep. One point in this section has been disputed many times...that is, the words "perfectly straight." They are generally interpreted as meaning that our dog should not be "high in the rear." Those who argue the point say that "straight" does not necessarily mean "level with the ground." Nevertheless, we can be sure that our dog's back (whether high in the rear or level) should not have a dip in it or a roach, or an arch. Perfectly straight means just that!

The hind quarters, meaning the entire rearend of the dog, are described as "well developed" indicating that there is nothing skimpy about this end of the dog either. The legs of the hindquarters will be noticeable as being "very muscular"-something not seen in all Saint Bernards today.

It seems that the Standard, in asking over and over again that the dog be very muscular, is trying to tell us that we have so much dog here that we need extra muscle to hold all his parts in place so that he will be capable of doing the job for which he was bred.

The tail, a very important though often neglected part of the dog, rates the word "powerful" twice in its description, as if suspecting that we would not be thinking of a tail in terms of power. The St. Bernard tail is broad, powerful, long, very heavy. Even the tip of the tail is described as powerful. The thickness of the tail at its root is a good indication of over-all substance of the animal.

We are given a very clear picture of the forearm (upper part of the front leg) in a few well-chosen words. In fact, a word is used here that is not used anywhere else in the Standard-"extraordinarily. "A leg has to have one heck of a lot of muscle to be "extraordinarily muscular."

The foreleg itself is described as straight and strong. This rules out such faults as fiddle fronts, east-west feet or weakness in the pastern joint (wrist). No mention is made of the fact that the most efficient pastern has a slight slope which prevents knuckling over and also absorbs some of the shock when the pad hits the ground.

Not too much is said here about the hindlegs. We are told that the hocks should be of moderate angulation, which of course, should correspond with the angulation of the shoulder blade to keep the dog in correct balance. There are, however, a few things that we have already learned about the hindlegs. For one thing, we read that they are very muscular and well developed. It stands to reason that they would have to be in order to propel the rest of the dog we have been describing. Under the general heading in part 1 of the Standard, we found we were reading about a dog that was "strong and muscular in every part," and "every part" would naturally include the rear end.

On a big dog like the St. Bernard, the feet are, perhaps, the most important part of the animal. No one can work with hurting feet, and to support his tremendous weight, good feet are a must for the Saint. The foot itself should be neither delicate nor pancake-like, but should be compact and "fat." The toes should be short toes of the cat foot, and while they do not have to be very well closed up, they should be fairly tight and by all means, well knuckled up.

The Standard tells us that female animals are finer over-all. A male should appear masculine, a female feminine.

This little paragraph covers a multitude of sins and it is here particularly where your knowledge of what makes a dog "good" will be put to the test. The St. Bernard, as a working dog, has got to come as close to perfection in soundness as he does in type- and we are told in no uncertain terms -"CONSIDERED AS FAULTS ARE ALL DEVIATIONS FROM THE STANDARD", and we are given several examples. These examples could have been continued with every fault of conformation and soundness (crabbing, straight shoulders, moving out at the hocks, etc).

The last paragraph deals with the coat of the long-haired St. Bernard and I think the sentence on the feathering of the foreleg deserves mention. "forelegs only SLIGHTLY feathered..." is how the Standard reads. Since we see such heavily feathered front legs on so many dogs now-days, it might be well to keep this in mind.

The St. Bernard dog as originally bred was more than the showpiece that modern advances have made him today. At the time when he was used by the monks at the Hospice of St. Bernard, he was a powerful worker, built for endurance on the dangerous mountain slopes. At present, he is one of the most distinctive of all breeds, and it is the responsibility of every breeder to breed dogs that meet the Standard.

It should be noted in closing that the St. Bernard is quite gentle in nature. Although the Standard does not require this, his job as rescuer in the Alps did.