



## 4<sup>th</sup> International Judges Meeting for Bernese Mountain Dogs

Thursday August 24<sup>th</sup> 2023 at Domaine de Divonne

Participants: 48 from 20 countries

List of participants:

Zoltan Baffia, Hungary

Joëlle Bardet, France

Patricia Barr, United Kingdom

Rick Berwick, Australia

Sandrine Boiteux, Switzerland

Lyn Brand, Australia

Regula Bürgi, Switzerland

Eustachius Casteels, Belgium

Ros Catt, Australia

Hana Chovancova, Czech Republic

Vaclav Chovanec, Czech Republic

Anne-Marie Class, France

Célia Cuellar, USA

Dan Cuellar, USA

Helen Davenport-Willis, United Kingdom

Alisa Ebnet, USA

Murayama Eitaro, Japan

Emily English, United Kingdom

Svante Frisk, Sweden

Terézia Gargusová, Slovakia

Stephen Green, United Kingdom

Karoline Gsell, Austria

Juhász Istvánne, Hungary

Martina Kopecká, Czech Republic

Margit Kortleve-Prins, Netherlands

Géraldine Lavergne, France

Bernard Leger, Switzerland

Maddalena, Manciani, Italia

Andrea Maret, Switzerland

Dr. Kira Martin, Hungary

Maurizio Mauro, Italia

Erikas Piskunovas, Lithuania

Jovita Piskunoviene, Lithuania

Lee Reynold, United Kingdom

Christian Schmid, Germany

Heike Schraven, Germany

Dalmiro Carlos Sirabo, Argentina

Jana Stefanová, Slovakia

Ksenija Steiner Potocnik, Slovenia

Nancy Stewart, USA

Joanne Sutton, United Kingdom

Matti Tuominen, Finland

Jens Utke Ramsing, Denmark

Lisbet Utke Ramsing, Denmark

Deborah Wilkins, USA

Satu Ylä-Mononen, Finland

Wendy van Dijk, Netherlands



### “Short introduction: who are we and why are we here?” by Andrea Maret, Switzerland

Andrea Maret, president of the Swiss Bernese Mountain Dog Club opens the meeting. The club organizing the meeting decides who is invited. In this meeting participate only judges for Bernese Mountain Dogs so we can discuss differences by country or otherwise open and freely.

Judges have an important role in the breed, so education is important.

Stop putting overgroomed dog in first place and look carefully at the anatomy and health.



## **“The biggest problem in the breed: front” by Vet. Melinda Baschera, Switzerland**

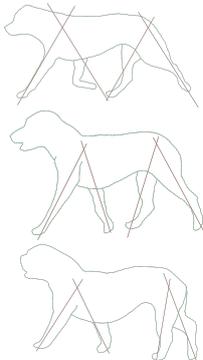
Vet. Melinda Baschera is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner and Certified Osteopath. She talks about things we face if dogs lack confirmation.

Form follows function – we see different body types in modern breeds

The wolf is built for persistent and efficient movement; covering long distances with short durations of maximum speed and strength.

Dogs are not wolves, but their progeny, refined and molded through thousands of years of breeding, “ideal” as in close to the original purpose and natural selection. Efficient movement, astounding endurance.

Molossoids are bred for protection, war and pulling. So the dogs are heavier, stout, broader and sometimes bigger. Common issues: short muzzles, oversized flews, excessive skin wrinkles, brachycephalic syndrome, back issues- IVDD and over- or under angulated hindlegs.



- Gaits differ between body types
- Rear drive needs to match front extension, regardless of body type
- **Flashy movements are usually less efficient**

### **The front – Forechest**

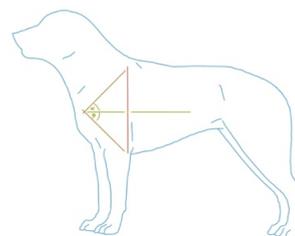
A good forechest is an indicator for a correct front. It carries a lot of weight and is necessary to walk and cover ground. You can cover a lot with grooming or feeding but we want muscles.

### **Judge: HANDS ON IS KEY !**

Lacking forechest or front, or both, can cause massive problems for the dog, like not being able to walk pain-free at an age of 6 years. From many of the faults mentioned dr. Baschera spoke about clinical cases from her experience.

### **The ideal shoulder:**

- Oblique
- Same length as upper arm
- Angle to horizontal line shoulder and upper arm are equal
- Peak of shoulder above elbow



Steep shoulders causes:

- Short and hard steps, less reach
- Jumping is more difficult
- Greater impact during movement
- Medical issues as OCD, biceps tendinitis, arthritis, arthrosis and more possible issues



### The ideal upper arm:

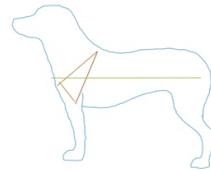
- Equal length as shoulder
- Oblique; forechest visible, top of shoulder above elbow
- Tip of forechest approx.. in the middle of the torso

### Too short upper arm causes:

- Legs not positioned under withers (body weight not well distributed)
- Lacking forechest (muscles not in functional positions)
- Alters head and neck carriage
- Flashier, but shorter strides – less reach

### Too steep upper arm

- Usually together with less than ideal chest
- Instability in the front (elbows)



### Too long upper arm

- Not as often as short or steep
- Usually 'nice' forechest due to placement
- Regal, proud look due to upright posture, forechest tip too high
- Shifts movement, shock absorption through the leg; abnormal wear and tear on joints

### Ideal elbow

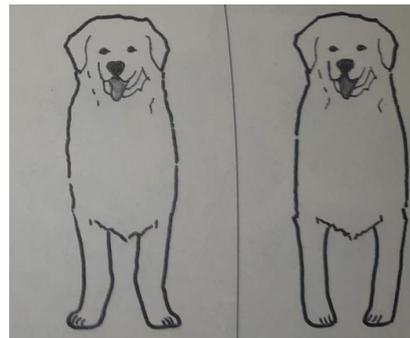
- A good elbow means/needs a good chest and upper arm
- Should reach deepest part of the chest
- No rotation – internal or external

### External rotation

- Often with broad, barrel-chested dogs
- Internal rotation of paws or closely placed
- Very prone to serious injuries

### Internal rotation

- More often in young, not yet developed dogs
- External rotation of the paws
- Wide stance of hind legs
- Unstable, prohibits proper shock absorption



### Ideal pasterns

- Front view = straight line
- Side view = slightly oblique (ca. 20 °)
- Relatively short

Absolutely essential for proper shock absorption and therefore reducing wear on joints!



### Too flexible

- Flat toes, wrong claw orientation, less surefooted
- Prone to injuries esp. with high speeds or deep/muddy ground

### Too short / steep

- Less shock absorption
- Desired in some races

### Too long

- Rare
- Heavier, requires more energy to move
- Often paired with too flexible, high wear on soft tissue (tendons, ligaments) – often injuries

### Ideal Paws

- Toes well arched, well knuckled
- Tightly places paw pads, solid thick
- Short and strong nails, growing in the direction of the ground

### “Rolling off” pads

- Toes curl up spontaneously while standing or in movement
- Pads are visible while paw touches the ground
- Pads are too small and too far apart
- Shifts weight to central pad, toes loose support
- Prone to injuries, infections, arthrosis

### Standard

The Bernese Mountain Dog has a nice standard: quite moderate dog. So keep the extremes away: they only cause problems. Choose for the moderate dogs, not the ones with extremes. It might not be the flashiest of the biggest, but it'll be the one who's fit for function.

***“Extreme bedeuten Probleme”***  
(Extreme mean problems)

### Discussion

Difficult for judges to judge conformation in few minutes time; look at the movement; if it looks easy. If the dog has issues on the skeleton, the gait will be the indicator.

Regarding judging puppies; most puppies don't grow equally. Evaluate them at 8 weeks, then after over one year. When judging in the ring: some things they will grow out of it, like the chest will grow broader, but not better.

Quantity of food for puppies and young dogs is hard, because they usually don't grow evenly. Use your eyes and hands. Diet is important for the individual dog and involved in the therapy. But food is not going to help the breed in the long run.



Evaluating the lecture for judges

### **How are we using this as international judges?**

We mention these problems in our critiques. Once you lose the good fronts, it's hard to get them back. Some of the problems we often see are wrong proportions. Some of the Bernese are square. This is not correct, it's a working breed.

We're all judges; we shouldn't give excellent all the time. We can make a difference and that's our job: describe the dog according to the standard! If you give a good, you're a "bad judge"; so describe it really good in the rapport. Please make technical critiques, make them more exact.

In some countries judges don't give critiques. Withhold ribbons is not popular. Also, we see a lot of allrounders only give excellent.

### **We're judging dogs, not pleasing people!**

This states not only for the beauty but also for health. Animal welfare organizations are getting there way, because we're not taking care of it.

Everyone will bring these subjects to the other Bernese judges in his or her country.

### **"When to disqualify a Bernese according to the breed standard? Serious problems in this breed" by Satu Ylä-Mononen, Finland**

Satu Ylä-Mononen is a breed specialist judge since 1991 and owner and breeder of Bernese Mountain Dogs since 1982, Hon Member of the Swiss Mountain and Cattle Dogs of Finland, member of the Finnish Kennel Club's Show and Judges Committee and Chairman of the Finnish Dog Show Judges' Society.

FCI standard for BMD is no. 45, date of publication 25, March 2003

#### **Disqualifying faults:**

##### Temperament/Behavior disk. faults

- **Aggressive, anxious or distinctly shy**
- Any dog clearly showing physical or **behavioral abnormalities**

We see more shy dogs in the ring and even some aggressive ones. BMD should be friendly family dogs. If they are shaking in the ring and/or you can't touch them: disqualify!

##### General appearance disk. faults

- Any dog clearly showing **physical** or behavioral **abnormalities**

Super straight, flat feet, weak haws; there are a lot of serious anatomical problems in the breed. These dogs can't pull a cart. We're getting used to the faults. Sometimes good to judge other breeds as well. Let the dogs do **free standing and use your hands!** Disqualify if serious physical abnormalities.



## Head disk. fault



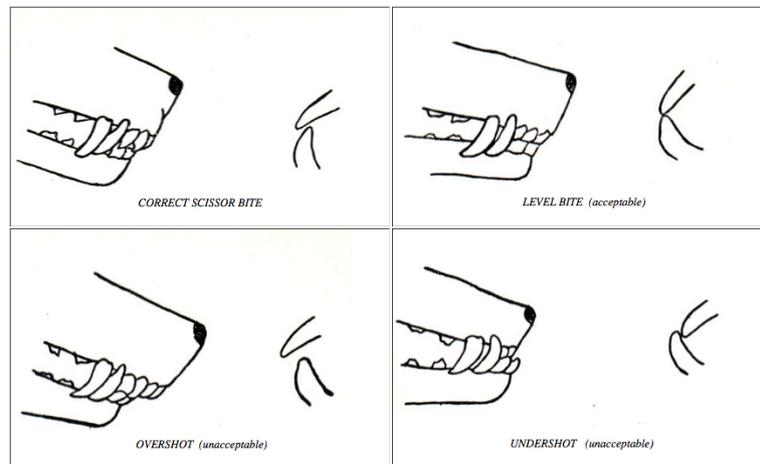
- **Split nose**

Hardly ever seen. Three breeds have it in their standard

## Jaw/Teeth

Strong, complete scissor bite. Pincer bite accepted

- Fault: Absence of any other teeth than 2 PM1 (premolars 1); the M3 (molars 3) are not taken into consideration
- **Disk. Fault: Undershot or overshot mouth, wry mouth**



Wry mouth or wry bite: occurs when one side of the jaw grows more than the other and shows as triangular defects in the incisor area. Wry bite is a severe inherited defect.



Sometimes the mouth changes, but we judge the dog today!

If there is a veterinarian report, read it carefully.

Sometimes canine is growing in the upperjaw; this is very painful for the dog; this is a physical abnormality

If we accept missing teeth and bad bites, it will get worse; don't give excellent. Bad bites; disqualify.



### Eyes disk. Faults

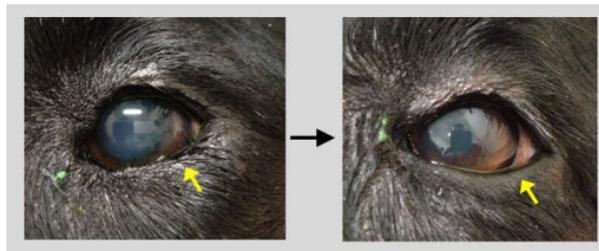
- **One or two blue eyes (wall eye)** (not often seen in the ring)
- **Entropion, ectropion**

Entropion is an abnormality of the eyelids in which the eyelid rolls inward.

Signs of entropion:

- Dogs will:
- squint
  - Hold the eye shut and
  - Teas excessively (epiphora)
  - A mucoid discharge

Treatment is a surgical correction, but entropion is considered hereditary



Left picture before surgery, right picture after. Don't use the dog for breeding, but the surgery is nicer for the dog.

If you can't put entropion (or ectropion) in your critique describe "eyelids rolls in/out wards, so you don't give a diagnose. Follow the standard and disqualify!

Ectropion is an outward-rolling eyelid

Still disqualifying, but used less as the disorder is less painful for the dog.

### Tail disk. Fault:

- **Kinky tail, ring tail**

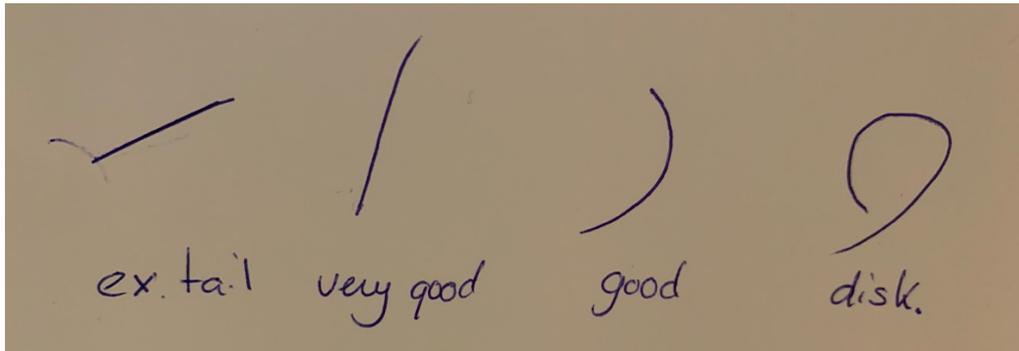


Ring tail

Kinky tail occurs as a result of

- Genetic abnormalities
- Tail fractures
- Limber tail syndrome

Follow the standard.



### Coat

Hair: Long shining, straight or slightly wavy

#### **Disk. Fault:**

- **Short coat, double coat (Stockhaar)**
- **Other than tri-colored coat**
- **Other main color than black**



Stockhaar (short, double coat)

In the ring hardly short, double coats, but often short badly-groomed coats- give dog lower grade (Structure of a long coat is very different to stockhaar)

### **Discussion**

Disqualifying:

If a dog is disqualified twice in some countries, it can't be showed ever again. So be sure to give disqualification – sometimes better “can not be judged”

UK: more people trim whiskers – in Austria not allowed – it is over-grooming

If it's getting common and we accept it- it will get worse. Tell them in your critiques the dog is over-groomed and therefor lower placed/graded.

**Judges should use their hands-  
we should be a good example ourselves!**

What do we do when dogs are very small, even champions: measure more dogs in the ring.  
Club can decide we measure all dogs of the breed.

If the temperament is right; you can measure a Bernese.



### **“Short ribcage and long loin – new problems on the horizon?” by Regula Bürgi, Switzerland**

The Bernese was a guard-, draught- and cattle dog, today they are also family- and versatile working dogs. Over 90% of all puppies are sold as family dogs. Without them no point in breeding. Even dogs that are not shown, need correct proportions (to avoid early joint problems) and they need longevity. We've to take care in terms of health, especially as judges. The judge sets the standard.

What says the standard (FCI nr. 45) to the chest / ribcage?

- Broad and deep
- Reaching to the elbows
- Ribcage of wide-oval section extending as well back as possible

Dogs with insufficiently deep or narrow have less space for lungs and heart; will not be very enduring.

A narrow chest doesn't give enough stability to stand. The dog will compensate with turned out front paws and in the rear more spread legs.

Pay attention to short ribcage and long in loin; if you see it, mention it in your critiques.

Mostly the shoulders are not laid back enough.

At the age of 8 weeks you'll see how the dog will look once grown up. The proportions will not change. So be careful in junior class with giving excellent mentioning "still developing"; things hardly ever improve.

A pointed (egg-shaped) ribcage is a health issue; it increases the load on the elbow and can cause problems.

Problems in the front cause different movement.

Standard: moving forward in a straight line. The weight is balanced.

Incorrect: Moving forward in an oblique line and turned out paws. Unbalanced.

Don't judge what you like; judge according to the standard!

Describe the dog according to the standard.

### **“Ring behavior – new rules in Europe because of emphasis on animal welfare” by Regula Bürgi, Switzerland**

It's no news what we're saying, it's your job according to the FCI.

We MUST consider health aspect as well.

In Switzerland already since 2016: no powder, no spray, no problem.

No slip leash without a stop.

New Animal Welfare rules since 2019 are now reviewed and enforced.

Dogs with listed health problems are not allowed to be judged at shows.

If you are too gentle to the exhibitors on the prohibited things; you can be punished. Not only the dog owner, but you as a judge as well. There will be inspectors from animal health fare, often vets at the shows.



### **Discussion:**

Austria: all dogs are checked on arrival. But there'll also be health inspectors that can report a judge.

*We shouldn't leave it to animal health organizations; we should take responsibility ourselves.*  
Education of breeders is the first point; they breed them before the dogs are shown to us.

Austria: breeding dogs should x-ray hips and elbows; non-breeders have to prove both parents are x-rayed (is on the pedigree).

It's almost the same in Germany. If you enter the show you turn in health certificates. This is a huge problem for shows, entries went down.

We're not save with Bernese, so we'll have to take action.

Enjoy your hobby, in 10 years we might not have dog shows anymore.

Animal welfare is grown through social media, using terrible pictures.

But if checking all dogs means they have to wait in the sun at 30 degrees; it's not doing anything for the dogs.

All of us have a responsibility, as owner, judges, etc. The dog shouldn't carry the consequences.

### **Conclusion by Satu Ylä-Mononen, Finland**

If we look at the difference with dogs in de seventies, the Bernes are getting longer coats, more bone, more angulation. The breed changed over 50 years.

We followed the standard, still the dogs look different. Do we want to change the breed in the future; NO! **So no extremes, also mid-sized, middle-strong.**

We also have a responsibility according to the welfare of the dogs.

Don't allow the exhibitors to pull up the dogs, don't allow the slip leash without stop.

As a judge you have to check it, it's your duty. The same counts for dog schools etc.

You can ask the ring steward to check the leashes, because if you see it as a judge you have to send them out.

### **Summery and closure**

Take responsibility for the breed by judging according to the standard and secure welfare for the dogs! Let's give a good example.

### **Closure by Satu Ylä Mononen and Andrea Maret**

Divonne-les-Baines, 24th August 2023

*Andrea Maret      Melinda Baschera      Regula Bürgi      Satu Ylä-Mononen      Wendy van Dijk*  
Andrea Maret   Melinda Baschera   Regula Bürgi   Satu Ylä-Mononen   Wendy van Dijk

Next international Bernese Mountain Dog judges' meeting is August 2025 in Helsinki, Finland. Only for qualified Bernese judges and judge students.  
Looking forward to see you there!