

# JUDGING THE ROTTWEILER

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**I**t is a delight to write this article for both aspiring and experienced AKC judges; there are many well respected, long time breeder/judges from whom I have sought counsel and perspective—and through their wisdom, experience and invaluable mentoring, I have provided the following perspective regarding the judging of the AKC Rottweiler. Evaluating Rottweilers is a pleasure and a passion, whether it be sitting ringside in a camp chair, catalog and pen in hand or it be as an honorary judge presiding in an official capacity at an AKC Rottweiler specialty show. Drinking in the sight and feel of a sea of Rottweilers, particularly at a breeders' showcase event such as a specialty, is a peak experience, a unique pleasure and a memorable honor.

I had an English teacher long ago who posed the question: "Which came first: language or meaning?" Initially, the answer seemed obvious. Surely meaning necessitated words which in turn were used to express and create pictures, thereby forming images in the minds of others. The question reared its head again in my mind when I considered our century-old Rottweiler Breed standard, inspired by the breed's rich heritage passed to us in the 1920s by the ADRK and preceding generations, (see "Rottweiler History and Heritage", co-authored with Joan Klem, *ShowSight Magazine*, March 2012). That image of the ideal Rottweiler is very nearly the same today in our AKC Rottweiler Standard.

The AKC Rottweiler Standard assigns the language and conceptual boundaries to create a consensus, a collective mindshare if you will, of what the AKC Rottweiler is, in all of his essence and in all of his splendor—a mental image borne of and realized through decades of dedicated and attentive breeding—and to be recognized and acknowledged by any AKC judge



*Movement should be balanced... with strong forereach and powerful rear drive. (BIS Ch. Cammcastle's Hollywood First Lady, "Reagan")*



*Neck is powerful, well-muscled, moderately long, slightly arched and without loose skin. (Multi BISS ARC Select Ch. Cammcastle's Quantum LeapYear, "Launa")*

who, as part of that mindshare, knows and affirms the image created by those words and embodied in so many outstanding Rottweilers (from the standard):

*"...A large, robust and powerful dog, black with clearly defined markings... his compact and substantial build denotes strength, agility and endurance... expression is noble and alert... tail docked short close to body... is a trotter... motion is effortless, efficient and ground-covering... calm, confident and courageous..."*

## The Standard IS

We have an important job as Rottweiler judges in the AKC show ring, as our adherence to the AKC standard is critical. The AKC Rottweiler Standard is more than a simple map; it is the book of business for our task as judges. It is not interactive; it is not an evolving handbook of best practices or political trends; and it is not a document that we as judges are entitled to rewrite. It simply "IS" and that which it "IS" is nearly a century old, representing decades of generations bred unto the ideal image of the Rottweiler it promotes. Our task as AKC judges is finite: to select the exhibit before us that best represents the image of an ideal Rottweiler as presented by our AKC standard. Space does not permit the attachment of the standard to this article; however, it

may be referenced on the AKC website at: [http://www.akc.org/breeds/rottweiler/breed\\_standard.cfm](http://www.akc.org/breeds/rottweiler/breed_standard.cfm). Our good fortune is that the AKC Rottweiler Standard is well-written and comprehensive—and for our benefit, adequately and constructively addresses the whole Rottweiler including his temperament, his appearance, his gait and his appendages.

## The Negotiables, Definitives & Deal Breakers

The language of the AKC standard constructs and reveals the Rottweiler through three characterizing mechanisms. These I will refer to as the "negotiables" (ranges), the "definitives" (factuals or absolutes) and the "deal breakers" (disqualifying faults). Much like the diagramming of a complete sentence reveals at least two parts to communicate a complete idea (a subject and a verb), the AKC Rottweiler standard is made up of these three parts and together, they merge to create the complete, intended and ideal image of the Rottweiler whose meaning inspired the language of his standard.

**Negotiables:** These are ranges and typically within the standard present as acceptable variations: examples include size in both dogs and bitches, depth and substance of the neck and body, strength of legs and pasterns, density of undercoat and



*This puppy already show promise of harmonious balance on the move.*

quantity of rust markings. In addition, these are sometimes characteristics which while acceptable, are not preferred and are therefore classified as “serious faults”: examples include one missing tooth, yellow eyes and curly coat, among others.

**Definitives:** These are aspects of the breed standard presented without affording negotiation or implied range. They are finite, factual and characterized by definitive adjectives and verbs: examples include “nails short and strong, tail docked short close to body and rear dewes must be removed”.

**Deal Breakers:** These are the disqualifying faults that render the Rottweiler ineligible for competition under the AKC standard: examples include long coat, overshot and ectropion, among others.

Those aspects of the standard written as negotiables are intended to be just that, given measurements or size falling within the parameters provided. The language, however, of the definitives is presumed to be intentional, as no range or option to fault is provided. Therefore, while a 22 inch female Rottweiler meets accordance with the AKC standard, a 22 inch female with rear dewclaws does not. She is not in accordance with the standard. A discussion on whether she could reasonably have one dewclaw rather than two on each rear

leg is moot. The standard clearly indicates that the dewes in the rear are removed. And so it goes with the tail which is also conspicuously addressed within the AKC standard. The standard’s language is clear and definitive, “tail docked short close to body”; a parallel conversation about how an undocked tail should be carried is equally moot. In judging and seeking constructive ways to assimilate the standard, a comprehensive grasp of these three characterizing mechanisms of our AKC Rottweiler standard (negotiables, definitives and deal breakers) is critical in preparing us for the challenges we as AKC judges will face in today’s show ring. The language of the standard is intentional and telling and we as judges can educate each other and inquiring exhibitors by demonstrating this broader, intellectual regard for the standard—and its language—as entrusted to us.

### **Judging Rottweilers to the AKC Standard—Here Comes the Fun!**

**Start with your mindset:** Rottweilers are beautiful creatures. They deserve a judge who can assess virtues ahead of faults (all of course within the framework of the AKC standard). Just because someone can fault a dog does not mean it is not the best dog on the mat. As well, just because

someone can find a fault doesn’t mean he can find the best Rottweiler. There is a certain grace that accompanies an earnest effort to look for a Rottweiler’s virtues—and it does change energy between judges and exhibitors in a positive way. Whether you judge for virtues or not, you may hear ringside editorials about how inconsistent you are on a given day. Sometimes it is simply not possible to be consistent because the dogs are all so different and as we know, judging is sometimes complex. Further, to seek to be consistent simply for the sake of others’ evaluation of you as a judge not only turns your thoughts away from the exhibits (and inappropriately inward to yourself), but well may preclude you from courageously pointing to a deserving exhibit (in accordance with the AKC Standard) that you feel is exceptional due to its virtues. I recall nearly 30 years ago, our national breed club hosted Ms. Joan Blackmore from the United Kingdom to adjudicate the national specialty. She awarded Winners Bitch to a bitch with one missing tooth. She acknowledged her decision that day by proclaiming that in her mind’s eye the virtues of her winner far exceeded those of any other entry, missing tooth or no missing tooth! I noted the accomplished track record of her breeding program and concluded (for a lifetime) her position on that day to be far more credible than that of those expressing sideline rancor and incredulity.

**Balance:** The AKC Rottweiler Standard describes the Rottweiler’s most desirable proportion of height to length to be 9 to 10. A Rottweiler can meet this ratio and be very handsome standing still, but he can only be spectacular when on the move. His carriage and the manner with which he commands himself as he covers ground tells more about the dog than a dozen hands on examinations. Although the AKC requires the physical exam of every exhibit, the truth is that much can be told on the structure of the Rottweiler by how his structure computes to motion. A dog built harmoniously moves harmoniously. The topline should remain strong and level while the dog moves effortlessly, his legs moving straight and strong, his feet converging to a single track as his speed increases. The reach and drive are

simpatico, executed in parallel motion generated by balanced angulation of the front and rear assembly. I once heard respected Breeder/Judge Joan Klem humorously remark that when she saw this fusion of perfection in a dog before she had conducted its individual exam, she would pray ahead of the exam that it would have all 42 of its teeth! If you see a dog that appears to be moving rapidly but covering little ground or a dog that appears to cross over, rear feet to front feet, you are observing the results of incorrect structure and balance.

**Breed Type:** As important as balance is to the Rottweiler, so too does Breed type matter. It is the essence of the Rottweiler and serves to upper case the ideal image presented by the AKC standard. Breed type is the embodiment of those characteristics that most make a Rottweiler look like a Rottweiler. For example, while some may assert that the Rottweiler is not a head breed, a strong or pleasantly pronounced head is undeniably one of the hallmarks of

the breed and most certainly of a beautiful Rottweiler. Dark eyes and substantial bone are also characteristics of type that breeders strive to produce. Occasionally, ringside criticism is offered of exhibits that boast of type: "That dog is overdone." An exhibit's head may appear extreme or its bone may appear to be more substantial than other entries. Be cautious not to overly penalize such a dog if the excess type does not occur at the expense of balance and harmony of movement; it may be a superior dog. And sometimes it is the superior Rottweiler that looks like no other in the ring. And sometimes, given the alternatives, one might be wise to select "overdone" before he would lean toward "underdone". Some of us who breed can point to times when "overdone" is the best breeding solution for "underdone"! Uniquely beautiful breed type in combination with correct balance and harmonious movement is not always common and when it appears it can be so remarkably inconsistent with what else is exhibited on

a given day, that only a seasoned judge or breeder would recognize the quality rather than penalizing it for standing out as too different from the others.

More common, we find ourselves facing exhibits that boast various combinations of balance and breed type—and we have to be mindful of the image the AKC standard presents as the ideal Rottweiler, finding the exhibit that best presents that image. Sometimes it is so beautiful that a judge might forgive something in its structure, while in much the same way, another judge may forgive a dog somewhat lacking in type but with exceptionally beautiful proportions and balance. On these days, there is never more truth in the saying that *beauty is in the eyes of the beholder!*

**Incidentally:** The following are a few incidentals for you to consider as you embark upon judging Rottweilers:

Plan a ring procedure that will allow you to observe adequately the movement of your exhibits.

Rottweilers need room and are easier to judge in open spacious rings.

Always remember that much like a parent who brings to the teacher his best in the way of his child, your exhibitors often bring you their best with pride and anticipation. Exhibitor dignity is paramount and short of misconduct on his/her part, the exhibitor should be afforded always the courtesy of kindness and patience.

One misconception in the AKC ring is that a bigger dog is a better dog; in the AKC Rottweiler Standard, the structure, proportion and balance, standing and moving, are more important than size, as long as the size meets the range guidelines presented in the standard for his/her gender.

When counting teeth, be sure you look under the handler's fingers. You should count 42, 22 on the bottom (two canines, six incisors, eight premolars and six molars) and 20 on the top (two canines, six incisors, eight premolars and four molars).

On the down and back, have the dog stop facing you and if its front is turned away from you, walk around the dog to see it (and you can enjoy the view of the dog's freely stacked rear this way also). This is your opportunity to view the dog's front



Rottweiler: calm, confident and courageous. (Multi BIS/Multi BISS GCH Cammcastle's Friar Tuck, "Tux")



Rottweiler: a large, robust and powerful dog. (Multi BIS/Multi BISS Grand Ch. Cammcastle's Kore Elements ATTS, CGC, "Karbon")



Breed type are characteristics that make a Rottweiler look most like a Rottweiler. (Multi BISS Ch. Cammcastle's London Calling, "London")



The AKC Standard represents decades of generations bred unto the image of the Rottweiler it promotes. (Multi BISS ARC Select Ch. Cammcastle's X Equals One v QR, "Trig")



Motion is effortless, efficient and ground covering. (Multi Breed Winning Ch. Cammcastle's Valentino v QR, "Vinnie")

and rear assembly in his/her natural stance with no hand stacking.

Be patient with a young Rottweiler. There is a fine line between a condition of shyness (as penalized by the AKC Rottweiler Standard) and simple inexperience. If a puppy seems malleable but is not showing the bite easily, move the puppy and try again. Dogs do associate location with stress and sometimes simply moving him to another spot on the mat can make a difference.

Don't assume that you won't occasionally award a Rottweiler you feel is mediocre; sometimes this is true of the best one entered.

### Worthwhile Considerations

Sometimes it's tough to remember that bitches should be judged against bitches and dogs against dogs. As judged against others of his gender, the breed winner should be better than the Best of Opposite Sex winner judged against others of her gender—and vice versa. In other words, if the dog (male) is a better dog (male) than the bitch is a bitch, then he is the Breed winner; however, if the bitch is a better bitch than the dog is a dog, then the bitch is Best of Breed.

Resist efforts by exhibitors and advertisers to have you ignore—or worse, by your actions, rewrite—the AKC Rottweiler Standard. I once witnessed an exhibitor, donning an armband, enter the Rottweiler ring to show a pot bellied pig! While this action was conducted in good humor, it serves as a reminder that we as AKC judges cannot control the decisions exhibitors make about what they will enter and bring to the ring. Whether the entry is parody by farm animal or an orchestrated effort to challenge us to treat the standard (and ultimately the image of the AKC Rottweiler) as an evolutionary idiom (*an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of its constituent elements*), the final authority on the integrity with which the AKC Rottweiler standard is adjudicated stops with us. Breeders and exhibitors rely upon us to affirm through our actions the written standard and the image of the ideal Rottweiler it is intended to promote.

Judging the breed amounts to offering exhibitors our opinion by way of our actions. An inquiring Rottweiler exhibitor deserves to understand the judge's opinion, regardless of whether he (the exhibitor) agrees with it. And we as judges should be

able to support and explain our decisions. For the purposes of breeder-exhibitors, this can be essential; as a breeder myself, I find it helpful to understand what the judge sees even if it's less painful not to know.

### Conclusion

My English teacher also taught that although meaning came first, language is power. It is the power to persuade, to explain and to define. Through its characterizing negotiables, definitives and deal-breakers, the AKC Rottweiler Standard language provides for us as AKC judges that image of the ideal Rottweiler against which our exhibits are evaluated and selected. Even through time, Rottweiler heritage has prevailed in the AKC Standard and the ideal has not changed. Popular for its enduring depiction of the refinement of the Rottweiler, the language written by ADRK President Herr Pienkoss echoes: "beautiful, noble and proud looking. Size is not the main feature of the refined dog, but beautiful, clear outlines and a harmoniously proportioned body. Refinement does not express itself only in the form, but also in posture and character. Temperament without pushiness, courage without wildness, friendliness with a touch of reserve." Enjoy judging the Rottweiler and by all means, embrace the ideal Rotweiler image as contemplated by our AKC Rottweiler Standard, demonstrating regard and respect for its lovingly tailored language and the powerful implications found there for the Rottweiler, his heritage and for us, as his stewards. If God created the remarkable souls of our Rottweilers—and within each of us souls to admire them so deeply—then surely they are heaven bound creatures. Therefore, to be surrounded by their earthly forms in an AKC ring is a divine privilege to be honored. ■

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