

Have we lost the “Classic” Greyhound?

I have been in **Greyhounds** for the last 21 years, a relatively very short time if compared with some breeders I do respect a lot for their knowledge and the specimens they bred. In 1996, the only book about the Greyhound which was available in Italian was “Il Greyhound”, written by Mr. Gilberto Grandi, judge and breeder with the prefix “Della Caveja”. I was a total beginner and found that book of extreme importance for my understanding and comprehension of the breed. First of all, because it was clearly describing the history and the standard of the breed. Secondly, because it was pointing out unequivocally some differently constructed Greyhounds a beginner could meet either in a dog show, or in a coursing field or in a racetrack. But the reason why I treasured so much that book was the lovely feeling that I could finally understand without any “qui pro quo” what a real Greyhound was, and I still think that such specimen would very well fit with my idea of “classic” Greyhound. In the last five years, many times I felt the need of writing down some of my impressions and thoughts over the breed, but nothing triggered my will as the interesting article written by Dr. Barbara Kessler, a friend and a breeder.

Given that the adjective “classic” has only very little to do with the innumerable example of Greyhounds (or better, Sighthounds) painted, sculpted and represented in the history of art, I strongly feel that it would be a mistake to change this adjective in “standard” Greyhound. Of course, the classic Greyhound has to fit absolutely in the standard but the idea that many of us fanciers have in their mind goes well beyond the standard for those characteristics which in the standard are mentioned but not (maybe) sufficiently enhanced. I know, this probably happens in many other breeds and breed standards, but I would like to focus on some points which are essentials to me.

First of all, as from Grandi’s book, I do not think that the breed is nowadays represented by two types, i.e. the show type and the racing type. Grandi was

indicating a third interesting type in his book, “The Coursing Type”. Yes, “tertium datur”, the third (type) is given (in this case). In the book that type was, and to me still is, the “classic” Greyhound. An athletic, generous in lines and strongly built specimen which could certainly try to chase a rabbit but at the same time could have a long walk with its owner, in the countryside or in the city, showing an easy, effortless movement.

It is true, for some breeders and fanciers, the needs connected to (win) dog shows have been emphasizing some characteristics of many breeds (not only Greyhounds), very often in a wrong way. Some specimens have become too long or too angulated. But I cannot agree on the performance in the show ring. As we all should know, Beauty is in the Balance. And there is no Beauty without Balance. A tremendous reach and drive in movement (“*TRAD*”) is still tremendous: it only matters HOW it is performed. If it is just a “*tourbillion*” of legs and muscles at exaggerate speed, to me it is absolutely worthless. BUT, if it is instead a long reach in front, well balanced by a strong drive in the rear, all of it associated with a beautiful top line (i.e. like the dog is standing) and a correctly carried tail (i.e. with a light semi circle), not missing an adequate soundness and the indispensable effortlessnes, to me it looks not only satisfying but even IDEAL.

The drive provided by the hind legs has to be strong, since the standard asks for “**powerful quarters**”: now, once again we have to find an agreement about the word “tremendous”, because in itself this word does not mean anything. It is not a philological matter, it is just practical. The drive from behind **has** to be powerful, this is a fact. The hind feet should not just step on the ground, they have to push the body, that’s why they must be “**coming well under body giving great propulsion**”.

Although the standard does not say anything about effortless movement, I do believe that it is easy to deduce it from the rest of the standard, especially where, in the general description, “**suppleness of limb**” is mentioned. The movement must

look easy and there are many examples of dogs belonging to other breeds that perform instead a great effort and therefore need much energy to produce their movement: one above all others, the German Shepherd.

As for the thorax region, the standard asks for “**deep chest**” and “**capacious body**”. The ribs should be “**deep, well sprung and carried well back**”. I think that this is a matter of proportions and not only of shape. The chest of a Greyhound will NEVER look like the chest of a Boxer: it is easy to generalize, but we need to be specific and precise. Some Greyhounds might have a broader chest than others, but this has to be regarded in accordance with the general balance of the dog, otherwise breeders (and judges) risk to become no more than simple “measure accountants”.

On the other hand, the proportions are very important also when taking about the length of legs. It is doubtless that the standard claims for a dog clearly inscribed in a rectangle. Since in the standard there are no numbers regarding the proportions of the sides of this rectangle, it is mandatory to deduce these proportions from the rest of the standard. And in this we are helped by the second world describing the general appearance of the breed: “**Upstanding**”. This means that the Greyhound can NEVER look like a Dachshund. Unfortunately, this matter of evaluation is left to the people who are examining the dogs and I can assure that very many of them can hardly tell if the dog is long or short in body. So, imagine how more difficult for such people would be to say that a Greyhound is “low on legs” or “up on legs”. Anyway, as a matter of fact, even in my most recent visit at a Specialty Dog show, though the big entry of Greyhounds (more than one hundred in two days), I could not see actually any relevant number of dogs looking low on legs, and this opinion of mine was actually supported by other breeders near me.

And now angulations. In my humble opinion, even this issue has to be regarded in relation to the general balance of a Greyhound. If we have a dog which is well angulated in front (“**clean well laid shoulders**”), we cannot think of straight rear angulations, otherwise the dog would be unbalanced. And vice versa, of course. But

there is a very simple method to check this out: looking at movement. A dog judge might have differently angulated dogs in the ring, but their own balance can be evaluated only through their movement. In a way it is quite easy. They must be sound coming and going, long reaching in front with good drive in the rear, keeping their top line with an easy action close to the ground and a proper carriage of the tail. I think that, whatever is our idea of the current status of the breed, it has to be supported by facts, and the only opportunities to share these facts are given by breed specialties, especially those with a large number of entries, or by those big international shows where the Greyhound entries are usually well supported.

About the “**rather long back**” from the standard. I think that the back cannot be seen and evaluated separately from the croup, because, together with the withers, they form the top line. There is no specific mention about the croup in the standard, but the words suggest us that it must not be steep, otherwise it would “cut” the whole top line and would not provide the desirable “**great propulsion**”. In this way it comes to our mind an idea of how a top line should look, starting from a (smooth) neck set, a rather (which means the opposite of little) long back and (I would add) a well inclined (and not short, because it has to match the rather long back) croup. It is more difficult to say it in words than seeing it in reality.

About the shoulder and the shoulder placement. the contribution about the “Jenaer Study” (“*assuming that the centre of rotation for the front limb is not at the shoulder joint, but at the cranial angle of the scapula*”) is interesting and welcome. Nevertheless, I suppose that many breeders already know that what is essential for the “**free stride**” is not only a matter of the shoulder angulation, but even of the position and the mobility of its blade. However, I strongly doubt that a Greyhound which is moving with a long “**low reaching, free stride enabling the ground to be covered at great speed**” can be considered defective according to a scientific theory which is applicable to the anatomy of the dog and states that “a more loose suspension increases the mobility and enables a longer stride”. Once again, it is a personal matter of evaluation and not an absolute truth.

Now, it is indeed very appreciable the work of picking up a picture of a famous Greyhound of the past and drawing on it the edges of a “current” Greyhound, no matter who this current dog is. But it has its faults. First of all, it is just a picture. And if there has not been the possibility of looking at the dog of the past in real (possibly touching it) and see how it moves, as I am quite sure about, the comparison cannot be made in a proper way and after all is rather unfair, because we all know that pictures catch just a moment. Well, in that moment, the dog from the past (just as the current one) could have shown an outline which is fitting the idea of the writer, but not necessarily its true outline. And this can apply for two, three or more specimen of the past. In order to have a correct result, instead, the comparison should be done on many more specimen, maybe one hundred or more through the years: such pictures are definitely available. I don’t think it would be a fair analysis applying this method only on two or three specimen of the past, of which there is no video or clue about movement, at least. It might be fascinating for sure, but not correct under a statistic, scientific and zoological point of view.

By purpose, I propose, in the end of this article, some drawings of profiles of Greyhounds since the ‘50 up to today’s show scene. I wonder if anybody could tell exactly if they are “old” or “current” Greyhounds ... 😊

Drawing rectangles and analyzing proportions has a noble intent, but it is not with numbers applied on the proportions of two dogs (1:12 compared to 1:25) that we can support the theory that we have lost the “classic” Greyhound. This should be done on many more subjects.

Furtherly, another question comes to my mind: are we just pointing out a role model to follow (the “classic” Greyhound from the past) or shouldn’t we instead try to understand if nowadays Greyhounds are a natural evolution of that model? I cannot see any attempt in this direction. Saying just that the breed is going the wrong way compared to the standard (and the “classic” type) sounds fancy and probably captures the attention of many Greyhound breeders and lovers, including

several (sometimes very smart) judges, but it does not give any real contribution to the improvement and the positive evolution of the breed as long as it does not suggest a path to follow in order to achieve what would be desirable.

I do not want to forget (and hopefully I will never) what is the ancestral purpose of the Greyhound: a functional, effective hunting. On the other hand, times have changed and nowadays Greyhounds are our everyday companions, they live in our house and very often sleep in our beds. Occasionally, we take them to dog shows or to lure coursing competitions, but we do not own and breed them for those purpose. They are still able to run and hunt. If necks and backs have become slightly longer, briskets a bit deeper, movements perhaps more reaching in the front and driving in the rear (but also in many cases sounder), slightly different general proportions (0,05 to 0,1), I would not make it **too** dramatic as long as the Greyhound keeps on fitting the standard when it comes to overall type and stays a healthy and athletic companion. It is just needed by the serious breeders to use **common sense** when making combinations, be critical on their breeding results and openly discuss them with other breeders. On the other hand, what would be otherwise the purpose of a **World Greyhound Congress?**

In the end, my last very sincere thought. Looking back to when and where I started my journey with this unique wonderful breed and considering all the specimen I could see and touch, I strongly believe that, through these last 21 years, the overall quality of our beloved breed has improved. I don't know honestly if some or many dogs from the further past were better than all those, although some of their pictures (mainly thanks to the archive of the most generous Mrs. Dagmar Kenis Pordham) have been inspiring me and strengthen my love for the breed, but this is not an important issue if we think for the future. I am frankly not afraid that **“the “classic Greyhound” will soon be consigned to history”**. I am convinced, instead, that very probably several winners from today are better Greyhounds (according to the standard) than many winners from the past. I strongly believe that the future is bright, provided that breeders can seriously and fairly work together, no matter

what the results in the show rings can be and no matter which dog is winning. Just think that all we are lucky because we have the precious opportunity to breed and live with the most beautiful, noble and amusing dogs in the world: the Greyhounds!
Pierluigi Primavera, Doctor in B&A, co-breeder of SOBERS, Italy.

**Below, some outlines of Standard Greyhounds from different years (in no order) ...
... try to guess each one from which decade or year?**

Standard Greyhounds 1951 -2017

