

# Introduction to the Basenji Standard

*What does it all mean?*

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the Basenji University in 2010



A standard is a description of the ideal dog for each breed. It is intended to serve as a word pattern by which dogs are evaluated.

Every Breed's Standard has a history. The first UK Basenji standard, written by the breed's founders, was approved in 1942. There have been several revisions over the years. The current AKC standard became effective June 28, 1990. Each update is meant to clarify not change the basic description. The 1990 standard came about when brindle Basenjis were finally successfully brought from Africa so the new color description was added. AKC required all revised standards to be uniform in layout and use of terms so these changes were required at that time as well.



*1932 imports from Africa to England*

We are going to go through the Basenji standard by sections as it appears in its official AKC form. The actual standard will be in **black** and comments will be in this rusty brown color.

This is simply an introduction to demonstrate what each part of the standard is discussing. It is not meant to explain why the standard calls for each feature nor is it meant to change the official published standard. It is wise to study the origins and original function of the Basenji to understand the reasoning behind some of the points in the standard. Information on these subjects is found throughout the Basenji University. If the canine terminology sounds like a foreign language study the Basenji University course “301 Practical Canine Anatomy.” Course 301 is very detailed and covers conformation thoroughly. People do spend many years learning why one type of construction is superior to another for various functions. You are at the beginning of an interesting journey.

The first section is “General Appearance”. The objective of this section is to paint an overall picture of the breed. In evaluating Basenjis it is important to keep this overall description in mind as well as learning all the parts thoroughly. The whole is greater than all the individual parts.

## General Appearance

The Basenji is a small, short haired hunting dog from Africa. It is short backed and lightly built, appearing high on the leg compared to its length. The wrinkled head is proudly carried on a well arched neck and the tail is set high and curled.

Elegant and graceful, the whole demeanor is one of poise and inquiring alertness. The balanced structure and the smooth musculature enables it to move with ease and agility. The Basenji hunts by both sight and scent. Characteristics — The Basenji should not bark but is not mute. The wrinkled forehead, tightly curled tail and swift, effortless gait (resembling a racehorse trotting full out) are typical of the breed.

Faults — Any departure from the following points must be considered a fault, and the seriousness with which the fault is regarded is to be in exact proportion to its degree.



# So what picture should you have?



You should be able to recognize a Basenji from a distance by its overall proportions and style as well as its prick ears and curly tail. This clear, distinctive overall appearance is important to establish breed type. The perfect Basenji would be a square in outline with a strong, level topline and look long-legged. The neck is well arched and the head is carried proudly. This is not a heavy, sturdy dog like the beagle or a slighter racy greyhound.

Another “distinctive characteristic” can be seen when the Basenji starts moving. The topline, style and head carriage should remain and the movement should be free, easy and ground covering with effortless grace. The correct dog does not appear to be putting out a great deal of energy to move around.

As the Basenji approaches the typical expressive head becomes clear. A handsome typical head is pictured on the next page...



## Some Background

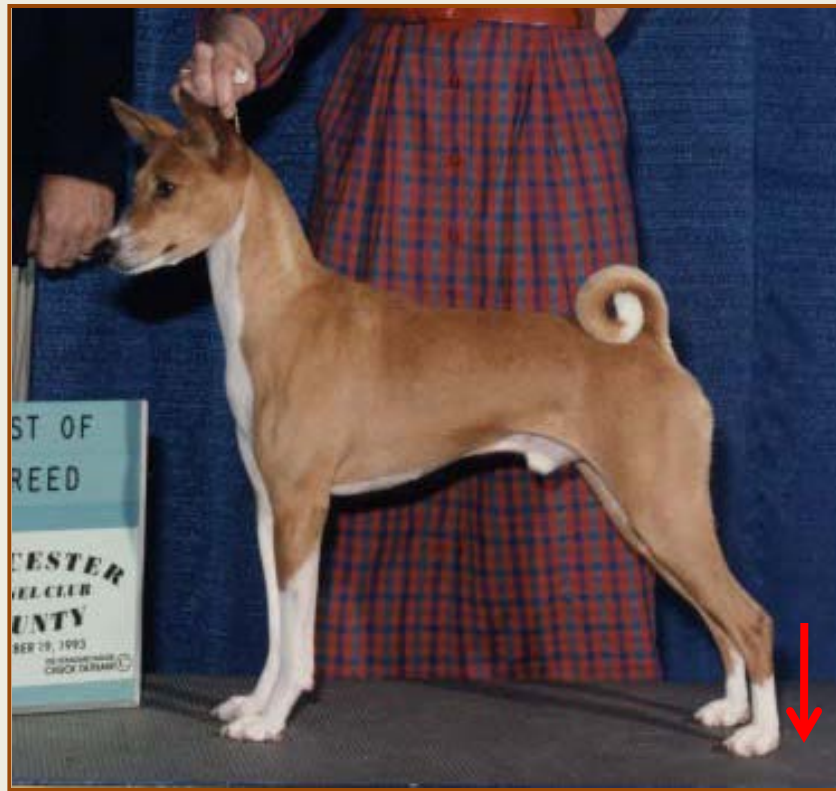
Basenjis are African hunting dogs suitable for all-purpose hunting in the bush, not on the open plains. This requires a small agile dog that is able to maneuver in thick cover. He must have stamina to work for long hours. His coat is short for the warm climate and to keep it from tangling in the forest. His hunting style varies to fit the situation and often requires the dog to make decisions. He must be alert and intelligent to do his job.

## Faults

The standard tries to paint a positive picture of the Basenji. Anything not perfect is a fault. Dogs are never perfect but you need to be able to recognize faults and virtues to be a good breeder..

*This is a Basenji  
in Africa in 1988.*





Hocks close to vertical

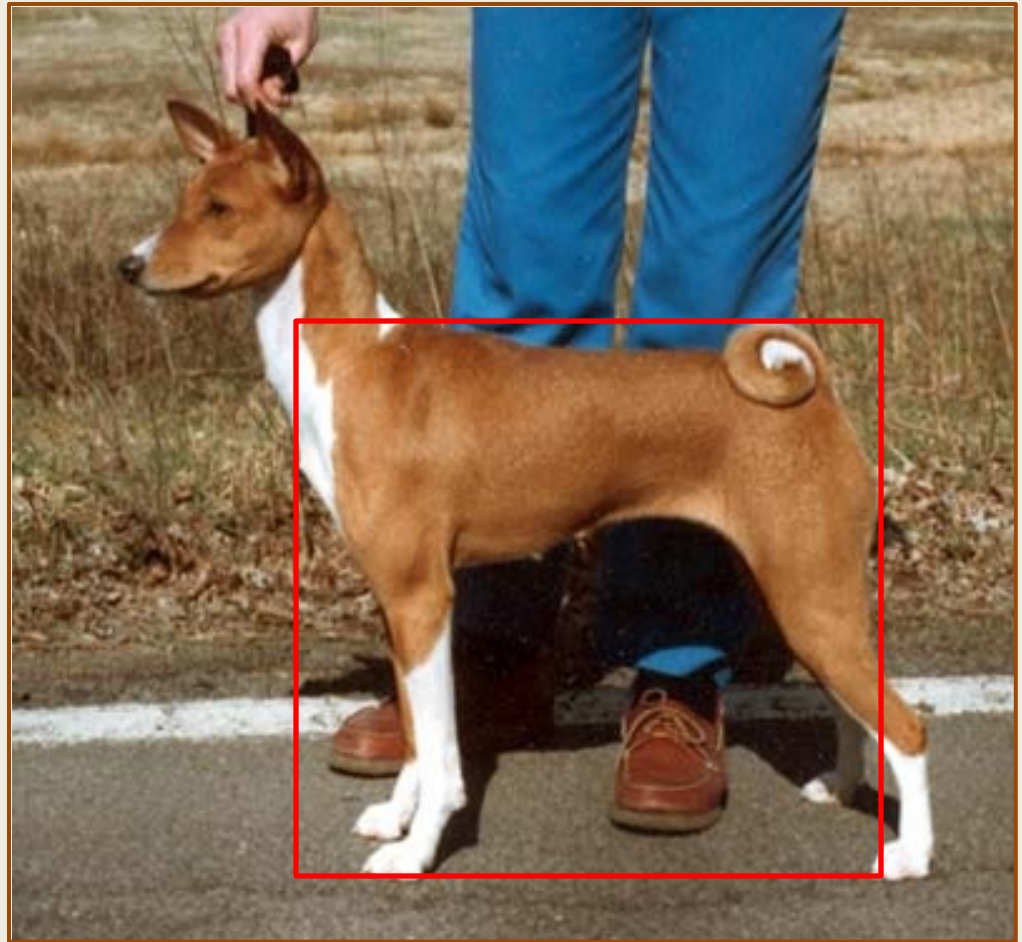
## Stance

To evaluate a Basenji according to the standard, the dog should be standing in a relaxed but alert manner with the hocks close to vertical. The closer the view is to an exact side view or exact front or rear view the better for photo evaluation. This is the stance that will show how the dog is built. It is the stance in which you can easily understand the dog's actual structure. The relations between the parts as described in the Basenji Standard will be clearly shown.

For evaluation of movement the same square-to-the-camera orientation works well for side view movement. To consider movement coming and going the dog needs to move straight away and toward the viewer.

## Size, Proportion, Substance

Ideal height for dogs is 17 inches and bitches 16 inches. Dogs 17 inches and bitches 16 inches from front of chest to point of buttocks. Approximate weight for dogs, 24 pounds and bitches, 22 pounds. Lightly built within this height to weight ratio.



Measurements should be taken as shown in this photo. The Basenji should be standing on a hard surface so the height can be measured correctly. You can see or feel the top of the shoulder blade. The dog's body should form a square.

Males are slightly larger in weight, height and length than females suggesting that the male should be masculine while the female should be feminine.



## Head



The head is proudly carried.

The head carriage when standing at attention or moving is high giving a proud appearance.



Eyes—Dark hazel to dark brown, almond shaped, obliquely set and farseeing. Rims dark.

The photo above shows particularly good eyes with good shape, color and eye rims and small sized ears on top of the head.

Ears—Small, erect and slightly hooded, of fine texture and set well forward on top of head.

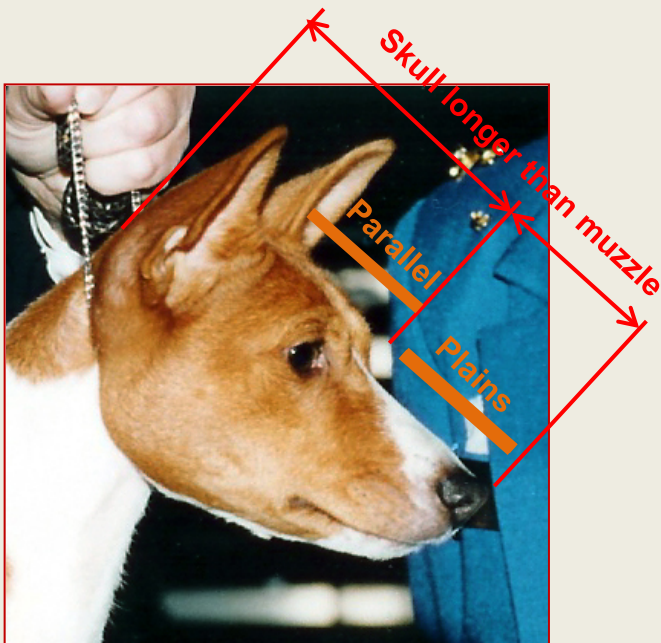
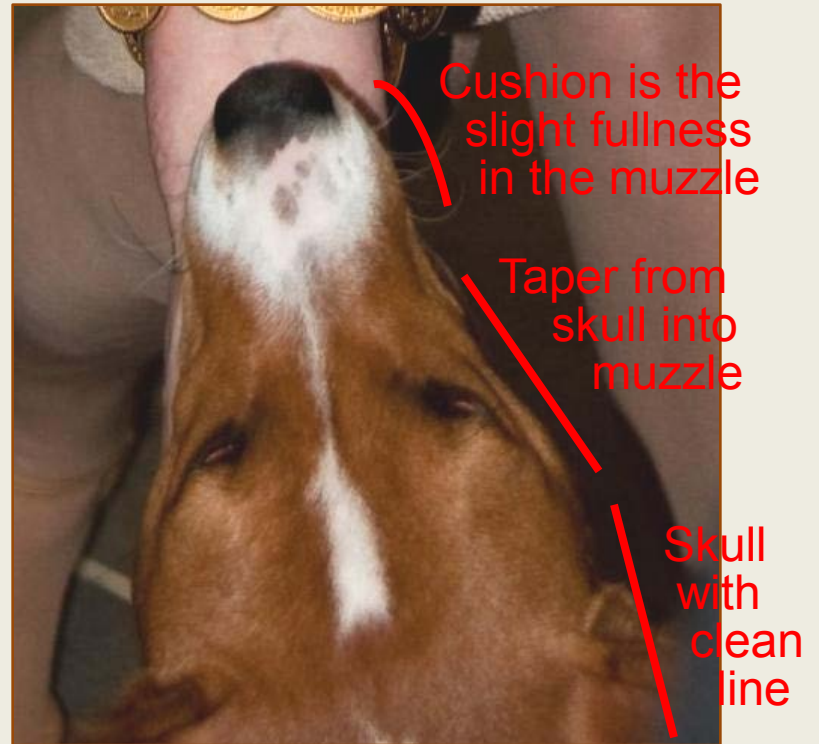
The photo on the right shows how the well hooded ears extend the line of the neck's arch.



## Head continued...

The skull is flat, well chiseled and of medium width, tapering toward the eyes. The foreface tapers from eye to muzzle with a perceptible stop.

The lines on the photo right show the clean jaw, the taper from the jaw's width to the muzzle and the cushions on the muzzle. Notice the parallel lines of the forehead and muzzle in the photo below. The good brow over the eyes forms the line of the forehead in profile.



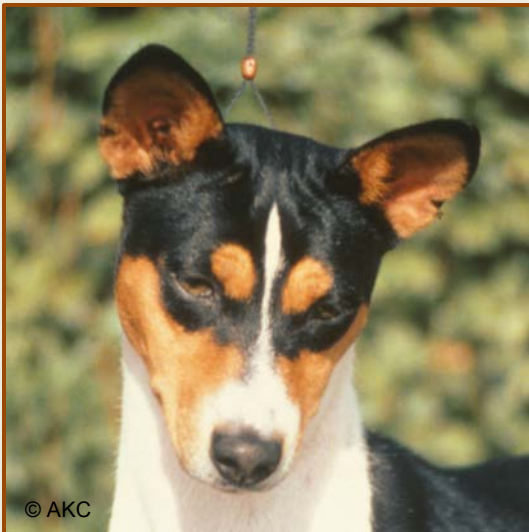
Muzzle shorter than skull, neither coarse nor snipy, but with rounded cushions.

The desired length of the muzzle is not always agreed upon amongst fanciers. The Standards over the years have never been more specific than muzzle is shorter than the skull. If you divide the entire head into 5 parts and measure from a point just between the inner corners of the eyes to the end of the nose, a short muzzle would be 2 parts with the skull being 3 parts.

## Head continued...

Wrinkles appear upon the forehead when ears are erect, and are fine and profuse. Side wrinkles are desirable, but should never be exaggerated into dewlap. Wrinkles are most noticeable in puppies, and because of lack of shadowing, less noticeable in blacks, tricolors and brindles. Nose—Black greatly desired.

All these dogs show good wrinkle and all but the tricolor have proper black noses. The tricolor's nose is not quite as black so not as desirable as the others but it is not a major problem.



## Head continued...

Teeth—Evenly aligned with a scissors bite.

The upper teeth are just in front of and overlapping the lower teeth at the front of the mouth. The teeth are also correctly aligned horizontally all around the mouth.



© AKC



*Early author/breeder Veronica Tudor-Williams used this dog as example of “a practically perfect head” in her breed books and articles.*

# Neck, Topline and Body

Neck of good length, well crested and slightly full at base of throat. Well set into shoulders.

Both the dogs on this page have good length of neck. The clue to the qualities of “well set into shoulders “is that the transition from neck into body is very smooth, that is there are no skin wrinkles over the withers and the lines flow smoothly.

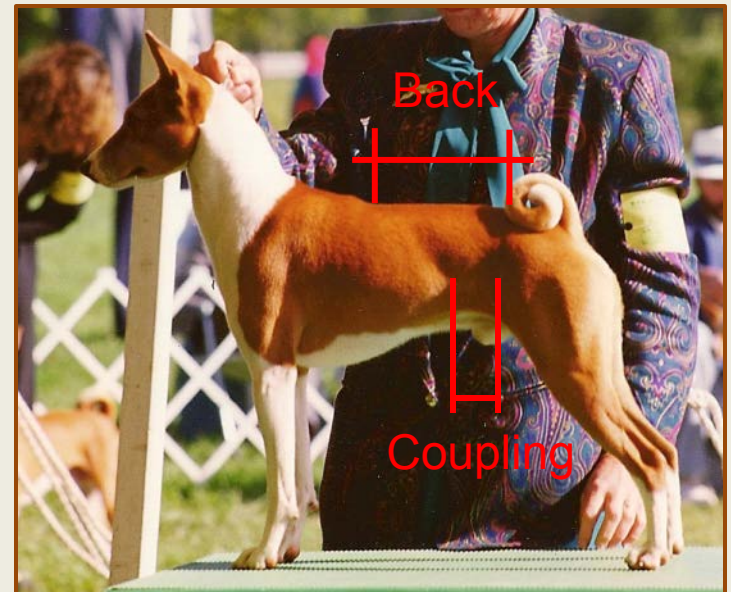
Sometimes the white markings can make the neck look longer or shorter. You must learn to see beyond markings.

## Topline–Back level.

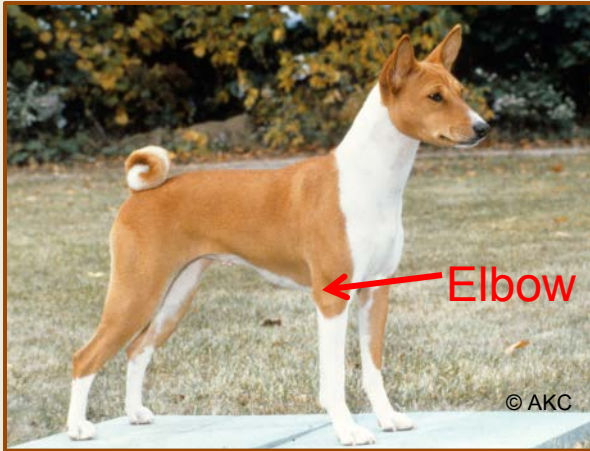
When a dog is standing with the hocks vertical, the entire topline should be near level. The back should not roach, any arching over the loin should be very slight and the rear of the dog should not be higher than the shoulders.

Body–Balanced with a short back, short coupled and ending in a definite waist.

The coupling is the area between the last rib and the hip. The ribs should be longer and the coupling short.



# Neck, Topline and Body continued...



Ribs moderately sprung, deep to elbows and oval.

Here are good ribs. They are neither very flat or very round, but round enough to give lungs and heart room to work without being so big that they interfere with the movement of the legs.

The chest extends down to the elbows.



Slight forechest in front of point of shoulder.

Chest of medium width.

On the left is a correct front with good depth shown from the front and tucked in elbows. In the photo to the right the one dog is too wide and the other too narrow.

On the left you may notice how the space between the front legs is well filled by the chest.

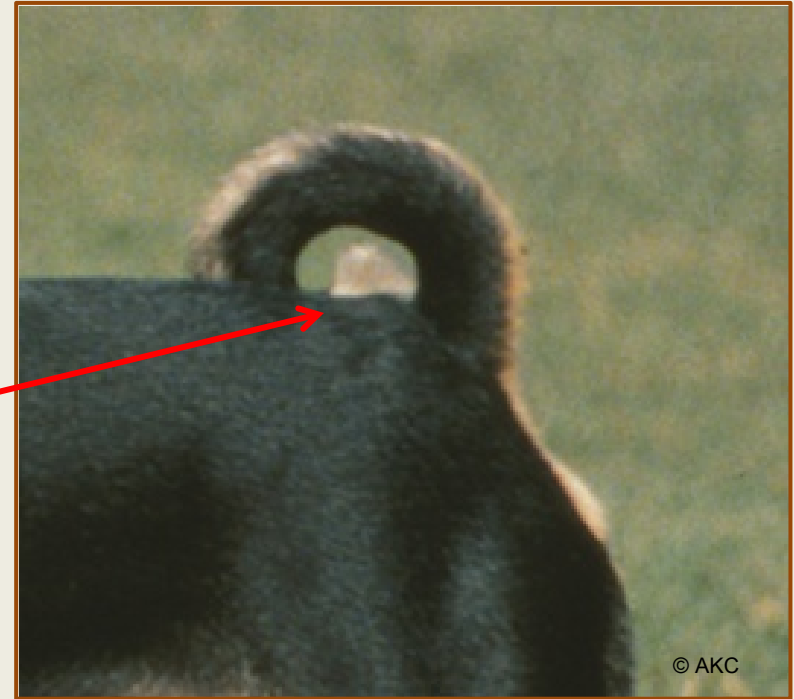


# Neck, Topline and Body concluded...

Tail is set high on topline, bends acutely forward and lies well curled over to either side.

It is easiest to see the tail set when the dog's tail is not in the way. The root of the tail should sit right on top of the back. The top photo shows a high tail set. The right lower photo shows the topline curving down before the tail's root.

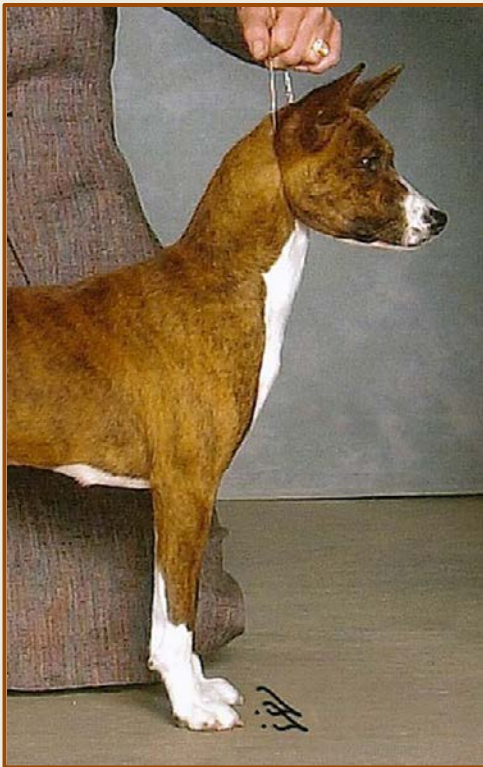
Tail in the photo below is well curled and down on the side. The amount curl in the tails of all these dogs is acceptable.



# Forequarters

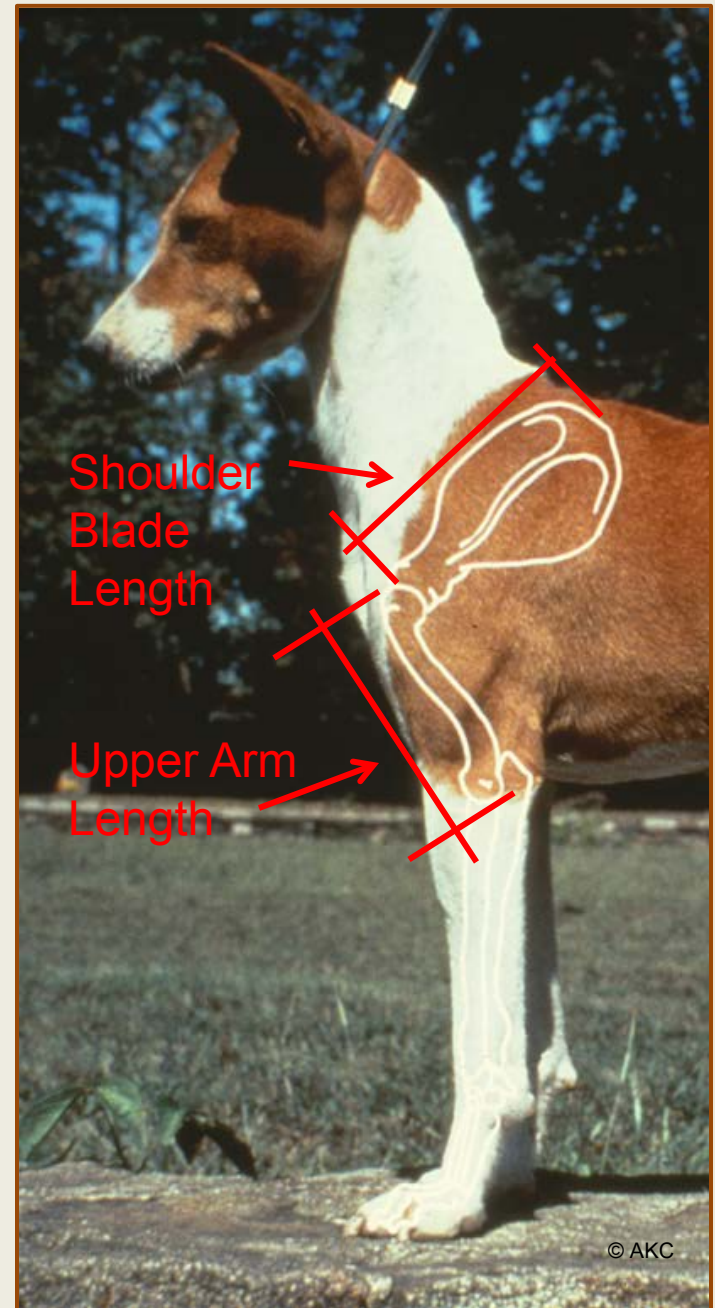
Shoulders moderately laid back. Shoulder blade and upper arm of approximately equal length.

This description tells how the bones are within the dog which are overlaid on photo right. You need to learn to feel the lengths and angles of the bones. You can feel the ridge down the center of the shoulder blade to help find its angle. Moderately laid back is about 30-35° from a vertical line.



The upper arm should reflect the shoulder angle. This angle sets the front leg under the body. If the front leg is not set back the angles are faulty.

Photo left: Imagine the bone structure this good front is based on. Also note the smooth line of transition down neck through shoulders.





# Forequarters continued....



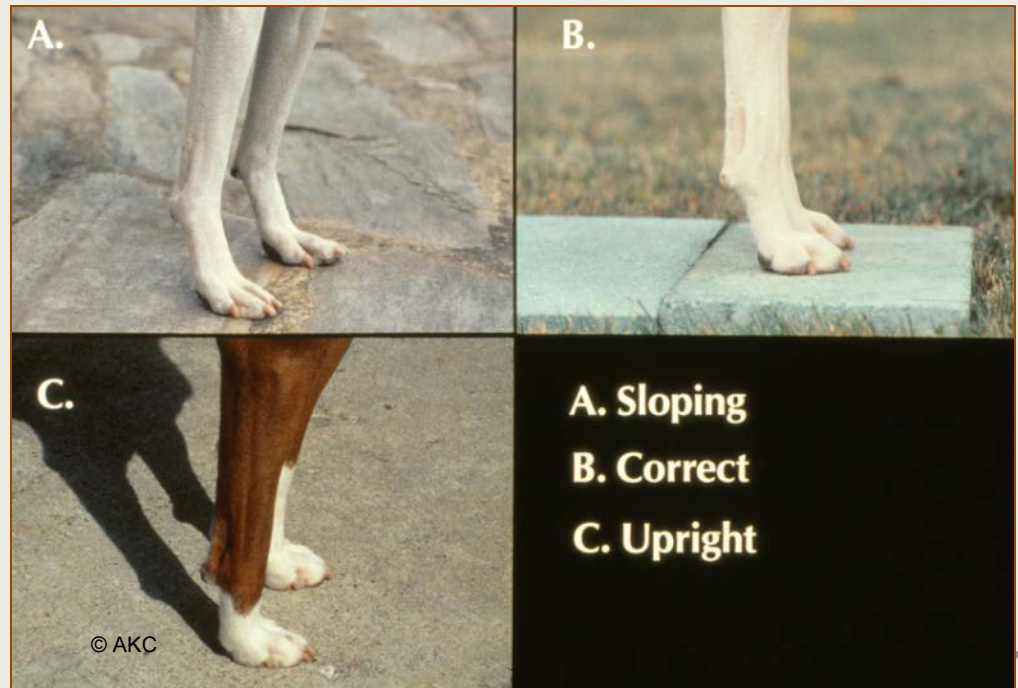
Elbows tucked firmly against brisket. Legs straight with clean fine bone, long forearm and well defined sinews.

Dog in photo left has elbows tucked in which you can see from this front view or from the side view. This photo shows the correct length of forearm. Length of forearm also should be considered in a side view as the bones of the forearm, upper arm and shoulder blade should all be the same length. The bone looks fine because it is shaped like a blade for strength while still being streamlined

Forearm

Pasterns of good length, strong and flexible.

Photos on the right demonstrate correct and incorrect pasterns.



# Forequarters continued....

Feet—Small, oval and compact with thick pads and well arched toes.

The photo right shows toes of the correct length with good arch to the toes. You can easily see that the pads are thick.

The lower photo shows how the feet are not much wider than the legs. This helps produce the clean look of the leg.



Dewclaws are usually removed.

Dewclaws are the vestigial thumbs which appear on the front legs. They are generally removed to avoid having them tear in the field. There is no penalty if it is not removed.

# Hindquarters

Medium width, strong and muscular, hocks well let down and turned neither in nor out, with long second thighs and moderately bent stifles.

The stifle corresponds to the human knee. Extremes of bend toward very straight and toward too bent cause weakness and may lead to health problems. The rear is best judged with the dog standing with the hocks vertical.

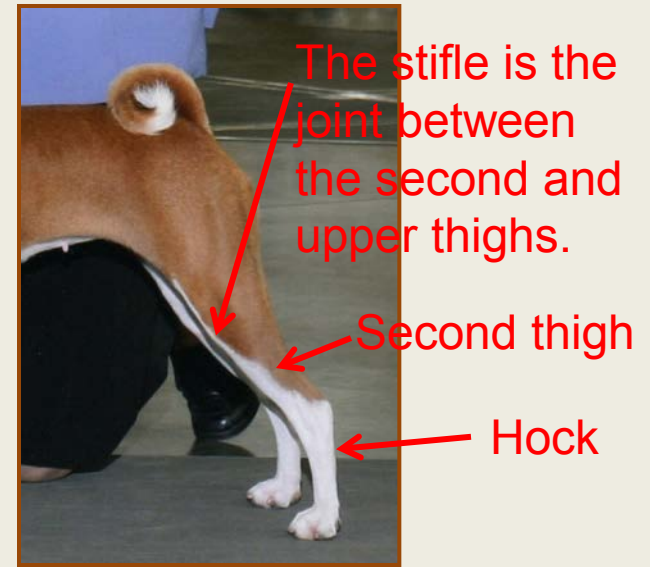


Photo left shows the straight line of the leg from the rear. The width is medium and the dog has the desired muscling both inside and outside the leg.

Photo lower right shows a good bend of stifle with long second thighs and short hocks.

Feet—Same as in "Forequarters."

Small, compact and with well arched toes.

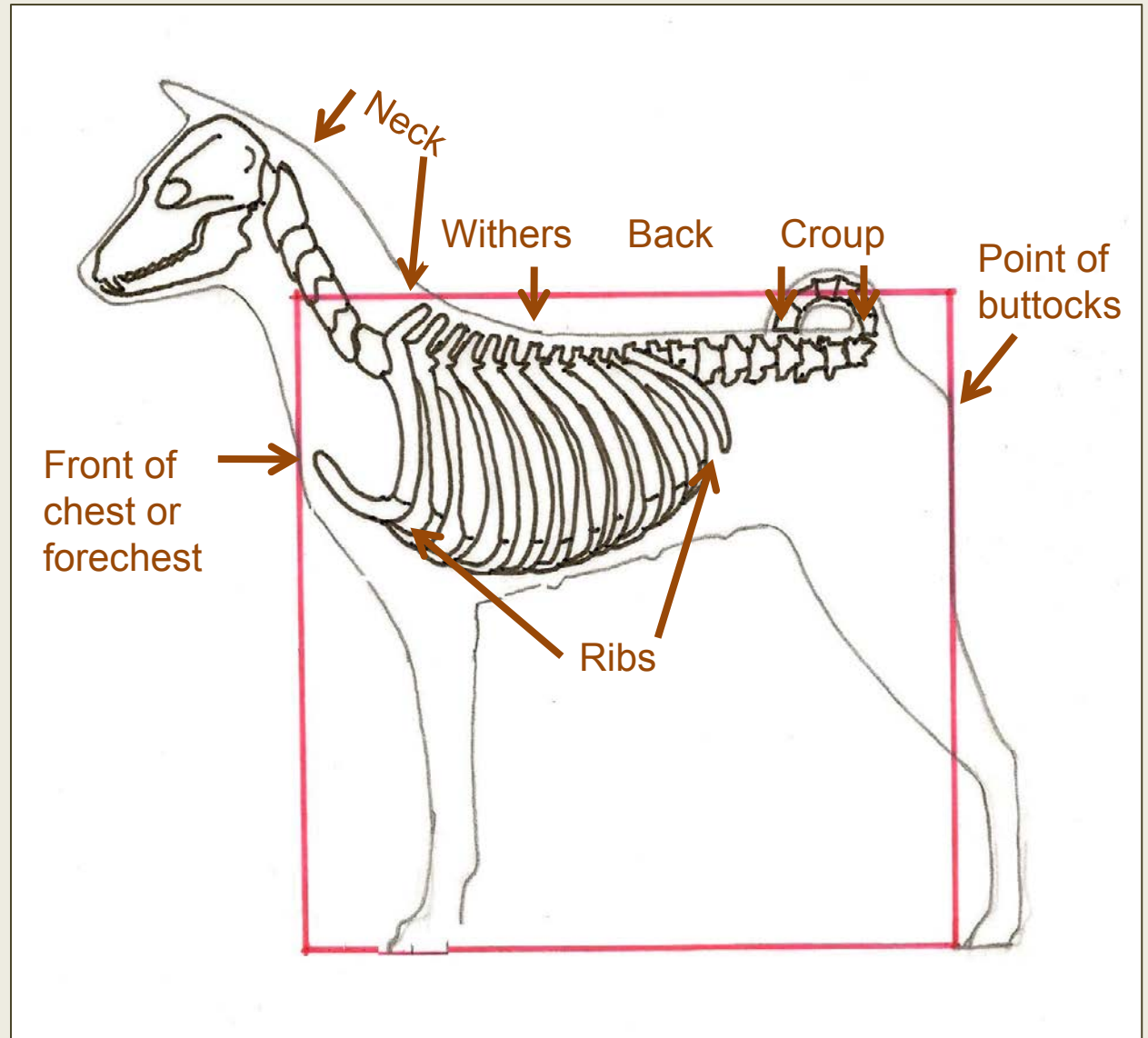


# Reviewing the Framework

The Basenji is built on a framework of bones. Here is an illustration of a Basenji spine and rib cage with terms used in the Standard.

Note how this Basenji fits into a square measured from the front of chest to the point of buttocks.

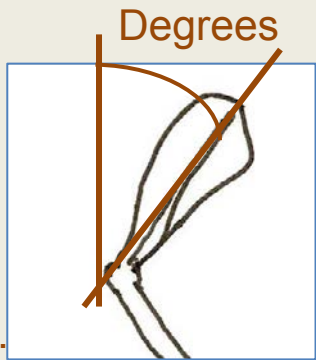
Tailset is where the tail leaves the croup, basically ending the topline.



# Reviewing the Framework

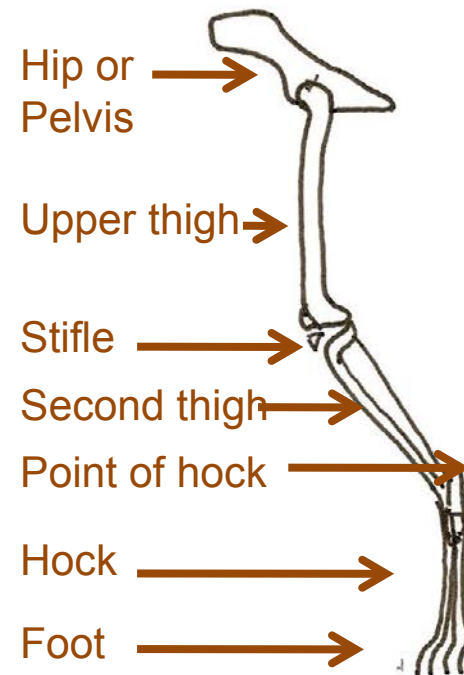
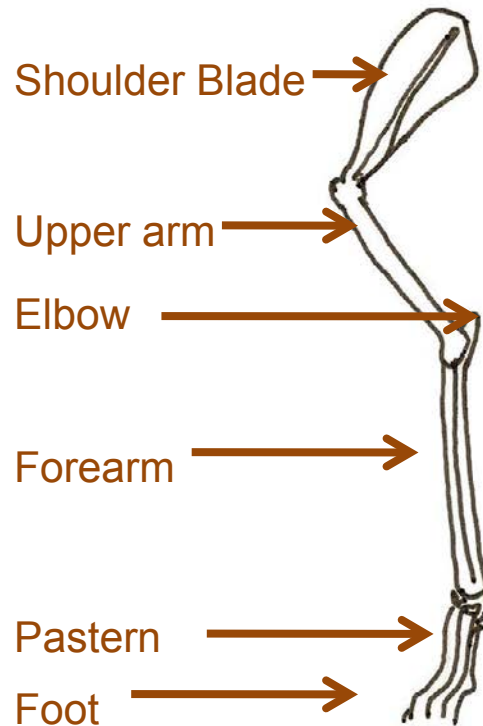
This illustration is of the forequarters and hindquarters..

Shoulder layback is measured back from a vertical line



30-35° is considered moderate and correct for a Basenji.

Hock well let down means the hock should not be long.

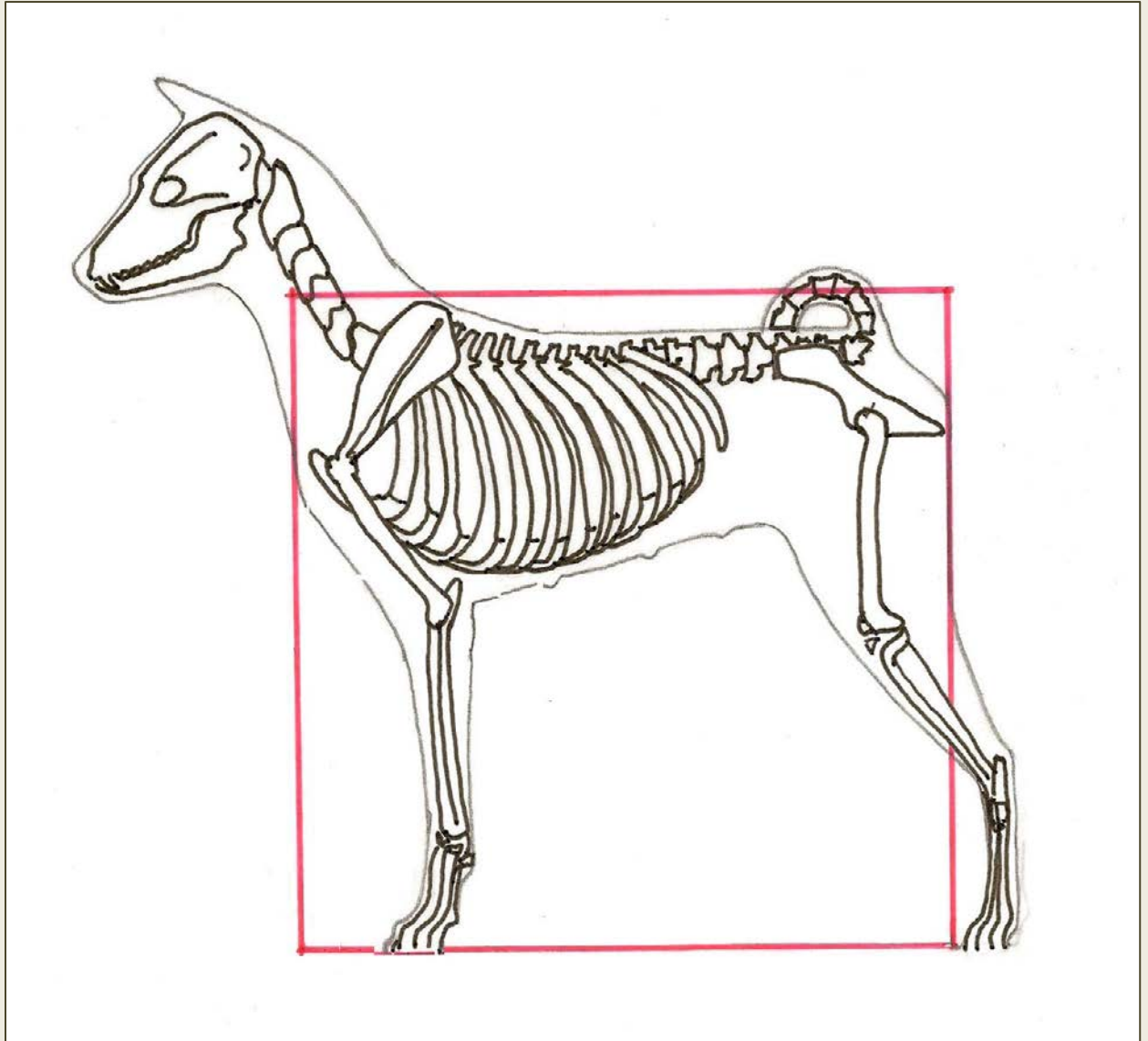


# Reviewing the Framework

Combing the parts of the skeleton of a typey Basenji.

Now you can see how the angle of the hip bone falling away from the desired horizontal topline forms the shelf. If the pelvis angles too steeply from the horizontal or if the tail set is lower there will be little shelf.

The way the bones are put together influences how muscles and ligaments attach affecting how the dog moves.



# Coat and Color

Coat short and fine.  
Skin very pliant.



Color—Chestnut red; pure black; tricolor (pure black and chestnut red); or brindle (black stripes on a background of chestnut red); all with white feet, chest and tail tip. White legs, blaze and collar optional. The amount of white should never pre- dominate over primary color.



Color and markings Should be rich, clear and well-defined, with a distinct line of demarcation between the black and red of tricolors and the stripes of brindles.

**AKC has stated that a black, tan and brindle Basenji, will be judged as tri-color.**

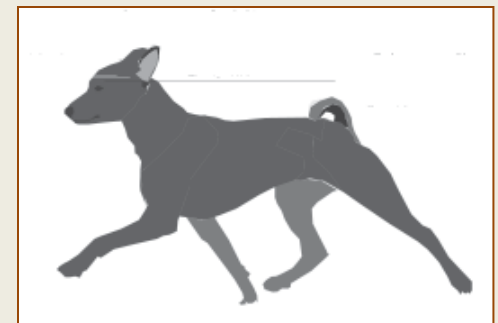
# Gait

Swift, tireless trot. Stride is long, smooth, effortless and the topline remains level.

Viewed from the side there is a lot to keep track of when watching a moving dog. Check 1) the topline remains level at all times; 2) watch that the front leg extends into one clean line from the top of the shoulder through the leg; 3) front and rear legs do not interfere with each other under the dog, and 4) rear leg should extend fully in balance with the front.

Top Photo: You can see the level topline and the clear line of the front leg, there is no interference. The lower photos show movement faults.

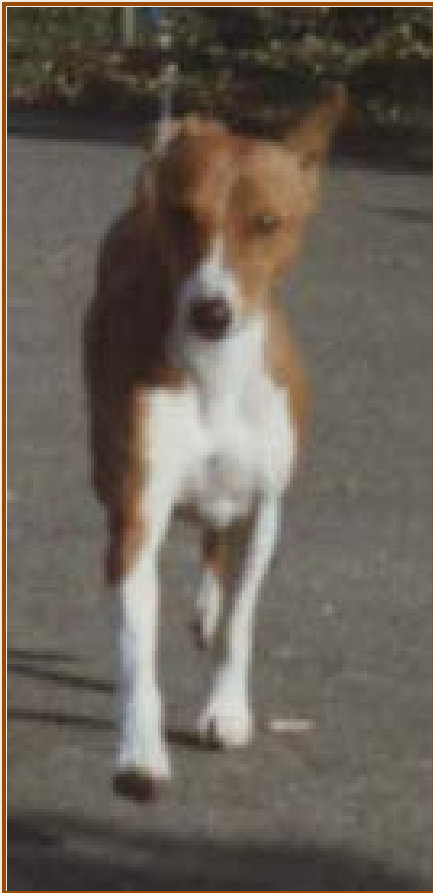
In the lower left photo a dog moving high in the rear and the legs are interfering under the body. On the right the dog is lifting his front leg to compensate for a stronger rear action.





## Gait concluded...

Coming and going, the straight column of bones from shoulder joint to foot and from hip joint to pad remains unbroken, converging toward the centerline under the body. The faster the trot, the greater the convergence.



When the dog trots toward or away from you the best movement is the cleanest. Elbows moving out of line, legs swinging out of line or pasterns flipping instead of maintaining a clean column of support are incorrect. The front leg continues an uninterrupted line from the body to carry the dog forward efficiently.



Similarly the rear moves in an efficient manner. If the hocks angles either in or out, it is incorrect. There should be a distinct clean line along the rear leg as it moves. When the rear leg is properly extended you will see the pads of the foot.

# Temperament

An intelligent, independent, but affectionate and alert breed. Can be aloof with strangers.



If the Basenji loses its curiosity and independence, it isn't really a Basenji. A timid dog is not a typical bold and proud Basenji. In breeding, the temperaments of the dogs in the pedigree are equally as important as structure and movement.



Although the study of canine anatomy requires that you learn about the individual parts of a dog, the biggest challenge is never to lose sight of the whole dog.