

# AKC Standard Analysis

## INTRODUCTION

If it were necessary to describe the Akita in one word, "dignity" would suffice. For it is this concept that the breed embodies. Whether in proud stance or no-nonsense movement, the breed's dignified presence is its most distinct quality. Each element described in the standard is designed to contribute to this impression.

There is an emphasis in Akita standards on the head. The overall broad and triangular head shape is brought to extraordinary impressiveness by the harmonizing triangular shape of the eyes and ears. The product is an alert and fearless expression.

As a balancing agent, there is a large, full tail. It cannot trail behind or up in the air but must curl around to meet the dog's back or rest against his flank.

The Akita is in the bottom range of the large-size breed category. His size and obvious strength leave a lasting impression on all who see him. At the same time, there is no harshness in his appearance. For the short, thick and lustrous double coat softens the rugged outline of muscle and bone.

In his driving movement, the Akita combines great power with a precision and smoothness which make it seem as natural to be moving as to be standing still. Every step is a purposeful expression of the dog's own will.

The breed character is reserved, silent and dominant over other canines. Although the Akita is unruffled by minor irritations, he is alert toward other dogs, and any serious challenge is met with swift retaliation.

With man, the Akita is a delightful companion. He gives in devotion and protection more than he could ever take in food and shelter. Friendly strangers are treated with respect, but trespassers find the door barred by an awesome figure.

## GENERAL APPEARANCE

"Large, powerful, alert, with much substance and heavy bone. The broad head, forming a blunt triangle, with deep muzzle, small eyes and erect ears carried forward in line with the back of the neck, is characteristic of the breed. The large, curled tail, balancing the broad head, is also characteristic of the breed."

More discussion about the General Appearance section will be included later as each of these subjects are examined. Unfortunately, this is the section that is often used by breeders as a focal point of their breeding programs. The beginning sentence is often emphasized to the exclusion of breed type as it is identified within the rest of the standard. This sentence could, by itself, describe a breed other than the Akita. It should not be used as an excuse for breeding dogs that are lacking in correct standard type. The entire written standard should be equally as important as the General Appearance section.

The original Japanese standards, (NIPPO, AKIKYO, and predominately AKIHO) that served as the model of the ACA standard, mention that the male is masculine and clearly distinguishable from the feminine female. The Points To Remember section, that has followed the standard since its inception, states in point number one, "The Akita is broad and powerful. This quality is more evident in dogs than in bitches." It would be appropriate to include this distinction in any future revisions to the body of the ACA Akita Standard.

## HEAD

"Massive but in balance with body; free of wrinkle when at ease. Skull flat between ears and broad; jaws square and powerful with minimal dewlap. Head forms a blunt triangle when viewed from above." "Fault---Narrow or snipy head."

About one third of the standard describes the head. The introduction to the standard states "There is an emphasis in the Akita standard on the head." This indicates the importance of the head of the Akita breed to its overall appearance. Most of the breed's type is expressed in the headpiece.

"Minimal dewlap" should be included under the "Neck" section of the standard. The original Japanese standards did not allow for any wrinkles, loose skin or dewlap. Because some Akitas at the time of AKC recognition could not meet this criteria, compromises were made in our present standard.

Keep in mind that the Akita should be a tight dog. Throughout the standard this point is made clear from the following phrases: "skin pliant but not loose", "free of wrinkle", "eye rims...tight", "lips...not pendulous" & "minimal dewlap". Breeders who breed for overdone dogs are often plagued with these general looseness faults. Though traits that do not fit the standard are obviously faulty, it would be desirable for the standard to mention these sloppy characteristics as faults so that breeders would not hastily overlook them. Such faults greatly detract from this noble breed's alert and dignified appearance.

The Points to Remember section states as its 4th point, "Most Akitas have no loose skin on their heads at any time. Under conditions of excitement, a slight wrinkle on the forehead is acceptable but not desirable.....Loose and sagging lips are incorrect." The original Japanese standards clearly state the Akita should have no wrinkles. A large head that is ugly is of no use in a breeding program. Though the head is to be broad as stated in the General Appearance section, its massiveness must be in balance with the body. There should be breadth in the frontal forehead as well as at the back of the skull behind the ears. Round or apple heads that are not flat are faulty. The flat plane of the skull when viewed from the side profile should be parallel with the bridge of the nose.

The original Japanese standards did not use the "head forms a blunt triangle when viewed from above" terminology. But because the back of the head is broader than the nose, the appearance from above the head could be viewed as somewhat triangular.

However, this triangular shape can be overdone if the muzzle gradually widens too far at the base where it attaches to the face, giving the appearance of no separation. This shape can give the face the look of a Bull Terrier rather than an Akita.

Also the appearance of full cheeks can be somewhat lost if the triangle is overdone. Full cheeks are not mentioned in the ACA Akita standard, but are a part of the earlier Japanese standards, upon which the ACA standard is based, and most breeders recognize the fact that the Akita should have well developed cheeks.

**Muzzle** --- "Broad and full. Distance from nose to stop is to distance from stop to occiput as 2 is to 3."

The General Appearance section adds the word "deep" in describing the muzzle. Balance is very important when determining how broad, full, and deep the muzzle should be. "Deep" is not a term that has ever been used in the Japanese standards, though "broad" and "full" are used to describe the muzzle.

As with anything, the muzzle can become overdone and overpower the face if it is too broad, full, and deep. This can give the appearance of a Mastiff instead of an Akita. On the other hand, the muzzle should not be too pointed or slender. The muzzle should be in balance to properly fit the face.

Muzzle length is very specific in the ACA standard. Early Japanese standards did not give such an exact length. It was not until the Akikyo standard revision adopted June 1, 1989 that a Japanese standard gave an exact length ratio as is used by the ACA standard. The Akikyo standard uses 4 to 6, which is the same as ACA's 2 to 3 ratio.

Many Akitas tend to have a muzzle that is too long and which can give the appearance of a German Shepherd. Because this extra length is accompanied by much depth and breadth, it may not appear too long to the average person. This fault has become so common, many Akita fanciers do not even recognize this as a problem relating to correct Akita type, but instead erroneously consider this look to be correct type!

Muzzle shape or attachment is not mentioned in the standard. When viewed from the front, the ideal attachment shape should be somewhat round in appearance. Neither the triangular nor the square (boxy) shape will ideally impart the proper facial expression.

From the side profile, the bridge of the muzzle should be straight, rather than concave or convex, and looks best when the lip line and underjaw are nearly parallel to the bridge or top of the muzzle. An Akita whose muzzle, when viewed from the side profile, is shallow at the nose end but deep at the back end that attaches to the face, is most unbecoming.

**Stop** --- "Well defined, but not too abrupt. A shallow furrow extends well up forehead."

The stop should not be too shallow or sloping, nor should the stop be too deep, which often results in a heavy brow. There should be only a slight elevation from the bridge to the forehead.

The furrow looks best when the groove or valley is not too deep or wide (forming a V shape) between the eyes where the crease or furrow begins. A smoother appearing stop that is filled in and not so severely recessed will permit the head a cleaner appearance.

**Nose** --- "Broad and black. Liver permitted on white Akitas, but black always preferred." "Disqualification--Butterfly nose or total lack of pigment on nose."

The term liver should be changed to reflect the nose of white Akitas more accurately. The nose can be quite light in color and still have some pigment, but the darker nose color is more desired and adds to the striking appearance of white Akitas. Any streaks or spots that lack pigment on an otherwise pigmented nose would be disqualified as a butterfly nose.

**Ears** --- "The ears of the Akita are characteristic of the breed. They are strongly erect and small in relation to rest of head. If ear is folded forward for measuring length, tip will touch upper eye rim. Ears are triangular, slightly rounded at tip, wide at base, set wide on head but not too low, and carried slightly forward over eyes in line with back of neck." "Disqualification--Drop or broken ears".

The Japanese standards indicate that the ears should be thick. Though this point has been left out of the ACA standard, the Akita is a northern breed and most breeders desire their dogs to have the more aesthetically pleasing thick ears. Ears with a thick plush coat, both inside and outside, are also desired. The ears should be well cupped and appear to be thrust into the skull.

Ears shape is a symmetrical triangle. If a vertical line was drawn perpendicular from the top point of the ear downward, it should divide the ear in half.

The width between the ears should be equal to the width of the base of an ear. If the skull has proper width, this can be accomplished without the ears being set too low on the side of the head.

The inner border of the ear where it attaches to the skull should be vertically in line with the center of the eye. The ears should not point or tilt inward or outward, but should point straight forward.

The angle of the ear slant is mentioned in the third Points To Remember as "angled forward at about 45 degrees from the vertical."

Ears that are narrow at the base, too vertically erect, long and pointed are not characteristic of the Akita breed. Properly shaped and set ears with the correct forward rake are a necessary and vital component to a typey head and expression.

**Eyes** --- "Dark Brown, small, deep-set and triangular in shape. Eye rims black and tight."

Since the very first Japanese dog standard, eyes have been referred to as having a raised outer corner. It is thought that about a 35% upward slant from the inner lower corner to the outer corner is ideal, and if an imaginary line were extended along the lower eye rim it would intersect the outer ear border where it attaches to the skull. Akitas that lack this shape and slant of the eyes (round, loose, bulging, light colored, large) will completely lose the proper expression, no matter how good the rest of the headpiece may be.

The eyes have more to do with expression than anything else. Eyes that are lower at the outer corner drag the whole facial expression down, often have a wrinkle on the side of the head, and do not contribute to the sharp, exotic oriental look described in the standard. Eyes should not be too close together nor set too wide apart, but should be properly spaced and in balance with the rest of the head. The Akita breed, as a whole in the United States, is in need of renewed attention to preserve the correct eye.

**Lips and Tongue** --- "Lips black and not pendulous; tongue pink."

The 4th Point To Remember emphasizes that "Loose and sagging lips are incorrect." Just because this is a common occurrence in the breed in the United States, it does not mean that some looseness should become acceptable. There are many Akitas in Japan with well drawn lips. It is an attainable goal and should not be excused for any reason. The ACA standard should remain firm and strong.

The lips should not be lacking pigment in any area. Lips that have pink blotches are distasteful and distracting. White Akitas will not always have black pigment in their lips or eye rims, but these should always be darker than a non-black nose on a white dog. The Japanese judges will often check to make sure the tongue is all pink and does not have any dark spots on it.

**Teeth** --- "Strong with scissors bite preferred, but level bite acceptable." "Disqualification--Noticeably undershot or overshot".

The standard could be made clearer on this point. Perhaps giving an exact measure, such as 1/8 inch off line for example. Though the Akita should have full dentition, we do not count teeth in the standard. Judges who insist on doing so and who base their placement decisions based on their count, are out of line.

## NECK AND BODY

It is difficult to understand why the words "comparatively short" were chosen. Compared to what? Perhaps it was to try to emphasize that the neck should be thick and muscular. A long neck will look elegant, but may not enhance the powerful appearance of the Akita. However, adequate length is required if overall balance is not to be sacrificed. A head that sits right on top of the shoulders would have too short of a neck, and would be out of balance.

The neck should flow smoothly over withers that are slightly higher than the top line. A skinny neck or a ewe neck set will not present a balanced profile. The neck set should be angled at about 45 degrees. This is necessary for the ears (also set at 45 degrees) to properly follow in line with the back of the neck and will appear natural in relation to the body.

**Body** --- "Longer than high, as 10 is to 9 in males; 11 to 9 in bitches. Chest wide and deep; depth of chest is one-half height of dog at shoulder. Ribs well sprung, brisket well developed. Level back with firmly-muscled loin and moderate tuck-up. Skin pliant but not loose." "Serious Faults--Light bone, rangy body."

All Japanese standards and their revisions from NIPPO, AKIKYO, AKIHO, and JKC/FCI state a different body proportion than ACA. The ratio in all these standards are 11 to 10 instead of 10 to 9.

None of the original Japanese standards give the bitch an exact proportion of height and length that is different from the male dog. The words "may be slightly longer in length" are used instead. (One Japanese standard that does give an exact ratio is the June 1, 1989 AKIKYO standard revision, which states that bitches are 12 parts long to 10 parts tall) This may be an area of the standard that could be revised.

If we do a little math, the dog in the middle of the standard at 27 inches tall would be 30 inches long, while the bitch in the middle of the standard at 25 inches tall would be about 30 1/2 inches long. This is a vast difference in overall dimensions between the sexes. It is doubtful that this much extra length, proportionately, is sex-linked. A breeding dilemma is thus created that would force breeders to breed specifically for dogs or bitches in order to fit the standard as it now reads. Most breeders agree that the 11 to 9 ratio is too long.

Though a deep chest is called for in the standard, this depth can often be overdone, and frequently is, as the appearance of a dog with too deep of a chest will look more mature and fool judges into picking such dogs as their winners. An Akita with proper depth of chest will have a fair amount of daylight underneath them because the depth of chest is qualified as being only 50% of the dog's height at the withers. Many Akitas today possess the faults of too deep of chest or too short of leg length. From a breeders perspective, chest depth should only be judged upon maturity.

The standard says there should be a moderate tuck up. The tuck up has much to do with the style of the Akita and greatly effects the quality of the silhouette. There should be a boat bottom shape from lower chest to abdomen. An Akita with little or no tuck up will appear to be more mature, but don't be fooled into thinking this is the correct look described in the standard.

The rib cage should be full and egg shaped from a cross-sectional view. It should not be too round or barrel shaped, nor should the ribs be flat or slabsided.

The General Appearance section mentions the Akita should have "much substance". This can be overdone. Balance is of utmost importance throughout the standard. When all the characteristics described in the standard are in place (balanced with each other), the appearance of the Akita is powerful, yet at the same time is also a stylish, athletic, well balanced animal. It is important to note that "light bone" and "rangy body" are the only two points listed as "serious faults".

A sway back, roach back or high rear is not desired. A level back or top line is vital to a majestic and dignified appearance. As previously mentioned, tight skin also contributes to this impression.

(As a side note, the June 1994 booklet published by the ACA entitled "The Akita A Guide" has an error under the heading "Body". The words "Ribs well sprung, brisket well developed." were left out of the standard when it was printed.)

**Tail** --- "Large and full, set high and carried over back or against flank in a three-quarter, full, or double curl, always dipping to or below level of back. On a three-quarter curl, tip drops well down flank. Root large and strong. Tail bone reaches hock when let down. Hair coarse, straight and full, with no appearance of a plume." "Disqualification--Sickle or uncurled tail."

The tail is very important as it is one of the symbols of the breed along with erect ears. The importance of a proper tail is emphasized in the 6th Point To Remember, "The Akita's impressive tail is a vital element in the total picture he presents." The tail must be large, "balancing the broad head", as mentioned in the General Appearance section. If the tail is curled too tightly, or hangs too far down the flank, or does not have long, full, straight coarse guard hairs, it will not fit the standard because it will fail to balance the head.

There should be no parting of the tail coat due to too soft of texture or insufficient coat. The ideal tail curl should probably be high and oval shaped with tail coat shaped in a round mold.

The Introduction section also tells us "It cannot trail behind or up in the air but must curl around to meet the dog's back or rest against his flank." If the tail is set high, you will notice a little dog behind the tail when viewed from a side profile. The high set of the tail is essential to convey the Akita's alert & dignified presence and noble character. A low set tail is detrimental to the overall balanced shape, style, and regal bearing. It is often difficult for an Akita tail that is high set to have enough length for the tail bone to reach a well let down hock. Still, a short tail should be considered undesirable.

## **FOREQUARTERS AND HINDQUARTERS**

**Forequarters** --- "Shoulders strong and powerful with moderate layback. Forelegs heavy-boned and straight as viewed from front. Angle of pastern 15 degrees forward from vertical." "Faults--Elbows in or out, loose shoulders."

The 1974 ACA publication "The Akita A Guide" includes a diagram of the properly structured Akita that describes the shoulder layback to be 55 degrees from horizontal. When viewed from the side profile, you should see some breadth though the front assembly. The front legs should be well under the dog, rather than positioned out in front and giving the impression that the legs are hanging off the neck.

The Akita with the heaviest round bone possible is very impressive, yet it may not necessarily be considered more standard than an Akita with slightly less bone, because such bone could also be considered as being heavy. A larger Akita may have bone that measures larger than a smaller Akita's bone, but both Akitas could still be considered as equals regarding bone size, if both Akitas' bone size is balanced in relation to their individual size overall.

If you used a copy machine to enlarge a dog photo 10%, the enlarged dog photo would have bone that measured 10% larger, but would not be 10% larger proportionately. The Akita was not meant or bred to have bone the size of a Mastiff, St Bernard, or other such giant breeds. Heavy or large bone must still remain in balance with the rest of the dog and not be overdone. These truths should not, however, be an excuse to breed "light bone", which the "Body" section of the standard describes as a "serious fault".

**Hindquarters** --- "Width, muscular development and comparable to forequarters. Upper thighs well developed. Stifle moderately bent and hocks well let down, turning neither in nor out."

If the Akita is viewed from the top down, the dog should appear to be approximately as wide in the front as in the rear. A dog that is overly broad in front and narrower in the rear would not be considered to be well balanced.

Adequate breadth should be apparent when viewed from the rear. Ideally, the shape of the legs coming off the back end will be somewhat wishbone shaped, rather than overly wide and bowed outward, or narrow with a more A frame shape. The thighs should appear to be thick and well developed.

From the side view of the hindquarters, the hock joint should appear to be a short distance to the ground. This is what is meant by the phrase "well let down". The hock joint should appear to be thick, but should not have a knobby protrusion at the back point of the hock. An Akita's rear legs should be able to be stretched out behind the dog while still maintaining a standing position and not have the hock joint disappear. Sometimes a dog may appear to have good angulations and strong hocks, yet may still lose the definition of the hock by simply shifting his weight. This creates a nasty appearance of a reverse or a popping hock.

The rear leg should widen gradually upward immediately above the hock joint. Some Akitas will remain the same width traveling upward above the hock before the widening begins. This usually results in a narrow thigh which does not have the proper width, and is not in keeping with the balanced and powerful build (well developed upper thigh) described in the standard. A moderately bent stifle will require adequate length of bone.

**Dewclaws** --- "On front legs generally not removed; dewclaws on hind legs generally removed."

**Feet** --- "Cat Feet, well knuckled up with thick pads. Feet straight ahead."

The 10th Point To Remember adds further clarity, stating "Splayed feet or long toes are incorrect." Round thick feet with short toes are to be cherished.

## **COAT**

"Double-coated, undercoat thick, soft, dense and shorter than outer coat. Outer coat straight, harsh and standing somewhat off body. Hair on head, legs and ears short. Length of hair at wither and rump approximately two inches,

which is slightly longer than on rest of body, except tail, where coat is longest and most profuse." "Fault--Any indication of ruff or feathering."

A coat can only be considered outstanding if the entire body is covered with numerous stiff guard hairs. A coat that will even stand up off the back and withers is a rare and magnificent sight in the United States. Many coats may have an adequate amount of coarse hairs over the topline, but fail to have enough guard hairs down the sides and on the rest of the body. A thick leg coat will give the appearance of a heavier boned dog. Other problem coats include flat, soft, wavy, too short or too long of coat.

In the past, Akitas with an expressed long coat gene have been routinely sold as pet, neither bred nor shown. Since this is not a disqualification, some have sunk to showing such animals.

The coat covers the entire dog, serving as protection and as an aesthetically exquisite finish. AKIHO judging will no longer award the top prize to an Akita that does not possess a proper coat. Perhaps their example would be wise to follow.

The Japanese standards have never put an exact limit on coat length, though some have disqualifications for overly short or overly long coats. The coat quality is the most important. The ACA standard says "approximately two inches" at the withers and the rump, but shorter elsewhere, except tail. It is a good thing the standard uses the word "approximately", since it is very difficult to breed a proper coat with hair 2 inches long at these locations.

Quoting from the 1990 published book "The Basics Of The AKITAINU" by Los Angeles AKIHO member Hiroshi Kuwabara, is the following passage: "Scientifically, there are probably many types of fur that make up the coat, but according to Mr. Kiyoshi Komatsu of Akita, Japan, there are three main ones. They are:

- 1) menmoh - This is the shortest and finest of the three furs. This fur is curly from top to bottom.
- 2) sohmo - Medium length. This type of fur is curly on the bottom, but straight on the tips.
- 3) Harige - This is the longest (six inches or more), and the thickest. The long harige is located at the withers (kamige), the rump area and the tail."

Quoting from the 1970 Los Angeles AKIHO Manual under the heading THE COAT:

"The coat of the Akita has three distinct layers. They are the outer guard coat, regular coat, and the wooly under coat.

Undercoat: As the term indicates a thick fine cotton like coat which thins out during the summer months but is most heavy during the winter keeping the body warm.

Regular Coat: This is a coarse hair, having much resilience. It protects the body from injuries, and also repels water.

Outer Guard Coat: This coat is about 1.5 cm. longer than the regular coat and stands out like needles.

The coat must be stiff and OPEN. In the event it encounters rain and snow, the dog should not become soaking wet as would a dog with a soft coat. The coat of the Akita should protect the body from water or snow in this manner.

The Whiskers are permanent and therefore are believed to have feeling in them where the above mentioned coats have almost no feeling."

Many Akita fanciers trim the whiskers before they show their dogs. They may believe that this will give their Akitas a more professional appearance and that it will give them a better chance of winning. However many purists never remove the whiskers of their Akitas and have had an equally high degree of success in the show ring. It is doubtful that any judge would even notice or allow whiskers to influence their decision.

The AKIHO standard states "The whiskered region is full." The ACA standard makes no mention of whiskers. Whiskers can enhance the character of the Akita, and as such should remain intact.

## **COLOR**

"Any color including white; brindle; or pinto. Colors are brilliant and clear and markings are well balanced, with or without mask or blaze. White Akitas have no mask. Pinto has a white background with large, evenly placed patches covering head and more than one-third of body. Undercoat may be a different color from outer coat."

Some breeders will tell you that they have never seen a good dog that was a bad color, and will say that color is the last thing or least important characteristic of importance in a breeding program. You may notice that these breeders have bred Akitas for decades, yet still have not been able to get a handle on consistently producing brilliant and clear color in their dogs. Please note that no where in the standard does such a notion or idea express itself. The standard says no such thing.

There is much variety of color within the Akita breed. Not all of this color spectrum will meet the standard. Any hue or shade of color that is "brilliant and clear" can be considered standard. Any color that is not "brilliant and clear" is to be considered faulty. The fact that color covers the entire dog makes this a type characteristic that is very important to the beauty of the the breed. Color is the first thing you see when you look at a dog. The 8th Point To Remember emphasizes that "Rich, clear colors are desirable."

Examples of non-standard, non-brilliant and clear colors include dull, dingy, muddy, faded or washed out colors. Coats marred by ticking, freckles, or roan appearing marks smudge an otherwise clear color.

White Akitas have no mask and have no other color on them, but are all white. Though some may have some buff on the ears or elsewhere on the body, a pristine clean white is more highly prized.

Most Akitas have a black mask in the United States, as a black mask is a dominant feature. Some Akitas have a white mask. Other Akitas have no mask, or are self masked, meaning the muzzle is the same color as the rest of the dog.

Examples of self mask would be all black, all red, all brindle, (which has brindle stripes on the muzzle). A white blaze is also acceptable on the muzzle, whether it has a mask or not. All the above descriptions are equally correct, with no preference mentioned in the standard.

The standard says "markings are well balanced". A marking pattern that is naturally well balanced is termed Urajiro and refers to the whitish coat on the sides of the muzzle, on the cheeks, on the underside of jaw, neck, chest, body and tail and on the inside of the legs. This coloration pattern naturally occurs in many animals.

Brindle patterns should be evenly and distinctly striped. If a brindle lacks clarity in the striping, lacks adequate stripes, or has the appearance of a goma, it will not be attractive.

The book "The Basics Of The AKITAINU" has this interesting description of the Brindle Color: "There are two basic types of brindles and one subtype. They are the black brindle, (kurotora), the red brindle (akatora) and the shimorui, respectively.

All brindles have the following basic colors mixed in them: red, black, gray, and white. The amount of each color indicates which category it falls into. On all brindles, the thin stripes should be clearly seen. The black brindle should be basically all black, gray, and white; the red color should not be apparent. In a red brindle, there should be a combination of all four colors, but red should be the most prevalent color.

The subtype mentioned above is the shimofuri. (There is no English translation for this word.) However, the word shimofuri is derived from when frost covers the cut part of rice plants. These plants are cut from the base, and that appearance is called shimofuri. The shimofuri brindles face resembles the cut rice plant which is partially covered with frost. A shimofuri can either be a kurotora or an akatora but it has white hair interwoven in the facial area. The white color is not spotted or streaked, but it weaves through the brindle pattern. Shimofuri only pertains to the facial area."

Pinto is described with patches covering at least one-third of the body. This is a bare minimum and patches covering two-thirds of the body usually results in a more attractive pinto pattern. The 8th Point To Remember states "Especially with pintos, well-balanced markings are vital to the overall appearance."

Interestingly, the 1960 ACA standard did not allow pintos. It stated "No more than one-third of the coat may be white and the white may appear only on the muzzle as a blaze, on the chest or forelegs, as a collar, or on the hind paws and tip of tail." This was a sensible approach to markings.

The framers of the ACA standard were considering making an Akita that did not meet the minimum amount of color on a pinto a disqualification. In the early years, all breeders seemed to understand this concept, and much like with the long hair gene, these dogs would be sold as pets. The desire to sell show dogs and make many champions has led to a weakening of the standard by many who try to find any loophole to breed less desirable dogs and have them accepted in the show ring. Sadly, this has resulted in a proliferation of Akitas with the unbalanced markings fault.

Examples of unbalanced markings include one ear colored and the other white, one eye with a patch of color like a Spuds McKenzie look, a split face with half the face colored and the other half white, a colored head on an otherwise white, perhaps with a small patch by the tail or accompanied by speckling throughout the body.

Part of the reason well balanced markings are so important is because of what is written in the very first paragraph of the Introduction to the ACA standard. "If it were necessary to describe the Akita in one word, "dignity" would suffice. For it is this concept that the breed embodies. Whether in proud stance or no-nonsense movement, the breed's dignified presence is its most distinct quality. Each element described in the standard is designed to contribute to this impression." If you were to dress up in a clown suit, you would not look dignified. But you would in a tux. When an Akita is dressed like a clown, the same undignified look is conveyed.

## **GAIT**

"Brisk and powerful with strides of moderate length. Back remains strong, firm and level. Rear legs move in line with front legs."

Only three sentences are included in the standard on gait. Everyone wants a good moving dog for the show ring. There is much more that could be considered about movement, and there are books, videos, and seminars available for further study. Show ring movement does not allow for the entire examination of a dog's athleticism or physical capabilities. If a dog has a slight movement flaw, but is still able to get around the ring with ease, a breeder or judge should not let that flaw be the basis for any decisions to the exclusion of the entire standard's description of breed type. Though an Akita that has strides of more than moderate length may make a better show dog, it will not make it a better Akita according to the standard.

## **SIZE**

"Males 26 to 28 inches at the withers; bitches 24 to 26 inches." "Disqualification--Dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches."

The exact size range is clearly identified in the standard. Yet size is so often misunderstood. This may be because there is no set disqualification for Akitas that are too far oversized like there is for being too far undersized. Perhaps by adding a disqualification of 27 inches for bitches and 29 inches for males, it would alleviate part of the problems some seem to have understanding the standard size correctly. Still, this point would likely continue to be confusing to some.

Simply put, any dog who is between 26 and 28 inches tall would be equally as acceptable, with no preference whether the male is 26", 27", or 28" tall. Any dog under 26 inches or over 28 inches should be faulted for being non-standard height. This doesn't mean these dogs cannot be used for breeding or win in the show ring if they have a size fault. But it is important for breed conformity to understand that the standard does not say a male Akita should be 25 inches or taller, the bigger the better.

The Introduction section states "The Akita is in the bottom range of the large-size breed category." Thus, this is not a giant breed. Some breeders mistakenly strive to breed the largest Akita possible with no regard for the standard. Some will even proudly advertise their dogs with height faults that are over standard.

## **TEMPERAMENT**

"Alert and responsive, dignified and courageous. Aggressive toward other dogs."

From the Introduction:

"The breed character is reserved, silent and dominant over other canines. Although the Akita is unruffled by minor irritations, he is alert toward other dogs, and any serious challenge is met with swift retaliation. With man, the Akita is a delightful companion. He gives in devotion and protection more than he could ever take in food and shelter. Friendly strangers are treated with respect, but trespassers find the door barred by an awesome figure."

## **DISQUALIFICATIONS**

"Butterfly nose or total lack of pigmentation on nose."

"Drop or broken ears."

"Noticeably undershot or overshot."

"Sickle or uncurled tail."

"Dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches."

## **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

1. The Akita is broad and powerful.  
This quality is more evident in dogs than in bitches.
2. Reflecting the moderate degree of angulation in shoulder and stifle the Akita's brisk and powerful gait is characterized by strides of moderate length.
3. Akita ears are different from those of any other breed. They are small, set well apart on the broad head, and angled forward at about 45° from the vertical. Ears are strongly erect.
4. Most Akitas have no loose skin on their heads at any time. Under conditions of excitement, a slight wrinkle on the forehead is acceptable but not desirable. Characteristic of the breed is a furrow down the center of the forehead. Loose and sagging lips are incorrect.

5. The Akita eye is small, dark in color and triangular in shape.
6. The Akita's impressive tail is a vital element in the total picture he presents. It is large and full to balance his imposing head. When the tail is brought down, the tail bone reaches the hock joint.
7. The Akita's topline is perfectly level, whether standing or moving.
8. Rich, clear colors are desirable. Especially with pintos, well-balanced markings are vital to the overall appearance.
9. The neck is thick and strong, with a pronounced crest.
10. Splayed feet or long toes are incorrect.
11. The Akita's double coat is thick and dense. The outer coat is harsh but not wiry. The undercoat is soft.
12. The only acceptable bites are scissors (upper teeth barely overlap lower teeth in front) and level (upper teeth meet lower teeth exactly).

[www.northlandakitas.com](http://www.northlandakitas.com)

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