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**Judging the Skye Terrier**Donna C. and B. Nolan Dale
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Written in about 1988

There are two varieties of Skye Terriers - drop eared and prick eared. The standard for both varieties is exactly the same except for the ear carriage and placement. At most shows it is doubtful that you will have the opportunity to see a drop. As this breed enters the show ring the judge assesses the class looking for Skyes of style, elegance and dignity: agility and strength with sturdy bone and hard muscle. The Skye should be long, low and lank. He is twice as long from forechest to rump as he is high at the withers and is covered with a profuse coat that falls straight down on either side of the body. The hair, well feathered on the head, veils the forehead and eyes to serve as protection. The Skye stands with head high and long tail hanging and moves with a seemingly effortless gait. The Skye should be strong in body, quarters and jaw.

In paraphrasing the standard in this introductory paragraph, describing the general appearance, strength is mentioned twice - elegance only once. We believe that it is important to keep in mind that Skyes are not slight, weedy, fine-boned dogs. You might look at them as big dogs on short legs. The adjectives that describe the Skye temperament should be evident to the judge: courage, strength, fearless, good tempered, loyal, canny, friendly with those he knows and reserved and cautious with strangers. If this appearance in temperament is not displayed, it may be because the owner is a novice and/or the dog has not been exposed to the environment of a show, especially a noisy building after the relative calm of home. With some Skyes, because they are reserved, it may take longer to acclimate them to a show situation. On the other hand, there are some Skyes who have never met a stranger and tend to be more outgoing as a result. Because of its characteristic reserve, it is advisable to do the examination of this breed on a table. Not only is it easier to see the dog, but because of the heavy fall of hair on the face, it is easier for the dog to see you on his level and they are less likely to object to having someone examine them. If you elect to do your examination on the ground, be advised that this breed takes a dim view of being swooped down upon or hovered over. Should you wish to reexamine a dog for any reason, put it back on the table. Skyes are a sensitive breed and a judge with a heavy hand or a threatening posture can easily ruin a promising dog's show career in one bad experience in the ring.

Normally the judge would view the dog in profile on the table first noting the general appearance of the individual dog looking for the 2:1 ratio of length to height, a level topline, and a gracefully arched neck. Then the judge should approach the dog from the front. At this point judges will often attempt to bait a dog to see expression. A noise will usually accomplish this more effectively than anything else. Allow the dog to sniff the top of your hand or speak to it in order for it to be aware of your presence. Then place your hand on the head, slipping it under the chin where you may take the whiskers in hand to serve as a handle. If it is obvious, after a couple of attempt, that this particular dog is just not willing to be examined, excuse the entry. In the main this occurs only with young, inexperienced dogs and it is better to let them leave the ring and try again some later day. Gently holding the whiskers, so that the dog's chin is resting in your hand, study the head for good balance between the backskull and muzzle. Look for a moderately wide backskull which tapers to a strong muzzle. The head should be long and powerful with strength being more important than extreme length. The stop is slight, the muzzle moderately filled, never snipey, and the nose is always black. The only disqualification in this breed is a dudley, flesh colored or brown nose. The bite should be level or scissors with no preference given to either. Lift the fall revealing the eyes which should be brown, preferably dark, medium in size, and close set.

The ears are symmetrical and gracefully feathered. In the prick eared variety, they are medium in size, placed high on the skull, erect at the outer edges and slightly wider at the peak than at the skull. Visualizing the face of a clock you can identify a correct set as being from 10 of 2 to 5 of 1. A quarter of three is definitely a problem. Skyes do not always carry their ears in the most upright and perky position. It should be stressed that having seen a dog uses its ears once, that should be enough. Some judges seem to want them up constantly which is not natural and often judges seem to make their decisions based on the ability of the dog to keeps its ears tighter and tighter, or cutsie head movements. Some Skyes may do this but it is neither called for nor is it necessary. Because of the perception of this desire on the part of judges, exhibitors in some parts of the cuntry have resorted to having tendons in the ears pulled and tightened to keep the ears constantly erect. These dogs are not able to relax their ears and should be disqualified for artificial changes.

The set of the ears is dependent on the strength of the head. Naturally, the ears are set wider on a Skye with a stronger backskull. While you are looking at the ears, be aware that even the darkest of ear points have a variation of color. There will be strands of lighter hair. Separate strands of hair, even in the darkest ears will be banded with a lighter shade of gray. If you do not identify a slight gradation of color in the ears, you should suspect that dye has been used. In the drop eared variety the ears are somewhat larger and set lower on the head. They should hang flat to the skull as a "hound ear." Some dogs are shown as drops who are really prick ears that didn't make it. Like the beagle, the drop ear should have almost an entire absence of erectile power. Please do not lift the ears of a drop to parody the prick eared variety. Not only will the visual impression be wrong, it will only serve to agitate exhibitors and breeders alike.

You now move down to the front assembly of the dog. Allow your hands to descend over the shoulder and front legs of the dog. Elbows should fit closely to the sides and be neither loose nor tied. The forearm should curve just slightly around the deep chest. The legs should be short and muscular and as straight as possible, considering the deep and wide chest. This must not be misconstrued as "terrier straight" as in a Fox Terrier. The dog should have strong bone, its large hare feet should point forward. The pads thick and the nails strong and preferably black. The feet may turn out slightly as the construction of the front demands for a digging dog. A fiddled fronted Skye whose feet are east-west and whose wrists knock is objectionable. We like to be able to get three fingers between the carpal bones when the dog is set up with the elbows set properly. This measurement is, of course, relative to the size of the hands of the judge, but it gives you an idea of what is the minimum.

The Skye Terrier is an achondroplastic breed. In other words, a congenital dwarf with short extremities with a trunk of normal size and a large head. A condition known as premature closure of the distal ulna physis is a natural characteristic of dwarfism in humans and it is expressed as well in some Skye Terriers. The difference between a Skye Terrier and a toy breed is similar to the different between a dwarf and a midget. A midget being anything very small of its kind, normally formed and proportioned but diminutive, a miniature. A dwarf is considerably smaller than the average for its species and sometimes implies a malformation or disproportion of parts. When you visualize this explanation and consider the bone structure of the Skye as compared to a toy breed, you begin to understand that the characteristics of dwarfism are a natural part of the breed, and the predisposition to premature closure is a very real possibility in any of the dogs of this breed.

The very characteristics that make the Skye unique, the strength and bone, the strong head and jaw, rather than the smaller head and body structure of some of the Skyes' short-legged cousins, make breeders accept this predisposition as a natural part of this achondroplastic breed. Often, when feeling premature closure in the front legs, the judge might think that the dog is severely out at the elbow because of the pronounced lump on the leg. On closer examination you will usually find the elbow to be in its proper place and a congestion of bone usually on the outside of the lower leg just below the elbow.

Shoulders are well laid back with tight placement of blades at the withers. You must, however, take into consideration the large chest and not expect the blades to touch. It is also important to measure the length of the upper arm which should be approximately equal to to the length of the shoulder blade. In going over the body of the Skye you should check for a level topline, a deep chest with oval shaped ribs. The sides appear flat because of the straight falling and profuse coat. However, they are not flat sided. There should be no dip behind the withers and no roach over the loin. Anything less than the 2:1 ratio in length to height is a fault. Often dogs will look high in the rear when stacked due to the fact that some Skyes will stand with their rear legs well under them, being more clever than their handlers who have not noticed this indiscretion. If you wish, there is nothing wrong with your resetting the rear or asking the handler to do so. Hindquarters are to be strong, full, well developed and well angulated. The legs are short, muscular and straight when viewed from behind. All principals of proper rear movement for any working terrier holds true for this breed. You do not want to have cow hocks, sickled hocks, weak thighs or other generally accepted rear assembly faults.

The tail is long and well feathered, set on as to be a prolongation of the backline. When the Skye is standing, the tail hangs. The upper section is pendulous and follows the line of the rump, the lower section, the lower section is thrown back in a moderate arc. A shorter tail may not have as much arc but no tail should be held tightly to the rump and between the legs. The Skye tail should not be carried above the level of the back unless expressing excitement or anger. In movement it is preferred to see the tail out behind the dog or to about 30 degrees above the topline rather than having the tail held close to the rump between the legs or hanging limp or dead. Any tail constantly carried upright at an angle of 45-90 degrees above the topline is highly objectionable.

The Skye has a double coat. The undercoat is soft, downy and wooly. The outer coat is hard, straight and flat. Some coats have a thicker hair strand than others but even the finer coats should have a harsh feel. Black and cream dogs usually have softer coats than grays. The standard calls for 5.5 inches of coat with no extra credit for extra length. Sometimes it seems that judges are overly impressed with excess coat and tend to give extra credit for greater length. It is true that most champions carry a luscious coat since exhibitors wish to present their dogs in the finest possible condition to accentuate the beauty and the outline of the dog. The standard, however, does not require it. Coats which are softer and not of proper texture such as those resembling a Maltese, Lhasa Apso or Shih Tzu, are easier to grow. You will sometimes find a coat that is of correct texture and length which exhibits a slight wave. A slight wave is not objectionable, however, curly or heavy waving is objectionable.. Also excessive coats longer than the level of the floor are unnecessary and detract from the outline of the dog. The head hair may be shorter and softer than that of the body and veils the forehead and eyes from forming a moderate beard and apron. The long feathering of the ears falls straight down from the tips and outer edges surrounding the ears like a fringe and outlining their shape. The coat must be of one overall color at the skin but may be of varying shades of the same color in the full coat, which may be black, blue, dark or light gray, silver, platinum, fawn or cream. All of the shades of black, blue, gray, silver and platinum are gray based. Therefore, a Skye should be various close shades of gray or shades of cream and fawn. With the exception of the dark, often black, ear feathering on the cream and fawn Skyes, gray should not be a part of a predominately cream or fawn coat as often seen. Likewise, the brown shades should not be present in a predominately gray coat (water stains and sunburn notwithstanding). Few gray coats have only one shade of gray, but rather will consist of a number of shades of gray. The strands of the gray coat are banded with more than one shade. There should be no distinct patterns or markings with the exception of the darker points. White on the chest, not exceeding 2 inches at the skin, is permissible. The shade of the head and legs should approximate that of the body. In puppies, as the coat clears, wide variations of color may occur. Often you will find a black band circling the body coat of a cream or gray dog. This is normal and not to be penalized. Throughout a Skye's life, particularly in the grays, color may deepen and lighten.

As mentioned previously, the ratio of body length to shoulder height is 2:1. Ideal height at the withers is between 10 and 11 inches. There are many discrepancies on this point. Today in the United States, and to the best of knowledge in the United Kingdom, there are no 10 inch Skye Terriers which are exhibited. Another point worth mentioning, a Skye Terrier cannot be too long but must be at least twice as long as he is high at the withers.

Correct movement requires proper structure. The trot is the gait at which Skye movement is judged. The dog must gait in a straight line. Coming to you the forelegs form a continuous straight line. The legs move in two parallel planes with the feet the same distance apart as the elbows and having good reach without a great deal of lift. Paddling, winging, hackneyed or other common gait irregularities are faults. Poor fronts, however, it will not be so obvious when a dog is in full coat. Propelling power is furnished by the strong, full, well developed and well angulated short rear legs which travel straight forward with good extension. It is always nice to see the pads of the rear feet. The whole movement of the Skye is free, active and effortless which gives the impression of a more or less fluid, floating picture.

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Courtesy of the Gleanntan website and the late Bob Dale. (D 27/04/2010)