

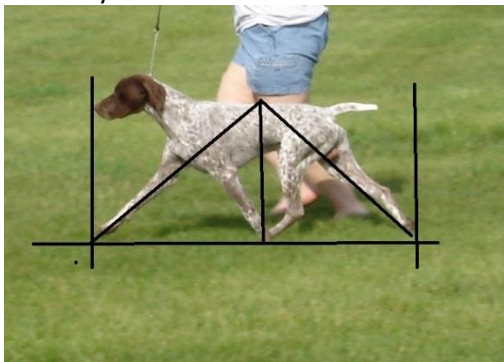
I recently read a post on one of the social media sites that was discussing the reach and drive of show dogs. I began thinking that what is shown in the show ring, is not necessarily what our hunting dogs exhibit in the field while doing the jobs that they were bred to do. I am a firm believer that form and function are linked together, and if you don't have both in one package, the package is not complete.

Reach and drive are probably one of the most important aspects of endurance and stability in our hunting dogs. Their movement should be effortless and non-constrained. Although, when evaluating our dogs in the ring, you only get to see them at a show gait, which does not give a true picture, but we need to be able to look deep and see how and why they move.

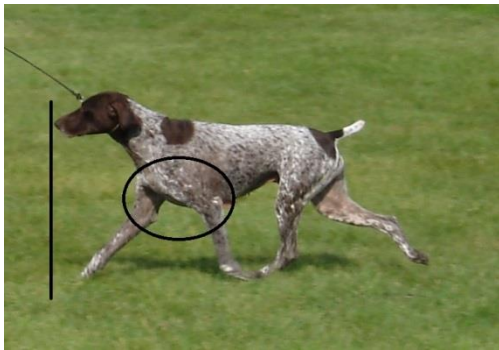
Look for a dog that is balanced. Not too tall for their length, and not too long for their height as stated in the breed standard. Notice the "square" in the picture below, with the dog standing his ground in the correct position, not over angulated which gives a distorted picture.



In balancing the picture, the length of reach should have their front feet extending to their nose, and the rear extension should be in balance with the front. Too much reach and drive or too little, will have the dog wasting too much energy, depleting the stamina needed to perform their job, hour after hour, day after day.



Dogs that are not structurally sound, ie short or too long of upper arm, not enough or too much turn of stifle, will not be able to achieve correct reach and drive. Dogs with a shorter upper arm will not have functional angulation and will appear to either a "hackney" gait or a "daisy cutter" gait. Picture one shows correct proportion and Picture two shows incorrect proportion. (Notice in picture two the short reach but long rear extension, unbalanced).



Another aspect of balance is the tail carriage. One must remember that the tail is an extension of the spine and is used by the dog for balance while performing their function in the field. A dog with a high tail carriage, or “terrier tail”, will more often than not, have a shorter stride than a dog that uses their tail as part of their total movement application.

Head and neck placement are also essential pieces of the total package. Dogs should move in a natural gait, yet “reaching” with determination. Dogs with incorrect head, neck and shoulder structure will move with a more labored gait. When evaluating dogs at a “show gait”, so often I see handlers that distort this aspect of movement by “stringing” the dog up or “flying” around the ring at excessive speed. This happens for one of two reasons, one is to hide faults and the other is handling inexperience.

In looking at the final total picture, we want to see a dog that is relaxed, balanced and moves with ease and gives the appearance of “floating” while having a ground covering gait that can last all day.