

BACKLINE IN REVIEW

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PURPOSE: The backline is part of the axial skeleton and foundation on which the dog is built. The curves of the spine, like the curves and arches of a bridge, are designed for strength, support, and flexibility.

ANATOMY: The backline is part of the topline from the withers rearward to the point where the croup begins. At about the 10th thoracic vertebrae the spires change their angle, with the forward spires slanting toward the rear and the rearward spires slanting toward the front; the spires are shorter in this area, which is called the anticline, and may create a slight dip that is not a weakness. A sag between the withers and croup is a sway back, and does indicate weakness. An arch between the withers and croup in the lumbar region is a roached back, and may be due to incorrect structure or, in the case of a change in backline, a dog experiencing internal pain.

AKC BREED STANDARD: "Backline strong and level from withers to slightly sloping croup, whether standing or moving. Sloping backline, roach or sway back, to be faulted."

JUDGING: A strong, supple back is level in stance or in movement, without bouncing or rolling. Hands on examination while standing is necessary to ensure that a level back has not been artificially created by grooming.

Many correctly built dogs in hard working condition may show a slight dip just behind the withers called the anticline. This is not a fault.

A sloping, setter-like topline is undesirable.

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..."

[Portions of this article are from "Judging the Golden Retriever," © Marcia Schlehr, used with permission.]

