

# Judging the Siberian Husky

## Krystyan Greenland

With such a delightful array of colours and markings and differences in type, judging the Siberian Husky can be no easy task. This is a beautiful arctic sled dog breed, but, above all that, it should have the appearance of a top class athlete. This is a dog bred to run at moderate to fast pace over vast distances, which sets it apart from all the other sled dog breeds, and, quite clearly, Siberians should look noticeably different to Alaskan Malamutes, Canadian Eskimo Dogs and Greenland Dogs. Like most breeds, it is NOT a dog bred originally for the showing and judges have a duty to remember and understand this and help promote the breed as the working dog it is - fit for original function. Over the years, when people judge Sibes, I've seen many reactions from utter delight to despair and great confidence and competence to sheer panic and confusion. It's essential you spend much time studying this complex breed.



*Photo 1: The Alaskan Malamute*



*Photo 2: The Canadian Eskimo Dog*



*Photo 3: The Siberian Husky*

When judging Siberians, stand back from the dogs and look at the overall picture. Assess in your mind whether the dogs in front of you are clearly recognisable as a Siberian Huskies given the education you have received at Breed Appreciation Days and from breed mentors and experts. Do they fit within the acceptable medium range for the breed in the UK and not just the medium born of your own personal preferences or what you may have seen in some other showrings around the world?

Importantly, look through the colours and markings – everything is equal in this breed! A monochromatic black, agouti or a pure white can look very untraditional to the untrained eye or someone not in the breed, but they are just as correct if not often higher in quality than their grey and red cousins. (A dead giveaway to breed people as to whether an all-breed judge really knows what they are doing is whether they miss a high quality exhibit in these less 'traditional' colours'.) A good tip when judging Siberians is to imagine them as one colour – solid white or black- with no markings. The Siberian should be shown on a loose lead and should never need stacking if given enough training. The breed has traditionally been free stood and most would like to keep it that way.

Keep in mind as you look at the dogs that the breed should never appear short legged, square, stuffy, overly short coupled, flat and rigid in topline, heavy in bone and body compared to size nor cumbersome or have an outline obscured by coat. Equally incorrect are those dogs that have

shallow, narrow chests, excessively long lower forelegs (distance from elbow to ground) roached backs and overall more hound like in make and shape. Some do struggle with what correct looks like within the boundaries of these extremes, and unfortunately fall into the trap of putting 'beauty and attractiveness' above all else.



*Photo 4: Very standard fitting Champion bitch displaying the correct proportions, angulation, bone and slight arch over the loin.*



*Photo 5: An athletic Champion male of piebald colouring displaying good bone for size, super head and fit athletic body. His coat does not obscure his outline.*

At this juncture, I should say that Siberians should be a slow maturing breed, so if you are judging a puppy class, you are NOT looking for a dog that would look better in a limit or open class. Youngsters can rightly appear narrower throughout, leggier, and have less coat. That said, they should still be well constructed! A mature puppy will almost always go on to become an overdone adult.

Never up for debate with this breed are the essentials of athletic ability - and the constructional conformation that this requires- balance, proportions, good condition and muscular structure. When going over the dogs, look for good angulation – well laid shoulders, good return of upper arm – both roughly equal in length. Look for horrible short necks or weak swan necks. We are looking for an elegant slight arch. The hind angulation should importantly balance the front with a well angulated pelvis, stifles and good definition at the hock. An unbalanced Siberian is one that can pick up injuries when working. An un-angulated Siberian, is one that would have to take far more steps to cover the same amount of ground as its well angulated counterpart, and, therefore, tire quicker, making it far less effective for its task. Unfortunately, as with most breeds, angles have become straighter. Watch for dogs being raced around the ring with legs flying everywhere or moving in an up and down motion too fast and frequently. The croup of the Siberian should slope away from the spine at an angle and never be flat or too short so you have a nice freedom of movement behind. Some Siberians do stand cow hocked as they can be very lazy in the ring, but as a judge you can easily assess this by feeling for strength in the joint and watching the dog move.



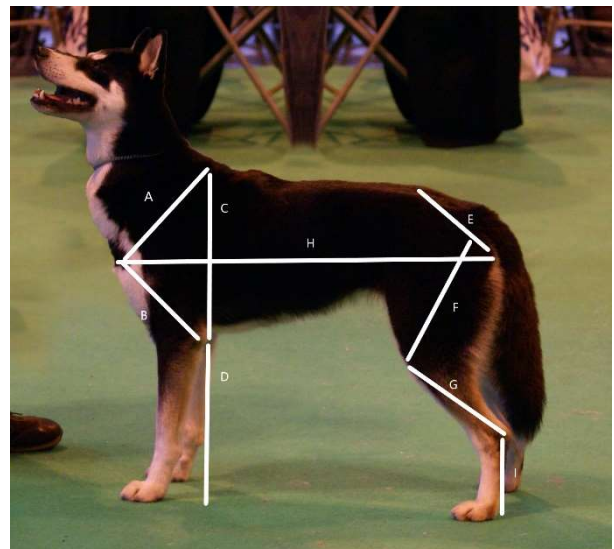
*Photo 6: Judge assessing the rear assembly*



*Photo 7: Judge feeling for width of chest*

Siberians obviously need lots of room for heart and lungs, so the chest should be deep enough and be carried well back. Short rib cages are a serious fault. They should also not be barrelled or slab sided. We desire slightly arched ribs which are and flattened on the sides. The topline should not be flat and rigid or sloping. When going over the dogs, look for a strong, level topline with a slight – but distinct- arch over the loins. This gives the Siberian the flexibility it requires to work effectively – enabling the body to ‘double-up’ when running. The arch should not be a roach, where it starts halfway down the ribcage with rear end tucking under. Note her that the FCI and USA standards no longer mention the requirement for the loins to be slightly arched. The UK retained this in the standard, as it is a fundamental requirement for a functional dog. Siberians have a distinct waist with loins taut and lean. There should be a slight, but perceptible tuck up. We are not however looking for dogs who have an excessively sharp tuck up as seen in some hound breeds. The tail is set on just below the level of the topline and never carried tightly over the back. We are looking for a sickle curve when carried up. Judges should however remember that the tail can be carried down in repose and the dogs may also often move with the tail down – a trailing tail. This is perfectly acceptable and no preference should be given. This would be very common and functional when the dog is working.

The Siberians bodily proportions are critical for the potential to work efficiently and effectively. The body from point of shoulder to rear point of croup should be slightly longer than the height from the ground to withers – never square! (In the photo opposite, the length H should always be slightly more than the total of C+D. The length of leg from elbow to ground (D) MUST be slightly more than distance from elbows to top of the withers (C) – many Siberians have an equal length here, so watch out for this. Studies have shown that dogs that display endurance at the TROT like the Alaskan malamute or Canadian Eskimo Dog would have a lower leg length about equal to the depth of the chest. Dogs that display much swifter to very fast travel such as hounds or so called Alaskan Huskies have a lower leg length about 1.3 times the depth of chest. Siberians display endurance at a gallop with moderate speed and should have a lower leg length of about 1.2 to 1.25 times the depth of chest. When judging, get your hands in there and feel under the thick coat to get a proper interpretation. In the photo above, remember that the length D MUST always be slightly longer than C in a correct Siberian.



*Photo 8: A Siberian displaying very good proportions and balance in angulation*

Other functional essentials for this working dog are slightly sloping pasterns which act as the essential shock absorbers and prevent serious injury. Likewise without good feet, a Siberian would



be rendered useless in its original environment and tasks. We are looking for strong feet with long but well arched toes. Feet should not be splayed/flat which imparts weakness and probable injury, or cat like, which would just punch holes in the snow and require far more effort – if they could get going at all!

I have purposely left the head until last, as this is most definitely not a head breed in as much as no matter how typical the head, with the right brain, body, feet, conditioning and training, the dog will perform its' task to some degree. That said, the head does define this breed and has a number of features critical to survival in its' natural environment.

When observing the Siberian, I would suggest that a judge approach from a slight angle rather than head on. Feel the contours of the head with your hands. It shouldn't feel big and bulky and must be in proportion to the body. We are looking for a foxlike head with a cheeky mischievous expression. These words in themselves should impart that the Siberian should never be heavy and overdone in head. Refinement is paramount, but with males still looking masculine



*Photo 9: Examples of three excellent heads in three different colours – left to right piebald dog, silver grey Champion dog, copper Champion bitch*

bitches feminine. There should be no signs of blokieness or coarseness, particularly through the muzzle. We don't want deep stops or short muzzles that are equal in depth and width to the tip as this does not reflect or impart the desired foxy expression. The head length should be balanced with the length of stop to occiput being equal to the length from stop to the tip of the nose. Lips must be clean, dry and tight – think about it – any dampness, dribble or looseness would lend itself to freezing and frostbite. Jowls are an absolute no no!



*Photo 10: This bitch displays a super foxy head. She also displays how a blue eye can easily look round in a black face.*

Eyes must be almond in shape and set obliquely. Round and/or level set eyes are very common and should be penalised as they tend to create a surprised, dull or sad expression and would not afford the protection desirable in the natural environment. They are moderately spaced. Be careful when assessing blue eyes in a black dog as eyes can appear round in shape when they aren't. Really look at the shape of the eye rims – as all eyeballs are essentially round!



*Photo 11: Another bitch displaying a super foxy head with beautiful almond shaped eyes and the important cheeky (as in mischievous) expression! Look at the refinement and elegance here.*

Ears should not appear as two small equilateral triangles popped on the top of the head – an increasingly common fault in the UK and often seen abroad. They are high set, slightly taller than the width at the base with inner edges almost parallel and are well furred – though one might expect slightly less fur in our temperate climate. Pigment is usually black, but can be liver in reds/coppers and whites. A snow nose is completely acceptable and should not be penalised.

This is obviously a double coated dog, but the hairs are only medium in length and never obscure the outline. We are not looking for ruff as in other sled dog breeds. Please remember that Siberians moult! We do not penalise this. It is a natural process. If the bald dog is the best dog in the ring at the time, it should win!

Siberians for me are an elegant breed with great athletic prowess. They should be quick and light of foot, but not prancy, and when you watch your class of Sibes go round the ring, they should move effortlessly with great reach and drive with a typical daisy cutting action. Often, when moving away from a judge, Sibes can start off wide until they get into their stride when they will start to converge – single track. Most, if built right, will need a big ring to move effectively. Keep moving them until you are satisfied. A judge who does not move this breed is not a good judge of it. There should certainly be no choppiness in the gait. Those dogs that easily cope with a small ring are often not of the constriction we desire and are more prone to 'trotting' like a pony.



*Photo 12: An excellent moving Siberian displaying good reach and drive – a 'daisy cutting' action.*

The Sibe should look like a well-oiled machine. The marathon runner in body as opposed to a bulky sprinter. Elegant and graceful, where all the curves just flow. The Ferrari rather than the Land Rover. Medium in size and bone, refined and well-muscled.

Ability and competence in judging this breed depends on being able to ignore colours and markings, as too is the proper calibration as to what the medium range actually encompasses. A Siberian is not a 'Disney dog' as portrayed in films just as much as it shouldn't be a greyhound. It's a beautiful, active, natural, working dog. I'd advise going out with any top class working team to fully understand how form follows function. To judge this breed you must go over lots of shapes, makes and types. Don't just rely on the small numbers you may experience at Open shows – you need to ensure you go over a wide cross section to help you calibrate 'your' medium range in 'your' mind. Speak to breeders/exhibitors to understand the heritage and function. Above all, have a genuine love and interest for wanting to judge this exceptional and very specialised breed and a desire to maintain it as a working dog.