

Keeshond Head Type and Expression

The late Dick Beauchamp, respected dog writer, breeder and judge, once said that head type was one of the hallmarks of breed type. So in exploring the aspects of Keeshond head type we need to examine the wording in the breed standard and apply that to our dogs.

Spectacles are the first thing mentioned in the standard. Judges new to the breed often confuse the reference to spectacles as the appearance of light areas around the eyes circled with darker hair – like glasses. However, the standard states that spectacles are not only the orbital area but “the delicate line slanting from the outer corner of each eye toward the lower corner of each ear.” This combined with the eyebrows give the dog an alert and intelligent expression. This is essential to breed type. A dull and lack luster expression are true Keeshond expressions. A very serious fault is the lack of the dark line forming the spectacles.

The next descriptors in Keeshond standard have to do with the eyes and the ears. These are hallmarks of true Arctic breed type. Both have practical applications in the arctic environment. Eyes are to be dark brown in color, medium size, almond in shape, set obliquely (at an angle slanting upward) and not too close together or too far apart. One can imagine in an outdoor arctic environment that round, protruding eye would be a disadvantage and round eyes would be more prone to injury. Dark eyes, and eye rims are also required. Why? Arctic breeds are required to “squint down” in the snow. Much easier to do with almond shaped, dark eyes. Faults are round, light or protruding eyes.

Ears are required to be small, triangular in shape, and mounted high on the head. There are functional reasons as well for these ear requirements in arctic breeds. You can imagine that large ears would be subject to freezing and the dog would at least lose the tips of the ears in subzero temperatures. The smaller, higher placed ear is also more mobile and alert to the many sounds of the outdoor environment. One test that breeders (not suggested for judges) can do when evaluating puppies or adults is to fold the ear down toward the corner of the eye. The ears should just reach the corner of the eye. If the ear covers the eye it is probably too large.

The standard says that the shape of the head should be in proportion to the body. When viewed from above, not just the muzzle but the whole head should give the appearance of a wedge. Dogs that cheeky, or coarse will not have smooth wedge and there will be a distinct break where the muzzle fits into the back skull. In profile the head should exhibit a definite stop. It is somewhat controversial how much stop, but definite is definite and most would agree that ski slope is not definite. Faults are an apple head, or absence of stop. David Cavill, an English judge and expert on arctic breeds says that the rise of the stop over the nasal sinus is required in arctic breeds as it gives space for the air to warm as dog breathes in the colder climates. One can imagine the difficulty that a brachycephalic breed would have in this challenging and very cold climate.

The muzzle is called to be of medium length, neither coarse nor snippy. Bitches, of course, will have more delicate muzzles than dogs. Once illustration of a beautiful Keeshond head is the portrait of Eng. Ch. Furstin of Evenlode, her muzzle is delicate but strong and fits into a smooth wedge. The mouth is called to be neither overshot nor undershot and lips should be black with no wrinkle or sagging. A scissors bite is called for and a fault is misaligned teeth.

Given this outline balance is the key in seeking the ideal Keeshond head type. Breeding a true Keeshond expression can be a challenge for breeders. I think breeders fall in love with their dog's head

and expression and sometimes find it difficult to fault their heads – while they may find it much easier to fault, color, coat and structure. As in all breeding decisions objectivity is the key. It is helpful in evaluating head type as in other areas to measure dogs head. You will find that those with the most pleasing expressions will have many measurements that equal, such as the distance from the corner of the eye to the base of the ear, the length of the muzzle, the depth of the muzzle, the length of the back skull, etc. Keep the measurements on hand and compare generations. The information will be enlightening. Every generation of Keeshonden has individuals that are known for idea head type observe them and look at generations past. What they all have in common is balance and the exquisite alert and intelligent expression called for the Keeshond standard.

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