

Where have all the Shoulders gone?

Long time passing

Where have all the shoulders gone

Long time ago

"Correct" fronts are the hardest structural trait to keep in dogs. Once correct fronts are lost from the gene pool, they are very difficult, if not impossible, to recover. There also seems to be widespread misunderstanding about exactly what a good front assembly is.

The fact is, Rottweilers seem to have lost the gene pool for the desired front! This is a serious concern that needs our immediate attention!

Teaching breeders how to **see** the parts and how the parts "relate" to the whole dog-- is a very complicated process. I will give you an idea of things to consider, when trying to fix a front assembly problem. That way you will understand why it is so hard for most breeders to fix their fronts.

Assembly Instructions:

Forequarters :

Shoulder blade is long and well laid back. Upper arm equal in length to shoulder blade, set so elbows are well under body. Distance from withers to elbow and elbow to ground is equal. Legs are strongly developed with straight, heavy bone, not set close together. Pasterns are strong, springy and almost perpendicular to the ground. Feet are round, compact with well arched toes, turning neither in nor out. Pads are thick and hard. Nails short, strong and black. Dewclaws may be removed.

In understanding the front end assembly you need to realize there are many parts to this "assembly". And the importance of their length and placement.

Shoulder blade:

- Size - consider the overall length of shoulder blade.
- The thickness of the shoulder blade
- The length, and angle of the indentation of the scapula

- The angle of how the shoulder is placed on the body from the side view
- The angle of the shoulder and how it is placed on the body viewing it from the front.
- The position of the shoulder blade and how it hugs the body at the top or withers. (Which must be viewed from looking down on the dog).

Placement: (shoulder blade and upper arm)

The ideal front assembly is one that stands true when viewed from the front and a well-laid-back, correct shoulder, as well as good return of upper arm that brings the elbow well under the top of the shoulder blades when viewed from the side

The shoulders need to be **placed BACK on the body** and too many times we see them placed too far forward giving the dog the appearance of a short neck. All dogs have the same number of vertebrae, but they vary in length and width. .

When shoulders are placed too far forward on the body, they can't support the weight. Remember **the front holds the body weight**; the back propels the dog forward. Therefore if the front assembly (shoulder blade & upper arm) is set too far forward on the body, the front legs (carpal, toes, elbows) of the dog are often deformed because they can't hold the weight of the dog while they developing. Another problem with steep shoulders, is it will elevate the front of the dog, causing the topline to slope downward to the rear

Upper Arm:

One must consider the width, the shape of the bone (round, oval, flat), also the length compared to the length of the shoulder blade. The **Length of upper arm (humerus)**, should actually be equal to the shoulder blade (scapula). If the upper arm is shorter than the shoulder blade then the forelegs do not support the deepest part of the chest. The legs will not be well set well under the dog. This common structural problem can result in less reach when moving (an inability to swing the leg forward the optimum amount in order to cover the most ground). For example, picture a dog with a shorter upper arm, note where the legs are. But make the upper arm a little longer, and this brings the legs where they should be. Well set under the body.

A shorter upper arm can also result in inefficient movement, such as lifting the front feet too far off the ground with each stride (the front feet should just clear the ground as the dog moves -- anything more is wasted motion).

Figure A Shows correct shoulder lay and correct upper arm length

Figure B shows a steep shoulder and shorter upper arm length

Figure C shows correct shoulder lay and shorter upper arm length

Figure D shows steep shoulder lay with equal upper arm length.

Note the column of support on each of these examples.

Figure A

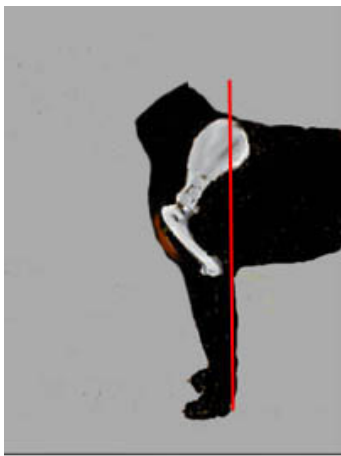


Figure D

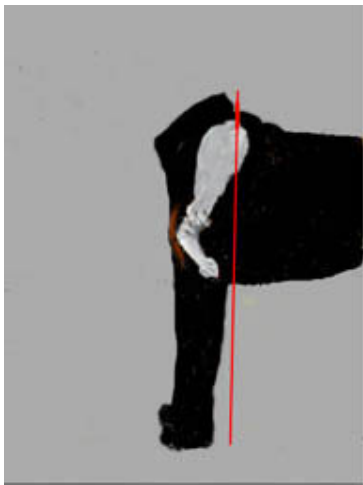
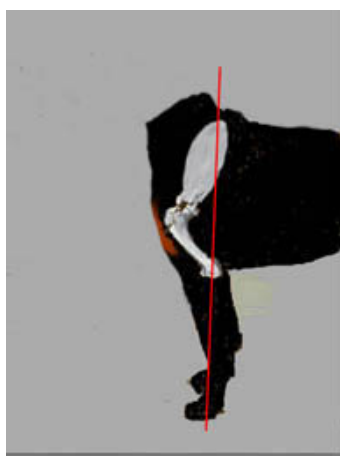


Figure B

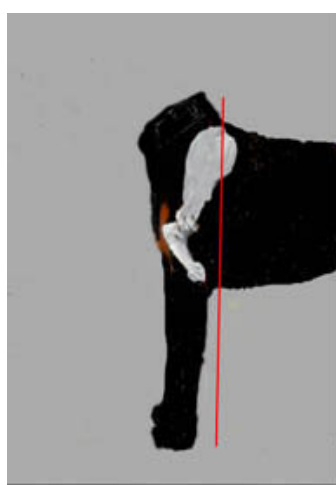


Figure C

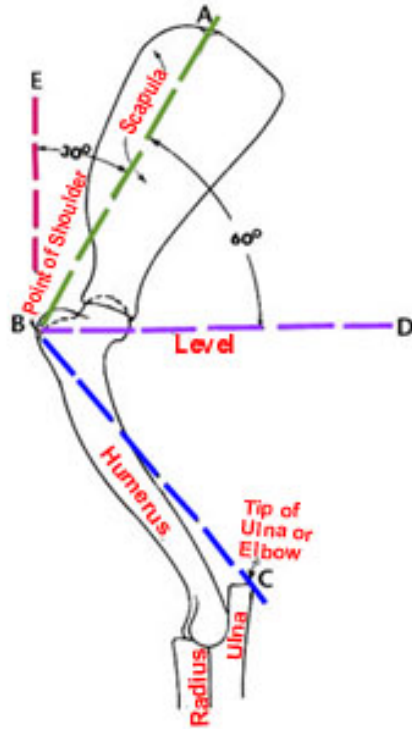
The Leg from elbow to the wrist (carpal joint)-- Note the length, width and shape of the bone and what is the length in relation to the upper arm? **They need to be of equal proportion to the upper arm and shoulder blade**

Correct layback of shoulder



Please Note the forechest

Legs are well set under the dog .



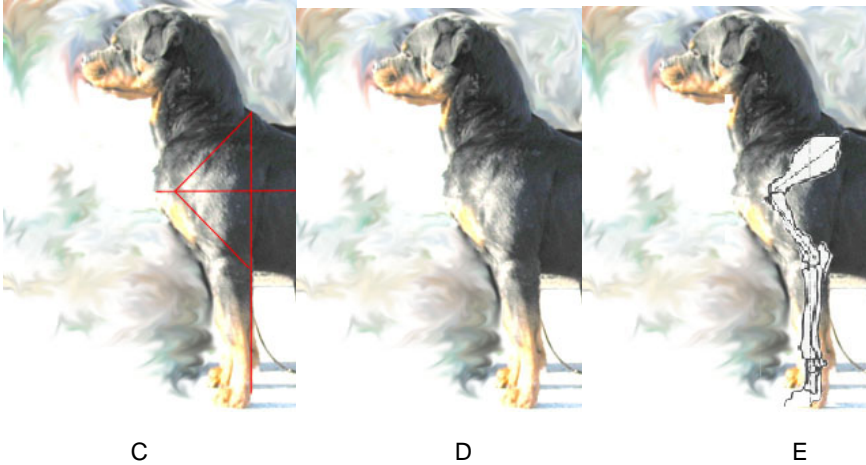
Parts of the front assembly

Placement: (shoulder blade and upper arm)

The shoulders need to be placed correctly on the body. When viewing the dog from the side, there should be muscle protrusion out in front on the chest. I mean pronounced MUSCLE MASS will be there if the shoulders are placed back on the body where they should be. If the shoulder blade is tilted too far forward, it results in a shortened neck appearance and lack of forequarter balance. .

To measure a shoulder angle:

Place the tip of a triangle on the point of the shoulder. Keep the horizontal line parallel to the floor. In correct shoulders, the shoulder blade and upper arm will fall fairly closely along the two sides of the triangle. If the shoulders are too straight or the upper arm too short, these bones will fall well outside the two sides of the triangle. (The edge of the triangle should be placed along the raised ridge of the shoulder blade, and the curve of the upper arm will fall a little outside of the triangle edge. See figures C,D, and E on the next page.



A dog which has insufficient layback -- is also called "straight shouldered". When moving, a dog with insufficient layback lacks reach. This can lead to other movement faults, especially if the rear is better angulated than the front -- a common problem -- causing the drive from the rear to be better than the reach in the front. Such dogs will have a longer stride in the rear than in the front and will have to find a way to compensate. A possible compensation is to lift the front feet too far off the ground with each stride. This is wasted motion, but it enables such a dog to "get out of his own way."

This dogs front assembly is too far forward, Note the placement of his front legs—**not**



well under body—due to a shorter upper arm. Note rolls over shoulder—usually a good indication of poor shoulder lay back.

Pull out a Rottweiler magazine and go through it.

- How many dogs are flat across the front. How many dogs to you see with muscle mass out in front of the dogs chest.

- Drop a plumb line from the caudal angle of the shoulder blade...If the upper arm and shoulder blade are correct in length, and the line intersects the point of the elbow, then the shoulder assembly will be properly placed.

Things to remember..

A dog's front assembly determines the amount of reach they will have when moving and how correct and efficient his front movement will be.

Dogs with a short neck usually have steep shoulder blades and lack of forechest. All dogs have the same number of vertebrae in each part of the body: seven in the neck, thirteen in the rib cage.

Three factors are associated with the vertebrae which affect shoulder lay back: Width of vertebrae, length of vertebrae spires and slope of spires.

Dogs with (longer) correct length necks often have long rib cages and well laid back shoulder blades

To breed good shoulders you need to start with a bitch that has good shoulders, and she should be bred to a male with good shoulders, who has proven his ability to produce good shoulders. If your foundation bitch is straight-shouldered, you will have little chance of improving shoulders, especially if she is linebred. One needs to also remember that the genetics of the well-laid-back shoulder is an additive, polygenic, recessive trait. Sadly enough, in many breeding programs, straight shoulders have been set through generations by breeding poor shoulders.

The goal of a dedicated breeder should be to select correct functional working type, built to endure and to stay healthy well into old age. You, as a breeder, should make whatever sacrifices are necessary to retain correctly made animals in your breeding programs. Competent breeders should insist on correct fronts and breed according to the AKC Rottweiler Standard (blueprint) for which correct "assembly" is required!

Elaine Starry

References:

DogSteps: *Rachel Page Elliott*

Born to Win: *Patricia Craige*

ABC's of Breeding : *Claudia Waller Orlandi*

K.9 Structure & Terminology: *Edward M.Gilbert & Thelma Brown*