

Keeshond Movement

*Original article was written by Kathy Stewart and published in the July 1993 issue of DOGS in CANADA magazine.
Revised July 1999.*

A lot more than structure goes into the makings of a good moving dog. One must also consider carriage, attitude, ligamentation, shape and timing of each foot, the back in motion, and overall conditioning. The late Sandy Krueger (Traveler Keeshonden) wrote, " A Kees with head up, neck arched, tail curled and carried flat against his back, and moving in one continuous motion, with no sway or jarring anywhere -- a just pick them up and put them down leg action, and briskly trotting off for a good time -- that's a typical Kees gait". There is a lot to be considered in this statement.

How a dog moves may be determined by considering the following:

- 1) What was the dog originally bred to do and how should it be built to allow it to accomplish this task?
- 2) How should a dog be built to provide the least amount of deterioration (jarring) of the joints and bones with age?
- 3) How should a dog be built to provide balanced gait, and
- 4) If you have the desire to win with your dog, what do the judges want to see?

Following is my opinion of what a correct moving Kees should be.

Our dogs should parallel track, which means that their feet fall on either side of a centerline of travel. Because they have a barrel chest, the front and rear legs do not move on the same plane. Foot prints left by the front feet should be slightly wider than those left by the rear feet.

Looking at a Keeshond COMING TOWARDS YOU, you should see straight legs converging slightly towards a center point. The faster the dog goes, the more the legs converge. Their feet should turn neither in nor out. Pasterns should be firm, showing a moderate amount of bend in motion, which helps prevent jarring to the rest of the front leg assembly. Elbows should be close to the body. The movement is straight and clean.

Viewed FROM BEHIND, the rear legs, parallel at a stand, should converge to the same degree as the front legs in motion. The legs should be straight from the hip to the toes -- not hocking or toeing in or out. Remember that the feet are landing on either side of a center line of travel. The pad of the foot should be seen when the rear leg is extended backward. The front legs should be barely visible, staying directly in front of the rear legs. That is, the body should not be crabbing or moving in a sideways motion. Please remember that a dog that has "a barrel (chest) well rounded" will move with its front feet landing slightly wider than the rear feet.

Other things can/should be observed as the dog moves away. If the dog has a sloping topline, tail correctly placed (close to the back) and if the neck is properly carried, you will be able to see the head as he moves away. Weak pasterns and fronts that are toeing in or out will also be quite

apparent. A balanced dog will move more smoothly. If the tail is remaining fairly steady, then it is likely that the dog is using what he has very well.

If the dog's front is to be in balance with the rear, it is mandatory that the angles (front and rear) be the same. What this means is that the angle formed between the shoulder and upper arm is equal to the angle formed between the hip bone and the upper thigh. We generally look for moderate angulation in our Kees. The shoulder, upper arm, and foreleg should be the same length; as are hip bone and upper thigh. While standing the Keeshond should not have totally upright pasterns, nor should they have a great slant to them. A slope of about 15 - 20 degrees is perfect (in my opinion). A perpendicular line dropped from the top of the withers to the floor, should touch the back of the elbow. This shows that the dog not only has proper bone length, but also has the proper layback. One should also be able to feel a pronounced prosternum at the front, between the two points of shoulder.

In SIDE GAIT, one should see the front legs moving to the same degree as the back legs. The hind feet should not interfere with the front feet. We want to see the same amount of reach and drive in the front as we do in the rear. Another way of saying this is: When the legs are at their furthest point of extension there should be the same amount of distance from the ground to the front foot as there is from the ground to the rear foot.

If you see a Keeshond who shows somewhat of a hackneyed gait, is flipping its front feet, or lacks forward reach in the front legs you should check for a shorter upper arm, and/or weak pasterns. In the rear you should not see a dog who has an exaggerated kick-up, with little or no forward drive. This often results from a too flat and/or short croup. Note also, that the topline should be fairly steady. There should be no noticeable up/down or side to side motion.

The Keeshond, in the photo above, is nicely balanced. Note that the angle that is formed under the body by the front legs is similar to the angle formed by the rear legs. The amount of forward extension is similar to the amount of rear extension. The rear foot is planted just behind the front foot. The pasterns are strong and straight. The head in motion is slightly lower than when standing. If a perpendicular line was dropped from the tip of the nose it should touch the front foot at its farthest extension. The tail is carried well over the back. Please also note that in motion a Keeshond will often pin its ears close to its head. This is not to be faulted, provided that when stopped and alert the ears are up.

It has been my experience that Keeshonden with balanced gait plus moderate amount of reach and drive, have a smoother, more effortless gait and are more likely to win in the show ring. In my opinion, this is what we should be aiming for.