

TYPE VERSUS SOUNDNESS

BY: LEE PIERCE / AKC JUDGE

"Type versus Soundness," is as old as pure-bred dogs. We have asked countless times, "What is more important, type or soundness? If you had to choose between a typey unsound animal and a sound animal greatly lacking in type, what would you choose?" We have discussed this with some of the West Coast's top handlers, read countless articles written by breed authorities, read numerous other breed books, which I might say some are absolutely excellent and should be read by every dog breeder in any breed. One of the best is "The complete Bull Terrier," and all agree that type is paramount. Without type you have no breed. What good to breed pure-bred dogs if you have to stretch your imagination to tell what breed they are? One of our most prominent judges told me as each dog comes into the ring, he says to himself, one of two things "Is that a Saint Bernard?" or "That is a Saint Bernard".

We generally think of head type first, as the head is the most identifying factor in any breed but other characteristics are extremely important, and where there's proper type, soundness comes into play. A Saint can have well laid back shoulders, and good angulation, level topline and nice feet but if he is tall and narrow as a Great Dane, he is lacking body type. If he is built more on the order of German Shepherd he might be sound but certainly not properly constructed. If the tail curled over in a ring over his back it spoils the whole picture of the Saint. Proper tail carriage is a must, as so states our Standard.

Some people become too concerned with one thing, such as huge bone, good hindquarters, rough coats, good color or heads, that they forget the rest of the dog. Two of the most forgotten items are fronts and tail carriage, and we need definite improvement there.

My answer to all this is, I want proper type and proper soundness, for actually the two go hand in hand. If we wanted a narrow dog, we would get a Great Dane; if we wanted a great furry dog with a ring tail we could get a Bloodhound. We want our Saint like the picture Eno Mayer drew for our Standard and that was adopted by the Saint Bernard Club of America as the ideal Saint Bernard years ago. How long has it been since you studied these pictures and compared them critically with your own dog or dogs? You should keep these pictures in your own mind's eye and compare them with every Saint you see, then ask, "How close does that Saint compare with the ideal??"

I would like to mention something that Dr. Montgomery, who writes for "Popular Dogs" and whose articles all of you should read, said, pertaining to mediocrity-"The mediocre animal offers nothing to the breed. You will virtually stand still in your breeding program if your stock is made up of mediocre dogs." He said the main thing they should excel in is type. So keep that word in mind, as type is the key to breeding good and sometimes great dogs instead of fair and sometimes good dogs.