

## The Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Standard Review



## **Table of Contents**

**Berner Sennenhund - Breed Introduction**

**History - Dog clubs**

**Photos of early Bernese, 1st Breed Standard**

**Bernese come to the US**

**BMDCA established, update AKC breed standard**

**Current AKC Breed Standard**

**Vocabulary & Anatomy**

**Temperament, Proportions – outline - profile**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Fronts/Forequarters**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Rears/Hindquarters**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Feet, Front and Rear Pasterns**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Sidegait – parts work together**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Tails**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Heads**

**Bernese Mtn. Dog Coats**

**An overview description (key features)**

**Substance (sturdiness)**

**Disqualifications**

**Follow up questions – you be the judge**

**Websites, References, acknowledgements/credits**

**Road ahead**

# Bernese Mountain Dogs Then & Now

*The timeframe covered in this breed standard presentation is from the late 1800's to present day (2010).*



## The Dürrbachhunde - Origins & Historical Purpose

The predecessors of today's Bernese Mountain Dog existed in Switzerland long before Breed Standards, before dogs were purebred, and before the time of dog clubs.

The Dürrbächler dogs lived and worked on farms in an area known as the Bernese Mittelland (*Midlands*). The Bernese Midlands is not the high altitude mountainous Alps, but is comprised of river valleys, foothills, hilly forested regions as well as the plain around the capital Bern.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's the Dürrbächler dogs were kept to watch over their owners' farms & property, family members and livestock. Observant and discerning, the Dürrbächler were alert, faithful companions seldom known to roam. The farm dogs performed a variety of farm tasks including keeping wild animals or strangers with ill intent in check. They were appreciated for their amiable manner when interacting with known friends, family and children. The dogs were utilized as cattle drovers.

Photos from the late 1800's and early 1900's in Switzerland show children accompanying draught dogs of many different types. The Dürrbächler dogs had trustworthy temperaments, and their body builds were well suited to pulling carts.



## Breed Development - Dog Clubs' Role

Dog clubs and organizations are responsible for creating breed standards which have influenced the evolutionary advancement of purebred dog breeds.

The Bernese Mountain Dog came under the direction of the dog club breeders in its homeland, Switzerland during the late 1800's. The Swiss Cynological Society (SCS - Swiss "Kennel Club") began in 1883.

In 1907, the "Schweizerischer Dürrbachclub" was established in Switzerland.

In 1904 SCS officials decided to recognize the Dürrbachhunde as a breed, and dogs of this type judged to have merit were registered in the Swiss Stud Book.

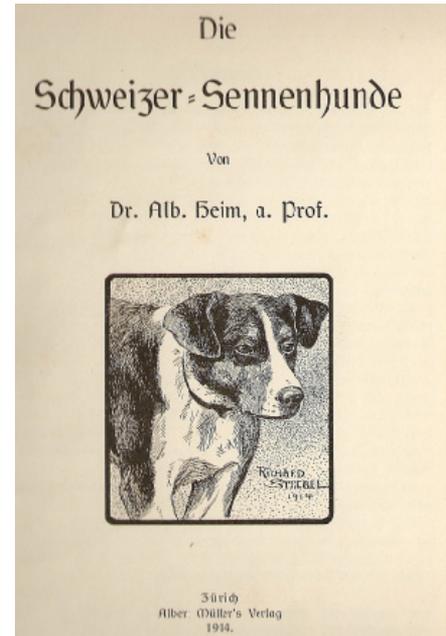


Descriptions of the 4 Sennenhund breeds were recorded by Dr. Albert Heim in a 1914 publication entitled, "Die Schweizer Sennenhunde".

### The first Breed Standard (1907)

described the dogs as well balanced, active and alert, and a combination of sagacity, fidelity and utility. Traits of the breed including a specific color & markings scheme were outlined.

Purebred dog breeds are changing, morphing entities, and a human construct in modern times at that. Characteristics can be bred in and bred out. Breed standards define ideal characteristics that a breed should possess. Early breed standards and dogs paved the road for the Bernese Mountain Dogs we know and appreciate today.



## Breed Development – the 1<sup>st</sup> Standard



### The 1st BMD Breed Standard 1907

Size: Dogs 60 – 70 cm, bitches 55 – 65 cm. (23.6"-27.5", 21.6"-25.6")

Head: Oval with slight stop and lengthy muzzle. flews only slightly developed, crown slightly rounded, eyes brown and full of fire, ears short and triangular, covered with curly hair.

Body: rather sturdy than long, with a well arched chest and a strong ribcage.

Legs: straight and bony, with well developed, stringy hocks, paws round and compact.

Tail: bushy and wavy, not carried over the back.

Coat: thick and long, over the back sometimes curly.

Colour: glossy black coat, rich reddish-brown markings on legs and cheeks and characteristic reddish-brown dots above the eyes. Front part of muzzle mostly white, also the feet. White patch on neck, white star on chests, white collar, white blaze and white tip of tail not a condition.

Facial expression : friendly and intelligent.

As faults are considered: split nose, hare feet, plump and heavy head, long and slender trunk, Tail bent forward over the back, heavy houndlike ears, eyes too light (like bird of prey), undershot bite.

## More Bernese Mountain Dogs from History



Fig. 9. „Netty von Burgdorf“, S. B. S. B. 3479. Eine der vorzüglichst. Berner-Sonnenhündinnen, bewährt: Zuchthündin. Z.: Max Schaltech, Burgdorf, gew. 12. IX. 1906 von „Bläsi“ aus „Prisca von Burgdorf“ (S. B. S. B. 3486). B.: Fr. Ehreteneid, Schloßgut Burgdorf.



Fig. 14. „Prisy von Obersongau“, S. E. S. B. 5672.  
Z.: Dr. Gschlögger, Langenthal. B.: Felix Trüb, Mancyrau (Bern)  
Gew. 1. VII. 1909 von „Bläsi“ aus „Ritt von Obersongau“.



Fig. 13. „Blöf Sarner“, S. B. S. B. 3972.  
B.: Ad. Sarner-Sailer, Langenthal.  
Gew. 1905. Z.:? Typfilder Berner-Sonnenhund, älteren Schlages.



Fig. 15. „Netti vom Schloßhof“.  
Z. und Dr. Schenker-Verwalter Baumann in Langenthal.  
Gew. 1. VIII. 1912 von „Clara v. S. Thoren“, S. B. S. B. 3678, aus „Adanna von Obmattler“, S. B. S. B. 3686.



## The 1st AKC Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Standard - Approved April 13, 1937

### Bernese Mountain Dog

**General Appearance**-A well-balanced dog, active and alert; a combination of sagacity, fidelity and utility.

**Height**-Dogs, 23 inches to 27 1/2 inches; bitches, 21 inches to 26 inches at shoulder.

**Head**-Skull flat, defined stop and strong muzzle. Dewlaps very slightly developed, flews not too pendulous, jaw strong with good strong teeth. Eyes dark, hazel brown, full of fire. Ears V-shaped, set on high, not too pointed at tips and rather short. When in repose, hanging close to the head; when alert, brought slightly forward and raised at the base.

**Body**-Rather short than too long in back, compact and well ribbed up. Chest broad with good depth of brisket. Loins strong and muscular.

**Legs and Feet**-Forelegs perfectly straight and muscular, thighs well developed and stifles well bent. Feet round and compact. Dewclaws should be removed.

**Tail**-Of fair thickness and well covered with long hair, but not to form a flag; moderate length. When in repose should be carried low, upward swirl permissible; when alert, may be carried gaily, but may never curl or be carried over the back.

**Coat**-Soft and silky with bright natural sheen; long and slightly wavy but may never curl.

**Color and Markings**-Jet-black with russet brown or deep tan markings on all four legs, a spot just above forelegs,

each side of white chest markings and spots over the eyes, which may never be missing.

The brown on the forelegs must always be between the black and the white.

Preferable, but not a condition, are - White feet, tip of tail, pure white blaze up foreface, a few white hairs on back of neck, and white star shaped markings on chest.

When the latter markings are missing, it is not a disqualification.

**Faults**-Too massive in head, light or staring eyes, too heavy or long ears,

too narrow or snipy muzzle, undershot or overshot mouth, pendulous dewlaps,

too long or setterlike body, splay or hare feet, tail curled or carried over back, cowhocks and white le

General appearance \_\_\_\_\_ 15

Size and height \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Head \_\_\_\_\_ 15

Body \_\_\_\_\_ 15

Tail \_\_\_\_\_ 10

Coat \_\_\_\_\_ 10

Legs and feet \_\_\_\_\_ 15

Color and markings \_\_\_\_\_ 15

Approved April 13, 1937



Paintings and drawings of the time depicted the breed's look, environment and purpose.



## US Post WW2

After WW II the number of dogs in the USA increased.

AKC's 'American Kennel Gazette', 1953 →

- ▶ In 1968 the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA) was formed, with 33 members and grew to just over 100 members in 1971. In 10 years of time BMDCA membership reached 350.
- ▶ In 1973 the American Kennel Club granted sanctioned status to the BMDCA.
- ▶ Several generations of BMDCA Standard Committees engaged in discussion about the need to revise the existing AKC standard. In November 1977 a proposed revision to the AKC breed standard was drawn up by Sylvia Howison and Esther Mueller, along with Mary Alice Horstick. The proposed revision was sent to the American Kennel Club. Mr. Mark Mooty, Secretary of the AKC offered input and copies of the proposed standard were mailed to the BMDCA Board and membership by January 1978. At that point discussions of revisions to the Breed Standard began in earnest among the Standard Committee and club membership.
- ▶ In 1980 the AKC approved revisions to the long worked and well honed breed standard.

Bella's Clara, born in 1967 ↓

& Zyta v. Nesselacher in 1976, pictured as Best Of Breed at the 1<sup>st</sup> BMDCA Specialty →



PURE-BRED  
DOGS



AMERICAN KENNEL GAZETTE



Bernese Mountain Dog - C. Gardner

Photos on the right are from the AKC's "Complete Dog Book". The top photo, Ajax vom Bucheggberg, 1947 edition; bottom 2 photos, 1958 edition.

### Bernese Mountain Dog



ARISTOCRATIC IN APPEARANCE, ancient in lineage, the Bernese Mountain Dog has long been at home on the farms in the middle land of Switzerland. One of the four varieties of Swiss Mountain Dogs, the Bernese shares similar distinctive coloring with the other varieties, but is the only one of the four to have a long, silky coat. These dogs worked as drivers and draft dogs as well as watch dogs in the Emmentaler mainly in the Canton of Berne.

## AKC – BMDCA – standard revision

OFFICIAL AKC STANDARD FOR THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG (1980 version\*)

### BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

**GENERAL APPEARANCE** - A sturdy, balanced, large, strong-boned dog. Intelligent and having an appearance of strength and agility suiting it to draft and droving work in mountainous regions. Dogs appear masculine, while bitches are distinctly feminine.

**HEAD** - Skull-flat and broad with a slight furrow and a well-defined, but not exaggerated stop. Muzzle strong and straight. Dry mouthed. Teeth - strong; scissors bite; complete dentition. Serious fault: overshot or undershot bite. Ears - medium sized, triangular in shape, gently rounded at the tip, hanging close to the head when in repose, brought forward and raised at the base when alert. Eyes-dark brown, slightly oval in shape with close-fitting eyelids; expression intelligent, animated and gentle. Serious faults: inverted or everted eyelids. Disqualification: Blue eye.

**NECK AND BODY** - Neck-strong and muscular and of medium length. Back-broad and firm. Topline level from withers to croup. Chest-deep and capacious with well-sprung ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows. Body-nearly square with over-all body length measuring slightly greater than height at the withers. Loin-strong. Croup-broad and smoothly rounded to tail insertion.

**FOREQUARTERS** - Shoulders-moderately laid back, flatlying, well muscled, never loose. Forelegs straight and strong with the elbows well under the shoulders. Pasterns slightly sloping without weakness. Feet round and compact with well-arched toes. Declaws may be removed from front legs.

**HINDQUARTERS** - Thighs-broad, strong and muscular. Stifles-moderately bent, tapering smoothly into hocks. Hocks-well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed from rear legs. Tail-Bushy. Bone reaching to the hock joint or below. When in repose, tail should be carried low, upward swirl permissible when alert. May be carried gaily, but may never curl or be carried over the back. Fault: Kink in tail. Coat - Thick, moderately long, slight wavy or straight, with a bright natural sheen.

**COLOR AND MARKINGS** - Tri-color: jet black ground color with rich rust and clear white markings. Nose always black. Markings (symmetry desired): Rust: over each eye; on cheeks, preferably reaching at least to the corner of the mouth; on each side of chest; on all four legs; under tail. White: blaze and muzzle-band; chest marking, typically forming an inverted cross; feet; tip of tail. Faults: Markings other than as described to be faulted in direct relationship to the extent of the deviation. Serious faults: White legs; white collars. Disqualifications: any ground color other than black.

**GAIT** - Natural working gait is slow trot, but capable of speed and agility in keeping with use in draft and droving work. Good reach in front. Powerful drive from the rear transmitted through a level back. No wasted action. Front and hind legs on each side follow through in the same plane. At increased speed, legs tend to converge toward the center line.

**HEIGHT** - Dogs: 24 1/2" to 27 1/2" at the withers. Bitches: 22 1/2" to 25 1/2" at the withers.

**TEMPERAMENT** - Self-confident, alert and good-natured. Never sharp or shy. A dog which will not stand for examination shall be dismissed from the ring.

### DISQUALIFICATIONS

Blue eye color.

Any ground color other than black. Approved July 8, 1980

*Summaries of club correspondence and work product including drawings pertaining to the parent club's breed standard revision were published over many months in the BMDCA Newsletter during 1978- 1979. Discussion included study of both the breed's*

*history, the dogs' functionality as working draft dogs, as well as in depth explorations of canine anatomy, structure and essential aesthetic qualities.*

*The carefully crafted language found in the 1980 Breed Standard reflects the key characteristics of the Bernese.*

*The AKC breed standard was updated again in 1989 to bring it into compliance with AKC's breed standards' formatting requirements.*

*A few content changes were made.*

*AKC approved the revisions on February 10, 1990, Effective March 28, 1990.*

### Best of Breed at the 1989 BMDCA National Specialty, Alpenblick's Alpine Alpenweide, 'Willi'



**\*Working Group American Kennel Club Breed Standard\* Approved February 10, 1990 Effective March 28, 1990**

General Appearance

The Bernese Mountain Dog is a striking tri-colored, large dog. He is sturdy and balanced. He is intelligent, strong and agile enough to do the draft and droving work for which he was used in the mountainous regions of his origin. Dogs appear masculine, while bitches are distinctly feminine.

Size, Proportion, Substance

Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27<sup>1/2</sup> inches; bitches are 23 to 26 inches. Though appearing square, Bernese Mountain Dogs are slightly longer in body than they are tall. Sturdy bone is of great importance. The body is full.

Head

Expression is intelligent, animated and gentle. The eyes are dark brown and slightly oval in shape with close-fitting eyelids. Inverted or everted eyelids are serious faults. Blue eye color is a disqualification. The ears are medium sized, set high, triangular in shape, gently rounded at the tip, and hang close to the head when in repose. When the Bernese Mountain Dog is alert, the ears are brought forward and raised at the base; the top of the ear is level with the top of the skull. The skull is flat on top and broad, with a slight furrow and a well-defined, but not exaggerated stop. The muzzle is strong and straight. The nose is always black. The lips are clean and, as the Bernese Mountain Dog is a dry-mouthed breed, the flews are only slightly developed. The teeth meet in a scissors bite. An overshot or undershot bite is a serious fault. Dentition is complete.

Neck, Topline, and Body

The neck is strong, muscular and of medium length. The topline is level from the withers to the croup. The chest is deep and capacious with well-sprung, but not barrel-shaped, ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows. The back is broad and firm. The loin is strong. The croup is broad and smoothly rounded to the tail insertion. The tail is bushy. It should be carried low when in repose. An upward swirl is permissible when the dog is alert, but the tail may never curl or be carried over the back. The bones in the tail should feel straight and should reach to the hock joint or below. A kink in the tail is a fault.

Forequarters

The shoulders are moderately laid back, flat-lying, well-muscled and never loose. The legs are straight and strong and the elbows are well under the shoulder when the dog is standing. The pasterns slope very slightly, but are never weak. Dewclaws may be removed. The feet are round and compact with well-arched toes.

Hindquarters

The thighs are broad, strong and muscular. The stifles are moderately bent and taper smoothly into the hocks. The hocks are well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed. Feet are compact and turn neither in nor out.

Coat

The coat is thick, moderately long and slightly wavy or straight. It has a bright natural sheen. Extremely curly or extremely dull-looking coats are undesirable. The Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged.

Color and Markings

The Bernese Mountain Dog is tri-colored. The ground color is jet black. The markings are rich rust and clear white. Symmetry of markings is desired. Rust appears over each eye, on the cheeks reaching to at least the corner of the mouth, on each side of the chest, on all four legs, and under the tail. There is a white blaze and muzzle band. A white marking on the chest typically forms an inverted cross. The tip of the tail is white. White on the feet is desired but must not extend higher than the pasterns. Markings other than described are to be faulted in direct relationship to the extent of the deviation. White legs or a white collar are serious faults. Any ground color other than black is a disqualification.

Gait

The natural working gait of the Bernese Mountain Dog is a slow trot. However, in keeping with his use in draft and droving work, he is capable of speed and agility. There is good reach in front. Powerful drive from the rear is transmitted through a level back. There is no wasted action. Front and rear legs on each side follow through in the same plane. At increased speed, legs tend to converge toward the center line.

Temperament

The temperament is self-confident, alert and good-natured, never sharp or shy. The Bernese Mountain Dog should stand steady, though may remain aloof to the attentions of strangers.

Disqualifications

Blue eye color. Any ground color other than black.

Approved February 10, 1990 Effective March 28, 1990

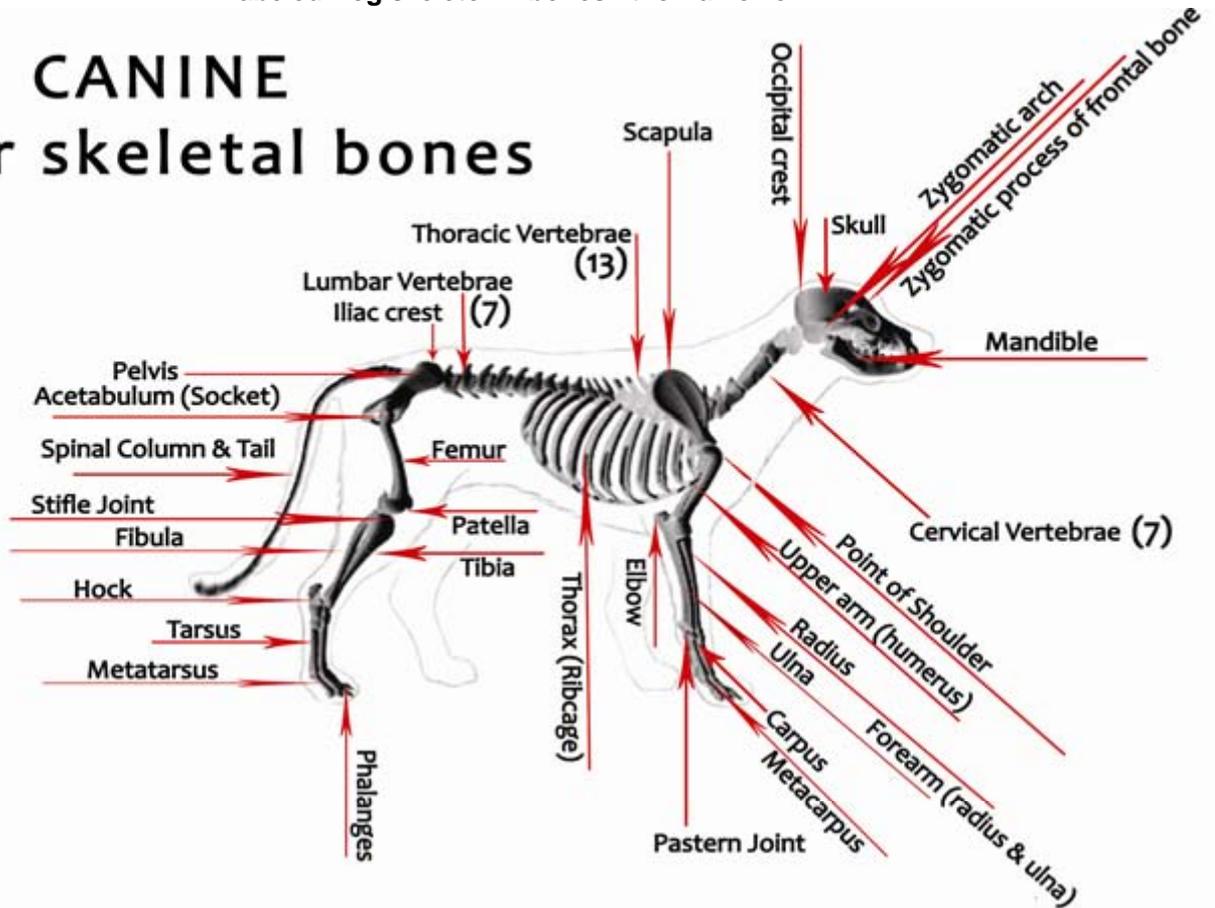
## Vocabulary - Terms

- ▶ The Skull or head is comprised of two parts; 1) the muzzle which encompasses the area from the tip of the nose to the stop and 2) the backskull which is the area from the stop to the occiput.
- ▶ The spinal column is made up of vertebral regions: 1) cervical (neck), 2) thoracic (upper/mid back), 3) lumbar (lower back), 4) sacral (pelvic) and 5) coccygeal (tail).
- ▶ Angulation – the angle which is formed by the meeting of bones at a joint
- ▶ Back – Region between the withers and root of tail
- ▶ Belly – under part of abdomen
- ▶ Bite – the relative position of the upper and lower teeth when the mouth is closed
- ▶ Brisket - reference to depth of chest
- ▶ Buttocks – rear of the upper thigh
- ▶ Carpal joint & bones – Bones of the wrist
- ▶ Chest – the forepart of the body/ trunk enclosed by the ribs
- ▶ Croup - The rear part of the rump, from the hip bones extending to the root of the tail. The croup consists of fused sacral vertebrae, that form the top of the pelvis, and the first few caudal vertebrae of the tail.
- ▶ Dentition – the number and arrangement of the teeth
- ▶ Elbow – the joint between the upper arm and forearm
- ▶ Flank – The side of the body between the last rib and the hip
- ▶ Forearm – the bones of the forelegs between the elbow and the carpus (wrist).
- ▶ Forechest – the front part of the chest
- ▶ Foreleg – the front leg from elbow to foot
- ▶ Forequarters – the front of the dog, excluding the head and the neck
- ▶ Hindquarters – rear part of dog from the loin
- ▶ Hock – The tarsus or collection of bones of the rear leg forming the joint between the thigh and the metatarsus; heel or ankle joint.
- ▶ Breast bone – sternum
- ▶ Layback – the angle of the shoulder blade as compared with the vertical when viewed from the side
- ▶ Loin – the region of the body either side of the vertebral column, unsupported by ribs, between the last rib and the hindquarters.
- ▶ Mandible – lower jawbone
- ▶ Metacarpals – bones of the foreleg between the wrist and the toes; the front pastern.
- ▶ Metatarsals – bones between hock joint and the foot, the rear pastern.
- ▶ Muzzle – the foreface - head in front of the eyes, which includes the nasal bone, nostrils & jaws
- ▶ Neck – the part between the skull and the withers
- ▶ Occiput – the upper, back point of the skull
- ▶ Pastern (front) – the region of the foreleg between the wrist and the toes.
- ▶ Pastern (rear) – the region of the hind leg between the tarsus (ankle) and the toes.
- ▶ The metatarsus. Often incorrectly referred to as the “hock”.
- ▶ Patella – Kneecap – in front of the stifle joint
- ▶ Pelvis – a framework of bones formed by the pelvic arch
- ▶ Pin Bone – the upper bony protuberance of the pelvis
- ▶ Point of Buttock – rear most point of the buttocks – anatomically called the Ischium
- ▶ Point of Hip – Front most point of the Pelvis
- ▶ Point of Shoulder – Joint where the upper arm meets the scapula
- ▶ Prosternum – front most upper point of the sternum – anatomical term, Manubrium
- ▶ Rear pastern - the region of the rear leg between the hock and toes
- ▶ Roach back – a convex curvature of the back towards the loin
- ▶ Rump – The rear part of the back from the front of the pelvis to the root of the tail (includes the croup) – some references consider the rump to be the entire fleshy area surrounding the pelvic girdle extending from the front most point of the hip to the rearmost point of the buttocks.
- ▶ Scapula – Shoulder blade
- ▶ Skull – bony regions of the head – Cranium - section of head from stop to occiput
- ▶ Spring of ribs – degree of curvature of the ribs.
- ▶ Sternum – central chest bone - breastbone – keel
- ▶ Stop – the depression in front of the eyes between the skull and the muzzle
- ▶ Stifle – joint of the hind leg - the dog’s knee
- ▶ Tail carriage – position in which the tail is held in relation to the body
- ▶ Tail Set – the position of the tail on the Croup
- ▶ Thigh – the hind quarters from hip to stifle
- ▶ Throat – front part of the neck beneath the lower jaw
- ▶ Topline – the outline of the back from just behind the withers to the rump
- ▶ Tuck Up – the concave underline of the body curving up from the end of the ribs beneath the loin; the waist
- ▶ Underline – the combined contours of the brisket and abdominal floor
- ▶ Upper Arm – the humerus - bone of the foreleg between the shoulder blade and the elbow
- ▶ Withers – the point where the shoulders and neck meet and the point at which height is measured
- ▶ Zygomatic arch – arch of bone forming the lower border of the eye socket extending to the base of the ear
- ▶ Zygomatic Processes – brow, boney points located above the eyes

Labeled Dog skeleton – bones - the framework

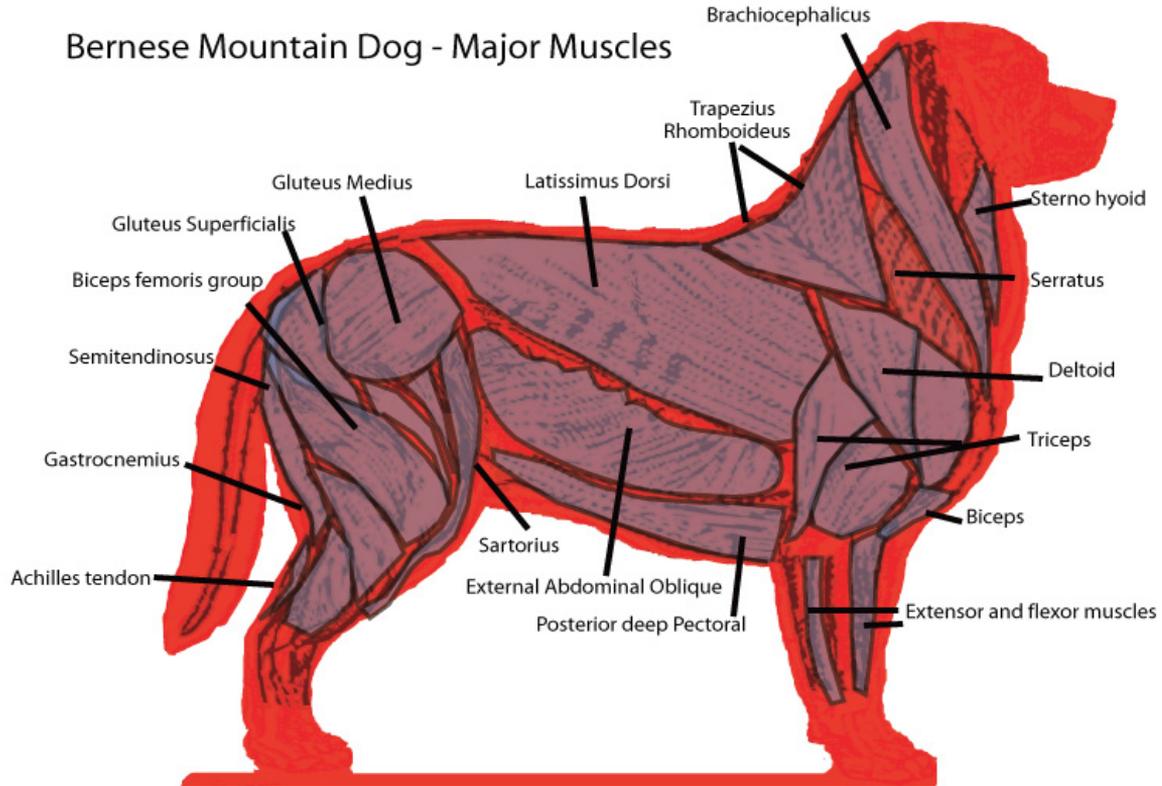
# CANINE

## Major skeletal bones



# Muscles of the dog

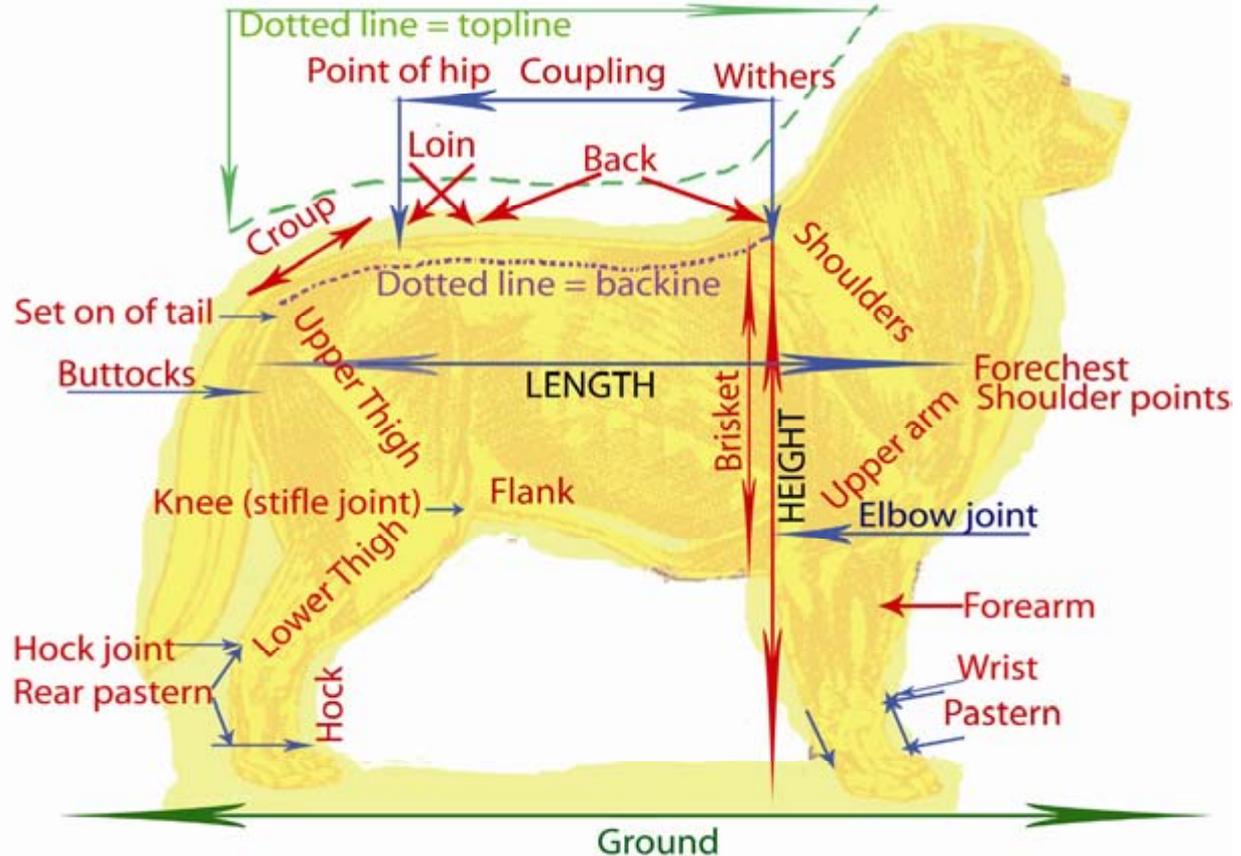
## Bernese Mountain Dog - Major Muscles



## Bernese Mountain Dog - Body Proportions & terms

Body length : body height = 10 : 9 (slightly longer than tall)

Ideal relation of height at withers : depth of chest = 2 : 1

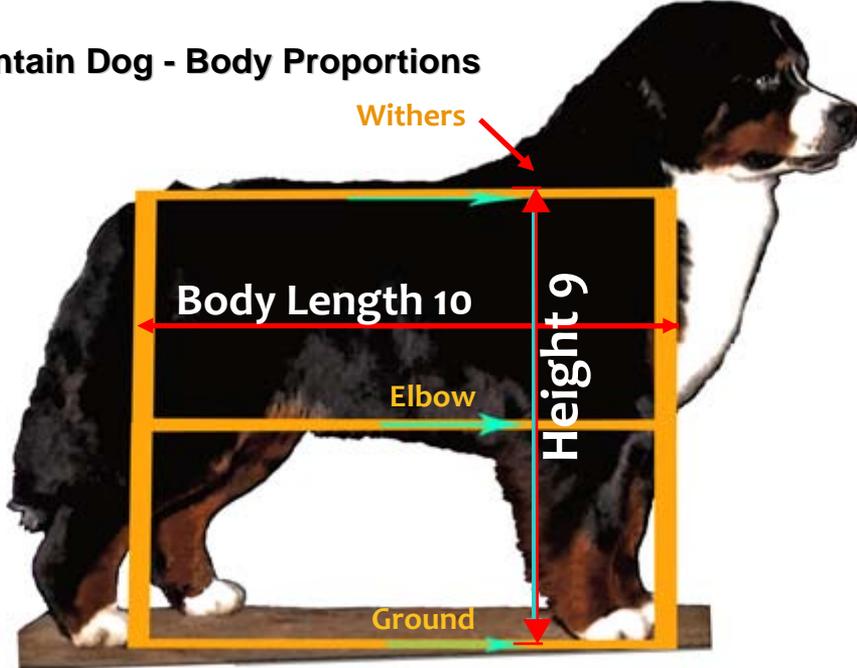


# Bernese Mountain Dog Temperament & Character are of Utmost Importance Today



# SUBSTANCE BALANCE

## Bernese Mountain Dog - Body Proportions



**Proportions - Height at withers : Body length 9:10**

**Total height from withers to ground : Length of leg 2:1**

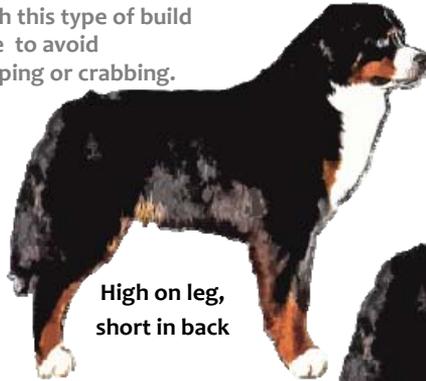
When examining the parts or components of a dog, it is important to recognize that the parts contribute to a bigger picture – the whole dog. The breed standards address the ‘whole dog’ under the General Description of the Bernese Mountain Dog with the word “balanced”. The words “sturdy”, “strong” and “balanced” have been consistently used to describe the breed.

## Proportions & outlines

### Bernese Mountain Dog Profile (outline)

When viewed in profile the Bernese should not be short or high on leg or appear long or short in back.

Dogs with this type of build may pace to avoid overstepping or crabbing.



High on leg,  
short in back



Correct  
outline



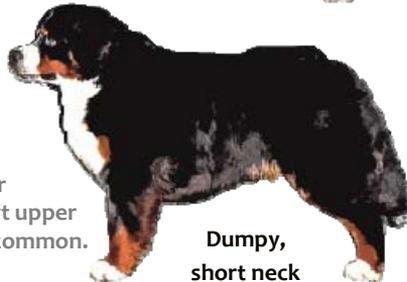
Setter-like profiles, toplines that slope down from withers to croup and tucked up underlines are incorrect.

Setter-like,  
tucked up underline,  
sloped topline



Low on leg,  
long in back

Short necks, are often caused by straight shoulder assemblies. Short upper arms are not uncommon.



Dumpy,  
short neck

Long backed dogs often have excessive length in the loin section. Dogs with this type of build may appear to have a concave waist line due to lack of muscle development.

## Body Shape

The Bernese Mountain Dog carries a heavy coat over the shoulders, neck and forechest and rump.

The length of hair on the under side of the chest and flank can be 3" - 8" long. The hair over the rump may be considerably longer and denser than the hair over the mid-back and sides. The only way to get a clear idea of the actual structure of the Bernese is by feeling the dog's framework and muscling. A dog might appear to be paunchy in the underline or appear to have a well arched forechest when neither is true. Likewise the perception of breadth or depth of chest, profile of the shoulders, neck, back and croup can be affected by the lie, length or density of the hair.

**Overline** refers to the profile view extending from the rear most point of the skull or beginning of the neck to the end of the tail.

**Underline** is defined as the combined contours of the brisket and abdominal floor.

← Flat croup.  
Neck abruptly meets shoulders.  
Low slung underline behind ribs.  
Paunchy flank.

← Steep croup, low set tail.  
Front legs set forward, head carried high. Tucked up underline.

**Correct  
Overline & Underline**  
← Smoothly rounded croup.  
Smooth transition of muscular medium length neck into shoulders & back.  
Chest arched forward.  
Slight rise to underline.



**Feel & observe – topline  
(overline) and underline**



**Feel the  
framework  
to determine  
the dog's  
chest shape.**

**Prolific coat**



**FEEL WHAT'S  
UNDER THE HAIR**

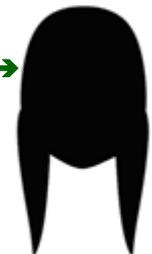
Barrel shaped chest,  
Well-arched ribs →



Deep chest,  
Flat ribs →



**Correct**  
Deep, broad chest  
Oval (egg shaped) ribs →



## Width of back, width across the shoulders and rump.

### Correct

A broad level back, good spring of ribcage with a well rounded rump. →

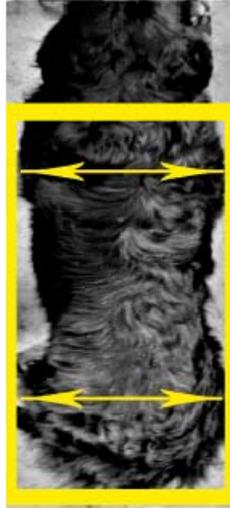


View the dog from above to gain a sense of the width of shoulders, chest and pelvis. The width of the front quarters and rear quarters should be nearly the same. The back should be broad and muscled up. The ribs are well sprung. When feeling the topline, pay particular attention to the angle at which the ribs meet the spinal column.

The shape of the ribcage influences the width of the back. →

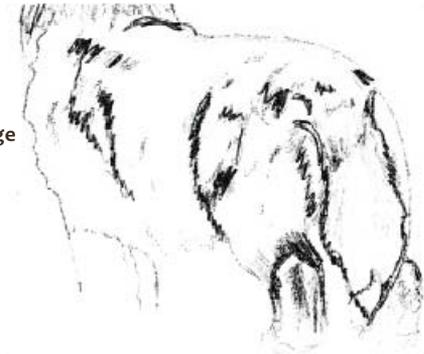
If you would, picture the dog's back as a table top. Could you set a dinner plate full of food on the center of the dog's back? If the dog's back is sufficiently broad it will accommodate the plate and the plate will remain relatively level. If the plate slips off or tips, the spinal column may be raised, the back line faulty, and/or the angle of the ribs (spring of ribs) is likely incorrect. Slackness in loin, dips behind the withers are not uncommon in Bernese.

Always feel what is under the hair!



↑Correct↑

\*\*\* This dog is out of coat & was not bathed or blown dry.

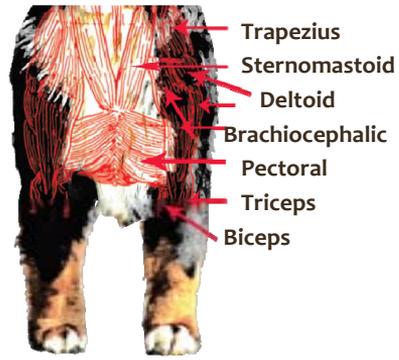


Narrow

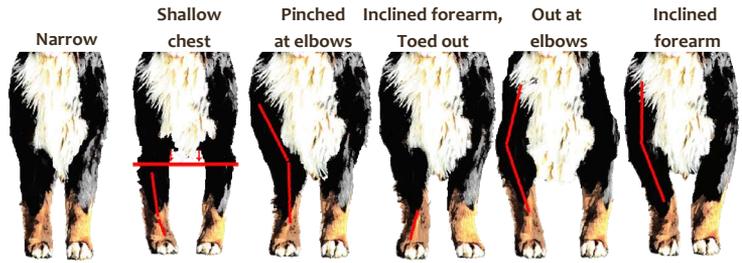


Wide front, narrow rump, too much 'waist'





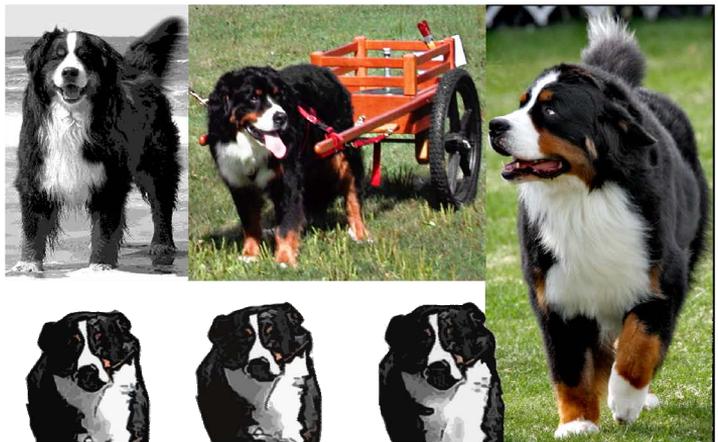
### Fronts



Correct →



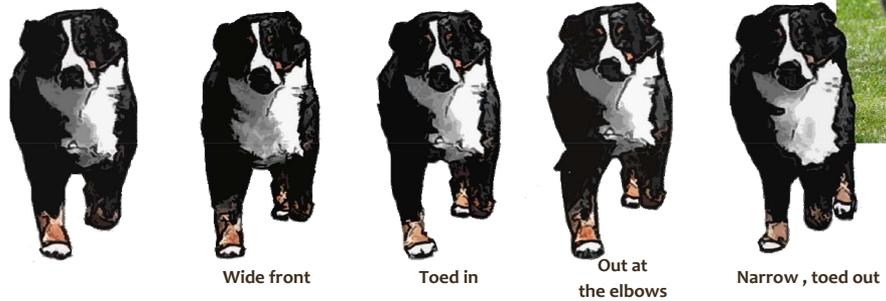
A straight column of support, broad chest, and firm muscling are desirable.



← Correct

A clean moving front.

Correct →



## More on Fronts

AKC “The chest is deep and capacious with well-sprung, but not barrel-shaped, ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows.”



When viewed in profile, the idea that elbows are well set under the dog and the forechest is developed or arched forward is an extremely important feature from the standpoint of structural soundness.

The weight of the chest, head and neck is carried by the forelimbs, so it is important that the elbows and forelimbs are well knit by muscling into the neck, chest and back.

Forelimbs situated under the weight load they must carry provide advantageous columns of support which adds stability to joints that influence frontend strength and range of motion.

Whether the dog is standing or moving, if the ribcage is sufficiently broad there is distance/ daylight between the elbows at the lower part of the chest. Pinched front end assemblies are somewhat common in Bernese.

When conducting a hands on exam or when looking at photos of dogs in profile, notice whether or not the dog appears to have ‘fill’ in front. ‘Fill in front’ is another way of saying that the forechest is developed/arched forward. ‘Fill’ in front is an indicator of how the scapula and humerus are situated on the ribcage. Dogs with poor ‘fill in front’ rarely have desirable ribcage conformation or forequarter’s angulation.

## Bernese Mountain Dog Fronts - Shoulders

The angle formed by the scapula & humerus as well as the length and vertical position of these bones affects muscle and ligament attachments which govern over the reach and weight bearing capabilities of the dog.

'Layback' of the shoulder relates to the angle of the scapula.

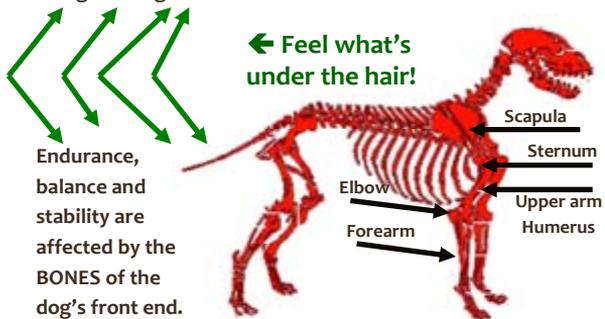


### FORECHEST

The chest should be arched forward. The elbows and legs should set under the dog's chest which provides a straight column of support from the scapula to the pad of the foot.

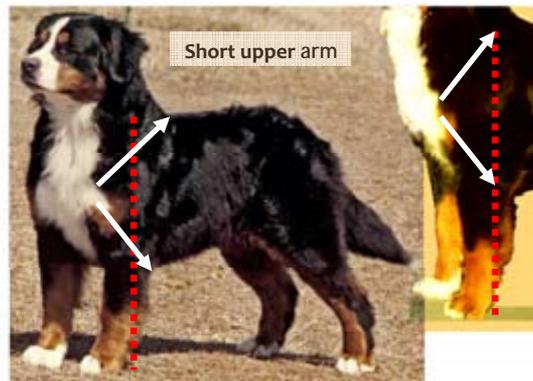
### FLAT FRONTS

Dogs that lack a forechest may have a vertical scapula and/or a humerus that sets too vertical. A short upper arm (humerus) will also result in the elbows and front legs setting too far forward on the chest.



Endurance, balance and stability are affected by the BONES of the dog's front end.

Lacking forechest, elbows, legs & feet too far forward



scapula & humerus too vertical, pad of foot in front of line through Scapula  
Dogs' weight centers shifted backwards

## Bernese Mountain Dog Fronts - Review the Components

### RIBCAGE, SHOULDERS & LEGS



A straight column of support from shoulders to feet provides a structural basis for clean joint action & efficient gait. Well sprung ribs/deep chest provide adequate room for heart and lungs.

### STANDING & IN ACTION



The shoulders, upper arm, elbow, forelegs, pasterns and feet bones, become moving parts activated by ligaments & muscles which tie together to support the front end's weight. In Bernese, breaks in the column of support are typically at the elbow and pastern joints. Loose shoulders will cause lateral shifts in body weight (the body may roll from side to side) and/or create lower leg gait anomalies. Increased load is placed on muscles and ligaments when the bone framework is poorly made. When muscles and ligaments have to work harder to support weight and move limbs, endurance is compromised.



### CHEST & ELBOWS

The weight of head, neck and forequarters are supported by the front legs. The elbows should set under a broad, deep chest and be well knit to the ribs, neck and shoulders by muscles and ligaments.



### FEET & PASTERNS

Feet are shock absorbers and provide traction. Thick pads, tightly knit, well arched toes and compact feet require less energy to lift, allowing the dog to conserve energy and increase endurance.



The pasterns act as shock absorbers. The muscles & ligaments here operate the wrist joint to maintain the line of support from forelegs to feet.



### SIDEGAIT

Shoulder layback and angle & length of humerus & forearm affects range of motion of the front legs. A long stride with good reach in front moves the body forward efficiently.

# Bernese Mountain Dog Hindquarters

\*\*\* Tails off to side to show rear leg conformation.

**STIFLE & HOCK**  
Bernese stifles and hocks should not turn in or out - adequate flexion with little lateral laxity in these joints provides the dog power in gait as well as optimal columns of support needed for rear body weight bearing.

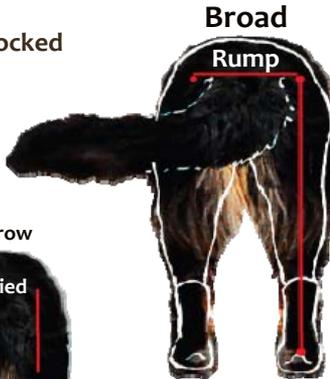


Cow hocked

AKC

"The hocks are well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed. Feet are compact and turn neither in nor out."

Correct



Broad Rump

Correct

Broad



Good Tail



**HAIR**  
can create an illusion of breadth, or mask structural deficiencies!!!

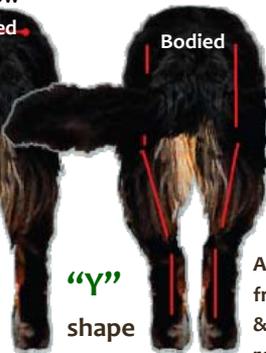
↑ Bandy, wide Stifles turned out

Narrow Bodied



Narrowly made rears may be associated with narrowly made forequarters and/or slab sided chests.

Narrow Bodied



"Y" shape rear  
Narrow Hocks

Straight column of support from pelvis to pad.

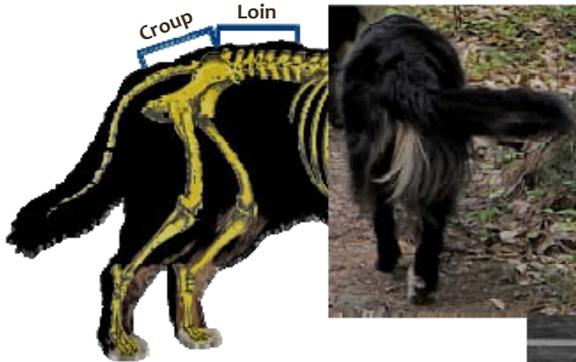
Any breaks in the straight line of support provided by the framework (pelvic girdle, femur, lower leg, rear pastern & feet) put undue strain on tendons and ligaments, requiring more muscular effort to support the dog's body weight and maintain soundness and motion. ...

Result - decreased endurance.



Toed out

## Hindquarters



### TAILS & CROUP

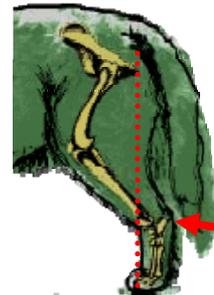
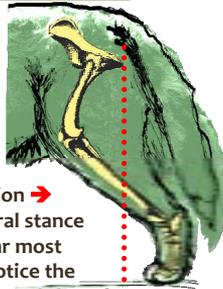
The angle of the pelvic bone affects tail set. Bernese should not have a flat croup or a steep croup. Check the angle of the pelvic bone to determine its position.

### TOPLINE

The topline should form an aesthetically pleasing outline from neck to the end of the tail. In Bernese the layout of the bones (angles formed) in the forequarters and rear quarters sections create the transitions seen in the topline. Abrupt junctures in any part of the topline creates an improper outline. Typically, when abrupt junctures occur they are caused by excessively oblique angles and/or extreme variations in lengths of bones.

Desirable - a smooth flowing of neck into level, broad back, back into loin and croup into a long somewhat heavy tail which reaches at a minimum to the hock joint.

**Excessive rear angulation** →  
The rear toes in a natural stance fall well behind the rear most point of the ishium. Notice the long lower thigh bones and short femur.



## ANGULATION

The femur and tibia/fibula bones form an oblique angle [that means any angle that is not a right angle or multiple of right angles.] This angle is referred to as the 'bend of stifle'.

The stifle joint is the knee.

Imagine a straight vertical line that is dropped from the rearmost point of the pelvic bone to the ground. In a dog with good rear quarters' angulation, the fronts of the toes should be cut off by the line - when the dog is in a natural stance.

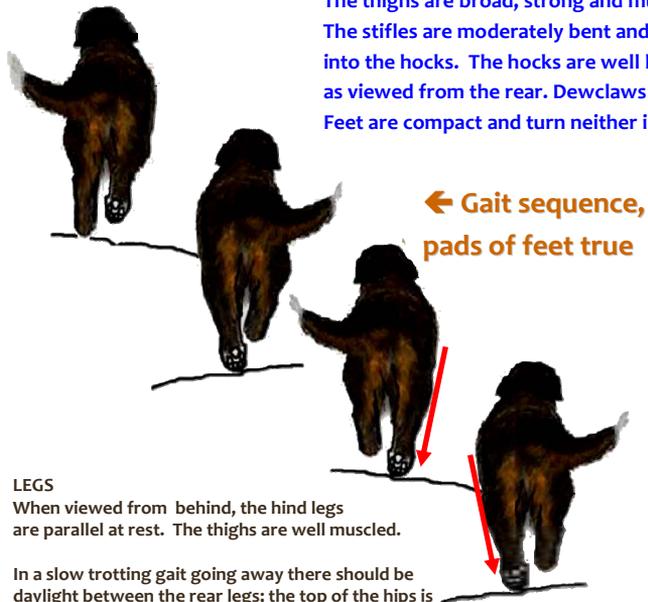
Often in a show 'posed' stance the rear legs are set further back and the hock & rear foot are artificially set up so the toes set just behind the line. This causes the dog to lean forward into his front as the weight is shifted forward.

The lower thigh tapers smoothly into rear pastern, often referred to as the hock. HOCKS (rear pastern) Well let down for leverage, endurance and stability. The distance from the **point of the hock** to the ground is short. The rear pastern should set vertical, turn neither in nor out.

## Rear movement – going away & stride

### AKC - Hindquarters

The thighs are broad, strong and muscular. The stifles are moderately bent and taper smoothly into the hocks. The hocks are well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed. Feet are compact and turn neither in nor out.



### LEGS

When viewed from behind, the hind legs are parallel at rest. The thighs are well muscled.

In a slow trotting gait going away there should be daylight between the rear legs; the top of the hips is the widest. At speed the legs converge towards a center line. The weight is carried by straight columns of support.

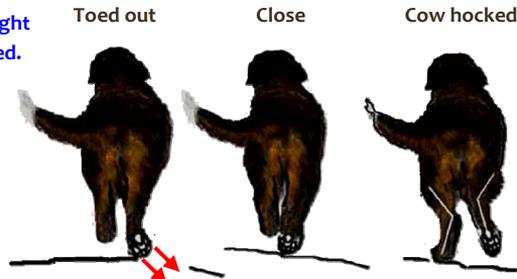
Stride unbalanced. Over reaching in rear, front reach breaks at pastern – caused by more rear angulation than front angulation.



Top lines sloping from withers to croup when a dog is gaiting are often the result of more angulation in rear than in front.



### ↓ Faulty going away ↓



DRIVE = Rear propulsion.

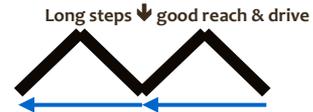
### ANGULATION

Bend of stifle - the less angulated the rear (& front), the more steps needed to cover ground. - shorter stride. Rear angulation in sync with front angulation and length of back is more efficient than mismatched components which cause the dog to overreach, crab, sidewind, pace, flip front feet or prance to avoid interference in foot placement.

### GROUND COVERAGE – balanced reach & drive

Arrows show the length of stride.

Shorter steps ↓ average reach & drive



## Bernese Feet

Bernese Mountain Dog Feet

Round, cat, circular, compact feet (toes all of similar length)

Well-arched toes

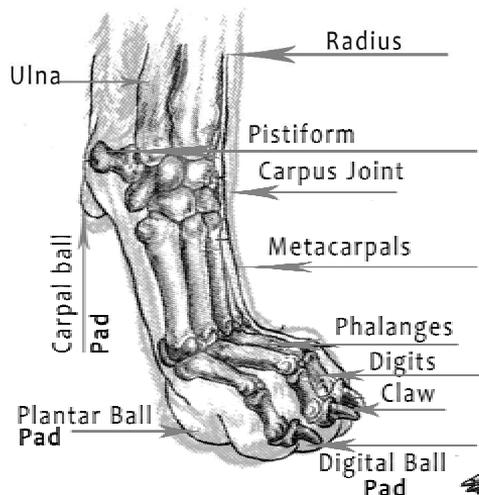


Well-knit foot



Pads of feet should not be visible (roll upwards)

Flat foot, down in pastern



Splay foot



Hare foot

(longer center toes, minimal arching)

Feet drawings from Canine Terminology (Author, Harold Spira; Illustrators, Mary and Peggy Davidson)

Feet are the dog's base of support; they act as a cushion to absorb shock, provide traction and braking in gait.

The bones in the pasterns and feet are held together by ligaments and muscles. Given that the Bernese is a heavily built dog, defects in bones in the feet place enormous strain on muscles and ligaments. Ligaments and muscles support in splayed feet and in double jointed toes have a tendency to break down over time.

This breakdown creates extra wear & tear on the pads of the feet which serve to cushion the impact and stabilize shifts in weight when the dog is moving.

The strength of muscles & ligaments in the pasterns is ultimately affected by the bone conformation and knit of the feet as well.

Good feet place less strain on pasterns.

Correct pasterns



Improperly aligned bones in feet or pasterns may create poor muscle and ligament tension or flexion inadequacies in moving dogs. These bones and joint issues will interfere with overall balance, stability, weight bearing ability, strength, endurance and footfall timing. Defects in pasterns and feet, in some cases are influenced by the bone placement (angulation) and the accompanying ligament muscle attachment structure above.

Notice the bend of the pasterns which begins below the carpal joint; and look at the lack of forward arch of the chest. → The weight bearing in these dogs' front falls on the rear of the plantar pad. This set up places more stress on ligaments in pasterns and feet. The slope in pasterns is indicative of the strain.



## Front & Rear Pasterns

*common terms - "wrist" & "hock"*

Upright pasterns



## Common issues in Bernese Pasterns and Feet include:

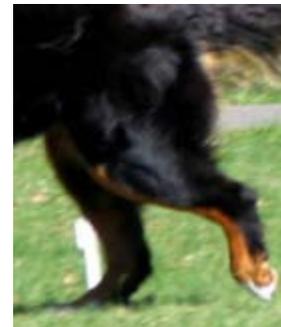
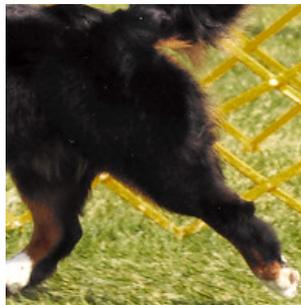
- ▶ Splayed feet - where there is daylight between the toes.
- ▶ Double jointed toes (seen more in the rear toes.) Pads roll up and are visible.
- ▶ Front pasterns in which the carpus and metacarpal bones slope or turn in or out excessively or are too upright, or knuckle over.

In any case, pastern or feet defects place greater stress on the muscles, ligaments in the joints which may compromise the integrity of the framework above.

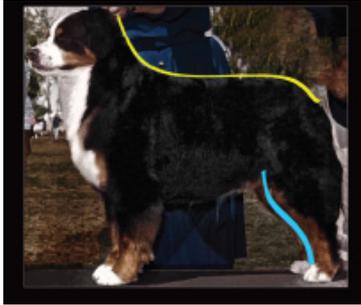
### Rear Pasterns

- ▶ Lack of flexion in rear leg and hock joint. Sickie hocks: result in loss of power, drive is diminished. → → →

### Good flexion in rear legs ↓



## Front, rear & body work together



Bend of Stifle - Angle of croup – Balance - Efficient, well made rear quarters aren't independent of the dog's body length and construction of the front assembly.

Slighter angulation - bend of stifle - steeper angle to croup.

When rear angulation is in sync with forequarter's angulation, the dog will have a balanced look. Movement will be sufficiently balanced; although, this dog will take more steps to cover ground than a dog with more bend of stifle and greater shoulder layback.

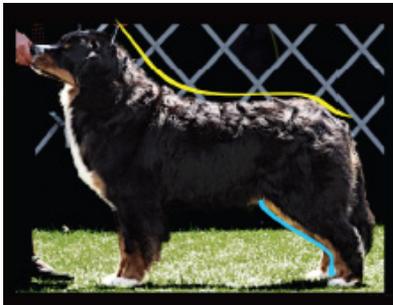
Reach and drive or range of motion are governed by the fore and rear quarters' angulation.



Moderate angulation - bend of stifle - croup gently rounded.

Notice the overline in yellow.

The angle formed between the junction of the neck and back is less vertical than the first dog. This type of transition of the neck into the back typically indicates a favorable layback of shoulder. The substance, well developed forechest, length of neck, length of back, coupling, angle of shoulder, bend of stifle, and gently rounded croup are aesthetically pleasing and exemplify a well made Bernese Mountain Dog.



Greater angulation - bend of stifle - flatter croup

Both fore and rear quarters are well angulated.

The angulation is in sync with the length of the back - which is slightly longer than ideal for this dog's height at the withers. The front and rear angulation coupled with the longer back will enable this dog to cover ground with long strides. The ideal proportion for a Bernese Mountain Dog is Length:10; Height:9. Bernese with longer backs should be felt across the lumbar area or loin section to assure adequate muscling exists. Couplings that are short tend to be structurally stronger but not as flexible.

Drooping in the loins or a tucked in waist are seen in some long backed Bernese.



↑ Structurally balanced dogs carry weight forward efficiently. ↑ In order to work effectively draft dogs need stability, balance & strength. ↓ Variations in reach, drive, topline and balance are seen. →



This photo of a draft dog → pulling his cart shows a sure footed, smooth stride.\* The head and tail carriage are typical for a dog in harness.

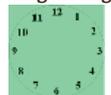


**AKC - The natural working gait of the Bernese Mountain Dog is a slow trot. However, in keeping with his use in draft and driving work, he is capable of speed and agility. There is good reach in front. Powerful drive from the rear is transmitted through a level back. There is no wasted action.**

The breed standards do not mention anything about head carriage. Although a somewhat upright neck with head carried high in show ring gait is 'flashy', the tendency is to confuse 'flashy' with a well-set muscular neck of medium length which blends smoothly into the shoulder region. Necks that abruptly meet shoulders or short necks are undesirable.

Attitude and training as well as the underlying structure affect head carriage.

Reasonable head/neck carriage for a draft dog moving at a slow trot typically falls between 10:00 and 10:30 as relates to position of clock hands, (dog facing west ←)



At a fast trot or when hauling a loaded cart, the dog's head will lower slightly as the dog's center of gravity shifts forward.

The tail helps the dog maintain equilibrium as weight centers shift. An upward swirl at a fast trot is acceptable as this helps the dog keep lateral balance.

Rolling of the body should not be excessive. Feet should remain close to the ground; the body should not move up and down or bounce. A smooth ground covering stride is desirable.

Structural inadequacies and imbalanced angulation or parts that do not work together to move the dog forward affect endurance and diminish a dog's overall working capability.

## More on Bernese Mountain Dog Tails

Range of  
acceptable  
tail carriage  
in gait. →



Tail carriage and tail set are not the same thing. Excited Bernese may have ‘happy’ tails which arc up. To determine the tail set, carefully observe the angle of the pelvis and placement of the tail as it relates to the croup. Tails positioned too far forward along the arch of the croup are likely incorrectly set. “Gay” or high tail sets typically lead to tails carried over the back which disrupts the desired flowing outline from head to tip of tail. Wry tails are carried off to the side, which presents a problem with the tail interfering with traces and cart shafts – a distinct disadvantage in a draft dog.

**CORRECT**



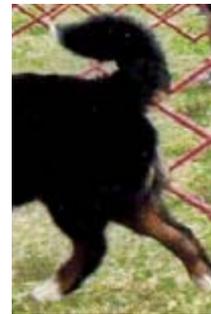
Wry Tail,  
Tail hooked



Gay Tail (standing)



Gay Tail (moving)



## Bernese Mountain Dog Heads – views - profile, full frontal

The backskull is slightly longer than the muzzle.

When viewed in profile the top of the skull is level, not domed in appearance.

When viewed from the front, the skull gently recedes laterally – the head is not flat.

The top of the nasal bones (muzzle) are level. The stop rises gradually from the foreface to the backskull.

The upper & lower jaw are broad in the rear. The muzzle is full and wide from rear to front when viewed in profile or from the front. The muzzle should not be narrow, snippy or noticeably longer than the backskull.

The front edge of the ear is set above the brow (Zygomatic processes), close to the top of the skull. The front edge of a well set ear will typically fall on a parallel line in the top portion of the rust markings above the eye. The front of the ear should be positioned slightly forward of the midline of the backskull. The bottom tips of the ears, when raised, should fall roughly along a parallel line with the upper jaw. Long, low set ears or ears set towards the rear of the backskull appear hound-like and detract from expression.



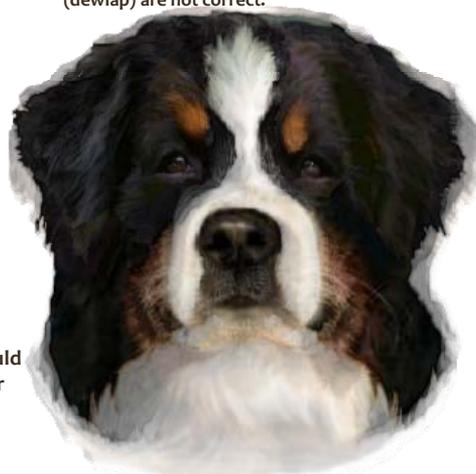
The outside of the eyes should roughly line up with the rear corners of the mouth.

A balanced harmonious headpiece will appear of appropriate size in relationship to the size of the dog's body.

Bernese Mountain Dog heads are attractive in many forms. With the exception of entropion and ectropion faults and jaw configurations that lead to faulty bites, the features discussed herein vary with the individual dog. Departures from the points discussed and fault finding is dependent upon the extent to which the features detract from overall balance of head qualities, including expression.

The backskull should be fairly broad between the ears. Heavy, massive skulls (as are correct for Saint Bernards) are not correct for Bernese Mountain Dogs. Slender backskulls combined with long, narrow wedge shaped muzzles are equally incorrect.

A clean gentle sculpting of features is preferred with some flare of zygomatic arch from foreface to backskull (cheeks), eyes with well fitted lids and tight mouth. Excess loose skin or deep folds around the eyes, mouth or neck (dewlap) are not correct.



## Bernese Mountain Dog Head Profiles, variations

Long muzzle, short backskull, snippy



Slight stop, shallow head, light eyes



Correct



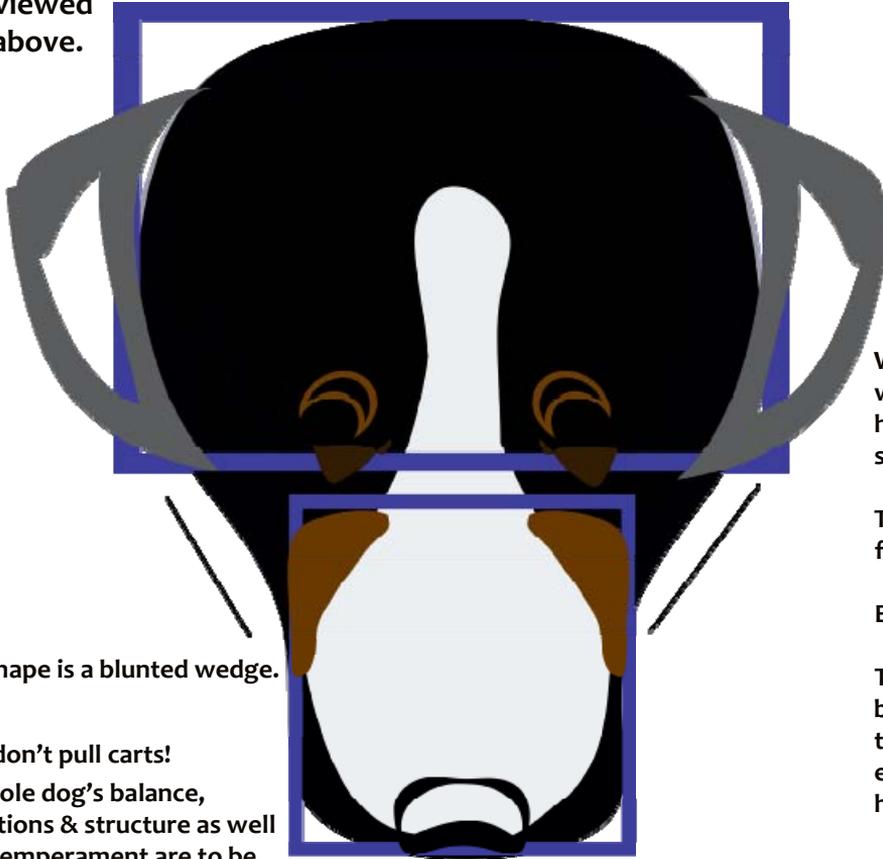
Round, receding backskull, round eyes, large ears



Massive, steep stop, low set ears, roman nose, loose eyes & over developed flews/lips

## Dorsal View - Head

Head viewed  
from above.



### Bernese Mountain Dog Heads - Backskull, Ears, Muzzle and 'Cheeks'

When viewed from above the head is wide and long. The ears hang close to head. The side of the face is not slab-sided or flat.

The muzzle is broad & flat on top. The foreface flares as it meets the backskull.

Extreme flare of 'cheeks' is not correct.

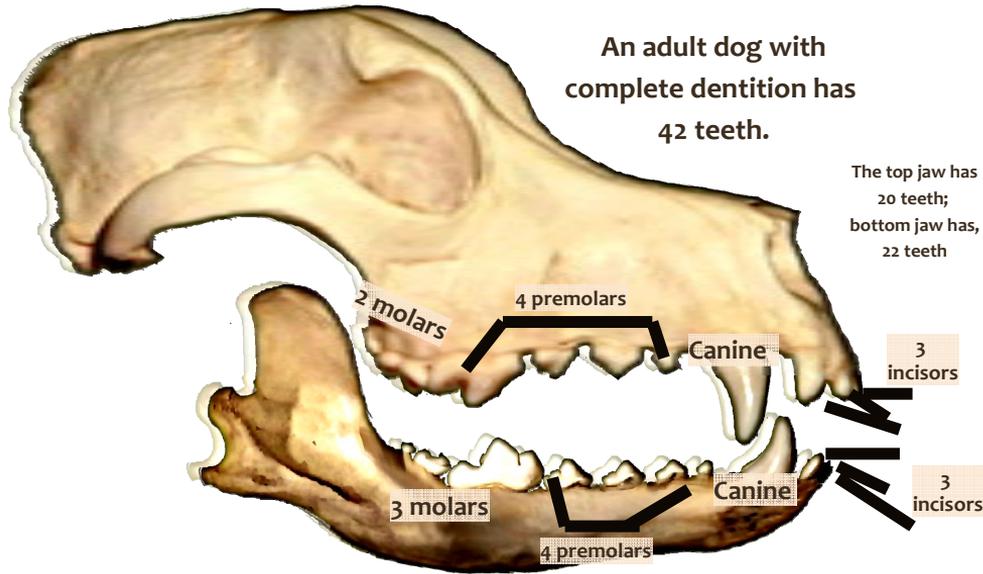
The transition between foreface and backskull is a gentle slope. The curve of the Zygomatic arch & strong jaws are evident when feeling and viewing the head.

The shape is a blunted wedge.

**Heads don't pull carts!**  
The whole dog's balance, proportions & structure as well as the temperament are to be held in the highest regard.

## Bernese Teeth

An adult dog with complete dentition has 42 teeth.



Typical bite faults seen in Bernese Mountain Dogs are missing teeth and malocclusions. Missing teeth usually occur in the premolar area in Bernese. Malocclusions include: undershot bites, overshot bites, wry bites (where one side of the lower jaw has grown longer than the other, skewing the end of the jaw to one side), crooked, crowded, or protruding teeth. With slightly over or undershot bites, the incisors may be the only teeth affected. An anterior cross bite is often identified as an undershot bite. The difference between these two bites is not subtle. An anterior cross bite occurs when the lower incisors extend beyond the upper incisors, but all other teeth mesh properly. In a true undershot bite, the other teeth do not mesh properly. Some Bernese have “dropped” incisors, a condition where the center, lower incisors are shorter than normal. Sometimes dropped incisors will tip slightly outward or be crooked. Crooked teeth in Bernese may be caused by crowding in a too-small or too-narrow jaw.

AKC:

The teeth meet in a scissors bite. An overshot or undershot bite is a serious fault. Dentition is complete.

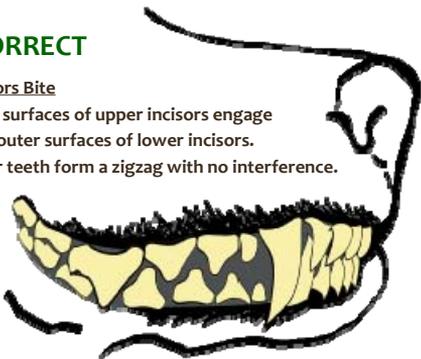
## Bites – Scissors, Level (pincer), Reverse Scissors, undershot, overshot

The Breed Standard calls for complete dentition, and a scissors bite.

### CORRECT

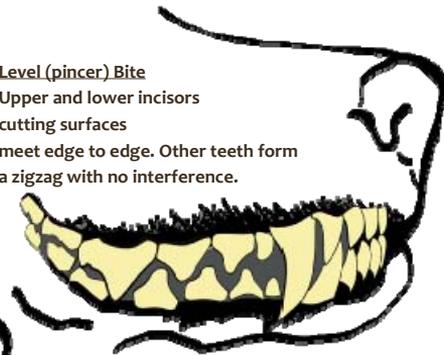
#### Scissors Bite

Inner surfaces of upper incisors engage with outer surfaces of lower incisors.  
Other teeth form a zigzag with no interference.



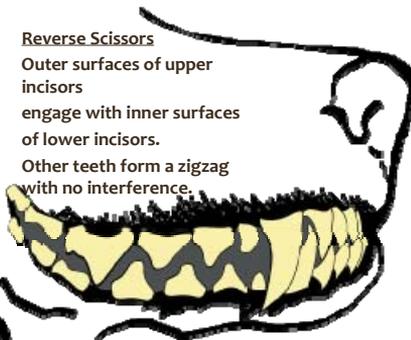
#### Level (pincer) Bite

Upper and lower incisors cutting surfaces meet edge to edge. Other teeth form a zigzag with no interference.



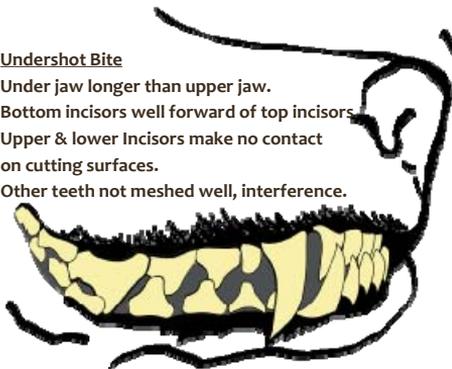
#### Reverse Scissors

Outer surfaces of upper incisors engage with inner surfaces of lower incisors.  
Other teeth form a zigzag with no interference.



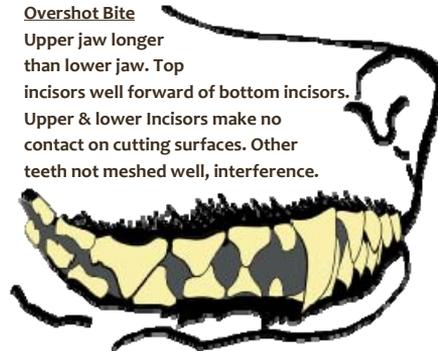
#### Undershot Bite

Under jaw longer than upper jaw.  
Bottom incisors well forward of top incisors.  
Upper & lower Incisors make no contact on cutting surfaces.  
Other teeth not meshed well, interference.



#### Overshot Bite

Upper jaw longer than lower jaw. Top incisors well forward of bottom incisors.  
Upper & lower Incisors make no contact on cutting surfaces. Other teeth not meshed well, interference.



## Bernese Mountain Dog Eyes

AKC: Head

Expression is intelligent, animated and gentle.

The eyes are dark brown and slightly oval in shape with close-fitting eyelids.

Inverted or everted eyelids are serious faults.

Blue eye color is a disqualification.

Beautiful expressions; they are called Berner smiles. The eye shapes, sizes and set on these dogs is correct.



In the range of correct color, size, shape and set. The 1<sup>st</sup> example is at the ► small end of range in size, & is a sharper almond shape. The 2<sup>nd</sup> example is of good size; the shape is a bit full from mid to outer edges.

The backskull, and foreface are full, but not massive. The stop & brow are well defined but not exaggerated. The eyes set vertical. They should not protrude. Entropion (lids turned inward, lower lashes contact cornea) & ectropion (lower lids sag) are faulty.

Eye shape and color varies.



Round eyes or light staring eyes are not ideal.



◀ Round Eyes



◀ Lighter eyes

Eye color lighter than the rust is undesirable.



Correct eye set, correct shape



Eye set too deep

## Bernese Mountain Dog nose, lips & flews



Nicely pigmented nose, lips  
& clear white muzzle band

AKC (under Head section)

The nose is always black.

The lips are clean and, as the Bernese Mountain Dog is a dry-mouthed breed, the flews are only slightly developed.

Over-developed lower lip ↓



Heavy muzzle ↓



Pale grey and mottled pink and black lips occur in Bernese. Mottled pigment of the lips is often times mirrored in skin color on the muzzle. Clear white markings are called for. The skin color under the white should be dark to produce a clear white coloration. Heavy lips or pendulous sagging flews are undesirable.

Correct

Correct



## Female & Male Heads



Notice the pigment on the dogs. Both are correct; the more darkly marked dog shows excellent coloration of eyes, muzzle band and rust.

## The Head - Facial Markings - variations

This is the same male dog with different facial markings.



All of these markings are acceptable.



AKC: Symmetry of markings is desired. Rust appears over each eye, on the cheeks reaching to at least the corner of the mouth...



The blaze extends towards the nose on both sides to a muzzle band. The blaze should not reach the tan markings above the eyes or extend rearward covering the entire backskull. A face with more white may appear wider than a darkly marked face, when in fact it is not. Dogs with excessively wide white blazes or muzzle bands have been known to produce dogs with white collars, wherein white markings extend around the neck or drift into the rust thumbprint markings over the eyes.

## Bernese Mountain Dog Coats

The Bernese Mountain Dog coat has a bright natural sheen. It is long, smooth to slightly wavy.

Hair over the shoulders and rump can be longer than hair over the mid back.

[IMPORTANT: hands on exam, observe gait from side to confirm correct fore & rear quarters' structures with forward propulsion through level back].



Kinky texture – lacks correct texture & natural sheen



Extremely curly coats are not correct for mature adults.



Length and texture qualities in coats about to be shed as well as new coats just coming in can be confusing. Kinky hair coats or open, standout coats and very short coats are not uncommon. These coat qualities are not correct.

\*\*Puppy coats [1<sup>st</sup> adult coat (>6 months, <18 months)] may have more curls over the back than a mature adult.

## Bernese Mountain Coats, pg. 2 – Mature Male, Female & young adult

Young male and female adult Bernese Mountain Dogs typically do not carry as dense or long coats as mature dogs.

Feathering on fore and rear legs as well as length and density of coats increase with age.

Overall coat length and density varies from dog to dog. Both sexes typically carry more hair in the area of neck and shoulders (ruff).

Males typically have longer chest furnishings than females. The length of hair on fore and rear legs and furnishings (feathering) is variable from dog to dog. When showing dogs in conformation, long wispy hair on feet, feathering and hocks may be neatened. ‘Back-brushing’ of hair on legs is routinely practiced to give the appearance of sturdy leg bone to match a blown dry, puffed out freshly bathed body coat.

Excessive trimming, grooming and scissoring or sculpting of coats with some dogs shown in conformation is practiced.

**AKC: The Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged.**

The length and density of Bernese coats can mask underlying body structure and framework or enhance the appearance of substance and bone.

**A correct Bernese is a dog of real substance – full bodied with sturdy leg bone.**



Young adults, ♂ male / ♀ female ↓



Mature adult ♂ males / ♀ females ↓ with correct coats



A good Bernese Mountain Dog coat protects the dog's skin from the weather, is not overly fine, or coarse, has a bright natural sheen and sheds dirt easily.

## Describing the Breed – A General Description

General appearance and Size, Proportion, Substance

AKC

“...striking tri-colored, large dog. He is sturdy and balanced. He is intelligent, strong and agile enough to do the draft and droving work for which he was used in the mountainous regions of his origin. Dogs appear masculine, while bitches are distinctly feminine.”



The male,  
◀ shown on the left,  
is full bodied, balanced and sturdy.



The bitch,  
shown on the right, ▶  
is substantial,  
with strong legs.

Bitch on left / Dog on right



This pair demonstrates the difference in size and general appearance of feminine & masculine Bernese.

\* NOTE: There is no disqualification for height in the Bernese Standards. The current FCI standard defines size for dogs and bitches as follows:

SIZE :

Height at withers : for dogs : 64-70 cm, (25.19"- 27.55")

ideal size : 66-68 cm. (25.98" – 26.77")

for bitches : 58-66 cm, (22.83"- 25.98")

ideal size : 60-63 cm. (23.62" – 24.80")

Bernese, whether male or female, should display balanced harmonious proportions including good depth of body, and a shorter coupling. Long -backed, rangy, fine boned, setter-like or long legs are not desirable traits in either sex.



**Female & Male Sex  
Differentiation**

**Distinctly feminine &  
masculine qualities**



**↑ Feminine ↓**

**↑ Masculine ↓**



## **BERNESE ARE...**

### **Biddable & Beautiful!**

#### **An attractive male & female**

The female, seated in the back, has a strong yet feminine head with correct eyes, ears, foreface & backskull. Her breadth of body is evident. Her correct jet black coat clear white pigment, with rich deep russet markings are lovely.

The male, lying in the foreground, has a larger, broader head of proper size and shape to compliment his broader chest and overall larger body size.

The calm pleasing expressions are those of focused, attentive dogs. The Bernese are known for their ability to accurately 'read' people and reliably respond sensibly to the situation at hand.



Bernese Mountain Dogs carry thick long coats which can make the dogs appear to have full, deep bodies, broad chests, well sprung ribs, muscular rear quarters and sturdy bone.

Hair is not substance!!!

### AKC

The chest is deep and capacious with well-sprung, but not barrel-shaped, ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows. The back is broad and firm. The loin is strong.

The male shown below is balanced. He has substance, and a pleasing outline with deep chest, level back correct underline and a handsome, masculine headpiece.



## Understanding substance.



*This bitch is not set up in a "Show" pose wherein leg positions are controlled. She is compact. Her chest is deep and her elbows are set under her body (her chest arches forward). Her slighter angulation does not detract from her sturdy body build, lovely coupling, medium length of neck, attractive head type and overall balanced look .*

Note the depth of the chest as measured from the upper most point of the withers to the lowest part of the ribcage compared to the length of the front leg from the elbow to the ground – the distances are roughly equal. She's carrying a full, thick coat!

Also, notice her underline which shows depth from the front part of her ribcage as well as depth at the rear of the rib cage ("Underline/belly : Slightly rising from chest to hindquarters.")

The underline of a dog's belly is also referred to as tuck up. Bernese should not have a tucked up underline as is seen in the conformation of whippets, greyhounds , or in the Manchester Terrier pictured to the right. ▶



## Bernese Mountain Dog Bone

Bone size is referenced; the AKC Breed Standard uses the phrase 'strong legs'.

The breed is described as a large, sturdy dog.



Light, fine boned



Moderate, sturdy bone

Bone size is somewhat variable in Bernese. Length of hair on the legs also varies from about 1/3" to 1 & 1/2".

*Feathering on the back of front legs and hocks is typically longer, particularly in mature dogs.*

Just as hair on the body can mask substance, grooming of hair on the legs can present the illusion of sturdy bone. Feel the bones - and look at the size of & feel the feet. A sturdy boned dog is unlikely to have narrow foot width; feet may be wider. Wetting down the legs will reveal true bone size.

NOTE: Strong legs does not necessarily = massive bones. When looking at and feeling the leg bones the amount of bone that exists should be sufficient to provide support for the dog's weight.

**Aesthetic & functional balance of bone size to body mass is desirable.**



Light bone compared to body

Bone size harmonious with body size



## Disqualifications



Blue eye color.

Any ground color other than black



## Questions – You be the judge



They are tri-colored...

Now what?

### 1st row across top.

Look at the length of their backs; do the dogs look long backed?

Which front appears to have a good shoulder layback?

Which dog's elbows set under the dog's body?

Which dogs have the most and least rear angulation; is there too much or not enough?

How does each dog's neck tie into their backs?

Which dog appears most balanced?

### 2nd row across

Do these dogs appear a bit shorter backed than those in the first row, a little longer than tall?

How's their front and rear angulation?

Does the first dog's forechest appear to be arched forward?

Hands on would tell you more about the front.

Does the 3rd dog have enough bend of stifle?

If you had to guess, without seeing movement, which dog do you think would have better reach and drive, the 2nd or 3rd?

### 3rd row across

Would you say these dogs are compact?

Can you compare the length of their necks?

Pictures can't tell you the relative size of the dogs.

Would it be surprising that there is a 30 pound difference and does weight and size matter?

Are their bend of stifle or angle of the croup different?

Do their shoulder laybacks' look different?

Which dog has the flatter topline?

Which dog appears to have the most balanced structure?

Opinions and tastes vary, the same as dogs. Breeders - know the characteristics described in the breed standard; structure is a component of breed type.

## Credits & websites

With special thanks and appreciation extended to the following people who shared many of the photos used in creating this presentation:

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... and from so many friends of the Bernese Mountain Dogs who have shared photographs of beautiful dogs with me over the past 26 years.

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... And thanks go to my husband, Mark Milligan, for his advice, patience and support of this project and for and being a steady companion in life & times spent with Bernese Mountain Dogs.

Thank you all for making this work possible.

Since the Bernese Mountain Dog has its origins in Switzerland and exists worldwide, it is fitting to include the following references.

The Naturhistorisches Museum – Science website contains extensive [information on Swiss dog breeds.](http://www.nmbe.unibe.ch/deutsch/531_5.html)

[http://www.nmbe.unibe.ch/deutsch/531\\_5.html](http://www.nmbe.unibe.ch/deutsch/531_5.html)

[FCI – Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Standard](http://www.fci.be/uploaded_files/045A2002_en.doc)

[http://www.fci.be/uploaded\\_files/045A2002\\_en.doc](http://www.fci.be/uploaded_files/045A2002_en.doc)

[Swiss Club for Bernese Mountain Dogs](http://www.bshkbs.ch/)

<http://www.bshkbs.ch/>

For an in depth explanation of the history and purpose of the breed see [Margret Bärtschi's article, "How it All Began" at:](http://www.bmdinfo.org/bmdhistory/2006_Bartschi_BMDCGB_Centenary.pdf)

[http://www.bmdinfo.org/bmdhistory/2006\\_Bartschi\\_BMDCGB\\_Centenary.pdf](http://www.bmdinfo.org/bmdhistory/2006_Bartschi_BMDCGB_Centenary.pdf)

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In North America

United States:

[The American Kennel Club](http://www.akc.org)

<http://www.akc.org>

[The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America](http://www.bmdca.org)

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Canada

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The New Dog Steps. Rachael Paige Elliot, Illustrated by Eve Andrarde and R. P. Elliot

This Illustrated Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Standard Review was authored and illustrated in by Ann Milligan; editors, Ruth Reynolds & Mark Milligan. The content is offered for the benefit of breeders & owners. It is hoped the pages will serve as a learning aid and improve understanding of the breed's characteristics as they have existed in dogs over time and today & as described in Breed Standards.

All the Bernese Mountain Dog photos shown in the presentation were or are cherished companion dogs. Thanks go to their breeders & owners.

Distinct phenotypes of dog breeds are the product of breed management in modern history. Breed Standards primarily address phenotype. This breed of dog is a changing, morphing entity, and a human construct at that. Characteristics can be bred in and bred out. Please never underestimate the value of choosing healthy, long-lived dogs for breeding; breed only sound, typey Bernese Mountain Dogs of intelligence & outstanding character and temperament.

**The road ahead – the dogs' future is in your hands. Build them & keep them well.**

