

CAKE OR FROSTING?

What defines a Tibetan Terrier? That is, what defines its breed *type*? This breed developed naturally, as opposed to having been purposefully designed by humans. It comes from an incredibly difficult part of the world and it never led a gentle life. For purposes of survival through *nature's* design, the breed became moderately small, sturdy, extremely fast and agile for its size, and able to endure hardships that would have quickly extinguished a less resilient, more delicate type of dog. These qualities of moderate size, solidity and sturdiness, agility and endurance are *hallmarks* of a Tibetan Terrier. In other words, they are the essentials of the breed's *type*. And, of course, because type sets the breed apart from all others, it is the Tibetan Terrier's most important attribute.

A Tibetan Terrier is *typey* when he displays a balanced combination of the traits described in the breed standard. Each individual trait adds an integral part to the whole, from placement of the eyes, the fall of hair that must cover them, the proper size range, flat and completely unique feet, the right degree of substance to the prescribed manner of movement. In a typey Tibetan Terrier, these individual elements or traits of type combine to balance one another in such a way that they flow together seamlessly, no one trait overwhelming another.

A Tibetan Terrier's *style* is something quite different from his *type*. Whereas type refers to the breed's distinguishing traits, style refers to permissible variations within the breed. If type is a cake, style is its frosting. The texture of a half-baked cake cannot be improved by applying pounds of ornate frosting. Elaborate frosting cannot improve the overall quality of a cake that lacks an essential ingredient. The cake, not the frosting, is the main event. Really, the only purpose of frosting is to add an attractive but *optional* finishing touch to a product that could - and often does - stand very well alone. Before anyone can adequately judge the Tibetan Terrier, he *must* be able to tell one from the other.

In the show ring, and perhaps to its endangerment, the Tibetan Terrier is a breed that lends itself easily to the art of decoration. There's all that lush coat to play with. Those who have a talent for the art of sculpting swirls, flowers and fancy designs into a pile of frosting have a tendency to get carried away. The art of frosting the cake becomes an end in itself. The dog becomes a gorgeous package with nothing inside.

The essential nature and purpose of the Tibetan Terrier is not ornamental. When external, optional decoration becomes the focus of ring presentation, it has a tendency to replace underlying type. It happens because, in reality, it's easier to learn the art of cake decoration than to become a great chef. It's also easier to *judge a* cake by the looks of its frosting than by the quality of its ingredients, for the latter presumes one has some serious understanding of the kind and amount of ingredients required to fit a highly specific recipe. When beauty of presentation becomes the objective, and when that - style - is rewarded over substance, the breed is diminished. What judges reward *will be imitated*. And it is very, very easy for judges not intimately acquainted with this breed to be bamboozled by a dazzling display of frosting by clever presentation. It is elements of style that impact the eye first. This is a breed that comes in just about every color and pattern imaginable. Some of these are 'prettier' than others. The range of colors and markings is part of the breed's charm, but in terms of *type* it is also utterly beside the point! When Tibetan Terriers are rewarded by judges on the basis of their colors or markings or sophisticated conditioning or trimming of the coat or even by the incredible

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speed at which they can make it around the ring without landing on their noses, judges are rewarding the art of frosting!

To be both realistic and blunt, the American show judge has a growing tendency to reward the extreme. Especially among coated breeds, dogs presented to excess – often over coated, over-angulated and moved with undue speed - will win more often than they really should if the underlying breed type were the judge's primary consideration. This has created a generation of what one wise breeder-veterinarian aptly refers to as "great American generic show dogs." The Tibetan Terrier ring has become far from immune to the seduction of creatures displaying considerable eye appeal, but demonstrating less and less distinguishable breed type. They are very pretty to look at. This trend towards exaggeration damages breeds, because most exhibitors want only one thing from the judge: a win. By far the majority of exhibitors, regardless of the breed, are not asking judges to affirm the value of their breeding programs, assuming they even have such a thing, but rather just to let them know what bring into the ring if they want to win. And it is a fact that it is far easier for a Judge to look at the dog's presentation than to recognize its essence. How much dedicated study is required to figure out 'pretty' from 'prettier' and 'prettiest?' So, when judges tell exhibitors that 'frosting' will beat 'cake' eight or nine times out of ten, 'frosting' is what exhibitors will enter. The qualities that define a breed's uniqueness will be overlooked and not much later diminished or lost, all in the pursuit of the winning presentation. The breed will no longer be what it was.

Therefore, those who judge *cannot* delude themselves that they will not have influence over the course of a breed. Whether you welcome this influence or not, you are stuck with it! That is why breeders who feel a deep obligation to cherish and maintain breed type ask that you accord the essence of Tibetan Terrier breed type the same respect you would accord that of your own chosen breeds. Stylish presentation makes the breed attractive, but strength in type makes the breed! It would be tragic for the Tibetan Terrier to have survived over centuries in his native land, only to find himself unable to survive the dispensing of ribbons in the show ring.

Gayle Nittler

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