

LENGTH OF LEG IN REVIEW

© GRCA Judges' Education 2018

PURPOSE: Length of leg is related to a breed's function and purpose. Breeds that hunt, like the Golden Retriever, need to have endurance and strength as well as agility, and be efficient at swimming. Their optimal length of leg is different than breeds which require speed, or breeds which work below ground. The Golden Retriever is not a trotting specialist, and exaggerated "reach and drive" are not called for. "Although...sporting dogs should be able to trot well for their build, in the field they are designed more for galloping than for trotting." (Curtis Brown)

ANATOMY: Length-to-height ratio is measured from breastbone to point of buttocks, and withers to ground. Length of leg is a ratio determined by distance from withers to elbows, and elbows to ground. Both have to be considered when discussing length of leg. A square breed, like the Doberman, generally has a 1:1 length of leg ratio. Speed breeds like the Greyhound are generally slightly longer in leg. Rectangular breeds, like the Corgi, are long and low: the distance from withers to point of elbow is proportionately greater than from elbow to ground. Dogs that are slightly off square, like the Golden Retriever, should have leg length that is approximately equal to the distance from withers to elbow.

AKC BREED STANDARD: "Length from breastbone to point of buttocks slightly greater than height at withers in ratio of 12:11." Length of leg is not addressed in the standard, but it will generally be correct when the 12:11 ratio is maintained.

DISCUSSION: "There is much discussion today about "tremendous reach and drive" (TRAD). So many seem to think that it is correct, and they want to produce it even in breeds whose standards distinctly describe a structure that won't produce long stride at the trot. So in order to lengthen stride on a dog, its proportions are changed. Square breeds are all of a sudden longer than tall. Slightly longer than tall breeds are longer still, and the length of their legs is shortened." (<https://www.petcha.com/the-modern-day-fairy-tale-the-myth-of-reach-and-drive/> January, 2015, Dogs in Review magazine)

JUDGING: Many Golden Retrievers today lack correct proportions and are longer and lower to the ground than the standard dictates. Shorter legs move more quickly (and have to, to keep up speed), and interference between front and rear is less likely when legs are shorter, but short legs are often accompanied by wide fronts (lack of convergence) and kicking up behind. A correct Golden can keep up with a flashy one, looks effortless doing so, and will endure longer in the field. But guess which one catches the judge's eye?

The length of coat on a Golden's brisket, which often falls well below the point of the elbow, can be deceptive when determining the correct length of leg and create an illusion of shorter leg length. It's important for judges to make a hands on determination of where the brisket is in relation to the elbow.

Ideally there should be a relatively short underline, which combined with correct length of leg, creates daylight under the dog. Again, coat can be deceptive in our breed vs. a short-coated breed, but when leg length is correct, one should not see a long and low rectangle under the dog but rather a rectangle closer to square.

Remember, the Golden Retriever is a hunting dog. Flashy movement, or tremendous reach and drive, expend a lot of energy and are very inefficient. They are not working gaits for ANY sporting breed.

REMINDER from the AKC breed standard: "Overall appearance, balance, gait and purpose to be given more emphasis than any of the component parts. Any departure from the described ideal shall be considered faulty to the degree to which it interferes with the breed's purpose..."

