

Illustrated Study of the Irish Terrier Breed Standard

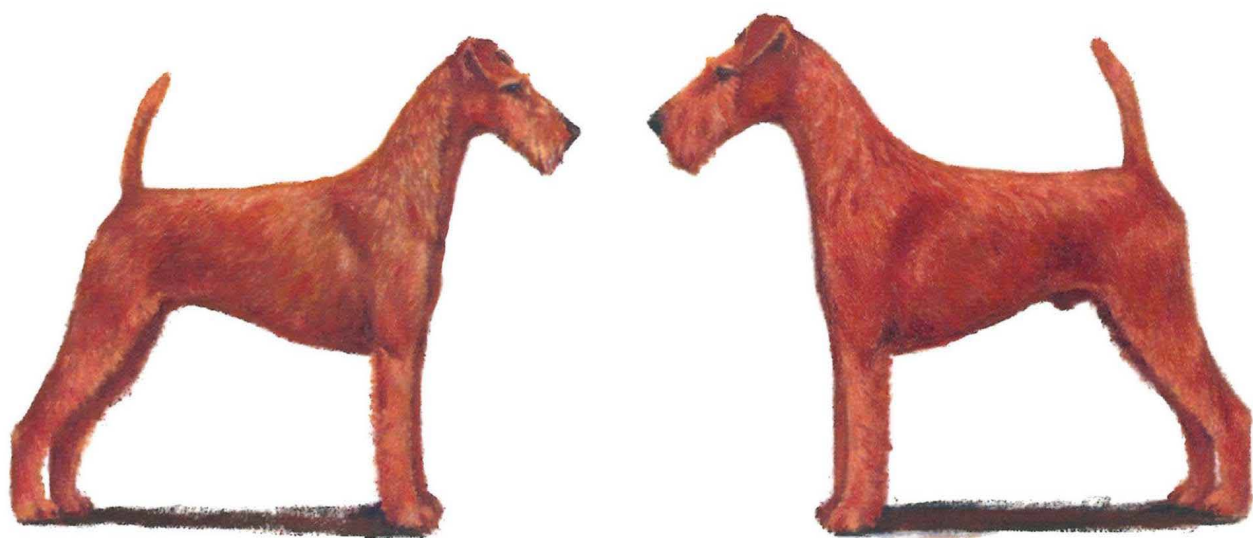


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Preface

This illustrated guide has been prepared by the Irish Terrier Club of America Judges Education Committee to promote a better understanding of the Breed Standard. Various points in the Irish Terrier Standard have been illustrated and clarified. The Irish Terrier Club of America believes this booklet can serve as a useful tool for judges, breeders and exhibitors.

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An Annotated History of the Irish Terrier

Dr. E. S. Montgomery, in his book *The Complete Irish Terrier*, provides historical notes as helpful as any we found.

“The Irish Terrier has existed for an indeterminate period in Ireland, where its history is a strange mixture of fact and fancy. In descriptions of this legendary animal, much truth has undoubtedly been discarded, making the breed’s history one of those charming folk tales the Irish are so adept at telling.”

“...However, there are some facts quite evident. Dogs played an unusually important role in the life of the ancient Irish people. In the Baerla laws (the very earliest of the Brehon code, recorded in the first centuries of the Christian era), there were elaborate provisions as to the control of dogs and the responsibility therefor. The law recognized the hunting Hounds, the shepherd’s dogs and a smaller breed of earth dogs, vermin killers, and watch dogs. The Hounds were the ‘dogs of the dignitaries’ and the Terriers the dogs of the Feini or common people.”

“Previous to 1885, dog fanciers gave but little cognizance to Irish Terriers. They were kept in Ireland for sport alone and little attention was paid to breeding for any standard type, the objectives being gameness, and great endurance to fatigue, rough going, and exposure to severe weather; hunting the water-rat in the creeks and rivers, drawing badgers in the rocky area, chasing and killing rabbits and field vermin as they were bolted by ferrets from their warrens and setts were the uses to which these dogs were generally put.”

“Dog shows had been instituted sixteen years before a class was opened for Irish Terriers in England. Even in their native country they were slow to make an appearance on the show bench. There is no record of a definite recognition of the breed earlier than 1870.”

The confusion that accompanied the debut of the Irish at a show in Dublin in 1873 is well documented: “...the unfortunate but well-meaning judge arrived, to be confronted with Terriers of all sizes and all colors and of various coats and types, large and small, stoutly built and racy. He became utterly confused, as no two dogs could really conform with any similarity. He sorted out the prizes as best he could, giving some mention to one type and some to another in the hope that he could prove his knowledge.”

Breeders persevered; and a mere six years later in 1879, a meeting was held in Dublin to establish a mother club to protect and to advance the breed. Although no accurate record exists, it is believed that around this same time the breed was introduced to America. In 1896 the Irish Terrier Club of America was organized in Boston and was officially founded on February 23, 1897,

when the first annual meeting was held in New York City. During this meeting the latest revised standard of the Irish Terrier Club of Great Britain was unanimously adopted as the American Standard.

Our American Standard was revised in 1929 to allow for increased weights in both dogs and bitches and was slightly revised again in 1969 to change the eye color to dark brown. However, notice should be taken of the fact that the Standard for the Irish Terrier has remained essentially constant for more than 100 years.

The Standard

For the purposes of the following presentation, the language of the Standard will be denoted by **bold** lettering and any commentary will appear in *italics*. Quotations will be shown with attribution.

HEAD

Head – Long, but in nice proportion to the rest of the body; the skull flat, rather narrow between the ears, and narrowing slightly toward the eyes; free from wrinkle, with the stop hardly noticeable except in profile. The jaws must be strong and muscular, but not too full in the cheek, and of good punishing length. The foreface must not fall away appreciably between or below the eyes; instead, the modeling should be delicate. An exaggerated foreface, or a noticeably short foreface, disturbs the proper balance of the head and is not desirable. The foreface and the skull from occiput to stop should be approximately equal in length. Excessive muscular development of the cheeks, or bony development of the temples, conditions which are described by the fancier as “cheeky,” or “strong in head,” or “thick in skull” are objectionable. The “bumpy” head, in which the skull presents two lumps of bony structure above the eyes, is to be faulted. The hair on the upper and lower jaws should be similar in quality and texture to that on the body, and of sufficient length to present an appearance of additional strength and finish to the foreface. Either the profuse, goat-like beard, or the absence of beard, is unsightly and undesirable.

Comments:

The term “rather narrow between the ears” should not be interpreted to mean an Irish Terrier is narrow-headed. Rather, this phrase refers to the fact that the ears should be set high on the head, thus creating the appearance of narrowness between the ears and the illusion of a narrow-headed dog.

The term “cheeky” refers to bulging, fleshy or coarse cheeks; such cheeks are prominently rounded, thick and protruding.



Frontal view of the
correct head
and ear set



Profile view of the correct head
and ear set

TEETH

Teeth – Should be strong and even, white and sound; and neither overshot nor undershot.

Comments:

Either the scissors bite or the level bite is acceptable.

LIPS

Lips – Should be close and well-fitting, almost black in color.

NOSE

Nose – Must be black.

EYES

Eyes – Dark brown in color; small, not prominent; full of life, fire and intelligence, showing an intense expression. The light or yellow eye is most objectionable, and is a bad fault.



Correct head and eye



Correct head with incorrect eye (eye is too large, light in color and rim has no pigment)

EARS

Ears – Small and V-shaped; of moderate thickness; set well on the head, and dropping forward closely toward the outside corner of the eye. The top of the folded ear should be well above the level of the skull. A “dead” ear, hound-like in appearance, must be severely penalized. It is not characteristic of the Irish Terrier. The hair should be much shorter and somewhat darker in color than that on the body.



Frontal view of correct ear set



Profile view of correct ear set

NECK

Neck – Should be of fair length and gradually widening toward the shoulders; well and proudly carried, and free from throatiness. Generally there is a slight frill in the hair at each side of the neck, extending almost to the corner of the ear.

Comments:

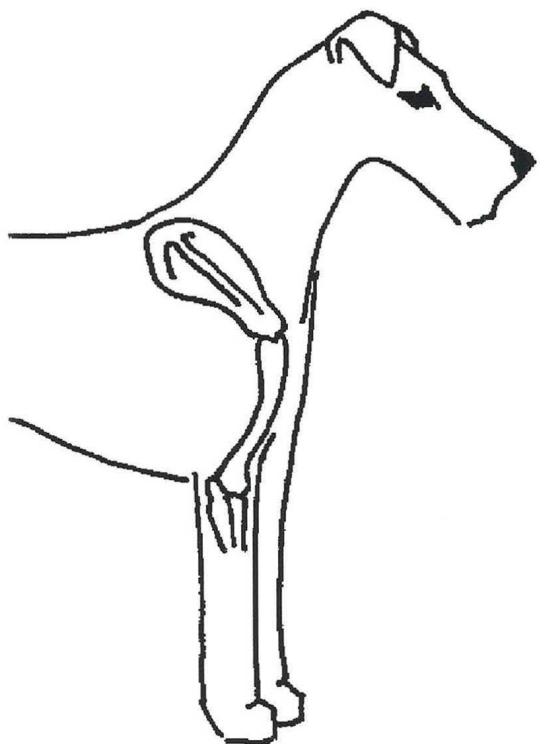
The correct neck is shown above in the frontal and profile head studies in the ear section.

SHOULDERS AND CHEST

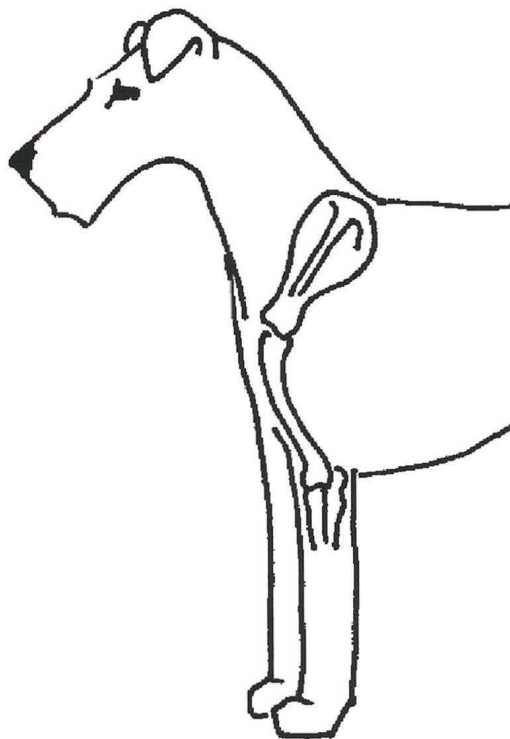
Shoulders – Must be fine, long, and sloping well into the back. The chest should be deep and muscular, but neither full nor wide.

Comments:

The shoulder should be placed far enough back that when viewed in profile a bit of breast bone shows in front of the dog. A dog with well laid back shoulders can efficiently obtain the desired reach by moving his legs straight-forward in a parallel track, enabling him to stay in suspension until the drive created by the hindquarters is expended. In comparison, a dog with upright shoulders has reduced forward reach, which forces him to compensate by moving his front legs in a semi-circular sideward arch to stay suspended until the force created by the hindquarters is expended. This inefficient front movement increases the impact on the front shoulders and legs, thus wasting the drive created by the hindquarters. This is evidenced by an up-and-down motion at the withers. A dog with upright shoulders often appears to have a short neck.



Correct shoulder
placement and layback



Upright shoulders

BODY

The body should be moderately long. The short back is not characteristic of the Irish Terrier, and is extremely objectionable. The back must be strong and straight, and free from an appearance of slackness or “dip” behind the shoulders. The loin should be strong and muscular, and slightly arched, the ribs fairly sprung, deep rather than round, reaching to the level of the elbow. The bitch may be slightly longer than the dog.

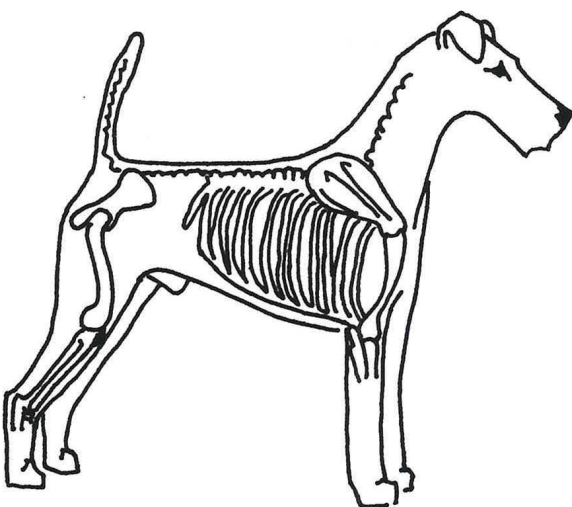
Comments:

A. *It should be noted that a “moderately long body” comes from a longer rib cage and **not** a longer loin. Both dogs in the sketches below have the same body outline, but the rib cages and loins are differently proportioned. The shorter loin (left) efficiently transmits propulsion from the hindquarters to the front shoulders and legs; the short loin anchors the spine and prevents it from bouncing up and down. By contrast, the longer loin (right) is less well suited to controlling propulsion and causes the body to sway from side to side.*

Note:

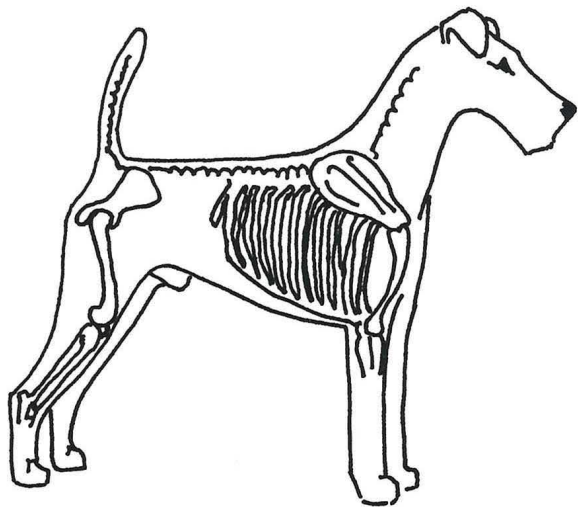
*The original Standard included language calling for a “well-ribbed back.” In his book **The Irish Terrier Standard Simplified** published in 1925, the prominent American breeder John Thorndike wrote: “Well-ribbed back means that there should not be a great distance between the last rib and the pelvis bone.”*

B. *While modern grooming techniques create the appearance of a level top line, the rise in loin dictated by the underlying musculature will be felt by hands-on examination.*



Correct:

Longer rib cage and shorter loin



Incorrect:

Shorter rib cage and longer loin

HINDQUARTERS

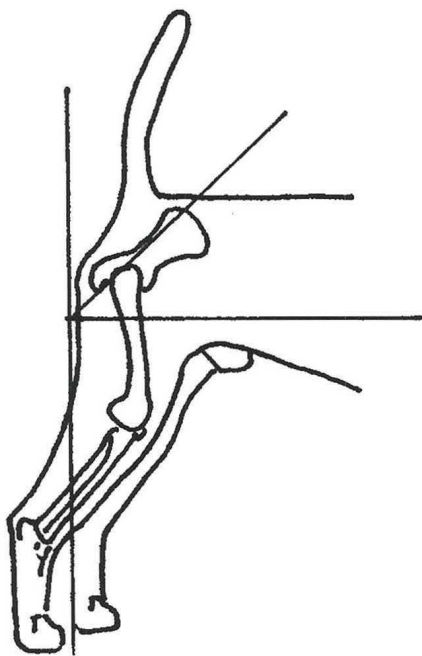
Hindquarters – Should be strong and muscular; thighs powerful; hocks near the ground; stifles moderately bent.

STERN

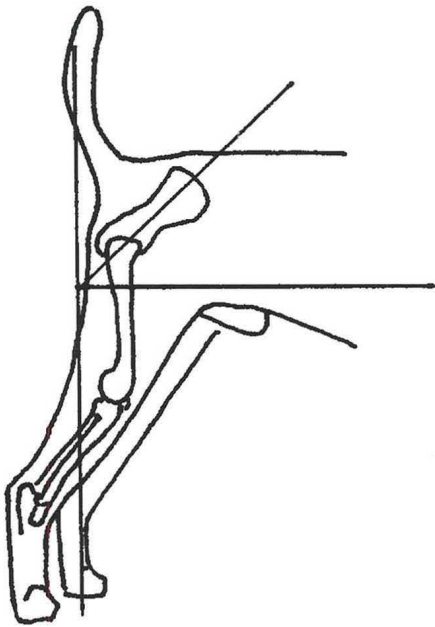
Stern – Should be docked, taking off about one quarter. It should be set on rather high, but not curled. It should be of good strength and substance; of fair length and well covered with harsh, rough hair.

Comments on Hindquarters and Stern:

The Irish Terrier's drive is generated only from the hindquarters. A dog with moderately bent stifles will exhibit good rear extension. In a dog with properly structured hindquarters, the drive passes through the pelvis to the spinal column and is transmitted ultimately to the front shoulders and legs. In a dog with poorly structured hindquarters, some of the drive travels vertically through the pelvis lifting the hindquarters into the air, which wastes the drive. A steeper pelvis results in a lower tail set.



Properly constructed hindquarters.
Moderately bent stifle and good tail set.



Poorly constructed hindquarters.
Straight stifle and low tail set.

FEET AND LEGS

The feet should be strong, tolerably round, and moderately small; toes arched and turned neither out nor in, with dark toe-nails. The pads should be deep, and must be perfectly sound and free from corns. Cracks alone do not necessarily indicate unsound feet. In fact, all breeds have cracked pads occasionally, from various causes.

Legs moderately long, well set from the shoulders, perfectly straight, with plenty of bone and muscle; the elbows working clear of the sides; pasterns short, straight, and hardly noticeable. Both fore and hind legs should move straight forward when traveling; the stifles should not turn outwards. “Cow-hocks” – that is, the hocks turned in and the feet turned out – are intolerable. The legs should be free from feather and covered with hair of similar texture to that on the body to give proper finish to the dog.

Comments:

Judges in the show ring should check the pads for corns, which will appear as horn-like growths – a very serious fault!



Correct front alignment



Correct rear alignment



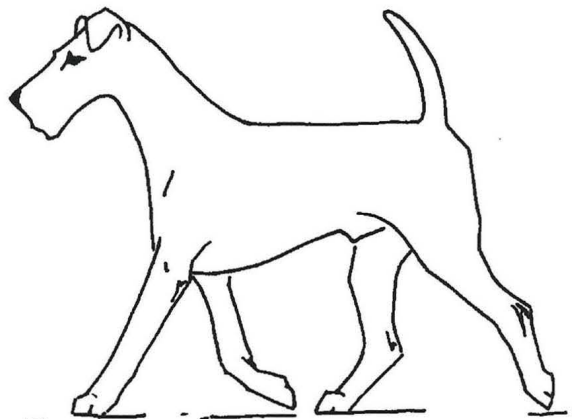
Correct rear movement



Correct front movement

Correct front and rear movement shown in profile.

Note: at faster gates the hind legs will tend to converge.



COAT

Coat – Should be dense and wiry in texture, rich in quality, having a broken appearance, but still lying fairly close to the body, the hairs growing so closely and strongly together that when parted with the fingers the skin is hardly visible; free of softness or silkiness, and not so long as to alter the outline of the body, particularly in the hindquarters. On the sides of the body the coat is never as harsh as on the back and quarters, but it should be plentiful and of good texture. At the base of the stiff outer coat there should be a growth of finer and softer hair, lighter in color, termed the undercoat. Single coats, which are without any undercoat, and wavy coats are undesirable; the curly and kinky coats are most objectionable.

Comments:

The subject of proper Irish Terrier coat has received much attention through the years. We believe that no one has explained it better than Dr. Montgomery in his book *The Complete Irish Terrier*. He writes: “Difficult to put into words and explain, yet readily discernible to the competent judge and breeder is the correct broken coat.”

Dr. Montgomery describes this correct coat in the following manner: “...The ‘broken’ coat. This is the only correct coat. It has, first of all, an undercoat as dense, soft, and even as sealskin – it is usually accompanied by a moderate amount of leg and face furnishings, which are usually dense and wiry in appearance. The coat is luxuriant, dense, thick, full of life and spring. When developing, it appears similar to the ‘flat’ coat, but upon maturing, it takes on an appearance of unevenness, and ‘breaks’ appear in the surface – hence its name. It is found in all the varying shades, ranging from wheaten to mahogany red.

As a key to good coats, it can be stated that a good undercoat is always accompanied by a sound outer coat, and vice versa.”

Dr. Montgomery provides further clarification by identifying and explaining six other coat types – none as desirable as the “broken” coat. He stresses that each is distinct from the others.

*“The ‘wavy’ coat – This coat has caused much confusion, for many judges and breeders alike consider it to be the correct broken coat. **It is not!** It can be considered a good coat, since it usually carries a good sound undercoat, and a moderate amount of leg and face furnishings, generally of good quality.”*

“The ‘flat’ coat – This is a hard, close-fitting coat, the hairs being of somewhat greater length than in the smooth coat. There is usually a sparse undercoat, although it thins out greatly on the back and loins. Generally, head furnishings are plentiful, although of poor quality and growing to greater length. The leg hair is of a quality similar to that of the face, but is usually quite sparse.”

“The ‘open’ coat – This coat carries about as much undercoat as the ‘flat’ coat. It is usually accompanied by a wealth of leg and face furnishings, especially the beard, which may grow quite dense and long. When this coat is maturing, it takes on a certain quality of harshness, but when it comes to full bloom, it does not ‘hold’ but rather, ‘blows’ in a fortnight. It then has an open appearance and is not unlike cat fur in texture, spring, and character.”

“The ‘smooth’ coat – This type is much the same as is found in the smooth Fox Terrier; specimens bearing it are without undercoat, leg or face furnishings.”

“The ‘soft’ or ‘silky’ coat – This coat needs very little comment, for it is easily recognized even by the novice. The coat is soft, silky, and devoid of undercoat...”

“The ‘curly’ coat – This coat is, as a rule, found on dark red specimens. It is very harsh, forming tight rows of curls on the back and neck. Specimens so possessed are usually devoid not only of undercoat, but of leg and face furnishings as well, the result being a fine-boned, snipey appearance.”

Of these six, the most objectionable is the “curly” (“kinky”) coat.

COLOR

Color – Should be whole-colored: bright red, golden red, red wheaten or wheaten. A small patch of white on the chest, frequently encountered in all whole-colored breeds, is permissible but not desirable. White on any other part of the body is most objectionable. Puppies sometimes have black hair at birth, which should disappear before they are full grown.

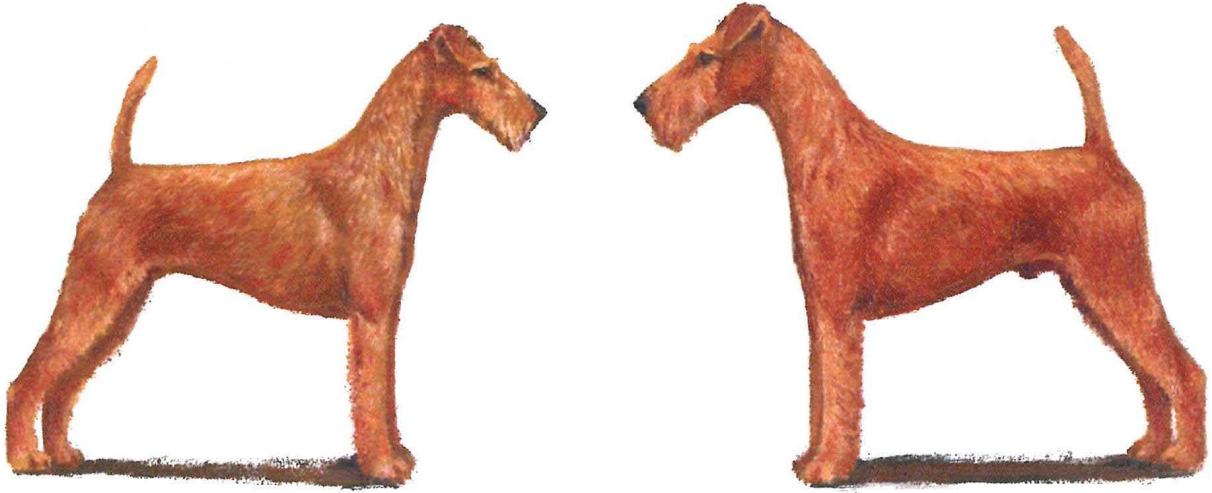
SIZE

The most desirable weight in show condition is 27 pounds for the dog and 25 pounds for the bitch. The height at the shoulder should be approximately 18 inches. These figures serve as a guide to both breeder and judge. In the show ring, however, the informed judge readily identifies the over-sized or under-sized Irish Terrier by its conformation and general appearance. Weight is not the last word in judgment. It is of the greatest importance to select, insofar as possible, terriers of moderate and generally accepted size, possessing the other various characteristics.

OVERALL APPEARANCE

The overall appearance of the Irish Terrier is important. In conformation he must be more than a sum of his parts. He must be all-of-a-piece, a balanced vital picture of symmetry, proportion and harmony.

Furthermore, he must convey character. This terrier must be active, lithe and wiry in movement, with great animation; sturdy and strong in substance and bone structure, but at the same time free from clumsiness, for speed, power and endurance are most essential. The Irish Terrier must be neither “cobby” nor “cloddy” but should be built on lines of speed, with a graceful, racing outline.



Bitch – with correct profile

Dog – with correct profile

TEMPERAMENT

The temperament of the Irish Terrier reflects his early background: he was family pet, guard dog and hunter. He is good tempered, spirited and game. It is of the utmost importance that the Irish Terrier show fire and animation. There is a heedless, reckless pluck about the Irish Terrier which is characteristic, and which, coupled with the headlong dash, blind to all consequences, with which he rushes at his adversary, has earned for the breed the proud epithet of “Daredevil.” He is of good temper, most affectionate, and absolutely loyal to mankind. Tender and forbearing with those he loves, this rugged, stout-hearted terrier will guard his master, his mistress and children with utter contempt for danger or hurt. His life is one continuous and eager offering of loyal and faithful companionship and devotion. He is ever on guard, and stands between his home and all that threatens.

Guidelines for Judges in the Ring

A. SPARRING

Sparring refers to letting terriers “face off” against each other in the ring, on lead and in a controlled fashion, allowing them to demonstrate boldness of character. When Irish Terriers are allowed to look eye to eye in the show ring, the full beauty of the breed springs forward. The good ones rise up on their toes, beautifully extend their necks and slam their tails forward – ears button down on heads and small dark eyes flash the breed’s characteristic fire.

Sparring is not about dogs out of control. It is about dogs standing their ground, alertly prepared for challengers. Keeping the show ring under control is the responsibility of the judge and the handler.

Handlers should not spar dogs until the judge requests it. When sparring dogs, the judge should keep them a reasonable distance apart (i.e., three feet or more). Handlers should not be allowed to put dogs nose to nose. Some judges prefer to spar dogs of the opposite sex.

During sparring, an Irish Terrier should never back away from another dog. However, judges should keep in mind that young class dogs often are more interested in playing with each other than sparring. Also, after dogs have been sparred, their “blood is up” and they will probably not exhibit their best movement.

The Irish Terrier Club of America encourages the proper use of sparring. It allows the dogs to show themselves, providing an excellent opportunity to fully evaluate and appreciate attitude, expression, and the “graceful racing outline” described in the Breed Standard.

B. SCALE OF POINTS

The Breed Standard contained a Scale of Points until 1969, when it was deleted by the AKC to achieve uniformity in breed standards (the AKC subsequently dropped this requirement). This Scale of Points is included as part of the Illustrated Study only as an informational tool for judges to help clarify how the individual components of the Standard relate to each other in relative importance. Ultimately, an Irish Terrier **“must be more than a sum of his parts. He must be all-of-a-piece, a balanced vital picture of symmetry, proportion and harmony.”**

Points

Head, ears and expression	20
Legs and feet	15
Neck	5
Shoulders and chest	10
Back and loin	5
Hindquarters and stern	10
Coat	15
Color	10
Size and symmetry	10
Total:	100

Negative Points

White nails, toes and feet	-10
Much white on chest	-10
Dark shading on face	- 5
Mouth under shot	-10
Coat Shaggy curly or soft	-10
Uneven in color	- 5
Total:	- 50

Glossary Of Terms

Angulation: The angles formed by the meeting of the bones at the shoulder (scapula and humerus); stifle (femur and tibia); and the hock joint.

Back: The vertebrae between the withers and the loin.

Breastbone (sternum): Bone in the forepart of the chest.

Cheeky: Bulging, fleshy or coarse in cheeks; cheeks prominently rounded, thick, protruding.

Chiseling: A request for clean cut lines and contours about the head and foreface – particularly if enhanced by fine, close fitting skin covering – adds to an impression of refinement.

Chest (thorax): The part of the body or trunk that is enclosed by the ribs.

Cloddy: Low, thickset, comparatively heavy.

Coarse: Too heavy in bone, lacking in quality.

Cobby: Short-bodied, compact.

Corny feet: Corny growths on the pads of the feet.

Cow-hocked: Hocks turn inward accompanied by toeing out of the rear feet.

Elbow: The joint between the upper foreleg (humerus) and the forearm (ulna).

Foreface (muzzle): That portion of the head from the stop forward.

Forequarter: The combined front assembly from its uppermost component, the shoulder blade, down to the feet.

Furnishings: The longer hair that covers the legs and appears on the face and eyebrows.

Hindquarter: Rear assembly of the dog (pelvis, thighs, hocks and paws).

Hocks: The tarsus or collections of bones of the hind leg forming the joint between the second thigh and the metatarsus.

Hound ears: The ears fall to the side of the head and are low hanging.

Kinky or curly coat: This coat is generally wiry with no under coat. It will have an abundance of tight waves or curls over the majority of the body. Dogs with this type of coat generally have no undercoat.

Layback of shoulder (scapula): The angle of the shoulder blade (scapula) as compared with the vertical plane when viewed from the side, (the opposite of straight shoulder).

Level bite: When the front teeth (incisors) of the upper and lower jaws meet exactly edge to edge.

Loin: The lumbar area extending from the end of the rib cage to the start of the pelvis.

Muzzle (foreface): That portion of the head from the stop forward.

Occiput (occipital bone): The highest and rearmost part of the skull.

Overshot bite: In this form of bite the lower incisors are situated some distance behind the upper counterparts; hence no physical contact takes place between them.

Pelvis (pelvic girdle, hip bone): Composed of three bones: The Ilium (front), Pubis and the Ischium (rear).

Reach of front: Length of forward stride taken by the forelegs.

Scissor bite: The upper incisors barely overlap the lower incisors forming a scissor action when the jaw is opened and closed. The lower canines should lock in front of the upper canines.

Single coat: Coats without an undercoat.

Snipey Muzzle: A pointed weak muzzle.

Stifle (stifle joint, knee joint): The joint of the hind leg where the upper and lower thighs meet (the dog's knee).

Stop: The step down from the back skull to the muzzle — between the eyes where the muzzle joins the skull.

Sway back: A back that sags, or is concave to some degree, along its entire length.

Tail set: How the base of the tail sits on the rump.

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Notes: