An illustrated and extended guide to the
UK Dachshund Breed Standard

The Dachshund - “Fit for Function”

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Introduction

John F Sayer wrote his illustrated Standard of Points of the Dachshund in 1939 and, for over seventy years, it has been the “bible” for Dachshund breeders and exhibitors in the UK and a best-seller worldwide. Both “Sayer” and the Breed Standard have been updated and amended several times in the subsequent years. Increasingly, I've been finding people are asking “when will Sayer be updated?”.

Let me start by saying that I wouldn't presume to “update Sayer”. His work has stood the test of time and will continue to do so. Rather, I want to create an illustrated guide that makes use of photographs to illustrate virtues and faults instead of graphics. Additionally, I think there have been so many important developments in the Kennel Club's approach to Breed Standards and I want to help breeders, exhibitors and judges to interpret the Standard with an eye to the now popular phrase “Fit for function”.


All Breed Standards now contain the following mandatory text:

'A Breed Standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. From time to time certain conditions or exaggerations may be considered to have the potential to affect dogs in some breeds adversely, and judges and breeders are requested to refer to the Kennel Club website for details of any such current issues. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure.'

For me, the key sentence in this is “If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure”. However, it is easy for exaggeration to creep in and eventually become accepted as the norm.
The changes to our UK Breed Standard were based on recommendations made by the Breed Council's Health and Welfare Sub-committee. They worked with several experienced breeders to identify updates that would both clarify the existing Standard and address potential health and welfare issues.

Clearly, it is important to recognise that the Breed Standard is only a “guideline”; individual judges' interpretations of the Standard will vary from person to person. That's a good thing, otherwise there would be no point entering shows as we'd see the same few dogs winning week after week. We'd probably also reduce the variation in type and, along with that, the genetic diversity and health of the breed.

Somebody said to me “Sayer is only one man's interpretation of what is correct”. I agree with that and no doubt you will bear that in mind as you read this guide. This is “my interpretation”, but I draw on what's been written by Sayer, Daglish, Heesom, Raine, Cole, Kershaw and others. I'd encourage anyone interested in Dachshunds to read as widely as possible other peoples' interpretations of what makes the perfect Dachshund. That includes reading the American Kennel Club's US Breed Standard which, in many ways, is so much more explicit about important aspects of the breed than the UK version. The FCI Standard is also essential reading. It is taken from the Dachshund's country of origin and so, to a large extent, could be considered the purist's view of what the Dachshund should be.

I am grateful to Jeff Horswell, Zena Thorn-Andrews and Jeff Crawford for their helpful critiques and advice on the early drafts of this guide.

I feel strongly about the importance of education and lifelong learning. I offer you this guide in that spirit.

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Chairman, The Dachshund Breed Council
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The Dachshund – Fit for function

In the UK the Dachshund comes in two sizes: Standard and Miniature, and three coats: Smooth, Long and Wire. With the exception of size and coat, the Breed Standard is the same for all six varieties.

When looking at a Dachshund you should always bear in mind its working origins; it should be able to do a day's work. Exaggeration of any form is to be avoided. The Dachshund is not a breed where ‘more is better’.

Health and welfare has to be at the forefront of any judge's mind. KC Regulation F9 (2007) says: In assessing dogs, judges must penalise any features or exaggerations which they consider would be detrimental to the soundness, health or well being of the dog. All dogs must be able to see, breathe, walk and be free from pain, irritation or discomfort.

If we are going to use the term “Fit for function” we then have to ask the question “what function?”.

While the origin of the Dachshund may have been a dog designed to go down holes and spend all day working, today most Dachshunds have to be fit to function as pets.
In relation to the Breed Standard, I think that means:

- Temperaments must be sound
  - The Standard says: *Intelligent, lively, courageous to the point of rashness, obedient. Faithful, versatile and good tempered.*
  - Nervous and cringing, or aggressive and snappy, are not what we want
- Standards should ideally weigh between 20 and 26lbs. (10-12 kg) and Minis should ideally weigh 10 lbs (4.5 kg) and no more than 11 lbs. (5 kg)
  - Pet owners don't want Standards that are so big that they can't lift them in and out of the car and they don't want a Mini that's actually a small Standard
  - If you could comfortably pick up and carry a Standard under each arm they are probably about the right size
- Coats should be the correct length and texture
  - Longs that look like “animated floor mops” and soft-coated Wires are hard to look after, particularly in cold, wet weather

Of course, fundamentally, they must look like a Dachshund: moderately long and low, with enough ground clearance to be able to cover the ground freely.

The 2009 Breed Standard revisions provide **clarification** of what is required for an ideal Dachshund to be fit for function. The revisions **do not change** what we should all have been looking for in a Dachshund.
It's easy for exaggeration to creep in to any breed and clearly there is a wide range of “type” when you look at pictures of Dachshunds from around the world.

The dogs above are from Europe/Scandinavia and more typical of the FCI type, whereas the non-UK dogs below are longer than the preferred 2:1 proportions in the UK Standard and lack the required ground clearance.

For many years, the brief breed description of the Dachshund has been that it is a “long, low and level” dog. This may have been misinterpreted and we certainly don't want “too long, too low and too level”. I would prefer never to hear the phrase “long, low and level” at all today.

All too often, Breed Specialist judges get obsessed with the nuances and finer details of the Breed Standard and lose sight of the overall Dachshund. They can end up fault-judging and nit-picking; quality dogs can get dismissed simply because of the judge's preoccupation with the narrow picture.

By contrast, All-rounder judges may be criticised for lacking enough understanding of the basic type and correct movement that is required. Critiques that refer to “a nice square type”, “lovely and low to ground”, or
“could do with more length” all demonstrate basic lack of knowledge.

All judges: specialists and all-rounders, should step back, see the whole dog and pay attention to how it looks on the move. It's often said that “if it moves right, it's made right”. That, of course, presumes the judge knows what “moves right” means. More on that later.

The Dachshund Breed Standard

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A Breed Standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. From time to time certain conditions or exaggerations may be considered to have the potential to affect dogs in some breeds adversely, and judges and breeders are requested to refer to the Kennel Club website for details of any such current issues. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure.

General Appearance

Moderately long and low with no exaggeration, compact, well muscled body, with enough ground clearance to allow free movement. Height at the withers should be half the length of the body, measured from breastbone to the rear of thigh. Bold, defiant carriage of head and intelligent expression.

Characteristics

Intelligent, lively, courageous to the point of rashness, obedient. Especially suited to going to ground because of low build, very strong forequarters and forelegs. Long, strong jaw, and immense power of bite and hold. Excellent nose, persevering hunter and tracker. Essential that functional build is retained to ensure working ability.
This Mini Smooth has an abrupt angle between its neck and withers, instead of the required graceful lines

This Mini Long is completely lacking in length of neck and is so short in leg you can barely see them!

**Forequarters**

Shoulder blades long, broad, and placed firmly and obliquely (45 degrees to the horizontal) upon very robust rib cage. Upper arm the same length as shoulder blade, set at 90 degrees to it, very strong, and covered with hard, supple muscles. Upper arm lies close to ribs, but able to move freely. Forearm short and strong in bone, inclining slightly inwards; when seen in profile moderately straight, must not bend forward or knuckle over, which indicates unsoundness. Correctly placed foreleg should cover the lowest point of the keel.

Sayer and Daglish both devote considerable space to the definition of the “front” of a Dachshund, which is one of its defining characteristics. The AKC Standard is particularly explicit and helpful, with its description of angles, lengths and proportions.
Correct 90° front angulation: note the prominent breastbone

When going over a Dachshund's front it is quite straightforward to assess the angles and to feel for the length of the shoulder-blade and upper arm. Well laid-back shoulders can be felt close together at the top of the blade (between the judge's thumb and forefinger) where the neck runs into the withers. Shoulder-blades that are wide apart and up in the neck are upright.

This judge can feel the top of the shoulder-blades with her thumbs, point of shoulder with her fore-finger and the elbow with her little finger.

This judge is feeling the breastbone and keel with her left hand and running her right hand down the dog's back to find the end of the ribbing.
In profile, a vertical line, drawn up through the middle of the leg should intersect the withers, not run up into the neck.

This Mini Long and Smooth are both upright in shoulder, with short upper arms

When you look at a Dachshund from the front, his forelegs should fit closely to his forechest and his elbows should not stick out. When judging, you should not be able to place your fingers between the elbow and the side of the body.

Above: These dogs have good oval thoraxes and their forelegs wrap closely to form a moderately straight front without excessive crook

The AKC Standard also says: “The joints between the forearms and the feet (wrists) are closer together than the shoulder joints, so that the front does not appear absolutely straight. The inclined shoulder blades, upper arms and curved forearms form parentheses that enclose the ribcage, creating the correct “wrap-around front”.

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This Wire is moving too close in front and demonstrates a “paddling” action coming towards you

In profile, his front legs should extend well out as he reaches forward and then extend well back under his body. A short, stilted gait is a sign of a short upper arm and straight shoulder. Equally, we do not want a high-lifting “goose-step” or “hackneyed” movement of the forelegs.

This Wire is lifting its front feet too high and not driving out behind

The hind legs, in profile, must also reach well forward and equally far behind. As with the front movement, a short, restricted or stilted gait is a sign of incorrect angulation, caused by short pelvic and thigh bones.

Both these dogs (ML & MW) are showing good profile movement, with plenty of extension front and rear and holding good top-lines
In the sequence of pictures below you can see good front extension, not lifting the forelegs too high and good rear drive
Some Dachshunds with too steep a pelvis or excessive length of bones from hock to foot (metatarsals) will stand sickle-hocked and are likely to move in a so-called “tummy-tapping” motion. Here, there is no rear extension and the dog appears to be moving with its hind legs tucked under its body, almost touching its stomach on the forward extension.

This Smooth is “tummy-tapping” and you can see it lacks the required rear drive and extension (its left hind leg is at full extension here)

This Wire is at full extension front and rear, but clearly lacks the required drive (note the poor top-line on the move as well)

This Wire is moving close behind when going away