

A UK CREATION?

IT IS DIFFICULT to remain calm and objective when a lifetime's passion and interest is denigrated – so why not just cut to the chase?

In the case of Siberian Huskies, Robert Cole's knowledge (*You Be The Judge*, Aug 17) is clearly little enough to be dangerous.

He has traced a photograph of a dog from DOG WORLD ANNUAL (1999, page 237) and claims that it could never do the work for which the breed was originally intended. To quote Mr Cole, "He doesn't conform to the original requirement to pull a sled over snow-covered terrain for long distances."

How starkly this unqualified assertion contrasts with his own invitation to let the reader 'be the judge'. He has made the picture more recognisable by quoting the dog's (then) show record of two RCCs; he also alludes to the dog's racing achievements by mentioning that he is a fast, short-distance winner.

Indeed, several UK Siberian Husky folk, including championship show judges, recognised this dog instantly from the outline tracing and the description. Not surprising, really, as he is still actively shown and worked.

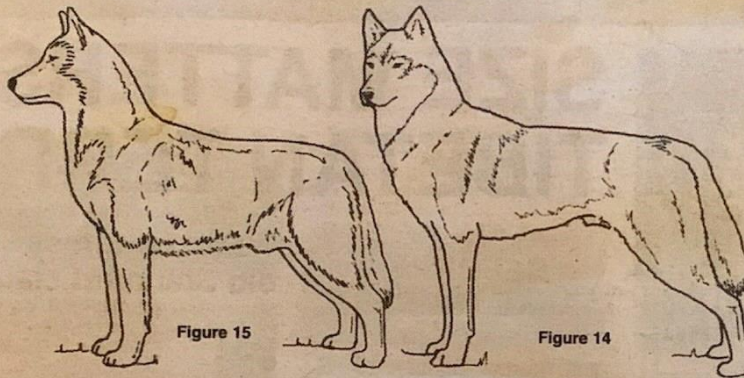
It is certainly not surprising that we at Forstal recognised the picture – we took the original photo from which it was derived, and published it ourselves. Let us tell you a little more about Ch Forstal's Kaliznik. He now has nine CCs (awarded by international specialists, UK specialists, and all-rounders) and ten RCCs, and has run on our top working/racing teams for three years, since he was old enough to do so.

We are particularly proud of him, because he represents five generations of almost entirely Forstal breeding. At the time the photograph was taken, he was only 18 months old.

The original working type Siberian Husky is a slow maturing breed and Kaliznik's is a slow maturing line – that is to say they reach maturity at around four or five years of age and then their looks really last.

His sire, Ch F Nikolaas, achieved BIS at the SHCGB show this year over 310 entries at 11 years old; his grandsire Ch F Meshka won the Pedigree Chum champion stakes final at nine years; his great-grandsire, Ch F Mikishar The Amarok, gained his championship title with three CCs in the year that CC status was awarded to the breed in the UK, which happened to be his eleventh year.

Any of these dogs could have represented the Siberian Husky as it is shown in the UK,



Above: Robert Cole's drawings.

but Mr Cole chose a young dog of limited showing experience to make his point.

Kaliznik (Cub, as he is known to his friends) had a lovely outline at 18 months of age, but it was still clearly immature. Now at four years of age, he is just coming into his prime (see accompanying photograph).

Mr Cole is suggesting that the outline picture in figure 15 represents the original Siberian Husky, and by implication that this is the dog who could complete those vast distances pulling a sled over snow.

It is apparently the heedless UK breeders who have disregarded the attributes required for this task, in order to develop their own sprinting version of the breed.

Actually, we believe the true scenario is more akin to the situation described by Mr Cole in discussing the English Springer Spaniel, ie the Siberian has been developed so far from its original working type by the fads and fashions of the American show ring that many show examples could be a different breed from their working cousins.

The US abounds with top-quality Siberians of the original working type, but they very rarely appear at the major shows. If they did, Cub would not look out of place standing alongside them.

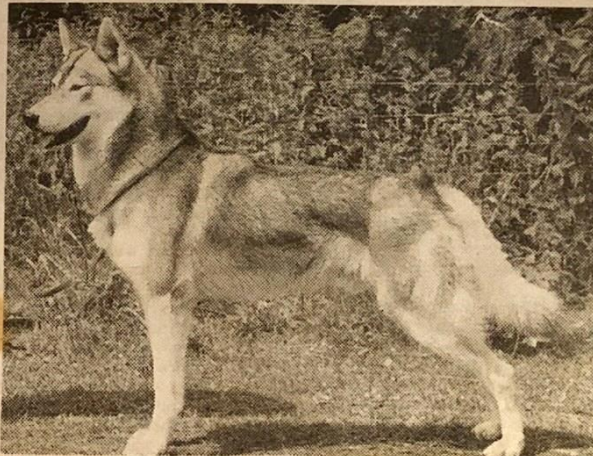
In fact, Mr Cole, we can guarantee you, if you send your two line drawings to just about anyone in the world who seriously works Siberian Huskies over sprint, middle, or long distances and ask them to pick one of the two for their team, they will pick Kaliznik (figure 14) over your other dog (figure 15).

Why? Because he has the front and rear

angulation to be able to pull and achieve shock absorption at the fast trot and lope, a decent length of loin to be able to double up at the run; his outline denotes an economical, energy-saving gait; he has legs that are longer from elbow to ground than his chest depth (as called for by the Standard), and he looks light on his feet and well balanced.

None of these attributes is displayed by the outline in figure 15, which actually appears to be more typical of the Siberian Husky developed for the American show ring.

We believe it is the show ring, with North



Ch Forstal's Kaliznik at four years.

Sheril Leich, Sally Leich, Ali Koops and Brian Skilton reply to *American versus British type* by Robert Cole

America playing a leading role, that has changed the breed from its original purpose and, if Mr Cole is interested, there is much reading he can do to investigate this assertion.

A particularly good article we would recommend is *Conformation: An Advanced Study* by Kent Allender and published in the International SHC *The Siberian Husky* (second edition, 1977).

It is also worth visiting the Iditarod team website for Earl and Natalie Norris' team of purebred Siberian Huskies (Alaskan/Anadyr) at www.ssanadyr.com where you can get a feel for the type of Siberian that is capable of completing this exceptionally tough, long-distance event.

A dog with the construction and type to work in harness – whether it is being trained for sprint or long-distance racing (as the type of dog remains essentially the same, while the training differs according to distance) – stands out a mile to anyone who knows anything about the sport.

Equally conspicuous from its build and overall shape is a dog that one would expect to fail in harness. The outline in figure 15 displays shorter, more heavy-boned legs, an overly deep chest, a shorter, rigid topline, with no apparent suppleness or arch over the loin area, and much less angulation front and rear.

Even if this dog has the will to work, and many dogs of good mental drive will make every effort to compensate for the failings in

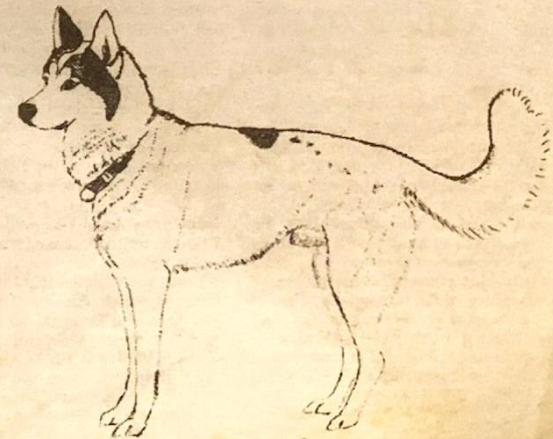
their construction, he will find it difficult to maintain a fast trot or a lope (ie moderate speed) over long distances. Over the span of a useful working career this will tell on him through stiffness and proneness to injury.

In short, we find Mr Cole's careless and unfounded comment about our dog to be hurtful and derogatory.

It is no secret that Forstal kennels and the Leich family were instrumental in the introduction of the Siberian Husky to the UK. It is also no secret that it has been our consistent aim and passion over the past 32 years to keep the working type of Siberian Husky in front of the judges in the show ring.

We have expended enormous time, effort, and money in fulfilling this aim, including importing and using bloodlines from good working kennels in the US and Europe to ensure that we do not stray from that typical working type dog.

We are well aware of the dangers of being insulated from the rest of the world on this island, and of the restrictions imposed on our working/racing regime in this country by climate and terrain. It takes sustained effort and consistent performance to build a reputation – it only takes a few badly informed but very publicly positioned words to undermine that reputation. It would be nice to think that Mr Cole would have the good grace to retract what we consider to be an untrue assertion. ■



Alaskan Spot of Anadyr, a member of Earl and Natalie Norris' purebred Siberian Husky team.