

## 204 *The Standard*



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### Neck, Topline, Body

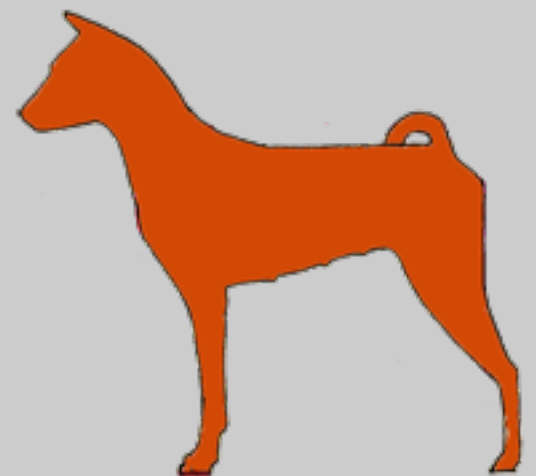
The Basenji Standard states:



*Neck of good length, well crested and slightly full at base of throat. Well set into shoulders. Topline—Back level. Body—Balanced with a short back, short coupled and ending in a definite waist. Ribs moderately sprung, deep to elbows and oval. Slight forechest in front of point of shoulder. Chest of medium width. Tail is set high on topline, bends acutely forward and lies well curled over to either side.*

This section of the Standard covers a great deal. It goes a long way in establishing the typical "outline" for our breed. This section combined with "Size, Proportion, Substance" develops the profile image that defines a Basenji. Without such an image the breed is not unique.

Now in step with the Standard we can build this outline and the correct Basenji profile here.





The first two sentences ***"Neck of good length, well crested and slightly full at base of throat. Well set into shoulders."*** work together. Going back to the skeleton representation we can see the bone structure builds a picture of these sentences from the Standard.

The actual neck begins at the first vertebra of the spine. The neck is the portion of spine between the skull and where the long-spined vertebra begin. However, the apparent end of the neck is formed by the angle of the shoulder blade. An upright blade will make the neck appear shorter. A moderately laid back shoulder blade will make the neck appear longer. The *"neck of good length"* provides length to the muscle that extends from the head to the upper arm, which improves the rotation and motion of the front leg assembly. It is the musculature that gives the neck its crest.

It is also the structure and musculature of the shoulder and upper arm that creates the width to make the base of the throat *"slightly full."*

While we tend to only consider the skeleton as structure, the muscle is also important throughout the dog. The features the Standard calls such as length and placement of bones allows for better musculature for the dog.



You cannot achieve *"well set into shoulders"* on a straight shouldered dog. This can be demonstrated by reusing a set of photos (above) from the Forequarters section.



Here are examples showing very nice breed representatives for those two sentences about the neck from the Standard.



Do not let markings on the neck influence you. The "perfect" collar can improve the apparent length of neck, especially in a photo. The two photos above are the same puppy photographed from the opposite sides to demonstrate this point.

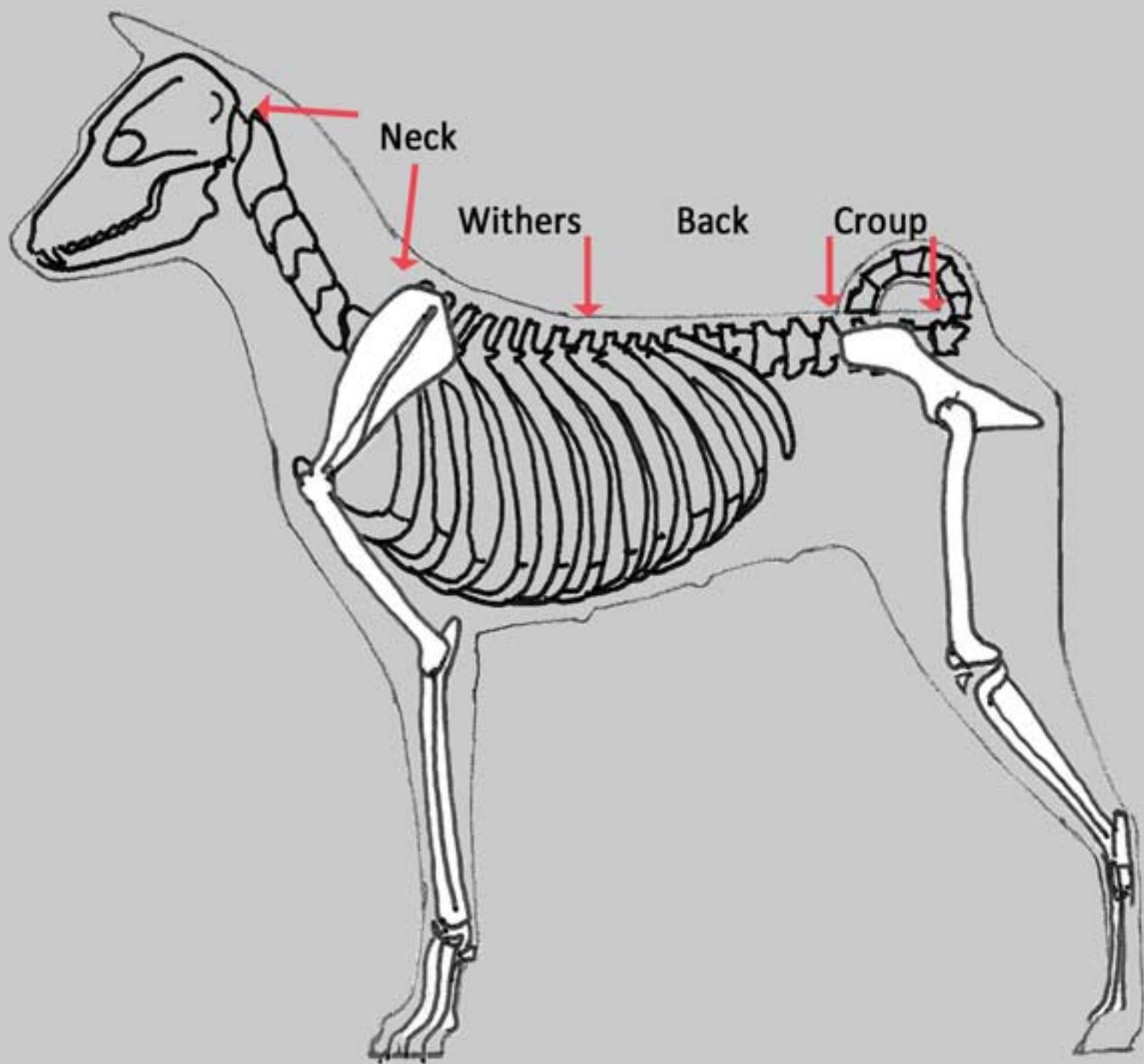


The two photos above show ewe necks. The Dall sheep demonstrates the origin of the name. The dog has a typical ewe neck with its reverse curve. The neck appears to come from in front of the shoulders. This is undesirable in a Basenji.



The dog on the left has a neck that comes directly out of the straight shoulders. It appears to be a cylinder stuck onto the body with no transition into the shoulders. Breeder-judge Irene Terry wrote in a recent critique: *"We hear so much about poor front assembly and our breed is no exception. The short upper arm and upright shoulder alters the whole front assembly giving an outline where the neck comes straight down to meet the withers at right angles, losing the lovely flow from neck through shoulders to a level back, spoiling the whole outline."* The cleared photos on the right compare the abrupt neck to a good neck.

**Topline—Back level** requires a clear definition which appears in Dr. H. R. Spira's "Canine Terminology" "back" means: *"In anatomical terms, the back is that portion of the topline commencing from a point just behind the withers and ending at the loins/croup junction, i.e., the combined thoracic and lumbar vertebral regions of the spine."*



Above is a diagram with general areas along the spine of the dog. The beginnings and ends are marked by arrows. The terms generally used to define the features are between the appropriate arrows. The loin, also sometimes described as the coupling is that part of the spine that is between the end of the rib cage and the place on the topline where the hip joins the spine. The back includes the loin.



Authors who have written about Basenjis and the breed standards over the years have always required the back be level. This means the back should be level when the hocks are vertical and the dog is posed as shown in the photo above and as depicted in the diagram above that.

The first ever Basenji Standard is the British one, which is the same as the 1943 AKC Standard regarding body: *"The body should be short and level."* It was 1954 when the American Standard introduced the term back with *"The body should be short and the back level."* The level back or body has always been demanded for the correct Basenji. Unfortunately toplines that are high behind or dipping in the middle are not an unusual problem in the breed and should be considered faulty.



It is important to note that it is easy to be confused by the creation of an inaccurate picture of a dog by altering the way the dog is set up. Do not be deluded by the "picture" that can be created by how the dog is set. For example, see the two photos above of the same dog. On the left, the dog is not overstretched in the rear and the faulty topline is apparent. On the right, the rear is extended with hocks well beyond vertical to bring the

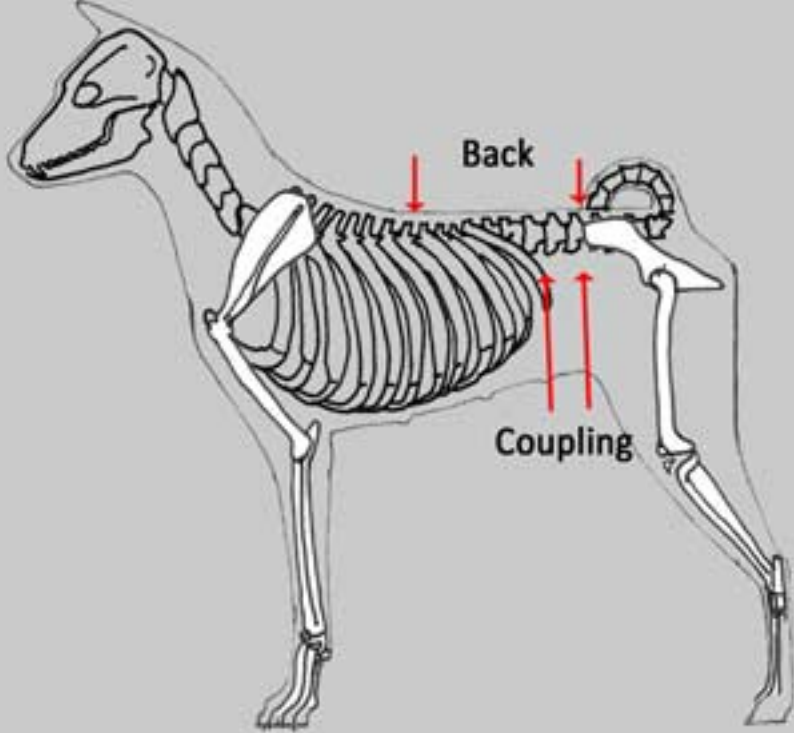
rear down and give the illusion of a level back. In order to make the right decisions for your breeding program, be on the look out for this quick show ring fix and choose the dog with the truly level back.



The back should be level with the dog standing with the hocks vertical, it should not be necessary to pose the dog with the rear extended out behind to bring the rear on the dog down to make the back level. Incidentally, if the rear is over-extended on a dog with a good correct, level back, the topline would look like it was sloping.

The back is one of the points in which specialized breeds differ from our multi-purpose Basenji. The sighthounds generally have a very different back with great flexibility requested from significantly more arch through the loin. Sighthounds appear to be in action even while standing still because they are set to spring into a gallop. In the correct Basenji any arching over the loin should be very slight and the rear of the dog should not be higher than the back.

**Body—Balanced with a short back, short coupled and ending in a definite waist.** Balance is important in many ways to make a good Basenji. For example, dogs should have balanced angulation fore and aft. The size of the head needs to be in balance with the total dog. But, what is the meaning of "*balanced*" in the sentence on body in the Standard? This is a bit elusive but it can be looked at in a couple of ways. First the body viewed from the profile and the front needs to be in balance. The meaning when you are viewing the dog in profile is that the body weight is distributed between the rear and the front leg assemblies in a balanced fashion as shown in the photos just above and below. The construction of the rear can be part of this balance or lack of balance. A dog with a narrow rear leg, lacking muscle width and strength may easily appear heavier in the front. Dogs that appear to carry more of their body mass on the front or rear assembly are unbalanced.



The back and the coupling, also sometimes called the loin, are shown clearly on the diagram and the shadows make it clear on the photos as well. The waist or tuck up is also shown well. The waist is usually a bit thicker on a male but the dog's body should not be a tube lacking definition at the waist. Looking again at extremes think of the deep tuck up that sighthound breeds have. This allows them to improve the coiled up galloping position. Some sturdy breeds such as the Labrador retriever hardly want to have a waist or tuck up on their dogs. One description heard was a Lab should be built like a railway boxcar.



All-breed Australian judge and Basenji breeder Doreen Duffin writes clearly on these relationships here: "Back length is the distance from the withers to the hip bones, and, while the distance from the withers to the last rib should not be too short thus depriving the dog of heart and lung room, the length of loin should be short to give the overall impression of a short back. Again, remembering that the Basenji is a hunting dog which must be capable of twisting and turning suddenly, the loin should not be too short as to hinder him in this function, nor too long to show slackness and weakness. Any length of

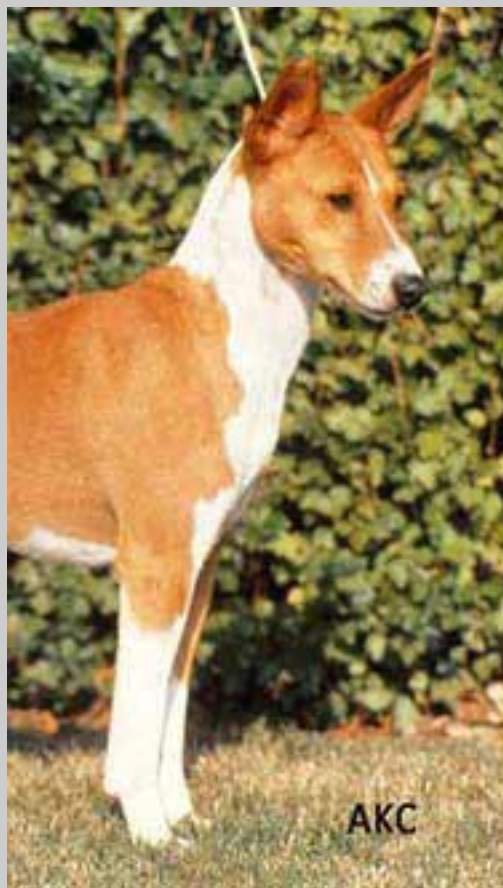


body should come from the sloping shoulder and well developed hindquarters."



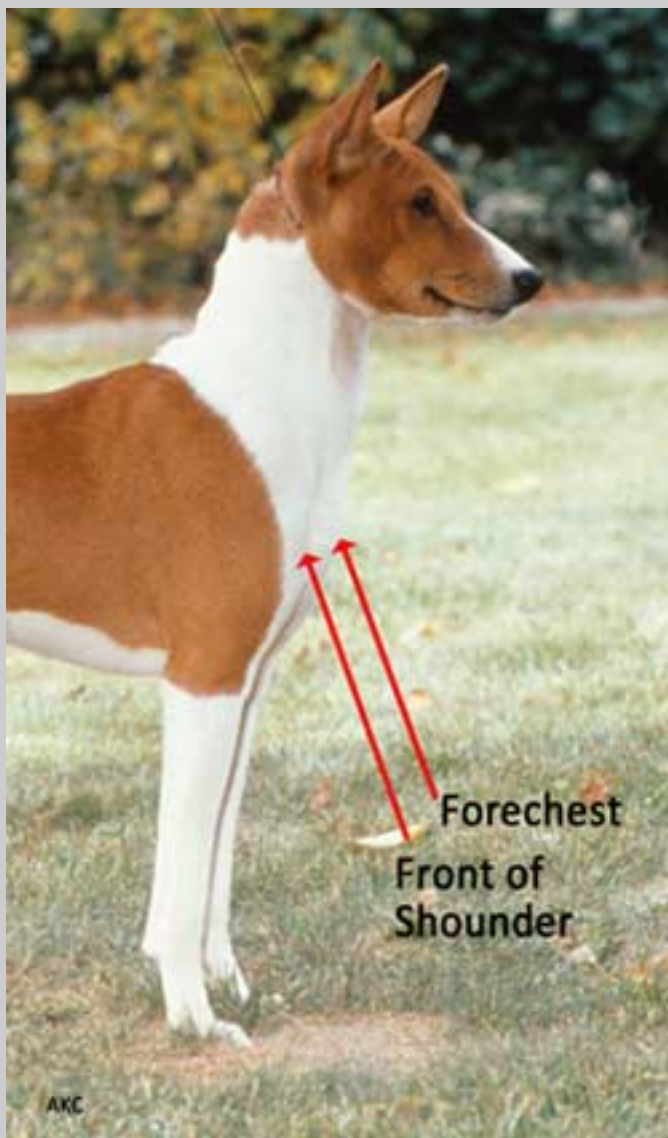
These two photos show several body faults. The red dog is quite unbalanced with weight unevenly distributed. The forequarters seem to carry quite a bit of the mass of the body. Also, the entire body is long. The black dog lacks tuck up making a tubular body shape and he has both a long rib cage and a long loin.

**"Ribs moderately sprung, deep to elbows and oval"** describes the rib cage as a cross section as moderately sprung and an oval. The rib cage carries and protects the heart and lung. It is important that there is room in the rib cage for the lungs to expand as the dog works. If the dog's rib cage is too narrow (also known as slab sided) there will not be room for expansion. But the advantage of room in the rib cage must be balanced with aerodynamics and a width that allows the shoulder and upper arm to fit properly around it when standing and to rotate around it at the trot and gallop. Even the rear legs reach around rib cage plus the front legs to coil up in the gallop. So the ribcage should not be too wide and interfere with these transitions as the dog moves.



The photo on the left above shows the rib cage is "*deep to elbows.*" The middle photo shows how the shoulder and upper arm fit around the rib cage. The photo on the left is a dog with a well shaped rib cage. The actual shape is not quite so even as the oval shown on the photo but you can see how the shoulder and upper arm fit around the shape of the ribs. If you want to imagine the opposite extreme in rib shape, think of the bulldog's broad build and its function as compared to a Basenji.

**"Chest of medium width"** is visible in the photo to the right above. Two faulty chest widths are shown at the right. Sometimes you see a dog standing quite wide in front; a barrel or very rounded rib cage can force the legs apart affecting the dog's stance and all its movement. If the rib cage is very narrow, then the front legs will be too close together. These proportions of width to height and leg length will provide clues when looking for the correct chest width. However, the best way to evaluate the shape of the ribs is with your hands on the dog. The dog on the right in this photo also demonstrates the undesirable "cathedral" front that is formed when the front is hollowed out instead of well filled in as shown on the dog in the photo above this one.



**"Deep to elbows"** again allows the maximum amount of lung and heart room without compromising movement. This is shown in the photo to the left with the elbows stopping just at the base of the ribs. This photo also demonstrates the desired "**slight forechest in front of the shoulder.**" The front of the shoulders is the joint where the upper arm meets the shoulder blade.



Tailset is a critical feature with dramatic effect on both the outline of the dog and in the way the dog moves. The Standard states: **"Tail is set high on topline, bends acutely forward ..."** Let's look above at our skeletal representation again. Here is the structure of a proper tailset and photo of a dog with a proper tailset. Not only does the set of the tail finish off the topline in a tidy manner making the dog appear appropriately short in the back but it also suggests that the pelvis is at a good angle and that the rear action will be good.

The sentence ends **"... and lies well curled over to either side"** as shown in the photo to the right.



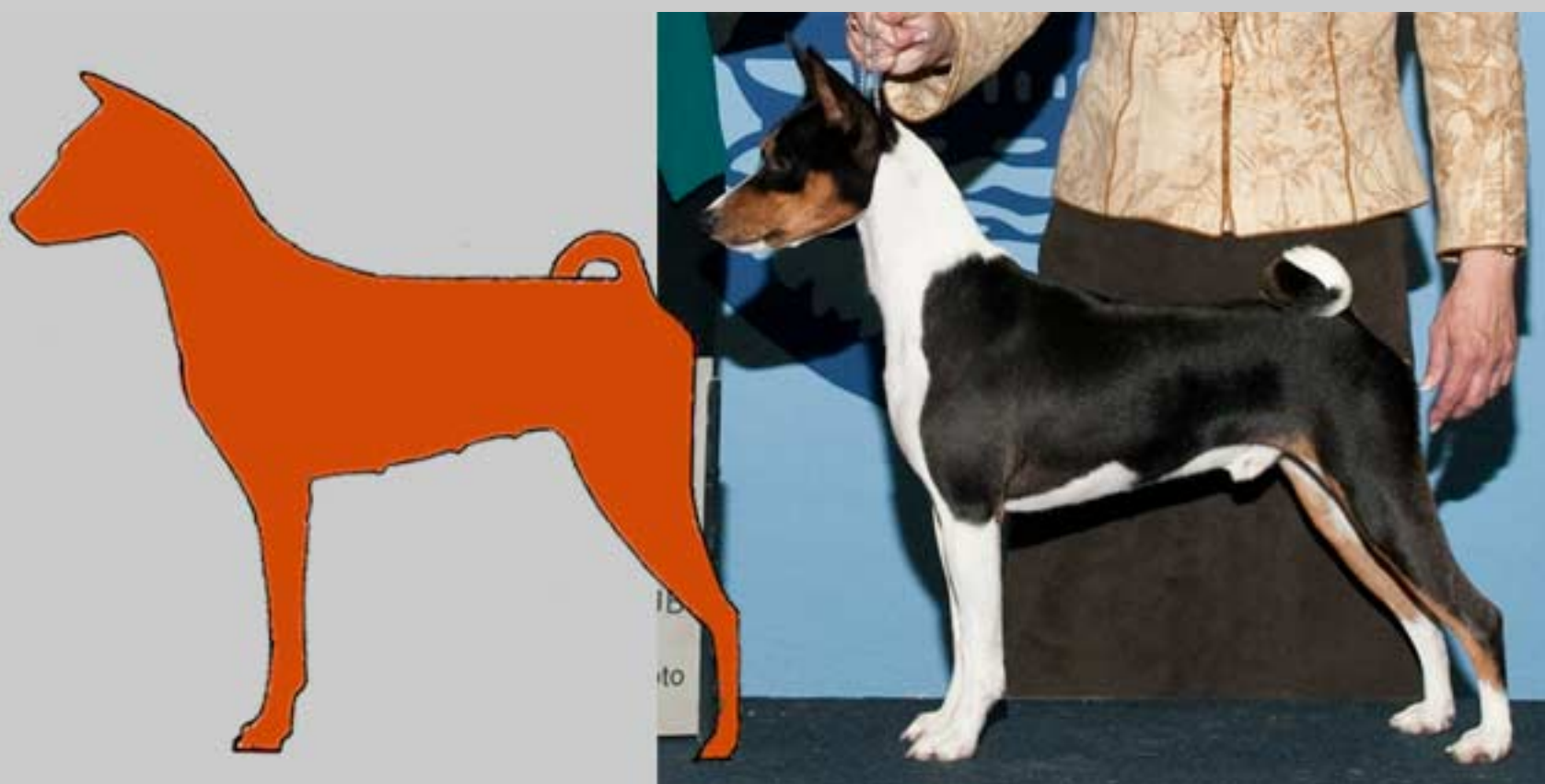
Handlers normally place the tail on the judge's side in the ring and in photos. This improves the general look of the dog and also can conceal the actual set at the root of the tail if it isn't so good. In the two photos above it is clearly evident that the one on the left has a good tailset while the one on the right is very poor. This is clear although the tail

curls hide the actual tail roots.

Breed pioneer Veronica Tudor-Williams enthusiastically wrote about the tail in her 1976 book: *"This is a very attractive feature, though even more important than the curl is that the root of the tail should be set very high and be placed right on top of the hindquarters, with the buttock curving out considerably beyond the root of the tail, giving a strong reachy appearance to the hindquarters, as opposed to the weak crouching look given by a tail which is too low set and has no curve of buttock behind it. The tail should lie as closely as possible to one hip or the other; a central curl is not desirable, as it gives a 'tea-pot' handle effect and spoils the outline of the dog. The ideal is a double-curl tail lying well down against one hip, so that only the root of the tail shows from the other side."* Note she ends with ideal but also has pointed out that the set is by far more important than the curl.

## Comment on Section

This Standard Section tries to paint a picture of a typical Basenji but it is easy to become involved with all the details and lose sight of the total picture. Have you gone to national specialties for breeds other than Basenjis? Have you noticed that some breeds have a considerable consistency in their look? Others breeds are rather confusing and you go home wondering just what the breed is supposed to look like.



What are features of the Basenji beyond wrinkles, prick ears and curly tail that make them uniquely Basenji? This section of the Standard, along with Size, Proportion and Substance, goes a long way in describing that outline...that Basenji-shaped outline from the line flowing from the neck to the tail and the overall shape of the body.

[Return to The Standard Dissected](#)

Contact the Basenji University with comments, questions, updates and Workbooks at [BasenjiU@basenji.org](mailto:BasenjiU@basenji.org)

We are indebted to the Basset Hound Club of America for the use of their Basset Hound University templates.