

American Staffordshire Terrier

Official Breed Standard

The Official American Staffordshire Terrier Breed Standard is provided here to help your understanding of the Amstaff breed. Two Bridges AmStaffs is committed to the betterment of the breed, in line with these standards.

Eyes:

"Dark and round, low down in skull and set far apart. No pink eyelids."

Dark eyes are essential to the proper expression. Light eyes are mentioned under "faults". Eye color should be brown, and as dark a shade as possible. The eyes are normal dog eyes, appearing fairly round, but not totally. They are not thin almond or triangular in appearance, but are set low down in the skull and deep. They should never protrude or bulge. They are of medium size, neither too small (piggy) nor over large. The expression is very direct looking keen, confident, intelligent, courageous, never fearful or evasive.

"No pink eyelids" refers to the inner part of the eyelid. Although the author of the standard was not perfectly clear in this regard, he stated later that he meant thigh eye rims, without pink mucous membrane showing. We feel this to be a valid interpretation of this point. No haws showing or loose rims. If you choose to also consider this to mean fully pigmented eye rims rather than pink ones, please treat pink eye rims as a cosmetic fault.

Ears:

"Ears are set high. Cropped or uncropped, the later preferred. Uncropped ears should be short and held half prick or rose. Full drop to be penalized."

Ears are set high on the skull and are relatively short. The standard plainly says cropped or uncropped and the later preferred. Uncropped ears of good size and set should be given more consideration than cropped ears. The proper carriage is half prick or rose, with no preference mentioned. Full drop is to be penalized, but fully erect ears although possible, are not mentioned to be penalized. Full drop or hound ears are not the same as low set ears and would seldom be seen. Cropped ears should be of medium length and should still display where they are set on the head, preferably high. Poorly cropped ears are a cosmetic faulty only, and have nothing to do with the construction of the dog. However they are shaped when cropped uncropped is always preferred and clearly stated by the standard- and consideration should be given for them.

Head:

"Medium length, deep through, broad skull, very pronounced cheek muscles, distinct stop."

The head should appear to be the correct size for the dog's body. It is not overly large, nor is it small. It is of medium length- balanced with the dog's medium sized body. The muzzle should appear to be about on half the total length of the head. The head is deep through, from the top down to the jaws. The depth is not achieved by a bulging forehead, but by deep strong jaws. The dog's mandible should be well developed far back to the skull. His skull is broad across, with a well defined stop and distinct eyebrows. The head should not be exaggerated however.

The description of medium length must be maintained. If the skull is too broad, the head will appear short in length, which is incorrect. The head is deep through, for strength, but the depth should extend to the lower jaw, not be achieved by an over deep stop with no lower jaw strength.

The cheek muscles are very pronounced. The planes of the forehead and muzzle should be parallel when viewed from the side. There should be no tendency for a down face, dish face, or frog face. In males, the muscle padding on the top skull may make the plane rise slightly, (in the bitches a lesser degree) but is still should not differ greatly from the plane of the muzzle.

The shape of the top skull should show the underlying bone structure, not be so overly padded with flesh or muscles to totally mask it, and appear lumpy. The most prominent muscle development of the head should be the cheeks, which should be pronounced. The head should appear clean, with no loose skin. A slight quizzical wrinkling of the forehead when the ears are lifted should be the only wrinkles found anywhere on the head.

The angle of light over the bitch's face shows off very clearly the beautiful bony structure of the American Staffordshire Terrier head- The prominent ridge below the eye, the bulging cheek muscle, the abrupt fall of muzzle below eye. Note the tight skin over the bones of the face, with the exception of the quizzical wrinkles on the forehead. She has nice close fitting lips and a muzzle that is only slightly light in the lower jaw. Her eyes are quite dark, even in very direct sunlight, pigment is very dark, eyes are well shaped and set correctly in the skull

Physical Impression:

"Should give the impression of great strength for his size."

This is a medium sized dog, not a large one, but should be possessed of great strength- FOR HIS SIZE. This does not mean that he should be large- or heavy, just that his strength should be great for the size he is.

"He is a "well put-together , muscular, but agile and graceful"

The proper specimen will appear balanced in all ways, showing muscular development, but not at the expense of agility. He must appear graceful as well as agile. This is totally descriptive of a "normally" built dog, without excess or exaggeration in any way. He is a balance of power and agility. He must display both. Any specimen which is exaggerated to appear so muscular as to no longer display agility and grace is no longer balanced. This balance extends to the ration of his bone size and general body weight. He must never be exaggerated. The balance of power and agility must always be kept in mind.

"He should be stocky, not long-legged or racy in outline".

This references the leg length of the dog in relation to this body type. He is not a racing dog with long legs and a light body, but due to his strength of body, he is a stocky one. He should be stocky, that is, solid and sturdy, but must have enough leg to still maintain the required agility and grace. He is not ever a short legged dog.

As an analogy, this dog is a (tri-athlete) (or decathlete) rather than a (body-builder) or (power weight lifter). He must still retain the ability to perform a variety of physical challenges, rather than just show raw strength. This breed's history created an animal with a balance of power, agility, total courage, and the intelligence to use it. The balance of power and agility inherent in the breed must be always kept in mind.

Temperament:

The first and most important impression should be the dog's temperament. No matter what the dog looks like, it cannot be a proper Am Staff without the proper temperament. The official standard is spare and is often faulted for not giving enough information to the student of the breed. However, the words used are beautifully descriptive of the breed's temperament.

"Keenly alive to his surroundings" describes a lively intelligent disposition that watches what is going on around him and misses nothing. Further, he not only watches, but interacts - he is quite aware of and very responsive to his surroundings. He is ready for whatever comes his way - in all the best sense of this term."

His courage is proverbial:

Proverbial, according the Webster's dictionary is defined as follows:

"The embodiment or representation of some quality. The byword for it. A commonplace truth. A common reference for some quality."

This is perfectly apt to describe the correct temperament of this breed. They are nothing if not courageous. This courage is inherent in their history. These dogs have faced death in all its forms, and have long ago had fear bred down.

They should appear supremely confident in all situations. NO excuses can be made for a specimen that lacks this quality. Courage has no similarity to aggressiveness, which often masks insecurity.

The ideal Am Staff should not display aggression toward other animals or humans. They should only appear confident and interested, prepared to deal with and take part in whatever situation develops. Many legends have grown surrounding this breed's courage.

The Ideal specimen must always display courage and confidence to a marked degree. Absolutely no consideration should be given to an exhibit that lacks this quality.

Although not specifically addressed by the standard, this breed has been long domesticated, as a farmer's and family dog, and even with the early fighting background, should absolutely never appear aggressive toward humans.

They are not a guarding breed by nature, and trust most people to be their friends, confident in these relationships.

They develop strong bonds with humans and are eager to please them - thanks to their working background. They are not solitary dog, preferring the company of humans. They are not subservient of fawning, but confident and friendly in dealings with humans

The ideal specimen must always appear confident and friendly with humans. Absolutely no consideration should be given to an exhibit that appears aggressive, threatening, or shy toward humans. These are completely incorrect for the breed and are inexcusable.

Muzzle:

"Medium length, rounded on upper side to fall away abruptly below eyes. Jaws well defined."

The proper muzzle is of medium length, neither short nor long, but approximately one half the length of the head. It is rounded and fairly broad on the top, falling away abruptly below the eyes. It should be heavy enough to provide good attachment for the upper jaw teeth, but not filled like a fox terrier or bull terrier. It is narrower than the back skull and cheeks, and wedges toward the nose, but the wedge is truncated, and the end of the muzzle is still blunt. Jaws well defined, not hidden by padding flesh. A strong and deep under-jaw, with a strong visible chin. The lips are close and even, with no looseness or thick padding. The muzzle is without extra flesh and definitely not wrinkled.

Dentition:

"Upper teeth to meet tightly outside lower teeth in front."

The full complement of canine teeth, well developed, and large should be engaged in a well-fitting scissors bite. As this was a breed developed to use its mouth in its work, missing teeth should be considered a fault, although not listed in the brief listing of faults in the standard. The more teeth missing, the greater the fault. Undershot or overshot mouths are both specifically listed as faults. When checking teeth for fit, the proper interleaving of the side teeth should also be considered, not just the small incisors across the front.

Nose:

"Definitely black."

Before AKC registration there were registered American Pit Bull Terriers with red noses. These dogs came from different root stock and had a different appearance- including liver coloration. The intention here was to prevent them from entering the AKC breeding pool of American Staffordshire Terriers.

The nose should be black- not red or pink.

We now know that it is genetically impossible for a blue dog to have a black nose. Yet there were blue Am Staffs then, as now, and they were shown and finished championships. The nose should appear darkest charcoal on dogs with blue dilute coloration.

Forgiveness can be made for dark charcoal on this color, but the darker the better. The nose should still appear as black to the observer. A Dudley nose (flesh colored) is listed as a fault. For dogs without dilute coloration, the nose to be correct must appear as written- definitely black.

Neck:

"Heavy, slightly arched, tapering from shoulders to back of skull. No looseness of skin. Medium length."

The neck should be heavy, slightly arched at the crest, tapering from heaviest at shoulders to lighter at back of skull. No looseness of skin at the throat. Again, medium length is called for. A short neck will spoil the proportions of an otherwise good dog. (An overly long neck, or a long, thin neck would also be wrong, but are seldom seen)

Shoulders:

"Strong and muscular with blades wide and sloping."

Strong and muscular shoulders that show good width and slope indicate a dog with moderate to good angulations, rather than a steep terrier front assembly. The upper arm should have good length, so that the legs do not appear put on too far forward on the body. Although muscular, the shoulders should not appear loaded or lumpy, and should be approximately as wide as the rear when viewed from above. The dog's neck should be set high on fairly well angulated shoulders, to permit an alert head carriage, not stuck on the front of overly straight shoulders.

Back:

"Fairly short. Slight sloping from withers to rump with gentle short slope at rum to base of tail. Loins slightly tucked."

This is not a square dog. This is not a short backed dog. The standard says fairly short back - which indicates a moderately short back. The topline is not level, rather it slopes slightly from the withers to the rump (croup) and then shows a "gentle short slope from the rump to the base of tail." This is also not a steep croup - but a gentle short slope. The loins are slightly tucked.

Body:

"Well-sprung ribs, deep in rear. All ribs close together."

The dog should show well-sprung ribs, that continue back to the loins without tightening up. Viewed from above, the ribs, loins, and hips should show an "hourglass" shape, with a definite narrowing at the loins and more width at the ribs and hips. The ribs are not barrel shaped, nor are they slab-sided. Viewed from the front, the ribs should describe an oval with the longest distance from the top to bottom, not from side to side. The lower line of the dog's body should show good depth, with the brisket dropping approximately to the elbows or slightly below. The deep in rear ribs should continue back from the brisket to form a good cage for the heart and lungs.

"Forelegs set rather wide apart to permit chest development. Chest deep and broad"

The standard calls for the forelegs to be set "rather" wide apart, rather, according to the dictionary, means "to a certain extent, somewhat, to a degree". The legs therefore should be moderately wide apart, not as wide as possible.

As a rule of thumb, the shoulders and forelegs should be about the same width as the rear, when viewed from above.

The dog should never look larger in the front than in the rear, but both ends should be in balance. The width of the chest has a direct bearing on the total agility and ease of movement of the dog. There should be good chest development, with strong muscle attachment, but not overdone for the sake of being the "widest".

The area of the chest between the forelegs should be rounded with muscle below the sternum. No hollow, concave or shallow look. The muscles of the lower chest should round and flow smoothly into the brisket. The sternum should not appear prominent or boney.

Tail:

"Short in comparison to size, low set, tapering to a fine point; not curled or held over back. Not docked."

The tail is set low on the rump after a "gentle short slope" as described under "Back". It should not reach past the hocks, and may be somewhat shorter. IT is traditionally described as an old-fashioned pump handle in carriage. It should not be curled or held over the back. The pump handle is gently "S" curved. A slightly straighter tail, held in the correct low position should not be faulted. Many dogs carry their tails higher when excited, but the tail should be low set, and not be held about the level of the back.

"tail too long or badly carried", is listed under faults. A too long tail is one extending past the hock, and a badly carried tail would be one either curled or held over the back, as described in the standard.

A tail held between the dog's hind legs should be considered a sign of improper temperament.

The ideal specimen must always display courage and confidence to a marked degree. Absolutely no consideration should be given to an exhibit that lacks this quality.

Rear legs:

"Hindquarters well muscled, let down at hocks turning neither in nor out."

The hindquarters show well developed muscles at the buttocks, and upper and lower thigh. The upper thigh particularly, should be well developed on the inside, between the legs. The hocks are well let down, and parallel to each other, turning neither in nor out. There should be no suggestion of cow-hocks, bow-legs or stifles turning out. The stifle should show good angulation, and be set low.

The stifle and hocks should both have good bend, but the bones of the lower thigh are not particularly long. The hind legs, when hocks are perpendicular to the ground, should not be set very far behind the dog's buttocks and should appear of moderate length. The angulation of the shoulders and hips should be in balance.

Gait:

"Gait must be springy but without roll or pace"

This is the only reference to movement that the standard makes, and has become an area that is poorly understood. However, since this is a rather "normally" structured moderate dog, it should show "normal" dog movement. In other words, the dog should move like an athlete.

At slower speeds, his footfalls will tend to be farther apart, and as speed increases, his feet will tend to converge toward a centerline under his body. This is the only way the dog could move as the standard describes, without rolling his body.

He should trot, not pace. He should show moderately good reach, and his rear legs should drive him powerfully. His well-arched feet, moderate angulation, powerful muscles, and generally good physical condition should provide him with a springy gait.

All normal dog movement criteria should apply. He should not paddle, toe out, cross, weave, ect. The front and hind feet should strike approximately the same distance apart, leaving tracks in two lines, rather than 3 or 4. The reference to springy gait denotes not only athleticism, but a state of mind.

The dog should appear light on its feet, and ready for whatever happens. It should never plod, or move in a listless or dull way.

Coat:

"Short, close, stiff to the touch and glossy. Color- any color, solid, parti, or patched is permissible, but all white, more than 80 percent white, black and tan and liver not to be encouraged"

Color is another area that confuses some who read this standard. The standard clearly states: "Any color, solid, parti, or patched is permissible". This is a breed that comes in a great variety of colors and markings. All are clearly permissible - period.

In the original draft of the standard, this section read simply that sentence. However, when returned approved by the AKC, the rest of the above had been added. At the time, the club chose to accept the version that AKC approved.

As a historical note, the author of the standard thought that "all white, more than 80 percent white not to be encouraged" was added at the request of the Bull Terrier Club of America, which was worried that there would be recognition problems between the two breeds.

The "black and tan and liver not to be encouraged" is worded exactly like the original English version of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier standard that was written about the same time in England. Whatever the reason for the last part, this is a breed that does come in all colors, and all are acceptable.

No color appears in the list of faults.

The wording of "not to be encouraged" is not very strong and color should not be detrimental to an otherwise good specimen. At the most, it is only a cosmetic consideration, and has very little to do with the conformation or temperament of the dog in question- both of which are much more important.

Size:

"Height and width should be in proportion. A height of about 18 to 19 inches at the shoulders for the male and 17 to 18 inches for the female is to be considered preferable."

The historical dog the standard was written to describe averaged approximately 18 to 19 inches and 48 to 60 lbs., with bitches 17 to 18 inches, and 42-55 lbs. This is approximately the proportions that should be considered preferable. There will always be some variation in sizes and weights, but many of today's dogs are indeed larger than intended by the original standard. Unfortunately, the weight and bone size has increased even faster than height, resulting in specimens that have a completely skewed weight to height ratio. This increase in size is encouraged by judges who wrongly reward dogs based on larger size/greater weight equation better specimen. This is not the proper way to judge this breed.

All other considerations being equal, the moderate sized dog should be preferred, and the sizes given above should be considered preferable as stated in the standard. The dog of moderate size is a balance between power and agility. To increase the weight decreases agility to the detriment of this balance.

Faults:

"Faults to be penalized are Dudley nose, light or pink eyes, tail too long or badly carried, undershot or overshot mouths."

A Dudley nose is an unpigmented flesh colored nose. Light eyes are eyes other than dark brown. Pink eyes would be like and albino (not generally seen).

Tail length reaching below the hocks would be too long. Badly carried would be a tail carried too high about the level of the back, curved over the back, curled, or carried tucked under the belly.

Undershot or overshot mouths - upper teeth not meeting closely in front of the lower teeth.

Any deviation from the standard should be considered faulty.

The degree of fault would depend upon the degree of deviation. Although not specifically mentioned as a fault by the standard, an improper temperament is the most undesirable quality possible, and should never be rewarded.

The ideal specimen must always display courage and confidence to a marked degree. Absolutely no consideration should be given to an exhibit that lacks this quality.

No consideration should be given to an exhibit that appears aggressive, threatening, or shy towards humans. These are completely incorrect for the breed and are inexcusable.

In addition, a dog whose physical characteristics or lack of soundness make him unsuitable according to the general description should not be considered for placement. In general, proper temperament is the most important quality, followed by proper physical structure, and the soundness that must accompany it.

Such faults as light eyes, long tail, improper nose color, less favored coat color are considered rather cosmetic in nature, and do not interfere with the animal's suitability for work.

Although these qualities are the only ones listed under faults, they should not carry as much weight as the proper temperament and structure of the breed - essential qualities that are well described in the standard.

This article was written by the [S.T.C.A](#)