

Saint Bernard Locomotion – Part 3

What the Expert Observes

By Stan Zielinski

The previous two parts of this series discussed the questions of *why do we want to evaluate Saint Bernard movement when it isn't mentioned in our standard?*, and *how do we define correct movement for our breed?* This section is intended to talk about those features that one observes in evaluating Saint Bernard locomotion.

We will begin by contemplating the details of evaluating the moving mechanism we call a dog. Of course, this is strictly a process accomplished by looking at the dog while it is being moved. These observations are always made from three distinct viewing angles.

These are the three views used in evaluating a dog's gait;

- the side view, which is used to evaluate the “side” gait,
- the front view, which is used to evaluate the “coming” gait, and
- the rear view, which is used to evaluate the “going” gait.

I have one strongly held opinion that is not universally shared with all of my fellow judges. When one is judging movement, you are trying to assess the ability of the dog to do its historic work. If you just consider the number of features that are to be evaluated then it is obvious that much more attention must be paid to the side gait than to the views seen when watching the dog go straight away or when watching the dog come straight towards you. Follow me while I try to make my case.

From the rear and from the front, you are looking basically at two features; does the dog single track or not, and does each leg operate exclusively in the canted plane it shares with the other leg on the same side? It is these deviations from the plane of action that denotes a form of weakness that we want to insure is not present in the dog under scrutiny. Most of these deviations from the planes of action have been given names.

From the front we see:	From the rear we see:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• crabbing• winging• paddling• toeing-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• crabbing• cow-hocks• moving close• popping-hocks

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weaving-legs • out-at-the-elbows • tied-at-the-elbows • running-wide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • barrel-hocks • running-wide • Weaving-legs
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I would advise the reader to forget all these terms and just remember what was already stated about what the evaluator should be trying to evaluate when the dog is coming and going. We want to know whether or not the dog single tracks and whether or not each leg operates exclusively in the canted plane it shares with the other leg on the same side.

Now we move on to the hard stuff – the side gait! I have heard speculation that so many judges don't do a proper job of evaluating side gait because the task is difficult and demands a trained eye. I suppose there is some truth in that piece of folklore.

From the side you look to find an athlete in action! This is the view in which you must assess

- Stride length (Does the dog have an adequate reach and drive; that is, does it have a good length of stride and is the front stride balanced with the rear stride?),
- Foot timing (Do you see the rear foot set down exactly in the just vacated track left by the front foot on the same side?),
- Suspension (Do you see a moment of suspension with each stride?),
- Stability (Does the body function without rolling or bouncing?),
- Strength (Does the dog show a strong firm top line? Do the feet, pasterns, hocks and legs provide firm support without sagging or buckling whenever the dog's weight is imposed?),
- Joint articulation (Do the primary joints open and close during each stride, or do they seem frozen in place – especially the hock and elbow joints?),
- Head carriage (Does the dog run with its head level or just above level? Or does the dog run down hill all the time in an effort to relieve the weight on the rear assembly?),
- Tail carriage (Is the tail carried correctly, or is it carried over the back, or in a tight curl, or tucked between the legs?),
- Grace (Does the dog move effortlessly? Do the feet lift off of the ground cleanly, or do they simply slide along the surface? Do the feet set down firmly without a sudden thud? Do the feet travel in an efficient path or do they go on some energy-wasting journey of their own design? Do you see poetry in motion? Do you see a dog able to perform its historic task?),

Obviously, it is the side gait that is the true test of the entire dog functioning as a smooth-operating, well-coordinated object of strength, beauty and grace. Does the dog

