

Saint Bernard Locomotion – Part 1

Why Do We Care?

By Stan Zielinski

Do you want to start an argument? Then simply stand up in a gathering of Saint Bernard fanciers and announce that movement is an integral part of breed type, and those who ignore correct locomotion in Saint Bernards do a disservice to our breed! But I am not the kind of person who looks for a confrontation! I would rather have a quiet discussion in which I simply share the unassailable logic of my position, and point out the error in your way of thinking. Hence, I would sing a serenade to the wondrous world of Saint Bernard locomotion.

Over the years I have observed quite a number of people in the dog fancy, be they judges, breeders or other experts, go through the process of evaluating Saint Bernards in action. Some people seem to have an eye for analyzing the moving dog, and some people must work very hard to develop this talent. Unfortunately, it seems that there are quite a few other people that can't (or won't) learn. Those who are not able to be educated have a problem for which I have no solution. But, those people who would like to be exposed to a few differing thoughts on this subject should read on.

Since my purpose here is to convince you that you should be very concerned with movement, I will take on this project in a number of pieces. The first piece is about the importance of movement in determining the quality of an animal. The second piece is about the philosophy one must use to determine just what is correct movement in a Saint Bernard. The third piece will discuss the mechanics of evaluating correct movement. As an after-thought I have also created a fourth piece which is a little off of the subject in that it discusses how handlers make the judge's job much more difficult.

Let's start with the question, "Why is it so important to appraise the movement of a dog whose worth we want to determine?" Do you suppose it is because we consider the dog's movement to be some sort of artistic expression? I think not! Some people like to see a hackney gait -- they think it is stylish. Some like to see the head-erect movement that is appropriate to Sight Hounds, but not to Saint Bernards. Those who truly understand Saint Bernards, however, like a standard (correct) reach in front and in back because they think it is beautiful. Beautiful because they feel that such a gait is efficient and because it is the gait usually associated with correct Saint Bernard conformation.

What I'm trying to say here is that we do not look at a dog's gait in a search for beauty but, rather, as evidence that the dog is both fit and functional. As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so the proof of the dog is in the moving.

