

In the United States, the Azawakh advanced to the Miscellaneous Group on 30th June, 2011 - and for the first time is qualified to compete in conformation in the American Kennel Club (AKC). It behooves new exhibitors to educate the judges at this early stage and set them in the correct direction. The AKC Azawakh breed standard is fundamentally the same as the current FCI standard - with the exception that in the U.S., we are "color blind" - and our breed standard indicates color is immaterial, whether it is the coat color or the eye color. I hope many AKC judges - all new at judging the Azawakh, take the time to study Dr. Vantu's article below.

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One Judge's View

by Dr. Cristian VANTU



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To describe this breed, I refer to the very good official [FCI] standard (*in Italics*), and present my writing as a letter from a breeder and an Azawakh judge to his colleagues. I write this, not only thinking about the future of the breed, but also to the judges desirous of understanding what an Azawakh is, and how we should judge this uncommon beauty to preserve its uniqueness. I have not found it necessary to dwell on the obvious aspects, but rather to emphasize the important points that make the difference between a good judge and a great judge.

If you want to judge the Azawakh, first of all try to forget all the other breeds, as well as the shapes and proportions to which you are accustomed. You must also try to forget classic dog temperament and behavior, and be prepared to accept something different.

As judges we are used to refer to a common model which all dogs must fit, but in this case the model does not exist. To perceive the right type of Azawakh, you will have to devote time and broaden your aesthetic criteria.

I remember I was walking in town with one of my dogs, a very young girl saying to her mother "Mom, look, a little horse." I knew then, that without mental preconceptions, this is what our eye sees: a little horse. The similarity between the Azawakh and the Arabian horse, especially in gait, is obvious.

Please remember the preceding comparison, remember that nature creates diversity and that the "canis lupus familiaris" is one of the best examples. We are not here to change it. Rather, we must understand the modern man's reasons for loving this breed are its elegance and its pride, not its unconditional loyalty and obedience. The Azawakh is not a slave but can be a lovely partner. We must appreciate the qualities that make the Azawakh great for its owners, and its right not to be touched by anyone, not even by us, the judges.



Photo 1a/1b Similarities Between The Arabian Horse And The Azawakh

A BRIEF HISTORY SUMMARY

The Azawakh is an African sighthound of afro-asian type which appeared in Europe towards 1970 and comes from the Nigerian middle basin, among others from the valley of the Azawakh. For hundreds of years he has been the companion of the nomads of the South-Sahara.

The first pair imported in 1968 into Europe was R'Eheouel and Reylane, by Gervais Coppé, then another pair (including Gao), was brought back by a Yugoslav diplomat from Mali to be delivered to Marshal Tito. This pair was at the origin of Mrs. Sekalec's lineage. Other dogs were imported later in France, and even today we import dogs of varying quality from Mali, Niger, Algeria and Burkina Faso. There is a lot of controversy between breeders and clubs because of the recent imports which brought not just new genes, beneficial to the genetic health of the breed, helping the European breeders to surmount the inbreeding crisis, but also new colors, not yet accepted by the standard. As judges we cannot have more than personal opinions about it. The French Breed Club is the only club authorized [by FCI] to change the [FCI] standard. Some of the dogs imported in the recent years are of excellent quality but not all of them. In the rush to introduce new genes, dogs of less quality have been used for breeding and the result can be seen in shows : overangulated hindquarters, tail set to high, short tail, long coat, too wide head, atypical expressions, atypical movement, and the worst : wrong type.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Particularly high in the leg and elegant, the Azawakh sighthound gives a general impression of great fineness. His bone structure and musculature are transparent beneath fine and lean tissues (skin). This sighthound presents itself as a racy dog whose body fits into a rectangle with its longer sides in vertical position.

IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS:

- Length of body/height at the withers = 9 : 10. This ratio may be slightly superior in the bitches.
- Depth of chest/height at the withers = about 4 : 10.
- Length of muzzle/length of head = 1 : 2.
- Width of skull/length of head = 4 : 10.

This is a short, a very short, the shortest dog, and the body proportions are a very important point in the standard, specific to this breed. It is high on the legs, dry, an architectural beauty with gothic lines. An Azawakh in show condition must have almost zero fat tissue and at least 2,3 ribs should be visible. An Azawakh must be elegant. There is no other word to describe it better than <<elegance>>.

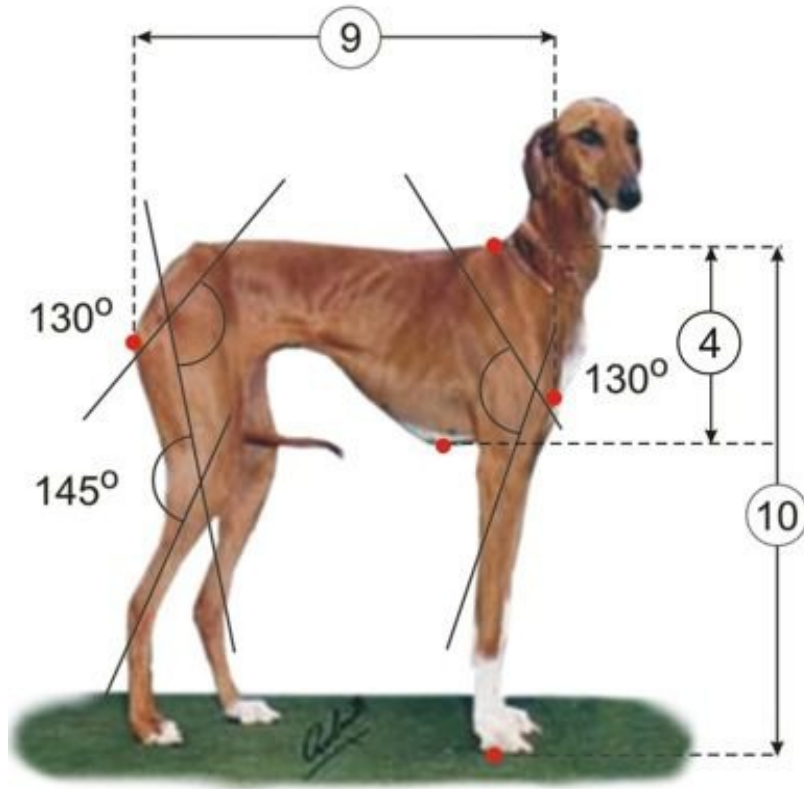


Photo 2: Proportions and Angles

BEHAVIOR / TEMPERAMENT:

Quick, attentive, distant, reserved with strangers and may even be unapproachable, but he can be gentle and affectionate with those he is willing to accept.

The Azawakh is closer to the proud <<domestic wolf>> than to the fully obedient dog. One must have a strong personality to be accepted as the master. It is hard to believe for those who have never had an Azawakh, but it can be very affectionate with its owner, when no <<possible enemy>> is within sight. True, this dog is very suspicious, but personally I like this trait. It might take some days before an Azawakh habituates itself to a new person, and even more for its acceptance [of the new person] in its environment. The Azawakh is the one that makes the approach and never the opposite.

This is the reason it is not good to touch them when we judge them, especially the young ones, because it stresses them and makes them detest dog shows from the very beginning. If a judge cannot understand how or why anyone would accept this behavior in a dog, it is only because he has never had an Azawakh. Personally I cannot imagine a totally and unconditionally obedient Azawakh, or one which is too friendly. I like this temperament, and this is one of the reasons I love this breed. Nobody likes fallen beauties, but we all love the mystery and dignity of natural beauties, even wildlife. Let's keep them pure.



Photo: the same dog that obeys a very little girl here, never accepts being touched by strangers. As long as it is an excellent partner for every member of its family, and can be correctly presented in a ring, its distrust should not be considered a fault but ... a quality.

CRANIAL REGION:

HEAD: *Long, fine, lean and chiseled, rather narrow, without excess.*

Skull: *It is almost flat, rather elongated. The width of the skull must definitely be inferior to half the length of the head. The directions of the axes of the skull and the muzzle are often slightly divergent towards the front. The superciliary arches and the frontal furrow are slightly marked. On the other hand, the occipital crest is clearly protruding and the occipital protuberance marked.*

Stop: *Very slightly marked.*

FACIAL REGION:

Nose: *Nostrils well opened. The nose is either black or brown.*

Muzzle: *Long, straight, fine towards the front without exaggeration.*

Jaws/Teeth: *Jaws long and strong. Scissor bite.*

Cheeks: *Flat.*

Eyes: *Almond shaped, quite large. Their color is dark or amber. Eyelids pigmented.*

Ears: *Set quite high. They are fine, always drooping and flat, quite wide at the base, close to the skull, never a «rose ear». Their shape is that of a triangle with a slightly rounded tip. Their base raises when the hound is attentive.*

NECK:

Good reach of neck which is long, fine and muscular, slightly arched. The skin is fine and does not form a dewlap.

Like everything about this dog, its expression is unique and difficult to describe in words. The best exercise is to look at the pictures attached to this material and become familiar with the expression of the head.



Photo 4-5-6: Correct Head Profiles and Expressions

The Azawakh has a long arched neck, with the head carried high, impassively and proudly.

Even though the standard does not mention any penalty for missing teeth, in my opinion the absence of PM1 or PM2 cannot be a disqualifying fault, but it does not mean that this dog may have no teeth. The judge should associate the absence of a tooth with the well being of the dog and the breed, and penalize accordingly. A scissor bite is the correct bite mentioned in the standard. The prognathism of the upper or lower jaw is an eliminating fault and the level bite is accepted as long as it is not mentioned as a fault.



Photo 7: Over coiled tail set too high, poor top line and croup.

Photo 8: Well set and carried tail, correct croup.

BODY:

Topline: Nearly straight, horizontal or slightly rising towards the hips.

Withers: Quite prominent.

Loin: Short, lean and often slightly arched.

Hip bones: Distinctly protruding and always placed at an equal or superior height to the height of the withers.

Croup: Oblique without accentuated slant.

Forechest: Not very wide.

Chest: Well developed in length, deep but without reaching elbow level. It is not very wide but must have enough space for the heart, so, the sternal region of the chest must not abruptly become narrow.

Ribs: Long, visible, slightly and evenly curved down to the sternum.

Underline : The sternal arch is accentuated and joined without abruptness to the belly which is tucked up very high below the lumbar arch.

The withers are protruding like the hip bones, which must at the same level or higher than the withers. The hip bones placed below the withers must be considered a serious fault.

In a dog with less subcutaneous tissue, the loin is sometimes more arched than usual and this should not be penalized so long as in movement the dog retains a good, straight top line.

The croup does not have an accentuated slant but is definitely oblique, and more often the fault is too horizontal a croup rather than one which is too steep.

Tail: Set low, long, thin, lean and tapered. Is covered with the same type of hair as that of the body and has a white brush at its extremity. Is carried hanging with the tip slightly raised, but when the dog is excited, it can be carried above the horizontal.



Photo 9: Too Pronounced Angulations / Photo 10: Correct Angulations / Photo 11: Straight Angulations

LIMBS:

FOREQUARTERS:

Seen as a whole: Long, fine, almost entirely vertical; legs perfectly well-set.

Shoulders: Long, lean and muscular and only slightly slanting seen in profile. The scapulo-humeral angle is very open (about 130°).

Forefeet: Rounded shape, with fine and tightly closed toes; the pads are pigmented.

HINDQUARTERS:

Seen as a whole: Long and lean; legs perfectly vertical.

Thighs: Long with prominent and lean muscles. The coxo-femoral angle is very open (about 130°).

Stifle : The femoro-tibial angle is very open (about 145°).

Hock : Hock joint and hock are straight and lean, without dewclaws.

Hind feet : Round shaped. Pads are pigmented.

The Azawakh has front angulation which is as open as its rear angulation but it should never have totally straight hocks. The metatarsus should be vertical, but in dogs that have a little longer second thigh, the angle between the metatarsal bone with the second thigh is less than 145. Obviously the metatarsal is not more vertical. This should not be considered a major fault if it does not affect the general appearance and the gait. Hocks that are too straight or have too much angulation that affect the distinctive type of Azawakh movement are not desired and should be penalized.

The front legs should be perfectly straight, but more often are turned outward about 5-10 degrees, which should not be considered a serious fault. The hind legs are perfectly straight.

GAIT / MOVEMENT:

Always very supple (lissom) and with particularly high action at the trot and the walk. The gallop is bouncy. The Azawakh gives a great impression of lightness, even elasticity. The movement is an essential point of the breed.



Photos: 12-13-14-15

The Azawakh has very open angulation which makes it impossible for a great extension of its limbs, but this is offset by the long legs that allow it to cover the terrain. An over-angulated dog may also have a spectacular gait but will not have the characteristic movement and should not be preferred. Looking at the front legs (at the trot) we see that they have a high action due to the extension of the humerus (upper arm) and not due to an exaggerated flexion of the radius that would be a <<hackney action>> and must be penalized. This is a very common judging fault in the Azawakh. A dog that has all the features of the standard but has a heavy trot or a hackney action cannot be considered for a championship certificate.

At the walk, on hard ground some Azawakh may flex their elbows more and lift their feet high, like a hackney action, but the same dog can have a good trot if the proportions and angles are good. This is a strong reason for us to judge their movement at a trot, where all the movement faults are obvious.

SKIN:

Fine, tight over the whole of the body.

COAT:

HAIR: Short, fine, down to none on the belly.

COLOR: Fawn with flecking limited to the extremities. All shades are admitted from light sable to dark fawn. The head may or may not have a black mask and the blaze is very inconstant. The coat has a white bib and a white brush at the tip of the tail. Each of the four limbs must have compulsorily a white « stocking », at least in shape of a trace on the feet. The black brindling is admitted.

Regarding the amount of white in the dog coat, this is determined by the "Self" allele which in order of dominance is: "S" - self = no white, "si" - self irish = up to 20% white, "sP" - piebald = between 20% and 80% white and "sw" - white = more than 80% white. In the Azawakh, the only acceptable allele is "si". No white at all, allele "S", as well as more than 20% white, allele "sP", are both disqualifying faults. [Note: this only applies to the FCI breed standard. In the U.S., the AKC Azawakh breed standard accepts all colors.]

Note: If the dog has white on the chest and/or neck, and 2 or 3 limbs, most of the time the white is present on the other limbs and on the tail too, but not in the same amount. The gene responsible for this is the same "si" and if you will check carefully, you will find probably just a few white hair between the toes or pads. This is not to be considered a fault. As well, the presence of a small white spot on the back of the neck is not a fault. Always remember that what the [FCI] standard wants is to preserve the "si" and to exclude the "S" and the "sP" genes.

SIZE AND WEIGHT:

Height at the withers:

Dogs: between 64 and 74 cm.

Bitches: between 60 and 70 cm.

Weight:

Dogs: about 20 - 25 kg.

Bitches: about 15 - 20 kg.

FAULTS : *Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog.*

- *General appearance : heavy.*
- *Skull too wide.*
- *Accentuated stop.*
- *Body too long.*
- *Hip bones placed distinctly lower than the withers.*
- *Distinct depigmentation of the nose.*

ELIMINATING FAULTS :

- *Lack of type (in particular when showing a recent crossing with another breed).*
- *Strong non-accidental anatomical deformation.*
- *Disabling anomaly - not acquired.*
- *All obvious redhibitory vices.*

- *Upper or lower prognathism.*
- *Light eye: i.e. bird of prey eyes.*
- *Ribs curving in at the base of the chest which thus takes on the look of « violin box ».*
- *Coat not conforming to the standard.*
- *Harsh or semi-long coat.*
- *Absence of any white marking at the extremity of one or more limbs.*
- *Size out by more than 3 cm from the standard measures.*
- *Timid character, panicky or aggressive with attack.*

When you are judging the Azawakh, before making the decision to disqualify a dog for this point, please remember what is written in the BEHAVIOR / TEMPERAMENT part of the standard:

« ... distant, reserved with strangers and may even be unapproachable. » If the dog is aggressive or attack without a reason, you should disqualify it, but do not try to touch it if you see it is not willing to be touched. Do not challenge it. This applies to many sighthounds, but for the Azawakh, it is almost a rule. When you are judging young dogs which are not yet used to the crowds around our show rings, please remember that this breed is accustomed to large, open areas and fewer people. Our shows are not like their natural habitat, but the opposite. Also please consider handling errors. Sometimes, probably most of the time, this is the major problem and for this reason the dog «cannot be judged» but should not be disqualified for a behavior fault.

Photos 3-5-6-12: Vantu and Sipos / insolens - Romania
 Photos 1 / b, 13: Susannah Thyni / ZounAdu-Sweden
 Photos 14, 15: Corine Lundqvist / de Garde-Épée - France
 Photo 2: A.u.U. Hochgesand / Aulad al Sahara's - Germany
 Photo 4: David Moore / Idiiyat-es-Sahel - USA