MEETING MINUTES

1st International Bernese Mountain Dog Judges' Meeting

August 28, 2015 (11 a.m. – 7 p.m.)

Hotel and Conference Center Rantasipi Airport, Helsinki, Finland

Attendees:

Name	Country
Satu Ylä-Mononen	Finland
Matti Tuominen	Finland
Johan Juslin	Finland
Hans Lehtinen	Finland
Soile Bister	Finland
Hannele Jokisilta	Finland
Anita Al-Bachy	Finland
Marjo Järventölä	Finland
Harri Lehkonen	Finland
Paula Heikkinen-Lehkonen	Finland
Kimmo Mustonen	Finland
Sanna Vakkilainen	Finland
Elena Ruskovaara	Finland
Juha Putkonen	Finland
Eeva Rautala	Finland
Tuire Okkola	Finland
Maija Mäkinen	Finland
Kirsi Tevalin	Finland
Hilkka Salohalla	Finland
Taina Nygård	Finland
Harry Tast	Finland
Jens Ramsing	Denmark
Lisbet Ramsing	Denmark
Gerner Sørensen	Denmark
Uschi Eisner	Austria
Norbert Bachman	Germany
Christian Schmid	Germany
Heike Schraven	Germany
Maija Heinilä	Norway
Elin Normannseth	Norway
Rali Suits (student)	Estonia
Regula Bürgi	Switzerland
Andrea Maret (student)	Switzerland
Joëlle Bardet	France
Anikó Istvánné Juhász	Hungary
Nikolett Szekeres (student)	Hungary
Stephen Green	United Kingdom
Jeanette Green	United Kingdom
Helen Davenport-Willis	United Kingdom
Gabriela Veiga	Portugal
Maria Amélia Taborda	Portugal
Svante Frisk	Sweden
Benjamin Donald Roland Taylor	Australia

1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

Suomen Sveitsinpaimenkoirat – Finlands Sennenhundar ry (Swiss Mountain & Cattle Dog Club of Finland) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015, and to mark the occasion the club decided to arrange a specialty show, an international health symposium and a meeting of the IWG in Helsinki. In connection with these events also an international meeting of Bernese Mountain Dog judges was proposed. This meeting was the first of its kind, and the proposal met with overwhelming support from judges who saw it as very necessary. The breed has changed over the years and so have the problems that judges keep seeing when at dog shows. In addition, there is much variation in the judging criteria: in the space of just a few months the same dog may be disqualified at one show and get a reserve CC at another; and at some shows all of the dogs shown have beed deemed "excellent" in quality. This is bound to cause confusion among dog owners and exhibitors.
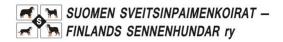
The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the current problems in Bernese Mountain Dog conformation and the principles of conformation judging, with special attention to the issues mentioned above. An invitation to the meeting was sent to all Bernese Mountain Dog breed associations and the event was advertised in Facebook, using the international judges' FB group and the FB page created specifically for the occasion. Participation was limited to conformation judges.

Prior to the meeting, a questionnaire was published on the judges' Facebook page, asking everyone to list which five problems they felt were the most pressing in the breed at the moment. More than 30 judges responded, their input was analysed and five main issues were selected for closer discussion: proportions, head & mouth, fronts, tails, and coats. In addition to the top five, other problems mentioned included rear angulations, movements, temperament, size, and color & markings. All of these were discussed in the meeting with reference to the English language version of the breed standard. The latest version of the breed standard was published in 2003 and its contents are the responsibility of Switzerland, the country of origin of the breed.

Of the 55 judges originally enrolled in the meeting, altogether 43 judges from 13 different countries eventually attended it, most of them also breeders. The meeting was chaired by Satu Ylä-Mononen and Matti Tuominen, with Anna Mäkinen from Finland as the secretary. The discussion was lively and active, all of the chosen problem areas were extensively dealt with and an attempt was made to find a common approach in judging. In these minutes, the sections in *italics* are direct quotes from the English language breed standard (=BS) of the FCI.

2. Opening and Short Introduction

Satu Ylä-Mononen from Finland opened the meeting, described the purpose and goals of the event, and extended a warm welcome to all of the numerous attendees. All participants were also briefly introduced.

3. Judges' Education in Finland - Greetings from the Finnish Kennel Club

   FCI Judge and Member of Finnish Kennel Club's Committee for Dog shows and Show Judges, Dr. Elena Ruskovaara, Finland, greeted the meeting on behalf of the Finnish Kennel Club and gave a short introduction to the education system that all Finnish judges go through before earning the right to judge at shows. In Finland all dog show results are published in the "Koiranet" database, often in real time or with a minimum delay after each show. This database is open to all Internet users and offers various ways to search data, listing all official results of individual dogs as well as all grades awarded by individual judges.

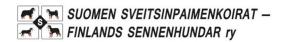4. Swiss Mountain Dogs - the "Ancient History"

   Uschi Eisner from Austria gave a presentation on the history of the Swiss Mountain Dogs: the Appenzell and Entlebuch Cattle Dog, Greater Swiss Mountain Dog and Bernese Mountain Dog. In order to understand the breeds we need to know the environment and conditions the different breeds come from, and what they looked like at the turn of the last century.

5. Some Early History of the Bernese Mountain dog

   Jens Utke Ramsing from Denmark subsequently illustrated the history of the Bernese since 1902 with a comprehensive collection of photos. Throughout its existence the breed has been plagued by the use of stud matadors, and these matadors have also left some negative traits in the bloodlines. Such problems as curled tails, epilepsy and poor temperament existed already a hundred years ago; in other words, the problems we are facing today have their roots many generations back. Modern breeders and judges must be able to identify these problems and continue to fight against them so that they cannot gain more ground once more. But also good things have happened; the overall construction is better, and the breed is not too far removed from its original conformation and function.

6. FCI BREED STANDARD – THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WITH BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG CONFORMATION IN 2015

   Prior to the meeting, judges were asked to give their list of the 5 top most problems with today's Bernese. More than 30 judges respondes, their lists were analyzed and five main issues were chosen for closer inspection. The top five were: proportions, heads & mouths, fronts, tails and coats. In addition to these, also rear angulations, movement, temperament, size and colours were discussed. Identifying problems is important so that corrective action can be taken in time to prevent them from getting more widespread in the breed, and also to prevent undesirable changes in breed type. The Bernese is a true farm dog, a guard and draught dog, and that is how we also want to keep it.

1.1. GENERAL APPEARANCE

BS: *"Longhaired, tricoloured, strong and agile working dog, of above medium size, with sturdily built limbs; harmonious and well balanced."*

CONCLUSION:

We want to preserve the breed true to its original function: it is a working farm dog, a guard and draught animal. This is what is was developed for, and it must always possess the capability to do its original work!

1.2. PROPORTIONS

BS: *"Height at withers: length of body (measured from the point of the shoulder to the point of the buttock) = 9: 10, rather compact than elongated. Ideal relation of height at withers: depth of chest = 2: 1."*
FAULTS: -
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS: -

PROBLEMS IN PROPORTIONS:

Many dogs have incorrect proportions.

The biggest problem is the height-length ratio: the dogs are too long in body (long loin) and/or too low to ground.

The correct Bernese breed type begins with the correct proportions. Judges must not only rely on their eyes, hands are needed to make sure that the depth of the chest is correct, etc. Bitches can be somewhat longer in body than dogs.

CONCLUSION:

Special attention must be given to correct proportions. Proportions must always be mentioned in the critique, and breeders need to be informed if a dog is incorrectly proportioned. The quality grade must be lowered if the proportions are not correct.

1.3. HEAD

BS: *"Strong. In size balanced to general appearance, not too massive.*
Skull: Viewed from the front and in profile little rounded. Frontal furrow hardly marked.
Stop: Well defined, but without being too pronounced.
Nose: Black.
Muzzle: Strong, of medium length; nasal bridge straight.
Lips: Close fitting; black.
Eyes: Dark brown, almond-shaped, with close fitting eyelids. Neither too deep-set nor prominent. Loose eyelids are faulty.

Ears: Medium-sized, set high, triangular in shape, slightly rounded at the tips, in repose hanging flat and close to the head. When alert, the rear part of the set-on is raised while the front edge of the ear remains close to the head.
FAULTS: -
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:
> *Split nose*
> *One or two blue eyes (wall eye)*
> *Entropion, ectropion"*

<u>MAIN PROBLEMS IN HEADS:</u>

Nowadays it is very hard to find dogs with a good head and expression. We need training material that shows examples of good, typical heads, and both judges and breeders must be educated to correctly identify the various shortcomings in the head. Breeders must concentrate on breeding dogs with good, typical heads and expressions. A typical head has the correct proportions of skull and foreface, correctly placed eyes with the correct shape and colour, well-placed ears, and the typical stop.

The most common faults are:
- Head shape!
- Light eye colour
- Round eyes
- Loose eyelids
- Loose lips
- Low earset
  - > Warm friendly expression is being lost!

<u>CONCLUSIONS:</u>

If a dog has any two of the faults listed above, the quality grade must be lowered by one step; if more than two, by two steps, etc. A dog with several faults in the head should not be awarded a quality grade higher than "good".
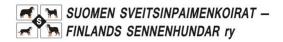
1.4.   BITE AND TEETH

BS: "Strong, complete scissor bite (molars 3 (M3) are not taken into consideration). Pincer bite accepted.
FAULTS: Irregular set of the incisors provided that the bite remains correct. Absence of any other teeth than 2 PM1 (premolars 1); the M3 (molars 3) are not taken into consideration.
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS: Undershot or overshot mouth, wry mouth"

<u>MAIN PROBLEMS IN BITE AND TEETH:</u>

Irregular bite and missing teeth. At the moment the breed standard also allows pincer bite; the necessity of this change was debated.

CONCLUSIONS:

The bite and any missing teeth must always be mentioned in the critique, and they should also affect the quality grade if necessary. As stated in the breed standard, the absence of two PM1 or M3 shall not be taken into consideration.

1.5.   FRONT: ANGULATIONS, FORECHEST, CHEST

BS: "Chest: Broad and deep, reaching to the elbows; forechest distinctly developed; ribcage of wide-oval section extending as well back as possible
Strong bones
Forequarters: General appearance: Forelegs seen from the front straight and parallel, standing rather wide apart.
Shoulders: Shoulder blade long, strong and well laid back, forming a not too obtuse angle with the upper arm, well attached to the chest, well muscled.
Upper arm: Long, set oblique.
Elbows: Close fitting; neither turned in nor out.
Forearm: Strong, straight.
FAULTS: Fine bones
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS: - "

MAIN PROBLEMS IN FRONTS:

- Lack of forechest (breadth and depth)
- Lack of angulation ->
    - Upright shoulders and short upper arm
- Short neck
- Poor front movement

CONCLUSIONS:

The biggest problems today are found in the front construction. Breeders and judges alike must understand how the front functions if they are to see what is wrong with it; this calls for more education. It is important to go over the front with the hands to really find out how it is constructed.

Articles dealing with the correct front construction are needed in breed magazines to increase awareness of the issue. Insufficient angulations and the lack of forechest must affect the quality grade. It is also important that the front and rear angulations are in balance: a sloping topline due to insufficient front angulations is a fault. Unbalanced angulations must result in a lower quality grade.

1.6.   TAIL

BS: "Bushy, reaching at least to the hocks; hanging straight down when at rest; carried level with back or slightly above when moving.
FAULTS: -
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:
Kinky tail, ring tail"

MAIN PROBLEMS IN TAILS:

- Tail set
- High tail carriage -> curled tails
- Short sloping croups
- "Dead" or "unnatural tails" (tail hangs limp between the rear legs, even when the dog is moving)

CONCLUSIONS:

Tail faults are still being overlooked; judges should pay more attention to the tail and always mention tail carriage in the critique.

High/gay tail carriage, curled tail and unnatural tail must cause deductions in the quality grade. A Bernese with a ring tail (like the Appenzeller tail) must be disqualified, like the breed standard requires.

The ideal Bernese tail is a natural continuation of the topline and sways happily from side to side, expressing the friendly, good-natured, relaxed temperament of the breed.

1.7.   COAT

BS: "HAIR: Long, shining, straight or slightly wavy.
COLOUR: Jet black main colour with rich tan markings on the cheeks, above the eyes, on all four legs and on the chest, and with white markings.
FAULTS:
Distinctly curly coat.
Faults of colour and markings
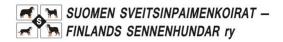*DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:*
Short coat, double coat (Stockhaar)
Other than tricoloured coat
Other main colour than black"

MAIN PROBLEMS IN COATS:

- Too short hair
- Over grooming!
- Trimmed dogs!

CONCLUSIONS:

The problem today is too short coats, and it is not always clear whether the coat is naturally short or caused by over-grooming. Either way, a short coat must result in a lower quality grade.

The coat of a Bernese must be natural, and males in particular should have longer hair on the chest (at least 5 cm).

The hair must not be trimmed with scissors, this is not a breed that requires trimming or grooming. Tidying the ears and feet is acceptable, nothing else!

Over-grooming must always be mentioned in the critique, and if necessary the quality grade can be lowered significantly because of it. In the future it is also possible to give the grade "cannot be judged", and grooming will be carefully monitored when judging. We do not want the breed to develop in this direction.

1.8. REAR ANGULATIONS

BS: "General appearance: Seen from the rear straight and parallel, not too close.
Upper thigh: Long, broad, strong and well muscled.
Stifle: Distinctly well bent.
Lower thigh: Long and oblique.
Hock joint: Strong, well angulated.
Metatarsus: Set almost vertically.
FAULTS:
Fine bones
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS: -
Pastern: Seen from the side almost upright, firm; seen from the front in straight line with the forearm.
Feet: Short, roundish; with well-knit, well-arched toes. Turned neither in nor out."

MAIN PROBLEMS IN REAR ANGULATIONS:

Lacking of balance with angulation
      - > over angulated hindquarters, less angulation in front
      -> sloping topline
Problems with rear pasterns -> long, weak

CONCLUSIONS:

Balanced front and rear angulations must be given special attention.

1.9. MOVEMENT

BS: "Sound and balanced movement in all gaits covering a lot of ground; free stride reaching well out in front, with good drive from behind; at the trot, coming and going, legs moving forward in a straight line.
FAULTS: -
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS: - "

MAIN PROBLEMS IN MOVEMENT:

Poor front movement; close or turned-out rear movement. Many dogs are in poor muscular condition.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Bernese must move parallel both coming and going. Close or turned-out rear movement should be reflected in the quality grade.

1.10. TEMPERAMENT

BS: "Self-confident, attentive, vigilant, fearless in every day situations; good-natured and devoted to his own people, self-assured and placid towards strangers; of medium temperament, docile

FAULTS:
Unsure behaviour
DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:
Aggressive, anxious or distinctly shy
Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities shall be disqualified."
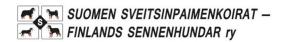
MAIN PROBLEMS IN TEMPERATURE AND BEHAVIOR:

Temperaments have improved over the past 20 years, and shy, fearful individuals are seen less often.

CONCLUSIONS:

Temperament is judged in accordance with the breed standard. Clearly nervous or shy dogs must be disqualified.

1.10. SIZE

BS: "Height at withers: dogs: 64-70 cm, ideal size: 66-68 cm, bitches: 58-66 cm, ideal size: 60-63 cm. "

MAIN PROBLEMS IN SIZE:

At the moment the size is not a problem.

CONCLUSIONS:

Size is judged in accordance with the breed standard.

1.12. COLOUR AND MARKINGS

BS: "Jet black main colour with rich tan markings on the cheeks, above the eyes, on all four legs and on the chest, and with white markings as follows:

Clean white symmetrical markings on the head: blaze extending towards the nose on both sides to a muzzle band; the blaze should not reach the tan markings above the eyes, and the white muzzle band should not extend beyond the corners of the mouth. Moderately broad, unbroken white marking on throat and chest. Desirable: white feet, white tip of tail. Tolerated: small white patch on nape of neck, small white anal patch.

FAULTS:
Absence of white on head.
Blaze too large and/or muzzle band reaching noticeably beyond the corners of the mouth.
White collar.
Large white patch on nape of neck (maximum diameter more than 6 cm).
White anal patch (maximum size 6 cm).
White markings on forelegs reaching distinctly beyond half-way of pasterns ("boots").
Disturbingly asymmetrical white markings on head and/or chest.
Black ticks and stripes within the white on the chest.
"Dirty" white (strong spots of pigmentation).
Black coat with a touch of brown or red.
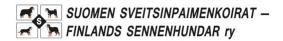*DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:*
Other than tricoloured coat
Other main colour than black"

MAIN PROBLEMS IN COLOUR AND MARKINGS:

Dogs with incorrect colour or markings are rarely seen at shows; colour is not a major problem.

CONCLUSIONS:

Colour is not the main issue when judging the Bernese, and thus it should not be given too much weight; the quality grade must be primarily dictated by other factors. For

example the absence of white colour on feet or tail is allowed and it should not lower the quality grade.

7. SUMMARY:

The chairpersons thanked everybody for their lively, enthusiastic input. Hopefully we can also keep up this active discussion in the same positive atmosphere. The goal of the meeting was not to change the breed standard but rather to give deeper insights into its interpretation and to find common ground and a shared approach for conformation judges. It was also felt necessary to highlight the problems seen today so that these can be given special attention in the show ring.

The meeting made it evident that the problems found in the breed are global, not limited to any one country or area, and all the attendees of the meeting agreed about them. All of the conclusions were formulated in a positive spirit and unanimously. The discussion revealed that the main problems in the breed are proportions, heads (including teeth and bite), fronts, tails, coats and incorrect grooming. These issues must be given particular attention in future judging. It is also necessary to communicate with breeders and make them aware of the situation so that they can focus on the right things in their breeding.

The attendees also expressed the wish that this judges' meeting should not be the only one of its kind; the next meeting could be held for example in connection with the international health symposium in 4 years from now.

On behalf of the judges meeting,

Satu Ylä-Mononrn   *Matti Tuominen*

Satu Ylä-Mononen   Matti Tuominen

12.9.2015/Satu Ylä-Mononen