

Event: IWCC Canada National Specialty Show

Date: September 17 & 18, 2005

Conformation Judge: Gretchen Bernardi, USA

It was my great honor to judge the 34th IWCC specialty and I could not have had a better time doing so, thanks in large part to my able steward, Rosemary Shoreman, aided by Judi Orsi on Sunday. The hospitality accorded me by the club's show committee was outstanding and then, what matters most, the dogs brought to me were, on the whole, very good. Because there was depth of quality in so many classes, I had the unusual privilege of being able to consider the finer points of the breed which, in most judging assignments, I have not given much weight.

I think most people active in the breed know that I like a strong, powerful wolfhound that is, as the oft-repeated adage goes, "fast enough to catch a wolf; once caught, strong enough to kill it." I try not to sacrifice the latter for the former.

To me, shape is the most important aspect to consider when judging the breed, because so much of its type is displayed in that shape: how the neck sits on the body, topline, bend of stifle, tuck-up, how the dog balances itself on its four legs. I do not like exaggerations in any aspect of a dog's shape for several reasons. First, we are bound to uphold the purpose of our breed and there is no exaggeration in true working dogs of any breed. In case we need to be reminded of this, we need only to compare the working specimen against the "show" specimen in, for example, Greyhounds, German Shepherd Dogs, Irish Setters, etc. It is especially important in our breed, since we have no means to test our Irish Wolfhounds against their natural prey.

There was, as usual, a disturbing range of toplines. But I was struck not so much by what common faults were in this entry of dogs, but by the absence of those faults that we always expect to see in the breed. I saw very few crooked pasterns, flat feet, noticeably bad hocks and that kind of "down and back" movement that can sometimes make one gasp. I would call attention to a trait that is not so much a fault now as a trend, and that is toward the very, very small front feet. I agree that these tightly knuckled, small feet are somehow attractive, but I think an animal that carries that much weight on its feet should have a stronger base of support. I have given this a great deal of thought and have considered horses, particularly the Arabian with its characteristically small hooves who seem to do very well. However, Irish Wolfhounds are not horses, but have a foot with digits that flex and give over many types of terrain. This is a good topic for further conversation. I did see some very upright pasterns which, if ignored in the breed, will lead to dire consequences.

I pose a question: do we breed dogs to be judged standing still or moving? I realize, of course, that a dog that is well-made and feels correct under one's hand should move well and that is usually the case. But what about the opposite and I am speaking specifically of front assembly? I don't think I have ever had the privilege of seeing in one place so many hounds with outstanding side movement, some almost breathtaking and a few of these had relatively upright front assemblies. I don't know why that is or the physics involved in the phenomenon, but I will tell you that I judged and placed these dogs on the move, not standing.

One last thing on movement: I believe it is any judge's job to find the best dog, regardless of the handling and presentation, bad or good. When going over a stacked dog, that is pretty easy to do, except in the cases in which the dog simply won't be touched. But doing so when the dog is moving is quite another story. Showing a wolfhound on a very tight lead or even a very short one does not cover any faults for a judge that is looking. In fact, it often makes faults more exaggerated as the dog struggles to find his own balance while his handler is busy working against it. There is virtually no wolfhound that is not improved by being shown on a loose lead. That is how he looks at home or in a field, where we all know they look their best.

I thought several times during the judging that our breed, at least our breed as represented at this specialty, is in very good shape. It is unusual to have so many good males at one time. And, thinking especially of the 12-18 Bitch and the Open Bitch classes, I was optimistic about the future, because there were so many good bitches of slightly different styles and from several different breeding programs.

I do want to make mention of a nice young male in the Open class that was out of the ribbons because his tail seemed to be completely dead and it bounced from hock to hock as the dog moved. Shortly after the class during a break, I walked by this dog and he stood up and wagged his tail perfectly well. If this is a new trick dogs have learned to keep out of the show ring, I hope it doesn't catch on.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Judge Gretchen Bernardi

JUNIOR PUPPY MALE

Starkeeper Cuhaven Digby

A very pretty young red brindle dog, carrying his tail with far too much youthful enthusiasm; slightly flat in topline for this age, but moved along nicely.

SENIOR PUPPY MALE

Lonnkyle Pathos

A very coltish (and to me, that's a compliment) youngster that is marvellous on the move. Because he has "gone to leg" he isn't quite as curvy in the rear, but it certainly does not inhibit his ground-covering ability. He is shown in rock hard condition. **Best Puppy.**

Ancient Rune of Kerry

A well-bodied, hard young dog with a nice shape and plenty of bone; not quite as sound on the donw-and-back as the first.

Rockhart Great Gatsby of Kerry

Another youngster with a beautiful body and shape and wonderful bone, but despite his good condition, isn't pulled together in the rear.

12-18 MONTH MALE

Wolfhaven Hearthside Dan Aerie

A very handsome, very masculine dog, exuding power and strength, moderate and well-balanced, with a powerful neck that is set on his body beautifully. He moves with confidence and determination. I believe he has grown in height a bit without his length keeping up, as he gave me a slightly short-backed impression, but a very nice dog and one to watch.

Wolfkin Odin

Another very strong and powerful dog, very similar to the first place dog, but not as settled in his topline.

Aotearoa Emrys Meriadoc

A handsome dog with a beautiful head, but not quite as deep or as powerful.

Rockhart Elysee

A beautiful dark brindle who is slightly steep in the croup, which throws his topline off at this age; very nicely laid on front assembly with a wide stifle.

CANADIAN BRED MALE

Wolfkin's Zydeco

This is a very moderate and workmanlike dog who moves well, a classic example of a dog using what he has to his advantage. Standing, his topline falls of slightly behind the withers, but it comes together on the move.

Starkeeper Kellamore Connor

Another good mover, but not quite as masculine and needs slightly more length of leg.

Starkeeper's Mallagan

Not quite the quality of the first two nor as shapely.

Castlekeeps Viking Soul & Spirit

A tall dog with a handsome, masculine head, but needs more shape in the rear and underline.

BRED BY EXHIBITOR MALE

Aotearoa Kia Ora

This dog has outstanding movement on both ends and from the side, reachy and powerful; a dog of great quality and outstanding

Rockhart Anthem

A very well-made masculine dog that is slightly too extreme in the rear for my taste, but who has a very well laid shoulder and upper arm.

Castlekeep's Soul of the Bard

Another strong masculine dog that needs more shape, especially in the rear.

Gairbraid's Edward De Ville

A handsome dog with tremendous bone, a beautiful shape and especially good width across the thigh. Because he is overweight and not in hard condition, he can't use his good construction and size to his advantage.

OPEN MALE

Pitlochry's Quintus

An upstanding young dog, looking especially youthful because he was in a class of more mature dogs. He has a beautiful, classic sighthound shape, but would be improved by more forechest and more spring of rib. And, although he would appear to be far too upright in the shoulder and upper arm, he is magnificent on the move, with those great long legs reaching out and covering the ground with grace and enthusiasm. For this, I forgave him his youth and awarded him. [Winners Dog](#)

Rockhart Kamouflage

A powerful masculine dog of quality with good width of stifle and a well-placed front assembly. He moves wide in front, but is a classic wolfhound type and deserving of [Reserve Winners Dog](#).

Tomahawke Wolfhaven Windtalker

A handsome dog in good condition that is just not as well made as one and two.

Gulliagh Brendan Behan

Another well-made dog with not quite the shape of the others.

AWARD OF MERIT

Ch. Curiann's Celtic Rune

It is not often that we can get down to the very fine points in judging our breed, but such was the case with this entry. A litter brother to the Best of Breed, this dog was not quite as well-conditioned as his brother and so did not cover the ground as effortlessly. Bigger and every so slightly more masculine, he is a dog of great quality and, again, a credit to those who bred him and also those who have kept him so well, a task we should never overlook and praise.

VETERAN MALE

Redtops Phantom of the Opera

I judged this dog as a puppy in the sweepstakes I did here six years ago and am happy to say that I gave him his class then. He's handsome and fit, with just the right shape, a veteran of which his owner and breeder can be proud.

BEST OF BREED/BEST CANADIAN BRED IN SPECIALTY

Ch. Curiann R Q Home to Wolfhaven

A five year old dog that proves the point that, although difficult to achieve, power and beauty are not incompatible and we should not give up in our quest for both. Impeccably groomed and presented, this dog was breathtaking in his side movement and dead sound on the straightaway. All soft curves with a shape that is close to perfect, he has very low hocks, which are too seldom seen, and a beautiful head with long muzzle and well-carried ears. It was a privilege to examine and to honor the dog, his owners and breeders.

JUNIOR PUPPY FEMALE

This is a nice class of baby girls all about the same age and very similar in shape. It is encouraging to see so many youngsters with good length of leg which has, in my opinion, been a problem in our breed and several others for a few years..

Aotearoa Emry Mango

The most together of the four today. She's shapely with good breadth of stifle and is well-balanced, both standing and on the move, carrying herself well.

Heathview Ella Draioct

Very similar in type with a very well-made front assembly, but soft in the topline now because, I think, of her slightly longer loin.

Gita of Aerie

Also similar in type to the first two, with a slightly soft topline and lacking strength in the hocks.

Starkeeper Cuhaven Darbee

This little girl was in good condition and had good depth and width, but she just wouldn't cooperate on the move, making it impossible to evaluate her in that regard.

SENIOR PUPPY FEMALE

Awesome Pawsome of Kerry

This is a well-bodied little girl who has herself altogether and moves with confidence. Let's hope her tail comes down a little with maturity.

Tailstorm Karontara Helix

This youngster looks like she just sprung up on leg overnight and can't quite figure out what to do with herself. She has a nice body and just can't quite get it all together.

12 TO 18 MONTH FEMALE

This is an outstanding class of bitches and one of the best on the day. It was one of those classes with so many good bitches that I was able to make decisions based on the finer point of our breed, a privilege that is rare.

Wolfkin Wolfhaven Gaia Curiann

This pretty girl is slightly shorter on the leg than I would prefer, but she is so balanced overall and moves so effortlessly that it hardly matters. She is sound coming and going and well-constructed front and rear.

Erinwood Niagara

Again, I would prefer slightly longer legs. Although she is a more powerful looking bitch, she could not surpass the first place on side movement and overall balance, but she pressed her very hard.

Hanta Wo's Cree of Tomahawke

This one has my preferred length of leg, and is really more my style, but she toed in ever so slightly, something I would overlook in a class of less quality.

Wolfhaven Don't Go Breakn My Heart

Another well-made bitch with correct length of leg. She is one of those dogs that is much better moving than standing. To quote verbatim from my recorder: "Standing still, she is a little common, but on the move she is pretty damned good."

CANADIAN BRED FEMALE

Castlekeep's Heavenly Freesoul

A powerful looking bitch with lovely curves in the front and good forechest who moves out soundly with determination.

Wolfkin's Corroboree

Another good moving bitch with more correct length of leg and good shape, but difficult to evaluate because she is giving her handler some difficulty, especially on the move.

Wolfkin Bydande for Wolfhaven

This dark, pretty bitch is slightly finer than the two in front of her, but has a good shape which she retained on the move.

BRED BY EXHIBITOR FEMALE

Taliesin's Luas

There is nothing flashy or exaggerated about this honest, workmanlike bitch, but she is very well made, with her front assembly laid on correctly and quality all around. She moves exactly as one would expect with her construction – soundly and with determination. [Reserve Winners Bitch](#).

Tomahawke's Manitou

Another honest, but more gracefully built bitch who also looks good on the move.

Sherwood's Abracadabra

A rather plain, but well-made bitch who is lacking in forechest and needs more curves, especially behind. She nevertheless moves soundly.

Northbrook of Aerie

This is a bitch of great quality, but she is not in the best condition and shows it standing by losing her topline and moving by not moving soundly. But her quality alone deserves to be awarded.

OPEN FEMALE

What a great class! I had to leave several very deserving bitches out of the ribbons who could easily have placed in lesser competition.

Stoneybrook Rockhart Rebecca

This winner is everything I like in an Irish Wolfhound bitch. She is strong and powerful with all of the right proportions. She has good width across the thigh and the right curves fore and aft, with excellent forechest. Just slightly shy of five years old, to be overly critical, she is slightly off coming and is showing more age than she should, especially on the move, which is certainly not energetic. [Winners Bitch](#), [Best of Winners](#), [Best of Opposite Sex](#)

Brimstone's Connemara Summer

Another strong bitch that moves soundly and with vigor. A younger bitch than the first, but of very similar type and with the same correct shape.

Stoneybrook Krystal

Another bitch of the same general type, she was shown in good, running condition and hard as a rock. With the correct shape and movement, this is one that could certainly do a wolfhound's job.

Knocknarea Tamsin

Another of the same type, strong, moving well and with powerful determination. This bitch and the two who stood in front of her simply found themselves in an outstanding class full of good bitches.

VETERAN FEMALE

Ch. Wolfhaven Meadows of Madness

A bitch just a few days shy of her ninth birthday, she won on her quality, but also because she reminds me of several great bitches I have known and admired in the past. Certainly she was not the most vigorous in the class, but her depth of body, width of stifle, low hocks and beautiful curves front and rear could be admired regardless. It was a pleasure to see and to reward this grand old lady.

Ch Kellcastle Starkeeper Vanilla

In better condition than the first by virtue of her relative "youth", this bitch looked and moved soundly and with power and suggested that she could do so for years to come.

Starkeeper Kellamore Viva

Another real veteran who was over nine years, but in fabulous condition. She moved well and is in very good condition.

Kindred's Brenna of Sherwood

A quality bitch with a crisp coat and lots of quality.

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Thank you once again for allowing me to judge puppy sweepstakes. It was a wonderful experience and how could anyone not love playing with puppies. I noticed a few things I wanted to mention.

I can't remember having a single shy puppy. Lots of wagging tails and happy smiles – how wonderful.

No noticeably bad bites.

A few too many high tails especially on the move.

I think overall that the shoulders seemed better than in other years with fewer really straight upper arms, but there were definitely more puppies with straighter rears, moving close behind and lacking width through the thigh.

When the Best in Sweepstakes puppy walked into the ring my first thought was "Now this is a stallion of a dog." And I thought that the Best of Opposite puppy complimented him nicely.

6 TO 9 MONTH MALE**Starkeeper Cuhaven Digby**

Nice head and good hard body. Pleasing shoulder and upper arm. Moved well coming and going but lacks reach. Held his ears flat but could rise them when he wanted to. High tail set.

9 TO 12 MONTH MALE**Lonnkyle Pathos**

Tall puppy. Average shoulder and decent rear. Nice underline. Moved with reach and drive. Nice head.

Ancient Rune of Kerry

Better shoulder than #1 but straighter in rear so not as balanced. Chest hasn't dropped yet and body gives the appearance of being tubular. High tail set and held high on the move.

12 TO 15 MONTH MALE – a nice class at a difficult age

Pitlochry's Ypsilon

Lovely type. Good shoulder and front assembly. Nice hard body and strong topline. Little straight in the rear. Sound on the move.

Wolfkin Odin

Lovely outline. Little straighter in front than #1. Sound and moving well. Good harsh coat and nice head.

Aotearoa Emrys Meriodoc

Taller puppy and being mischievous today. Wonderful masculine head. Nice depth of chest and good width of stifle. Steeper in the croup. Not as sound coming and going as #1 and #2.

Wolfkin Loki at Massapeag

Nice type and pretty good head. Good coat and nice underline but flatter topline. Balanced fore and aft but did not move well and carried tail high.

15 TO 18 MONTH MALE – loved both these boys

Wolfhaven Hearthside Dan Aerie

A big, tall, masculine dog, strong and balanced. Lovely masculine head and neck flowing into good shoulders right through a nice topline into a good rear. Nice short hock. Strong bone. Nice width through pelvis. Correct forechest and underline. Harsh coat. Moved with strength and kept his topline on the move. Needs to mature and will hopefully keep improving as he goes. [Best in Sweepstakes](#)

Wolfkin's Zydeco

Lovely type and shape. Nice head. Little less length of neck and straighter in front than #1. Good topline and underline and depth of chest. Nice width through pelvis and good width of stifle. Balanced and moved well.

6 TO 9 MONTH FEMALES – a class of really happy puppies**Heathview Ella Draioct**

Nice hard body. Short harsh coat. Pretty head. Longish neck. Balanced front and rear with a good forechest and underline. Rather flat in topline perhaps due to her long back. Would like to see more width through her second thigh.

Aotearoa Emry Mango

Very pretty puppy with a lovely soft expression. Softer coat. Flat topline but nice underline. Decent shoulder, nice forechest with good rear angulation.

Gita of Aerie

Another pretty puppy. Well balance. Lovely head and neck with good front and rear angulation but another flat topline.

Starkeeper Cuhaven Darbee

Such a happy puppy. Pretty head but shorter neck into a straighter shoulder. Softer coat. Nice length of body with the best topline in the class. Well angulated rear. Not moving well today.

9 TO 12 MONTH FEMALES**Tailstorm Karontara Helix**

Tall rangy puppy. Pretty feminine head and good ears. Harsh coat. Higher in rear right now and steep in croup. A finer built puppy but houndy.

Awesome Pawsome of Kerry

Nice shape. Good depth of chest and nice underline for her age. Straighter in rear. Curls her tail on the move.

12 TO 15 MONTH FEMALES**Wolfkin Wolfhaven Gaia Curiann**

Nice type and shape. Pretty head running down neck into good shoulders. Good forechest and underline. Little flat in topline. Balanced fore and aft. Well muscled but perhaps a bit plump. Moved well.

15 TO 18 MONTH FEMALES – a very nice class of young bitches**Hanta Wo's Cree of Tomahawke**

Tall rangy bitch. Nice shape. Pretty head, good forechest, pleasing topline and underline. Moved strongly with good reach and drive. **Best Opposite in Sweepstakes**

Wolfhaven Don't Go Breakn My Heart

Close to #1. Little straighter in front with a little less drop of chest. Solid bitch with a nice rear. Moved well.

Wolfkin's Corroboree

Pretty picture standing and on the move. Little shorter in body than #1 and #2 but balanced. Best rear in the class.

Erinwood Niagara

Solid bitch but little shorter on leg and flatter topline. Nice line from pretty head down neck and into shoulder. Good underline and rear.