

The Irish Wolfhound Type

by: Anthony Killykeen-Doyle

"We do not own the breed but hold it in trust for future generations."

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Tony Killykeen-Doyle stressed that the Irish Wolfhound is a native Irish breed and that the Standard adhered to by most of those members attending the 1996 Federation of European Irish Wolfhound Clubs ~ EIWC ~ is the Original Standard used by the Irish Club and accepted by the FCI.

To develop a better understanding of the Irish Wolfhound Standard some background concerning his origin may be of use. Pedigree dog breeding as we know it today dates only from the 19th Century when Breed Standards were first written down with the advent of Dog Shows. Breeding for excellence of function, on the other hand, is thousands of years old.

To fulfil the roles for which the breed was developed, the Irish Wolfhound is unique in being a dog of great size and strength. Today, however, in the totally unreal world of the show-ring, there seems to be little thought given to the original purpose of this breed. Many of the desired and cultivated points, so highly praised in the show-ring, were considered unimportant by our ancestors and the early breeders.

In the 20th Century when hunting for survival is no longer a daily reality for the Irish Wolfhound, the Standard must our guide to the ideal hound. It describes the breed in a word picture. The living animal must conform to this as closely as is possible.

The Standard describes the great historical Irish Hound which was the hunter, companion and protector. *It is not open to change or interpretation by anyone who objects to any of the points in it.* The Standard is, and should always be the specification in detail of what is correct and what is wrong. The Standard is the safeguard protecting the Irish Wolfhound for what it was and still ought to be. It is far too easy to deviate from the Standard in both appearance and in character and the show rings today are ample proof of this. Recent years have seen the emergence of very pretty "*chocolate box*" Irish Wolfhounds with soft coats, over angulation and close moving hind action. Unless we call a halt, we will see this breed divided into two types, the working type, which is described by the Standard; and the show type, which is fit only to perform in the show ring.

Our Standard was drawn up in 1885 by Capt. Graham, Major Garnier and MR. J.F. Bailey. This Standard with a few minor additions, is the Standard which is used by the Irish Wolfhound Club of Ireland and therefore the FCI, the Standard with which most of you are working.

In 1950 the Irish Wolfhound Standard was amended in America, the reference to the Great Dane and the Deerhound were removed. The only other differences in the current American Standard apply to height and a slight difference regarding faults of pigmentation. Besides these exceptions, the two Standards are identical and while I do not believe that these changes were necessary, they have not fundamentally altered the intent of the authors of the original Standard to the extent which prevents intelligent breeding and judging the historically correct Irish Wolfhound.

The Standard used in Great Britain was revised in 1985 by the Kennel Club in a more drastic manner. So many changes were made that it no longer paints the same word picture, some characteristics are now required or preferred which never were in the past. For example, ears are now preferably dark in colour which wrongly penalises self coloured wheaten hounds, for no reason of function or historical tradition. Other items which had previously been part of the Standard are now gone. Judges and breeders in Great Britain are required to follow this Standard so that it cannot but impact on breeding in some manner.

Tony went onto discuss the Standard and the strengths and weaknesses seen in the breed today.

Forequarters:

***Forequarters:* There are a number of problems in the breed. Forequarters are a problem worldwide. Breeders are finding it difficult to correct forequarter problems, this is no wonder to me because the majority of judges don't recognize a correct shoulder. Any interested person soon learns to spot bad forequarters. I believe the front assembly must be learnt on the living animal and from somebody truly knowledgeable and not from diagrams and photographs. It is not a simple case of believing that good fronts come with good hindquarters, they don't.**

Movement:

***Movement:* A lot of breeders and judges are oblivious to the fact that too many hounds move far too closely behind. This fact has become so common that I feel owners and judges have come to accept this as normal. In many cases they fault sound free movement as movement wide behind. Often I hear specialist judges contributing to the misconception of type and sound movement. I can forgive specialist judges putting up a favoured "type" ~ usually what they breed themselves ~ but I am amazed when high placements are made to lame and unsound dogs that mince around the ring with short steps, no drive, no reach ~ whereas hounds with free powerful movement which cover the ground with ease and purpose should take the top awards.**

Size:

Size: Which is an integral part of the Irish Wolfhound, unfortunately seems to have become a dirty word in the breed today. Instead of working toward its recovery, breeders prefer to knock the size they lack. This is a mistake. If size is lost it may be impossible to get it back.

Shape and Balance:

Shape and Balance: Are changing. The Standard states that the back should be rather long than short. Too many hounds seen in the ring today have square frames with legs that are too short. *There is no way you can end up with square dogs when the Standard says that the back should be rather long.* The hound should stand over a lot of ground with plenty of day-light underneath.

Coat:

Coat: The only correct coat is hard and rough. Breed for this and don't blame the shampoo or the climate for coats with soft texture. Soft coats are non-functional in a breed that should be able to hunt in all types weather and on all terrains.

Colour:

Colour: I am tired of hearing breeders condemning white markings on our hounds. This is a prejudice without foundation. In fact, the genetic term *Irish Spotting* refers to a colour pattern consisting of four white feet, a white chest, and a white tip to a dark tail ~ usually occurring on a dark or grey hound. Irish Wolfhounds marked in this manner were greatly favoured by breeders of the past and indeed by knowledgeable breeders of today. Discrimination against these traditionally marked hounds is another example of breeders throwing the baby out with the bath-water.

Tails:

Tails: Are more important than just decorative, they are a functional appendage to the animal. They act as a rudder, aiding the balance so important for a working, galloping dog. The Standard specifies a tail which is long and slightly curved. To the old breeders, this meant a tail which started to curve at the hock ~ not end at the hock, as unfortunately, many do today. The tail is a continuation of the spine. As such it can indicate trouble which goes beyond the actual tail itself, for example, a high set tail can mean a short croup or a faulty loin. These are serious faults affecting movement and balance; therefore it behoves breeders to pay close attention to tails in their breeding programmes.

Survival and the Future:

The breed has survived against all odds from the midst of Irish mythology to the present day ~ through periods of great fears for its survival, wars, famines, etc.

We must now look forward to the 21st Century. The breed is safe as to numbers worldwide but it is at a crossroads; typewise, as is apparent by many hounds seen and

winning in the ring today, and healthwise. This is due to breeders' individual interpretation of the Standard and the irresponsible breeding from unhealthy stock, both physical and mental.

It is now times for Clubs and breeders to get together and stop paying lip service to the Irish Wolfhound Standard. Breed judges must stop rewarding untypical, unsound, bad moving animals that could not catch an alley cat, let alone go out and do a day's work. The answer lies in education. Every person involved with this breed must make an effort to understand the real meaning of the Standard. Stop breeding from unhealthy stock that you know in your heart will not have healthy lives. You are going against nature.

Dogs are carnivores, they are meat eaters. Many of our problems today are man-made. Tony said he was old enough to remember the introduction of "*complete*" commercial foods and the resulting problems over generations since. He advocated that we go back to a more natural way of feeding, meat, eggs, milk and a basic plain biscuit meal. This diet could perhaps help solve a number of problems of modern day breeders.

Tony stressed the importance of not breeding from stock that is perpetuating health problems. If a puppy is weak in the nest, mother nature knows best. If the mother rejects it, don't wrap it in cotton wool, keep it going, then proudly boast in two years time; "*..isn't she lovely, and how hard it was to keep her alive*" ~ then breed from her ~ no wonder you have health problems in the next generation. This is a healthy breed which has survived for thousands of years. Only breed from healthy stock of physical and mental soundness. I see so many that are spooks, afraid of their own shadow. Then the other side of that, this wonderful hound, world famous for its temperament, "*gentle when stroked, fierce when provoked,*" will lay down his life for you, will protect you and your children. There are a number of dogs out there I wouldn't let a child near, so you must be ruthless when it comes to health and temperament. Don't fool yourselves, if it doesn't look right, don't breed from it. You'll be doing the breed a favour.

I love this breed too much ~ it saddens me to see what is happening. Thank God there are enough wonderful breeders in every country who are working hard to breed the historically correct Irish Wolfhound, both physically and mentally. Long may they continue.....