

Vizslas – Built to Run or to Trot?

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Have you sat at the Sporting Group ring and watched pointing breeds on the judge's request to "take them around"? Did they "wow" you with their tremendous reach and drive at a trot? Were some dogs even moving out ahead of their handlers creating a picture that is more commonly seen in the German Shepherd ring?

Though this movement is eye-catching and "showy" in the ring, is it typical or correct for an upland bird dog? Do the physical characteristics that enable a dog to work for many hours at a gallop influence the way a dog moves at a trot?

In his book *Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis*, Curtis M. Brown emphasizes:

"A breed should first be built with the best structure possible as needed for the performance of its special function. Second, after an exhibit has a structurally correct build as needed for its function, then it should trot as smoothly as possible within those limitations imposed by its structure."

The "Special Function" of Vizslas

When the Smooth Vizsla breed was officially recognized by the CKC in 1958, the accepted breed standard was a translation from the Hungarian standard at that time. Published in the first edition of *The Book of Breed Standards* (the official publication of the Canadian Kennel Club) it did not even mention the purpose or function of the breed. Since then, CKC standards have variously described the Vizsla as "an all-purpose gun dog", a "sporting dog" and an "upland bird dog".

But what does that mean? How *should* a Vizsla work in the field? The CKC, AKC and FCI* standards have no description of the breed's working gait, but the UK standard describes a "ground covering gallop."

At the International Magyar Vizsla Conference held in Hungary in 1999, a presentation on "Structural characteristics and typical proportions of Magyar Vizsla" gives more detail:

"Preferably, the dog should move fast, but since it is not searching for the game by sight, but by air scent, and catching prey is not among its tasks, persistence is more important than speed. While hunting, a fast (depending on the circumstances), but endurance gallop is a criteria. At the same time, in the general performance of the breed, retrieving the game and carrying it a long distance carries equal importance as hunting. Therefore, a persistent, efficient trot is necessary for an overall good work."

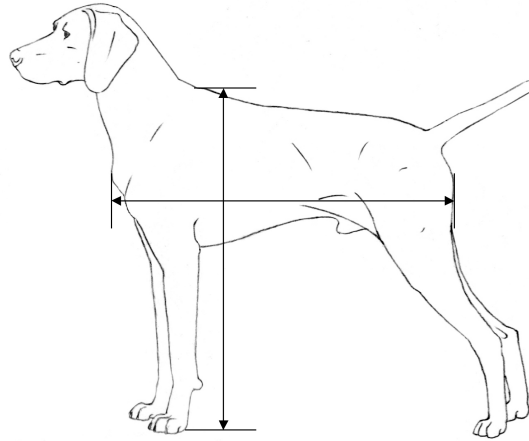
Therefore, a Vizsla should be built to excel at an endurance gallop as well as trot "efficiently" when this gait is needed. Among many aspects of body structure that combine to

make a Vizsla, the first impression for the show judge is overall body proportions. Two ratios are of particular significance in recognizing an endurance galloping dog.

1. Body length compared to height

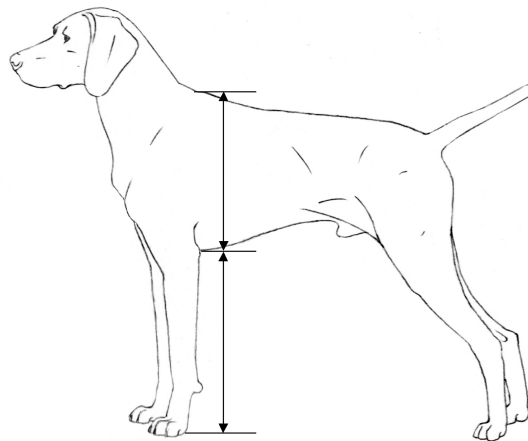
Body length is measured from the forechest to the point of the pelvis

Height is measured at the highest point of the withers



2. Legginess ratio

Length of leg below the chest compared to Depth of Chest



Vizsla Body Length vs Height

For endurance galloping, a square body is an advantage. At a gallop, the rear legs must lift the front and having a relatively short body makes this easier – thus contributing to endurance. At a trot, a square body is a disadvantage since there is more potential for interference between the front and rear feet. The best endurance trotting breeds (Dalmatians, for example) have a body length 10-20% longer than their height.

The CKC standard says Vizslas should have a “length to height ratio of approximately 1:1.” This proportion definitely puts the Vizsla into the endurance galloping category. Both the

AKC and FCI standards require the breed to be slightly longer than tall. Since Vizslas do perform some work at a trot, this would improve trotting efficiency but would sacrifice some endurance at a gallop.

Vizsla Legginess Ratio

Up to a point, longer legs allow longer strides, hence greater speed. For the fastest dogs, racing greyhounds, the optimum leg length is about 30% longer than chest depth. When leg length equals depth of chest (as in trotting dogs), galloping speed is slower.

Leg length that is about 20% longer than chest depth allows a combination of speed while still maintaining endurance at a gallop. Though the CKC standard does not refer to this proportion, it would seem to be the most efficient for a Vizsla. This is supported by the FCI Vizsla standard: “depth of brisket slightly less than half the height at the withers”. Interestingly, the UK standard specifies that the distance from the withers to lowest part of the chest should equal distance from the chest to the ground – the proportions of an endurance trotting dog!

Vizsla Angulation – What is Balanced?

The description of angulation in Vizsla breed standards is riddled with measures of angles and bones without giving reference points for how these are to be determined. The development of technology to x-ray dogs stacked and moving has revealed that some features described in breed standards are physical impossibilities. Other descriptions use wording such as “moderate” but give no guidelines, leaving their true meaning open to interpretation.

Without getting into detailed measurements, what is important is how the front and rear assemblies work together to allow a dog to perform its function. Brown defines this balanced angulation, as “Whatever angulation is needed for the function of the breed during locomotion.” But, he adds, “balanced” does *not* mean equal!

For endurance trotting dogs, front and rear angulation are “balanced” when the angle at the point of the shoulder is similar to the angle at the stifle, and the angle at the elbow is close to the angle at the hock joint.

Breeds whose function requires them to gallop are “balanced” when they have more angulation in the rear than in front. However, this can be carried to extremes in Vizslas when too much rear angulation decreases endurance.

The following table summarizes the features of dogs whose function requires them to excel at various gaits and some of the ways that trotting style is affected. To keep the working abilities of our Vizslas, the qualities of an endurance galloping dog should be maintained along with physical fitness, health and the desire to hunt. While some of these qualities cannot be assessed in the show ring, it is possible to choose to promote Vizslas as endurance galloping dogs rather than allow our breed to become flashy trotters that win because they are competing in a venue called the “show” ring.

FEATURES	Endurance Trotting Dog	Endurance Galloping Dog	Fast Galloping Dog
Typical breeds	Dalmatian; Shetland Sheepdog; Collie	Dogs that require endurance rather than speed when performing their function – such as Pointers quartering; Sled dogs like Siberian Husky	Afghan, Greyhound, Borzoi
Working Gait	Trot – 2–beats per stride	Endurance Gallop – 3–beats per stride Hunting dogs designed for galloping must cover many miles at the trot and efficiency at this gait is fairly important. However, the trot is not of supreme importance and the structure desirable for trotting should never be developed at the expense of efficiency at the gallop.	Gallop – 4–beats per stride Flexible back, double suspension rotary gallop
BODY LENGTH compared to HEIGHT	Body ~10–20% longer than tall	Square body.	Body slightly longer than tall. With a longer body and flexible back these dogs can take long strides and achieve high speeds at a gallop.
Legginess Ratio	Leg length below chest approximately equals depth of chest. Ratio: Leg is 1 to 1.1 X depth of chest	Leg length below chest is about 1.2 X depth of chest.	Leg length about 1.3 X depth of chest, for racing greyhounds.
Balanced Angulation	The angle at the point of shoulder should be approximately equal to the angle at stifle; and the angle at elbow about equal to the angle at hock joint.	Front angulation straighter than rear; BUT too much rear angulation decreases endurance at a gallop.	Front angulation straighter than rear. Greater angulation in the rear than in the front contributes reduces endurance but increases speed at the gallop.

References:

Brown, Curtis M., 1986, Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis, Hoflin Publishing Ltd., Wheat Ridge, CO.

Cole, Robert W., 2004, An Eye For A Dog, Illustrated Guide to Judging Purebred Dogs, Dogwise Publishing, Wenatchee, WA.

International Magyar Vizsla Conference, October 13-17, 1999. Presentations translated by I. Horvath (Canada) and Zsüzsza Fuzesa (Hungary).

* Fédération Cynologique Internationale – the World Canine Organization founded in 1911 has over 80 member countries worldwide (including Hungary) and sanctions world championships in conformation, obedience, agility, field trials and other events.