

## The Spinone Italiano - Toplines, Croups and Tailsets. Is there more?

As the Spinone Club of America's Judges Education committee is trying its best to step up with an education program and a new "era", with the committee members making themselves more available to judges and breeders, we often ask Spinone judges some basic questions. The answers we get regularly revolve around topline, croups and tailsets of the Spinone and these are the areas that the judge is basing his/her decisions upon. In addition, most judges are checking for divergent head planes.

It is good to hear that the judges have these basics within their grasp, but we would like to draw the following very important points to your attention, to help broaden your understanding.

The almost-human expression, which is considered to be an essential trait of the Spinone, is created from widely-placed, almost round, large and expressive eyes set on the frontal plane of the head, which is unusual and special to this breed. The definition of the stop, together with both the sub and supra orbital structure (brow and cheek chiseling) are minimally defined. The above, together with the unusual warm ochre color (in white/orange dogs) contribute to the human expression. Equally, in brown roan dogs the shade of brown for the eyes is warm and soft. A sharp or intense expression created by incorrect eye color, shape or set (deemed typical in the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon and German Wirehaired Pointer) must be severely penalized in the Spinone Italiano.

The head is long, lean and divergent. The Spinone head length is proportionally long compared with any other Sporting breed, approximately four-tenths of the dog's height.

The skull is roof shaped, with a marked occiput, well-defined interparietal crest (backskull/nape of neck) and gently sloping lateral walls. Particularly, in profile, this area helps to define breed type for the Spinone. From the front, the refinement of skull adds to the long, lean and divergent shape. Never Griffon-like (e.g. blocky, square, wide, well-defined stop and intense expression).

The divergent planes can also be clearly viewed from the front, where the wide-open nostrils of this breed will obscure a clear viewing of the dog's eyes in those dogs that have the incorrect parallel or convergent (Pointer-like) planes. **TIP:** Please take the time to lift the head of each exhibit and check for a soft, human expression and the divergence of planes. A clear view up the nostrils = incorrect planes! Convergence of planes of the skull and muzzle or a dish-faced muzzle is to be faulted so severely as to eliminate from further competition.

Ears are long, framing the face in an unobtrusive manner, with minimal erectile power, and are set on low, i.e. level with the eye line. **TIP:** A tight lead will obscure your view of correct ear placement, the roof-shaped skull, the divided dewlap and the marked backskull, all desirable traits that contribute to the correct silhouette for the Spinone.

The Spinone is a robustly-boned hunt/point/retriever (i.e. versatile breed) and its body shape fits almost into a square. Its bone is described in the Standard as "oval", which indicates a more refined impression when viewed from the frontal position, in keeping with the long, lean head type. Nonetheless, the word "robust" indicates more substance than most of the other Sporting

breeds. In profile its outline is also unique among the Sporting breeds, with a gently broken topline and nearly level underline. An underline with more than a minimal rise into the loin, i.e., tuckup like that of a GSP or setter, is a fault.

Spinone movement is unusual in that it is relaxed and energy-conserving, as is normal with the trotting breeds that are built for stamina. There is flex in the wrist joint and with the widely-placed scapulae; the large, round front feet will rise and fall without exaggeration. The unique profile outline should be held in shape when gaiting. The backline will remain gently broken in Spinoni that are correctly constructed, i.e. have symmetrical angles. An imbalance of angles will create level, sloping, or, the highly undesirable downhill movement. Any exaggeration or imbalance between the front and hind assembly will clearly affect the profile when gaiting. A Spinone that is lacking in length of upper arm, depth and breadth of chest and/or excessive length to the tibia (generally coupled with an overly-short metatarsus) will produce an atypical, and therefore undesirable, gait that may be highly regarded or acceptable in the more elegant Sporting breeds.

The shoulder should mirror the equally-proportioned rear assembly in this breed, with clear definition of a prosternum and a deep and broad chest. The correctly-constructed Spinone will carry its head just above the backline, with the nose pointing slightly downwards, and is therefore unable to move in the extreme style of a German Wirehaired Pointer. The GWPs are considered to be “gallopers” and will carry the stamp of a breed built for hunting at a faster pace in wide, open countryside. The desired gait for a Spinone in the field is an extended trot, with intermittent galloping strides. Therefore, the anatomy of this breed is designed to function at its optimum at the trot. **TIP:** Loose-lead gaiting at a natural pace will illustrate so much more than foot placement in this breed. Check for a deep underline in addition to the lightly broken topline and the correct proportions (i.e. long head, almost-square body-shape, equal leg/chest depth and symmetry of fore/hind angles). High head-carriage is undesirable and may be an indication of poor shoulder placement and an upright front assembly.

Last, but not least, is the essential wiry, close-fitting coat of the Spinone.

Judges are recommended to examine the texture and lay of the coat, in addition to the length, at the mid-line in the center of the ribcage, rather than at the wither, or along the backline. The correct, close-fitting jacket may appear from a distance to be too short, which is our reason for asking judges to take the time to evaluate the coat/skin very carefully. Coat that is soft, with an undercoat, may well stand away from the body. This type of coat is incorrect for the Spinone! Please take the time to grasp the skin as you examine the coat. It must be thick and leathery. Thin skin will often be attached to an incorrect coat in the Spinone. The recommended length of coat on the body is between 1 1/2” and 2 1/2”. Texture, lay and length are ALL important when evaluating coat type. The skin is of equal importance.

Judges should note that shorter hair on the head is desirable – i.e. it may be hand-stripped in order to present some of the most important qualities of the Spinone. Stripping dead hair or tidying of the body coat to present the unique outline of the breed should not be considered as sculpting or molding, but the use of scissors is contrary to the breed standard. Dogs with the correct wiry texture and lay of coat will require only a small amount of hand-stripping. Poor

quality coats may not strip at all and excessive, soft leg hair, or the evidence of scissor marks in the case where shaping may have taken place, will all be helpful hints at the pre-groomed texture and quality. Please take the time to carefully evaluate this very important characteristic of the breed.

And back to the three areas that are unique but nonetheless only a portion of the whole Spinone:

The topline is broken but not extreme (or saddle) and rises into the loin, but remains on a horizontal plane with the wither (i.e. the rump is not raised). The underline of the Spinone carries equal importance, with **minimal tuck-up**.

The croup falls only at an angle of between 30-35 degrees from the horizontal plane, i.e. a gentle roundness over the rump, taking the line of the tail just below the horizontal plane. A short croup may raise the tail above the back (this is incorrect), while an excessive length of croup will incline beyond the desirable 35 degrees. The latter will seriously restrict the hind movement and must be considered to be a serious fault.

The tailset is a continuation of the croup line, with minimal break in the flow of the backline and with the tail carried horizontally or lower. A poor tailset will essentially affect the unique Spinone silhouette, whereas a tail that is set on correctly, but still carried a little high (which is incorrect in a mature dog or bitch) may be just a temporary stage of development. Consideration must be given to separate tailset from tail carriage.

### **SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE SPINONE**

**HEAD: Long, lean, divergent planes, minimal stop, roof-shaped skull, marked backskull, almost-human expression**

**SUBSTANCE AND OUTLINE: Nearly square, robust, balanced, gently broken topline, minimal tuckup, tail carried horizontal or down**

**COAT AND SKIN: Close-fitting, wiry, 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches in length on body, no undercoat, thick, leathery skin**

**GAIT: Relaxed trot, without exaggeration, profile holds while moving, head carried just above backline**

We are hoping the above information will assist judges to get closer to the whole picture and expand and refine their understanding of this unique Sporting dog. We appreciate the time you have taken to read this information. Please feel free to contact us with any queries or comments at [SCOAJudgesEd@gmail.com](mailto:SCOAJudgesEd@gmail.com).