

## SOME INSIGHT ON THE STANDARD REVISION

by Lori Price (1st VP GSMDCA, Judges Education Chair, Chair, Standard Revision Committee)

In his article "Die Schweitzer Hunderassen", when referring to the goals of the earliest breeders of GSMD (Swiss farmers) Hans Raber wrote, "The practical use dictated the appearance. The dog had to have an impressive size, he had to stand bad weather gladly, be of steady temperament, and not eat too much. Because the ideal cow had to look husky, the farmer's ideal of beauty was bigness. Thus the massive looking, heavy dog was preferred to the slim looking dog".



*Dora von Faelliwald, typical bitch, showing good proportions, excellent bone and substance*

Hans Raber refers to a Moritz Magron, one of the earliest and most knowledgeable fanciers of the GSMD. Mr. Magron emphasized the importance of combining sturdiness, stamina, and solid structure as these traits are reminiscent of the draught dog heritage. A notable quote from Mr. Magron states, "the GSS is a dog for the weekdays and not for Sunday. And for the time being, we have six weekdays and but one Sunday". His point being that the working dog heritage cannot be overemphasized. The GSMD was not bred to be an ELEGANT dog, but an everyday working dog who could get his job(s) done.

I refer to the quote above because I feel it mirrors concerns held widely by many breeders today but for different reasons. The earliest breeders of GSMD were selecting their foundation stock from dogs of murkier ancestry and questionable origin and thus had to make decisions based solely on the superficial traits of those dogs as the priority was to breed for the type that best suited the PURPOSE for which the dogs (progeny) would be used -- an all purpose working farm dog.

Nowadays, breeders find themselves in a different set of circumstances. The breed has been established and the standard set for quite some time now, and more importantly, there are significantly more dogs in the gene pool. However, for a number of reasons, we are seeing a noticeable difference in the size and bone of the dogs from as recently as 10 years ago. Swissies are smaller and lighter boned, and this concerns many breeders, especially those who have been involved in the breed for decades, who were familiar with the much larger size/bone of the early foundation dogs and bitches as compared to the average present day Swissy (in the USA).

When I got involved in the breed in 1991, dogs and bitches were so much larger than they are today. The typical male averaged 120 lbs and a 100 lb bitch would have been considered on the small side. Today, males of such size are not so com-

mon and many bitches are well under 100 lbs. Dogs/bitches that would not have been bred by the early Swiss farmers because of their lack of breed type, are being bred by modern breeders as a result of high demand for puppies and lack of proper breeder mentoring and hence there has been a noticeable decrease in the typical size and substance of the GSMD in the USA population.

Progress has been made with regard to health and structure.

However, breed type is dictated not by health and structure but by the breed's original historical purpose as defined in the breed standard. That standard describes the GSMD as "a large, powerful dog of sturdy appearance"... The earliest breeders were poor farmers whose primary goal was to perpetuate breed type that attributed to working ability. A dog that could not do its job on the farm was useless to its owner as that farmer's livelihood depended to a large extent on the ability of his working animals to do their job(s) efficiently.



*Arno v Fryberg SHSB 29413. Born 8-09-1927. Son of Bello v Steinenberg, a stud of extraordinary importance for the breed. In 1927, Gottfried Lanz of Roggwil near Berne obtained from the Swiss Kennel Club the trademark for the kennel name "von Fryberg" and thus created something of a breeding center for the GSMD (Photo: A Dauer, 1929)*

Recently (in the past 5-10 years), breeders in the USA started to take the show ring into stronger consideration when planning their breedings. This can be especially noted since the admission of the GSMD into full recognition by the AKC in 1995. Perpetuating the historical working ability of the dog and the type reminiscent thereof has taken a back seat in many breeding programs to the elegance, smooth movement and showiness that would attract the attention of dog show judges. This is evident given the number of GSMD breeders whose primary focus is breeding for the success in the show ring instead of the all purpose farm work for which the dog was originally bred.

Although, in the past 5 years, more and more GSMD owners are participating in the working activities for which their dogs



Albert Heim

ancestors were originally bred, many of these modern working Swissies are significantly undersized compared to their ancestors of just a few generations ago.

It is for the sake of perpetuating the true historical type of this breed, that the Standard Revision Committee focused on emphasizing the importance of substance and working type, when revising the standard. The differences you will notice in the standard revision are not changes per se but the reintegration of wording from the standard in the country of origin, to put more emphasis on the importance of retaining historical type as it relates to PURPOSE.

Raber wrote, " Selection during the centuries had created a robust dog. The intended use had already determined the type".

Our goal was to finely tune the standard, reintegrating wording from the FCI standard to better define that original Swiss Mtn dog to the breeders in present day America, and to AKC judges who need to understand that the GSMD is supposed to be a large, substantial and sound working dog with Molloser heritage, not a light boned, elegant fluid moving dog that resembles a sporting dog or hound more than its true ancestors. When judges begin to consistently award dogs with correct breed type, as opposed to prioritizing ring presence and elegance, those breeding for the show ring will focus on producing dogs more consistent with the large boned, sturdy and sound working dogs who were the ancestors of our present day show dogs. These dogs may not have been so elegant but it is crucial to keep in mind that elegance was NOT their purpose!

Judges are in a tough position. So much hype goes into dog shows and so much emphasis is put on the "pretty picture" concept of a show dog regardless of the breed's purpose or history. When judging GSMD, judges need to keep in mind that "elegant" is not a word found in the GSMD Breed Standard. Instead, judges should be thinking of the breeds historical function, which required these dogs to be substantial, versatile and sound in both mind and body. If we are to retain our breeds true historical type, both breeders and judges need to put a stronger emphasis on those traits that the early Swiss farmers held so dear when making their breeding decisions. When comparing the present standard and the revision (effective end of May 2003), the most obvious differences can be seen in the description of general appearance and in other areas describing the superficial traits of the dog -- size, bone, color/coat, and proportions.

As a result of a well known judge's recent and well publicized misinterpretation of the "color" section of the present standard, specifically the use of the term "ground color", the

description of the color and coat of the GSMD is a lot more detailed so as to describe the absolute necessity for undercoat (dogs could not tolerate Alpine climate without it!), the range of undercoat colors, and the wide range of markings considered acceptable for the GSMD. The detail in the color section is not to make markings and color the main focus but to indicate how wide the range is. To emphasize the importance of FUNCTION over the cosmetic, the Color section as well as the Summary, state in no uncertain terms that traits that affect function are to be judged more severely than traits of a cosmetic nature. In the twelve years I have known her, our newly elected GSMDCA President, Sharyl Mayhew (also member of the Standard Revision Committee) has reminded puppy buyers, judges and anyone who would listen: "Remember, markings don't pull the cart!"

Markings are an element of breed type and cannot be ignored. However, as evidenced by the new standard, one can see that this standard is a lot more lenient when it comes to markings than the FCI standard for our breed (used in Europe) or the standard of the Swissy's close cousin, the Bernese Mtn Dog. The description of gait has remained the same as it is perfectly sufficient to describe the desired movement of a Swissy.

The Committee felt that if we went into any more detail about movement (as seen in the FCI GSMD, and the AKC Bernese standard), we might perhaps risks increasing a problem we are presently seeing too much of-- judges prioritizing pretty movement over essential breed type. The work of a Swissy dictates efficiency and soundness in movement, not elegance. Other changes are the presence of more detail regarding the proportions of the head, the emphasis in several sections of heavy bone, good muscle and sturdy appearance, and noticeable changes in the description of the tail. Gay and curled tails are, unfortunately, being seen more often in modern Swissies. A Swissy should have a straight, thick pendulous tail as opposed to a thin, whip- or rat-like tail. Although the tail may be held higher and slightly curved upwards when the dog is excited or in movement, the tail should not tilt over the back (gay tail), curl ("shepherds crook"), or be kinked. The new standard states "the bones of the tail should FEEL straight" as compared to .." ...BE straight" as reads at present. Hence the new standard is much clearer in defining desirable tailset and carriage as well as making judges aware that kinks (which can be FELT but are not always seen) are not desirable. Much of the revised tail description is merely the result of reintegrating the tail description from the FCI standard.

I hope the new revision is reviewed carefully by breeders and judges alike. We have made a lot of progress in the past ten years but there are areas presently on which we need to focus our attention for the sake of preserving the large, powerful working dog the first Swiss Breeders strove so hard to perpetuate. Size, and substance are integral factors in this giant working breed. In memory and appreciation of Prof Albert Heim (the judge who "rediscovered" the GSMD at a show in 1906) and foundation breeder, Franz Schertenleib, for bringing our beloved breed back from the brink of extinction, I feel it is our primary duty to ensure our Swissies live up to their GREAT prefix.