

BY: E. GEORGEAN RAULSTON / AKC JUDGE

After our discussion at our last meeting concerning the standard, I felt this article might be of much interest to you - our members. It is a long article, and will be continued in the next several issues. Ed.

Over one-half of the Saint Bernard Standard is devoted to description of the Saint. Bernard head. Why? The simplicity of the the answer is somewhat staggering: The Saint Bernard was bred to fulfill the breed function of working in extreme cold. He cannot fulfill his breed function without the proper head.

Much has been written on the proper head structure. Much has been written on type. Much has been written on the fact that one-half of the Standard is devoted to careful description of the head. What does the Standard say? "Considered as faults are all deviations from the Standard..." Afterward listing only a few of the deviations. It is not necessary to list them all as the Standard is highly specific and leaves no room for preference except where it firmly states: "very desirable, desirable, is not desirable, favorite." The rest of the standard is laced with "must be, are, is" and leaves no room for doubt that any deviation from those features with "are and must be" would be faults. A Saint Bernard without the proper head structure would then be faulty one-half of the entire standard, and could not be considered a worthy specimen regardless of how correct the remainder of his anatomy might be. It is also true that regardless of how perfectly shaped a head may be, a Saint without the "Powerful, proportionately tall figure, strong and muscular in every part," would be substandard. The standard is specific again and does not leave room for preference: A tall, proportioned (balanced) dog, very powerful, extraordinarily muscular, powerful, over and over again the standard take the Saint Bernard out of the "average" and places him at the top of dogdom for size, strength, endurance and power. The less than massive Saint Bernard could never endure powering up a mountain, moving over ice and rock with surefooted agility, moving his weight hour after hour against high winds and snow. The quick, taut terrier movement could not help an animal that must depend on agility and athletic ability. The Saint Bernard needs enough length of leg for reach, length of stifle for forward reach and powering off. He must be able to come down on his stifles and hocks and then power his body forward. The high, prancing movement would hinder him. He needs a low, efficient, driving movement to accomplish his job. Whether the dog is double tracking or single tracking is unimportant. How he uses himself as a whole working unit becomes more important to the Saint Bernard than how prettily he places his feet on a smooth mat or on nicely mowed grass.

A Saint Bernard who meets only one-half of his standard whether it is the working, functioning head he lacks or the ability to use his body (including legs and feet of course) for the purpose he was brought into existence. Saint Bernards without the head to fulfill their breed function should not be awarded titles any more than a Saint Bernard should be awarded titles who is not a powerful, proportionately tall figure, very powerful, extraordinarily muscular dog. All through the standard, where the standard concerns itself with anatomy, movement is implied. If a dog were not to be powerful of movement, why would he need to have very powerful and extraordinarily muscular forearms a body strong and muscular in every part and on and on.....?

Why is the standard so explicit about the head of the Saint Bernard? Not for purely cosmetic reasons, not for pretty, not for beauty. The working Saint Bernard cannot do his job as an Alpine Dog without the proper head. Every feature outlined by the standard has a specific purpose.

"Head" is the entire head, muzzle, and back skull. Where the standard describes muzzle or skull separately it so differentiates.

"Head-like the whole body, very powerful and imposing. The massive skull is wide, slightly arched and the side slightly slope in a gentle curve into the very strongly developed, high cheek bones."

The standard does not give preference. It states: "...is wide, slightly arched and the sides slope in a gentle curve into very strongly developed, high cheek bones." The standard is describing a skull not skin. It is proper skull that brings form to the head, not loose flesh. Where the skin is to be less than smoothly fitted over the skull, it states so.

"Occiput only moderately developed." The occiput is the formation at the base of the skull where it joins the neck. The moderate development of the occiput causes the slight indentation between the base of the skull where the skull meets the neck.

"The supra-orbital ridge is very strongly developed forms nearly a right angle with the horizontal axis of the head."

The orbit is the bony socket which contains the eye. The supra-orbital ridge is situated above the orbit. The horizontal axis? Let us investigate. Axis: A straight line, real or imaginary, passing through a body that actually or supposedly revolves around it, the center line, the center.

If then the horizontal axis is the line formed by drawing an imaginary line from nose point straight back on the bridge of the muzzle and continued straight through the skull that is the center, middle, midpoint, central line which divides the head into equal halves, upper and lower. Those two words in the standard "horizontal axis" are key words in beginning to understand the typical head of a Saint Bernard. Whatever depth there is to the lower part of the horizontal axis must be equalled by the upper horizontal axis. Therefore, the depth of the muzzle is to equal the height of the back skull.

We now have the first absolute must in bringing the Saint Bernard head to correct shape and balance.

"The supra-orbital ridge is strongly developed and forms nearly a right angle with the horizontal axis of the head."

We now have the second dimension which must exist. The word "nearly" means "approximately the genuine, close." So now we have the skull divided into the muzzle which is as deep as the skull is high. The supra-orbital ridge raises sharply above the eye socket (orbit) to form what is commonly called the "stop". The standard states flatly the upper head structure is to be strongly developed above the eye. The eye therefore is set about on the horizontal axis of the head and the skull is to extend straight up (right angle) above the eyes. This brings the "broken face" to the Saint Bernard as a "must." A Saint Bernard without this important feature is considered common of head and untypical.

The next important statement of the standard is highly important to bring about the proper sinus development. The large sinus cavities, are, after all, the entire purpose and reason for shape of the frontal area of the skull. We shall discuss "why" below.

We know we are working with squares. The standard states in explanation of how the ear is to be shaped and how it is to be positioned on the head.

"Lightly set ears, which at the base immediately cling to the head, give it an oval and too little marked exterior, whereas a strongly developed base gives the skull a squarer, broader, and much more expressive appearance.

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There are no preferences given under "Ear". "Ear: Of medium size, rather high set, with very strongly developed burr at the base. (The burr at the base is the connecting point of the ear to the skull (Backskull).) The muscle, tendon and cartilage involved in that connection is the burr. "They (the ears) stand slightly away from the head at the base, then drop with a sharp bend to the side and cling to the head without a turn. The flap is tender and forms a rounded triangle, slightly elongated toward the point, the front edge lying firmly to the head, especially when the dog is at attention. Lightly set ears, which at the base immediately cling to the head, give it (the head) an oval and too little marked exterior, whereas a strongly developed base give the skull a squarer, broader and much more expressive appearance."

The ears set properly are workable ears. The dog can move them to catch a sound. Extra length adds nothing to function. The too short ear fails to protect the outer ear opening sufficiently. The medium sized ear that the dog can work to his purpose is **what the standard states is to exist....***?***

"The skin of the forehead, above the eyes, forms rather noticeable wrinkles, more or less pronounced, which converge toward the furrow. The standard takes for granted that any specimen will have a furrow because it bases this important feature on that assumption."

"Especially when the dog is in action, the wrinkles are more visible without in the least giving the impression of morosity. Too strongly wrinkles are not desired."

On the Bulldog the wrinkles are extreme on forehead and muzzle for the simply purpose of providing channels for blood to run off the muzzle and around the eyes while it is fastened to the nose of a bull. The purpose of the pronounced but not too strongly developed wrinkles on the skin of the forehead (not muzzle, mind you) is to provide channels for melting snow and rain. The moderately deep set eyes are protected by the strongly developed supraorbital ridge above the eyes. The skull structure at the sides of the eyes all provide protection of the eye during blizzard, high wind, driving snow or rain.

"The slope from the skull to the muzzle is sudden and rather steep."

The muzzle includes the nose, just as the muzzle necessarily includes the lips (Upper and lower flews). The rule of thumb is that if one drew a line from occiput down the furrow over the peak of the supra-orbital ridge (called forehead), it should continue forward to pass just over the nose point. Many fine specimens have more slope to the skull, many a bit less. As the standard indicates clearly "muzzle", the angle would obviously be considered more correct if steeper and sloped toward some point of muzzle. The height of the forehead (supra-orbital ridge) would always prevent the flat headed structure so that the line could never end more than half-way down the bridge of the muzzle away from the base or root of the muzzle.

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This feature is brought about by the large sinus areas, the huge brain pan, development of the occiput. It also helps to provide runoff for rain and water into the wrinkles and away from the eye. The deep furrow on the head (skull) and between the eyes also provide deep channels for melting snow and water to run away from the eyes of the Saint Bernard. They are natural channels formed for the specific purpose of enabling the Saint Bernard to perform his function as an Alpine Dog.

The supra-orbital ridge (forehead) is formed partly by the large sinus cavities in the cranium. There are sinus' along the inner structure of the muzzle which give the width to the muzzle as well as performing the important function of warming air, condensing moisture, etc.

The cranial sinus' is wedge-shaped space along the line at which the costal pleura meets the mediastinal pleura. It is (the sinus) a recess, cavity, or hollow found chiefly within the cranium. An air cavity in one of the cranial bones; especially one communicating with the nose (muzzle). The purpose of the sinus' are:

1. The provision of moisture and warmth to air that is taken into the body.
2. Drainage of material from these open areas in the skull cavity which help to lessen the weight of the skull and maintain balance on the neck.
3. The resonance that is given by the sinus' to the voice are exactly as a resonant chamber used to heighten and broaden the tone of the voice for radio amplification.

We find that the width and height of the skull are not cosmetic or just for "pretty". They are necessary for the Saint Bernard if he is to provide his breed function. To deny the Saint Bernard the proper head is to deny him the ability to perform his work. The wide brain pan, the large sinus spaces, the broad muzzle with wide, flaring nostrils are as important to the Saint Bernard as any ability to work his body properly. The sinus's contribute to smell, hearing, balance, and most necessary, air warming, not to mention the function of drainage.

"The muzzle is short, does not taper (width or depth), and the vertical depth at the root of the muzzle must be greater than the length of muzzle. The bridge of the muzzle is not arched, but straight; in some dogs, occasionally, slightly broken. A rather wide, well-marked, shallow furrow runs from the root of the muzzle over the entire bridge of the muzzle to the nose. The flews (lips) of the upper jaw are strongly developed, not sharply cut, but turning in a beautiful curve into the lower edge, and slightly overhanging. The flews of the lower jaw must not be deeply pendant."

Where we have a muzzle that does not taper in width or depth and the vertical depth at the root of the muzzle must be greater than the length of the muzzle, where the muzzle depth (from bridge of muzzle to lower edge of upper flews (lips)) equals the distance from the horizontal axis of the head to the peak of the occiput, and the skull slants forward from the occiput to the supra-orbital ridge (peak of forehead) and the invisible line continues over the ridge to meet nose point or front half of muzzle, we have the working Saint Bernard head as well as the refinements the standard states must exist for the dog to function.

The wide open nostrils, the broad nostrils, have the job of admitting huge quantities of icy air into the sinus' where it is warmed and taken into the lungs. Air is also taken into the mouth of the dog. The overlapping lips form a warming chamber for air, the lower lips form a slight runoff channel back to the slightly more developed flew at the root of the lips which provides additional drainage. It is important that there is enough length of muzzle to provide the proper breathing apparatus with the muzzle and throat. The Bulldog has a Brachycephalic head or is short-headed. The Saint Bernard is not a short-headed breed. If brought to being a brachycephalic, the Saint Bernard will have the same breathing problems as the Bulldog. Such a condition would completely eliminate his ability to function as a working dog of endurance, strength, drive and stamina. The muzzle that is 50% of the entire head length and certainly no less than 3/4 the length of the skull with the muzzle depth greater than the length of the muzzle would give the short muzzle appearance. Any time depth is greater than the length the shorter appearance has been achieved. The function of the head is to provide the Saint Bernard the ability to see, breathe, eat and house the brain just as it is in any dog. The form was evolved through necessity, not for beauty.

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Earlier the standard stated that the head is very powerful, imposing, massive, wide, slightly arched (rounded at the sides).

The "head" includes both muzzle and back skull not just the back of the skull. Two boxes (cubes) of about equal size placed against each other, one brought down to midpoint on the back box, then a line drawn from the rear edge of the higher cube (back skull) down straight over the tip of the lower cube (muzzle) would give a rough outline of what the standard describes so well. The muzzle that is about 3/4 the length of the skull seems highly favored by many fine breeders. Certainly, where the standard is describing a head that performs a highly specialized job for a highly specialized dog one would not wish to push the limit of shortness to such extreme that the ability of the dog to function is impaired.

The workability of each part of the head is important. For the same reason the Saint Bernard has been brought to have an overhanging lip. It is to taper, so forms a parallel line with the bridge of the muzzle other than at the flews of the upper jaw which curves into the lower edge. The "curving" causes the lip at its base to form what can be described as a slight smile.

The upward curve (brought about by proper muscular connections) gives strength and control of lip to the Saint Bernard. "The flews of the lower jaw must not be deeply pendant." As we have seen, they are slightly pendant for the simple function of helping melting snow and rain drain from the mouth and away from the muzzle when the going gets too rough for the dog to handle by swallowing. All the way through the Standard we are reminded that the Saint Bernard is a very powerful, massive athlete who had a purpose for being brought into existence. Everything about him must be efficient if he is to perform his breed function.

"The teeth should be sound and strong and should meet in either a scissors or an even bite; the scissors bite being preferable. The undershot bite, although sometimes found in good specimens, is not desirable. The overshot bite is a fault."

"Only the overshot bite is a fault. The undershot is "not desirable" though sometimes found in good specimens. Those who doubt the undershot bite is functional should watch a Bulldog at work. It is, in fact, the strongest bite possible; however, for the working Saint Bernard it is found, but not desirable. The undershot bite is not given as a flat "must, is" as is the rest of the standard on head. Of all the faults (deviations from the standard) that can be detrimental to the Saint Bernard in performing his function, the standard states the undershot mouth is less hazardous than the imperfectly formed sinus' (aupra-oribital ridge), hence, head structure. As not any dog is perfect, the detrimental effect of any one feature for the performance of work must be the final value placed on features given as "undesirable, preferred, desirable, etc." Had the writers of the standard believed the undershot bite detrimental it would have stated as it has all other matters of head: "the bite is a perfect scissors." That would have left the matter

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crystal clear. As the Saint Bernard is to have a muzzle length other than long, the undershot bite occurs. The shorter the muzzle, the more likelihood of the undershot mouth: Bulldogs, Boxers, and extremely short headed breeds are perfect examples. We must not want those features of difficult breathing, consistently undershot jaws. Therefore, the muzzle that is 50% of the length of the head or no less than 3/4 the length of the skull would seem accurate. The head of the Saint Bernard is to be "IMPOSING." A neat little head on a neat little body isn't the aid of the standard. An imposing, powerful, massive head on an imposing, powerful, massive body is what the standard describes.

Eyes are to see with and the Saint Bernard with very red, thick hair showing would have trouble in driving wind and snow. An angular wrinkle in the lower inner corner of the eye provides drainage. Too pronounced wrinkles on the forehead usually is the case of too much skin which causes unwanted additional weight on the eyelids of the Saint Bernard. His eyes are partially protected by the bony structure above and to the outer ridge around the orbit. The upper eyelids should be functional, not a burden to a dog.

"Deeply imbedded (imbedded: pushed in, depressed area) between the eyes and starting at the root of the muzzle, a furrow runs over the whole skull. It is strongly marked in the first half, gradually disappearing toward the base of the occiput."

The "root of the muzzle" is the point where the horizontal axis of the head meets the right angle formed by the supra-orbital ridge. Where the skull below the supra-orbital ridge is "deeply imbedded" or "furrowed", the eyes set moderately deep, there is a concave appearance in profile of the area between the supra-orbital ridge and root of muzzle. There is a serious and important reason for this feature existing, as we shall discuss.

"The lines at the sides of the head diverge (to extend from a common point in different directions: to deviate a typical form: to vary from normal: to differ from a typical form: to vary from normal) considerably from the outer corner of the eyes toward the back of the head."

Later in the standard, we shall see the eyes are set more to the front than the sides, are of medium size, dark brown, with intelligent, friendly expression, set moderately deep. The skull around the orbit (eye socket) must then furnish a moderately deep skull set around which orbit (eye socket) the skull sets out around the orbit at the sides of the orbit. The proper structure of skull would bring the eyes to the front more than if the skull flattened back immediately from the orbit so the eyes were set on the sides of the head. We are now working with a skull shaped like a bow according to the standard. We have now to complete the back skull features which are important for proper function of the Saint Bernard.

".....eyes that are too light, are objectionable."

The standard states: "dark brown" then "eyes that are too light, are objectionable."

"Obviously, eyes of a lighter color do occur, they are objectionable but a bit of light eye would not be detrimental to a dog under physical strain.

On the matter of the cosmetic, the standard is very loose.

"Color-White with red or red with white, the red in its various shades: brindle patches with white marking. The colors red and brown-yellow are of entirely equal value. Necessary markings are: white chest, feet and tip of tail, nose band. collar or spot on the nape; the latter (all of the latter) and a blaze are very desirable. Never of one color or without white. Faulty are all other colors, except the favorite dark shadings on the head (mask) and ears. One distinguishes between mantle and splash-coated dogs. Nowhere is a third color allowed on the Saint Bernard. The pure fact is that black all over the head is considered faulty. The standard states: Faulty are all other colors: White with red or red with white, the red in its various shades: brindle patches with white markings. The dark areas favored for the mask (around the eyes) and on the ears is truly a dark brindle which is black appearing. The standard says the white muzzle band is necessary, a blaze is "very desirable," and that faulty are all other colors, except the favorite dark shadings on the head (mask) and ears.

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Most dedicated fanciers aim at the ideal always and wish to have as many of the favored, desirable and very desirable characteristics as possible on their Saint Bernards. However, if that is so, they will pay serious attention that they are far more devoted to the structure and head outlined as "must, is and are" on the breed. The Standard considered cosmetic features far less important to a dog designed to be "powerful: of head and body than pretty cosmetic features on nontypical specimens who could not perform if called upon to do so.

In summation, those who claim a Saint Bernard doesn't work with his head have failed to educate themselves about the purpose of the Saint Bernard. They have also denied over half of the breed standard with a flip of the tongue. Until a proper respect for the entire Saint Bernard as a working dog has been achieved, the breed will continue to lack consistency to type, balance, and workability.

Ed. This is the latest of a series of three articles taken from the Northern Illinois Bulletin and is unfortunately also the last. I feel one can learn much by reading and rereading all three articles.