

## **Nordic Flatcoat Breeders conference 2010 - Denmark**

Day 1. – Breed standard - construction of a flatcoat.

On March 20-21 the scene was set for an event of international proportions – An invitation to the Nordic Flatcoat Breeders conference, was extended from Denmark. The 4 Nordic countries take turns hosting the event, every other year. This year Denmark was hosting the event, and for the purpose The Danish Flatcoat Society (DFS) had made arrangements with the Danish Kennel Club (DKK) in Solrød, for the use of their conference room and the grounds nearby for outdoor activities. The Danish chairman of the DFS welcomed everybody. He then briefly gave information in Danish, and the rest of the day would be mainly conducted in English, for the benefit of all our international guests. Normal practice has been that the conferences are only held for delegates from the participating countries; however, in 2010 the DFS chose to open up the conference for all interested parties. Therefore it was a rather larger group who met this year. All contributed to the great success of the event.

There was a fixed program, and Saturday was dedicated to the evaluation of the construction of the flatcoat. Breed specialists from Norway, Denmark, Sweden and England had been invited. Unfortunately, the Finnish judge was not able to attend. The judges presented themselves shortly. The panel consisted of: Erling Kjær Pedersen (Denmark), Lena Häggglund (Sweden), Anne-Berit Waskaas (Norway), and Brenda Hutchison (UK). All judges had a long history within the breed, and no doubt it was a highly experienced and most competent panel, which participated during the day-program. All of them had had flatcoats since the early-mid seventies so historically they had seen a lot of developments in the breed, being breeders themselves and authorised judges for the breed.

After the introduction Brenda Hutchison went through the English standard of the breed. Except for slight differences in the wording it's rather similar with the European standard from FCI we use in Europe. Brenda pointed out that she would go through the standard based on the dog's function and thus show the connection between the written standards and the tasks, which the dog must be able to perform. The standard is not a description of the optimal hunting dog, but rather a description, of how the optimal flatcoat is built. In this way it has been ensured that the flatcoats were constructed to be hunting dogs.

As is it the case for any other written words, interpretations are based on subjective observations and can therefore be interpreted broadly although to a rather limited extent. Here Brenda referred to many English breeders of Labrador retrievers, who leave the standard very open and thus "allow" dogs with diverse functions. This way the written word contains much flexibility – and therefore it is most important that the standards are always interpreted on the basis of the dog's function as a hunting dog.

Brenda started by explaining her way of distinguishing between severe faults and less severe failings. She requested the audience to keep that in mind all day. ALL dogs have failings, if you look for them, but it is important not to be concerned with all faults and failings, but on the contrary to see the dog as a whole, and then to judge it on the basis of the breed standard. Brenda encouraged all to not get hung up on details. If we do, then we will risk the loss of fine representatives that could bring many positive things to the breed.

General appearance

Brenda expressed her worries that the dogs we were watching at the show were made too big. She assumed that if everyone would make the dogs big, then this would become the mental picture, which the judges at the shows would assume and perceive as standard (and not too big), and in future it could change the interpretation of the standard, making big dogs more a rule rather than an exception. It is not desirable that a retriever having to fetch birds all day at a hunt is too big and heavy. The musculoskeletal system will most likely be worn out sooner than is the case for a small dog, and the dog will thus be more exposed to joint and skeleton sufferings. On the other hand we do not wish for dogs being too small and slight – their body and skeleton will not be strong enough to stand the work, whichever will and ability they possess. The motto was neither too small nor too big, but just the right size.

Whether a dog is perfect as to substance is not the big question as it comes to the Danish working dogs, as it is for the English dogs, where the difference in construction is generally more distinguished.

Characteristics:

Brenda explained that she had problems judging the expression “natural gun dog abilities” as a show judge. How do you observe that in a ring? Not necessarily a question, of whether the dogs were wagging their tails intensely or not. No fault or failing in the construction will present itself better (or worse for that matter), just because the dog is wagging its tail during the entire judgement. Brenda said that she understood more than well, that some dogs were not so inspired by being in a show ring. Another thing was that showing is not a question of wagging your tail the most; this will not necessarily win you the day. That said it was obvious that a happy and comfortable dog made a much better impression than a drooping dog being clearly uneasy in the ring.

Temper:

It was of great importance that the dogs were well-balanced to manage themselves among many other dogs of both sexes. They must be so mentally balanced that they are able to handle being crammed together on a hunting van in a large group without problems. Being well-balanced was of great importance.

Head and Skull:

One-piece head. Everything must be cut in one piece. No stops or large cheeks. The skull must be flat and otherwise well-proportioned compared to the head.

Jaws:

Brenda pointed out that there was no reason to overstate the length of the nose part, as even a cocker spaniel is able to carry a pheasant. However, the strength of the jaw is very important. A slender lower jaw makes it more difficult for the dog to carry the game correctly, and therefore a very slender nose part is not desirable either.

Bite:

Scissor bite is to prefer, but a level bite may be accepted. Dirty teeth, might be important in some dogs.

Eyes

Tight rims around the eyes will help the dog when it passes through bushes and the like – it will not get dirt into the eyes. Eye colour. Dark eyes to be preferred, but the colour has to be in keeping with the colour of the coat. Black is not desirable.

#### Ears

The ears must be placed sufficiently high on the head, and must be able to dry a tear from the corner of the eye.

#### Shoulder:

The length of the neck is decided by the position of the shoulder. A well laid-back shoulder and a well-proportioned length of the neck are crucial to the dog's ability to pick up a runner efficiently. Lengthy swan like necks are not desirable.

The angle of shoulder and upper arm is desirably 90 degrees. There must be symmetry and balance between the angulation of the front and the hind quarters in order to secure fluent movements and the hocks should be well let down.

#### Chest:

The chest bone must be well defined; the elbows must lie close to the chest, to ensure efficient movements.

The ribcage must be well-arched; the arch being broadest after the shoulder, and then more slender towards the lower back. The bones of the legs must not be too excessive, as the movements must be as efficient as possible. Excessive bone will of course take more strength and muscle mass to move.

Brenda illustrated her points about the most often experienced failings as to the dog's front:

Upright front angulation – the angle between shoulder blade and upper arm is more than 90 degrees. This reduces the body's shock-absorbing ability, once the dog is moving.

Too broad forequarters - the front part is broader than the hind quarters. In this case the dog has to compensate for the broad front when moving, and it will roll in the body during movement.

Narrow front – the dog must also in this case compensate when moving, in order to keep its balance. This will result in erratic movements, the dog will often run on "several tracks", i.e. the dog leaves more than two rows, when the feet hit the ground.

Queen Ann Front – a rounded, broad front which gives the impression that the dog can run with a barrel between the front legs. Elbows will be pointing out and the dog will be toing in.

The ideally constructed front is balanced and correctly angled, which allows the dog to run in two tracks, with hocks well let down and as little energy waste as possible.

#### The body:

"Well ribbed up" – the ribs continue along the dog. The loin must be short and square. A ratio of 75% ribs, 25% loin is ideal when judging the dog's balance.

Strong topline indicates a well-trained dog.

Angulation of the hind quarters – must correspond to the front angulation. Too much angulation in the hind quarters will make the dog compensate in the front movements when moving, to ensure that the fore- and hind legs will not collide.

Brenda noted that breeds with long hocks will usually indicate that the dogs were bred to run fast.

Feet and tail:

Flat feet have more trouble absorbing shocks.

Failing – gay tail. A tail carried over the topline. Ruin the impression.

Movements:

Ideally the dog must set its hind legs in the tracks of the forelegs. That means it must move in a right and a left track.

Short upper arm means short steps. Therefore, a correct length of the upper arm is required to ensure efficient movements.

The impression must be balanced. The dog must be shown at the right pace.

Coat:

As flat as possible.

Show dogs of good coat. The coat is the icing on the cake. Do not overdo it. Excessive coat will hinder the dog's function. For the Liver-coloured flatcoats; the colour should be dark, and not of the same colour as a Sussex spaniel.

Trimming

Excessive trimming has become quite modern. UK blames Scandinavia for that. Trimming has to support a fine dog, and it cannot create it.

Then it was time to go outside and look at live dogs. Unfortunately, the gods in charge of the weather was not on our side that day, as the rain was pouring down. The 4 judges were presented for 10 dogs of different quality, age and sex. They judged each of the dogs and gave them their personal critique, and then the audience could ask questions regarding the judging. The rainy weather dampened the discussions. Personally, I was glad that we have hunting dogs which can stand the rain – judging trimming would not have been easy under these conditions. So having felt the dogs and watched the movements the judges arrived at their individual decisions.

Here are some photos and critiques of the participating dogs. The judges took turns to be the first to present their critique. Here are all the critiques in a random order. 4 critiques per dog:

Males:

Dog No. 1



Erling Kjær Pedersen:

2 ½ year old male dog. Nice head and expression, good reach of neck, good topline, good tailset, well angulated, good chest, must not be any longer in the loin, good bone, good coat, movements ADEQUATE, acceptable front.

Lena Hägglund:

Young male not yet fully developed. Head with fine proportions, dark, well-shaped eyes, very good topline, slightly upright in the shoulder, good length of upper arm, good body for his age, very well angulated in the hind quarters, with a slightly high hock, good bone and feet. Moves with good reach from the side, rather unstable in front. Lovely attitude, with a constantly wagging tail. Excellent coat quality.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

Male dog of good size. Fine head and expression, good shoulder and good topline. Good bone, rather weak pastern, good body, well angulated hind quarters. Slightly narrow front movements, a little bit close behind. Good coat quality.

Brenda Hutchison:

2.5 year male. Still immature. Medium size. Well-shaped head. Good eye shape and color. Has enough brisket; elbows are a fraction loose. Good bone and straight front. Correct front pasterns but would like a

slightly shorter hock. Feet could be a little tighter. Correct angulation at both ends; also length of loin. Good tailset and carriage. Movement was rather erratic and there was a roll on the move.

#### Dog No. 2



#### Erling Kjær Pedersen

Good long head, nice eyes, fine expression, good reach neck, good topline, tail set a bit low, good angulated front and back, would prefer a deeper chest, good upper arm, front could be better, slightly short in hind movements, would prefer more bone. Coat adequate, a little bit loose in front. A bit long in the loin.

#### Lena Hägglund:

Slightly uneasy young male. Head with fine proportions, hazel eyes. Rather big and low-set ears. ADEQUATE topline, rather sloping croup. Slightly upright in the shoulder. Not sufficiently angulated. Rather underdeveloped body for his age. Correct bone. Feet ADEQUATE. Moves with short steps and lacks drive when moving, because of the construction of the croup. Slightly short hind movement. Good coat quality.

#### Anne-Berit Waskaas:

2 year-old male dog. Heavy head, needs more time to develop. Good shoulder, a bit steep in the upper arm. Good topline, but rather sloping croup. Would prefer more bone. Rather weak pastern, well angulated



hind quarters. A bit undeveloped in the body. Moves well as watched from the side, a bit limited as watched from the front and behind. Needs more self-confidence.

Brenda Hutchison:

2 year old male. Very immature, not enough bone and substance all through for his age. Good head shape and eyes. Ears a little long, set rather low/back on the head. Angulation at both ends was adequate. Narrow in front resulting in loose elbows which were evident on the move. Lacked extension when moving. Rather long in loin. Feet could be better. White hairs on chest.

Dog No. 3



Erling Kjær Pedersen

Balanced outline, should not become heavier, good length of head, skull a bit broad. Eyes could be darker, good topline, slightly low tailset. A bit upright in front angulation, well angulated behind. Heavy bone, rather weak pastern, correct depth of the chest, fine coat quality, sound movements, could be more elegant.

Lena Hägglund

4 ½ year-old male. Strong male dog, at bit too mature to my liking. I prefer a dog with a more elegant construction. Powerful masculine head, with rather pronounced cheeks. Well-shaped eyes with a good colour. Good topline, slight in the chest. Well-developed body, good bone structure of the legs, feet could

be tighter. Broad, well-muscled thighs. Moved well from the side and behind. Unstable movements in front. Very good coat quality.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

4 ½ year-old male dog. Head too heavy in the skull – more length of the head preferred. Good neck and shoulders. Good bone with good tight feet. Well-developed body, which should not become any heavier. Good topline. Well angulated, moved well from behind, broad in front movements, adequate movements from the side.

Brenda Hutchison:

4.5 year male. Very mature and balanced. Head not classical, rather Labrador-ish. Eye good, but a little round. Good angulation at both ends with plenty of heart-room; deep chest with well-fitting elbows. Firm topline. Loin length ok. Strong bone and correct feet although nails needed attention. Movement ok but would have liked more drive. A good dog spoilt by his head.

Dog No. 4



Erling Kjær Pedersen

Well balanced outline. Nice head, good neck and back, correct angulation, slightly low tailset, ribcage could be more arched. Sufficient depth of the chest, lacks forechest. Adequate bone. Good coat. Moved well. Could be more accurate in the front movements. Rather long in loin.



Lena Hägglund:

Well-lined and well-balanced working dog. Good head that should possibly be more filled out below the eyes. Good topline, Well-balanced angulation both in front and hind quarters. Possibly a rather slight body for his 5 years, but nice construction of the chest. Good bone and feet. Moves with long powerful steps. A bit unstable in front, because the chest has not sufficient depth and volume to stabilise the front movements. Excellent coat quality.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

5 year-old male dog. Very fine head and expression. Good shoulder and upper arm, good bone and good feet. A bit thin-bodied, good topline, well angulated hind quarters, rather narrow in front, good movements from the side.

Brenda Hutchison:

5 year old male. Very stylish with a classical head. Not such a dark eye as previous dog but within the standard. Good length of neck, straight front, correct amount of bone. Good feet. More angulated at rear than at front. Would have liked more brisket. Good topline. A little proud of his tail on the move. Racy outline. Looked elegant on the move but some inclination to pin in front.

Dog No. 5



Erling Kjær Pedersen

Nice length of head, a rather heavy skull, rather marked stop, strong nose part, good neck, very sloping croup, low tailset, very upright in the front angulation, well angulated behind, correct bone, lacks depth of chest and forechest. Moved sufficiently behind, but movements are too short in front, with tendency to pinning. Adequate coat.

Lena Hägglund

Undeveloped body for his age, body and head imbalanced (too much head compared to the body). Rather marked stop, round eyes. Strong back, sloping croup, which cause him to stand “under himself”. This also causes him to move with short stride. Not enough angulation in front and in the back. Would prefer a better bend of stifle to enable a better length of step on the move. Thin, underdeveloped ribcage, lacks forechest. Would prefer more bone and tighter feet. Good coat quality.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

Male dog, 3 years old. The head has nice lines, but with a pronounced stop and bright eyes. Good neck and good topline, but rather sloping croup. Insufficient bone, flat feet. Too thin body and lacks forechest. Well angulated hind quarters. Moved with drive from the side – narrow in front. Needs more self-confidence.

Brenda Hutchison:

3 year male. Too strong a head for his body, with ears set far back. Had very little forechest resulting in a terrier front when combined with upright shoulders and short upper arms. Undeveloped chest. Not enough bone. Hare-feet made worse by long nails. Good topline and short loin. Enough rear angulation, but because it didn't match the front the stride was affected. Caused front feet to flip in on the move. There was also some hackney action as a compensation.

Dog No. 8

No picture

Erling Kjær Pedersen

10 months old male dog. Outline seems a little bit heavy. Correct length of head, neck a bit short, good topline, very low tailset. Could have better depth of chest and more forechest. Correct bone. Rather thick coat. Moved a bit tight behind, and loose in front. Standing a bit cow-hocked. Better when moving. Would prefer more filling below the eyes.

Lena Hägglund:

Junior male dog with excellent coat – too mature to my taste. Volume of the coat contributes to the mature impression. Masculine head, which could have more racy details. Sloping topline both standing and when moving. Sloping croup. Good shoulders and upper arm. Hocks a bit weak. Good body for his age. Short stride in hind movements. Toing in in front movements, caused by width in elbows. Lots of thick coat. May give a less mature impression, once he changes his coat.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

Male dog – 10 months old. Rather heavy head and good expression. Very good bone. Would prefer more forechest, good shoulder and good topline. Sloping croup, good body, which must not become any heavier. Well-angulated behind. Rather straight in angulation of front and behind. Moved with short stride behind. Rather loose in front. Seems a bit heavy on the day – lacks the elegance of the flat.

Brenda Hutchison:

10 months male. Heavy and over mature, lacking raciness, although also carrying a very heavy coat. Throaty. Weak jaw for strength of head. Would like more length of neck and better angulated forequarters. Heavy bone but in keeping with overall balance. Good topline, short loin, sloping croup. Excessive rear angulation caused this youngster to stand cow hocked. Lovely feet.

Bitches

Dog No. 6



Erling Kjær Pedersen

Excellent, well balanced bitch, typical feminine head. Excellent reach of neck and topline. Excellent angulation both in front and rear. Good depth of chest, well balanced body. Correct bone. Excellent coat. Sound movements all around.

Lena Hägglund:

Beautiful and well-constructed older bitch of the highest quality, presented in a first-class, well-muscled



condition. Excellent size, beautiful, well-shaped head, lovely expression. Dark, well-shaped eyes. Excellent topline when standing, a little bit sloping on the move. Balanced angulation front and rear. Excellent body and correct bone. Excellent movements from all sides. Happy and outgoing attitude.

Ann-Berit Waskaas:

Beautiful older bitch, 11 years old, shows her age incredibly well. Feminine head with an excellent expression. Good reach of neck and good topline. Excellent front. Good bone. Rather flat feet, nice body. Well angulated hind quarters. Moved very well for her age. Excellent hind movements.

Brenda Hutchison:

11 year bitch – a smashing old lady. Moved like a youngster but would like a little more extension. Sweet head and expression. Good eyes. Nice bone, front and feet. Well-developed chest. Firm topline – excellent for age. Short deep body. Loin ok. Good rear angulation.

Dog No. 7



Erling Kjær Pedersen:

3 year-old bitch. Would prefer a more feminine expression. Would prefer less pronounced stop desirable. Nice neck and back, very low tailset. Would prefer angulated. Would prefer more depth of the chest and forechest. Would prefer more bone. Coat a bit short haired. Adequate movements, but a bit short in the stride.

Lena Hägglund:



3 year-old bitch. Good size, but rather undeveloped for her age. Not the best proportions between the nozzle and skull, as the skull is a bit broad, and has pronounced cheeks. Good neck, strong topline, sloping croup, a bit over-angulated in the hind quarters. Shoulders requested to be a little more laid-back. Hind quarters are, owing to the sloping croup, not powerful enough, and therefore movements do not have sufficient strength. Small of the back is arched when moving. Good coat quality.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

3 year-old bitch. Good size. Would prefer a more feminine head. Good shoulders and good topline, rather sloping croup. Would prefer more bone, good feet. Would prefer forechest, rather steep in the upper arm. Good body. Well angulated behind, inaccurate/erratic frontmovements.

Brenda Hutchison:

3 year bitch. Head reminiscent of a working lab, spoiled the expression. Had upright shoulders and was short in the upper arm. Very little forechest. Would like more bone. Feet ok. Deep well-developed chest and well-fitting elbows. Loin ok. Enough rear angulation. Sloping croup. Not much coat. Carrying too much weight which made her move wide in front. Movement was erratic. Tended to be 'bum high' on the move, possibly due to the imbalance between front and rear angulation.

Dog No. 9



Erling Kjær Pedersen:

Nice feminine head, good reach of neck and good topline. Tailset a bit low, well angulated, good depth of chest, rather long in the loin, adequate bone, Good coat, sound movements.

Lena Hägglund:

Old bitch – very fit – on the day not in her best coat. Nice head with correct proportions, kind expression. Strong good topline, croup slightly sloping. A bit short in the upper arm, hind quarters could be stronger both when standing and moving. Good feet, rather weak pastern.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

9 year-old bitch. Very good head and expression. Good reach of neck and good topline. Slightly sloping croup, good bone and weak pastern. Good body, adequate angulation behind, moves with slightly open elbows. Moved well behind.

Brenda Hutchison:

9 years bitch. Should not be any taller. Head ok. Front was correct. Would like better feet and pasterns were weak. Needed more forechest. Deep chest. A little long in loin. Not in best coat. Movement not bad. Pinning a little and elbows were loose.

Dog No. 10



Erling Kjær Pedersen:

10 ½ year-old bitch. Nice feminine head, nice eyes. Good reach of neck and topline. Well angulated front and rear. Good depth of chest, good feet, sound movements, Excellent type.

Lena Hägglund:

Fit older bitch of the highest quality. Very well-proportioned. Beautiful head and lovely expression! Excellent topline, lacks a little in the forechest. Good body with good length of ribcage. Balanced angulation, front and rear. Strong and stable behind. Correct bone and strong pastern. Moved steadily and with dignity.

Anne-Berit Waskaas:

10 ½ year-old bitch. Very good head and expression, good reach of neck and well laid back shoulder, good topline. Good bone, slightly upright in the shoulder, and pastern a bit weak. Lacking a little in forechest. Excellent body and well angulated hind quarters. Moves very well.

Brenda Hutchison:

10.5 year bitch. Very sweet old lady. Pretty head. Well-shaped eye of acceptable colour. Good neck, front and rear angulation. Correct front, bone and feet. Would like a little more forechest. Excellent topline, especially for her age. Correct tailset. Not well muscled and elbows were a bit loose – forgivable at her age. Moved soundly but without enthusiasm (maybe she didn't like the rain?).

Furthermore, Brenda gave this comment to her critiques of all the dogs: "Generally, I was looking for the combination of a good breed and a construction making the dog move efficiently and with stamina. Also I distinguished between "failings" (cosmetic errors) and "faults" (more serious errors)".

After the judging, lunch was served for all participants. A very welcome break and a good excuse for getting out of the rain and sit down indoors.

Next item on the agenda was a presentation from the breeders' committee about their work for the breed. The committee had distributed a questionnaire during lunch break, and the result was included in the presentation.

After the presentation the floor was open for questions from the audience.

Then the Health Committee gave a presentation. Dorte Rasmussen went through the committee's work over the years, with a focus on the recent examinations made:

- Examination of heart condition – no follow-up for different reasons
- Spondylose examinations – See, HUNDEN 2009 (The Danish Kennel Club Magazine). Result of the report was that for all practical purposes the majority of the dogs examined did not suffer from the illness.
- Information database from DKK. Statistical data. Comparison with the Nordic countries.
- Cancer – 2008 6<sup>th</sup> breed on the list of the most affected dog breed. Many kinds of cancer.
- DKK project – reply based on the Swedish RAS
- Health table on the home page.

At the end of the day all participants had the possibility of asking questions based on their experiences during the day. The various delegations presented their views as to what caused the most severe problems in the construction within the breed in their individual countries.

Brenda kicked off the discussion by telling about the problems she most often experienced when judging the English dogs. The general problem here is inadequate movement behind. This was in dogs seen in dogs which did not extend the hind legs enough when moving, their stride was limited, the hocks too long, or the likes. Brenda pointed out that problems which show up when moving generally originate from problems in the construction. A dog with incorrect construction will quite naturally try to compensate when moving. Thus the dog's movement is the key to judging the construction.

The Norwegian delegation emphasized a problem with sloping croups, and heads not quite as elegant as the standard described. They also recognised Brenda's observations on hind movements.

The Swedish and Finnish delegations had worries about upright front angulations, short upper arms, lack of forechest and size. Many of the dogs had become much too big. It is not the question whether a big dog can or will work, but a big and heavy dog will – all things considered - as a working retriever be worn out sooner than a small dog of similar construction.

From Denmark we backed the mentioned problems, and worried about overly angulated dogs and sloping croups.

Everyone agreed that construction and movement are co-dependent. A dog with balanced angulation is able to move efficiently and with the best utilisation of energy; compared to a dog which has better rear angulations than in the front. The kick off from well angulated hind quarters cannot be optimised, if the front quarters are not angulated to the same degree. Physical laws set the limits. Therefore, the dog has to compensate in one way or another when moving, which may show in many ways, but it is obvious when watching the dog on the move.

Brenda asked all participants and anyone reading this: Look past the top dogs when choosing your breeding partner. A top dog is not necessarily a good breeding dog. What's most important is whether the male dog possesses the exact and good points which may balance failures and faults of the bitch, and vice versa. If the dogs have good things in common at the same time, this will only be another advantage, meaning a further strengthening the offspring.

After a long and most inspiring day the chairman thanked everyone for their contributions, and all invited parties for participating and sharing their experiences. I am sure the day started many discussions on the way home. I myself was filled up with different and new impressions – my head filled to the brim with thousands of thoughts and ideas. So I just had to rest, and get ready for the fieldtrial event on Sunday.

Randi