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EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN CHOW CHOW:
ITS OFFICIAL STANDARD PAST AND PRESENT

by Sam Draper

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Since it was in the 1920's and 1930's that the Chow Chow became extremely popular in the U.S., and in the top ten of popularity in 1987, it is an assignment to peruse the official AKC standards for the Chow as adopted in 1925, 1941 and 1986. Such a study may be quite provocative in order to assess the evolution of the Chow for the purposes of breeding and the show ring.

The Chows of the 1920's had general balance; that is, they were "square" in outline, had much less head than later Chows and had far less coat. If one looks at the photos of the Greenacres Chows and those of the Clairedale Kennels, it is obvious that these specimens excel, for the most part, in balance, the essential "squareness," and exhibit less head and coat than we expect to find in Chows of the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. (See photos in *The Chow Chow in the United States: The Beginning* in THE BOOK OF THE CHOW CHOW by Dr. Sam Draper and Joan McDonald Brearley, T.F.H., 1977) That the knowledgeable Chow breeders and theorists were concerned particularly with health, agility and balance can be substantiated by consulting THE CHOW CHOW by Will Judy (published 1933) and still considered a valuable tool in understanding the Chow.

"The tendency toward low Chows and short-legged Chows," explains Judy, "both in America and England in recent years, surely is not in accord with the original necessity of the Chow." It is nearly uncanny that Will Judy had an omniscience about the future problems of the Chow, an anticipation of the Chow's becoming a low-

legged, over-done caricature of the original working, hunting breed. This foresight and prescience are further reflected in Judy's words: "On ground where there has been snow much of the year, or for a breed, which in the case of the Chow, is used for herding and sled work, as well as hunting, there must be plenty of daylight under the dog." Then, Judy emphasized: "The legs must not be too short; otherwise, the dog cannot move properly or with any speed."

These comments by Will Judy are in regard to the Chow Chow Club's official standard approved by the AKC in 1925.

What is certainly interesting and gratifying about the 1925 standard is that it contains very little that is not included in the new Chow standard officially adopted by the Parent Club and the AKC in December of 1986.

Two specifics in the 1925 standard were dropped in the 1941 standard: First is the references to the Smooth Chow coat: "In the Smooth-Coated variety, the top coat should be of about 1½ inches in length." The second point omitted in 1941, and also in 1986 was under *General Appearance*, the adjective "lion-headed." That point has been a controversial one since it was omitted, deliberately, in 1941. Although the "ruff" of the Chow, a required characteristic, may appear "lion-like,"

the shape of his muzzle, the stop, and the ear-set are quite different from what is desired in the Chow. Another whole piece could be addressed to this "lion-like" or "lion-headed" nomenclature of the Chow, but most today realize that the "lion" description is more metaphorical than actual. When the reference to the Smooth-Coated Chow was omitted in the 1941 standard, this omission placed the Smooth Chow in a delicate position; under the new 1941 standard, this variety could not be shown or considered apart of the Chow breed. What happened, one wonders, to all of the Smooth Chow puppies born from 1941 until 1980, when the Smooth-Coated Chow began to appear in the show ring?

The rumor in Chow circles concerning the omission of the Smooth in the 1941 standard was owing to the opposition of Mrs. L.W. Bonney and Miss Kathleen Staples, now deceased, of Tally-Ho Chows and Dalmatians, and their considerable influence. That decision, at least in hindsight, was perhaps unwise, owing to the fact that the provision for the Smooth-Coated Chow remained in the English standard and in the standard for most countries of the world whose standards follow that of the Federation Cynologique Internationale (FCI), such as South Africa, most of Europe and Australia.

Although Will Judy had foreseen the problem of the short-legged, unbalanced Chow in 1933, and lamented that the 1925 standard simply set forth that the body was short, compact, well ribbed up and let down in the flank. Perhaps in 1925, no "dumpy" Chows existed, and that fact is borne out by the study of the photographs of the

Ch. Yang Fu Tang, 1926-36, bred by the Hoffman brothers of Milwaukee, was owned for most of his adult life by Louise Beamer. He won 22 all-breed BIS, setting the record not broken until 1964. Notice the excellent balance, and that no exaggeration exists with any part of his body. This great Chow, given a bit more coat, would come close to fitting the 1986 Chow Chow standard.



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Chow Chows, in the 1920's, were healthy, well-balanced dogs, such as "Chi-Chi" who won Best of Breed at Westminster. He travelled too much with his millionaire owners, Mr. and Mrs. E. Berry Wall, to be shown widely. When "Chi-Chi" died 1924, several French newspapers published a complete obituary for him, whose life and friends read like a fairy tale of beautiful trips, homes, servants, luxuries of all kinds, and of many famous people of the world as friends. The Chow Chow, as a breed, became heavier of bone and shorter in the muzzle, as the years progressed.

Ch. Tally-Ho Black Image Of Storm, was a big winner in the late-1940's. Bred and owned by the late, Mrs. L. W. Bonney, "Tut" this beautifully balanced Chow with nothing exaggerated campaigned under the 1941 Chow standard which called for a "square Chow" of perfect balance. Today, "Tut's" hind legs might be evaluated as unsound, but for his day he was a splendid specimen.



These Chows, both born in the late-1960's, are short-legged and unbalanced, which would be penalized under the 1986 standard, which lists as a serious fault a Chow with rectangular outline, instead of square. Although these two specimens have some positive characteristics, their lack of balance prevents their representing true Chow type.

1920's Chows.

However, by 1933, Will Judy had perceived the problem of *balance*, and he wrote: "...yet, too much bone means a slow, useless dog. Unless the Chow has upstanding carriage, a quick, light step, he is not a true Chow. If bone is too heavy and weighs too much, we have an undesirable Chow."

Obviously, other Chowists, in addition to Will Judy, had noticed the problem of balance. One strong addition to the 1941 standard, in order to offset the dilemma of the short-legged or long-backed Chow, was the following inclusion: "A massive, cobby, powerful dog, active and alert, with strong, muscular development, and perfect balance. *Body squares with height of leg at shoulder.*" The active and alert adjectives were also added in the 1941 version. And one serious fault was added to the 1941 standard which had not appeared in the 1925 description: "*A narrow chest is a serious fault.*" That fault was the only serious fault included; however, the disqualifications remained the same in the 1925, 1941 and 1986 versions: "*Nose spotted or distinctly other than black, except in blue Chows, which may have solid blue or slate noses. Tongue red, pink or obviously spotted with red or pink. Drop ear or ears.*"

In the new 1986 version, further clarifications are given as follows: "The top surface or edges of the tongue red or pink, or with one or more spots of red or pink." Also, "drop ear or ears. A drop ear is one which breaks at any point from its base to its tip, or which is not carried stiffly erect but lies parallel to the top of the skull." So the pink or red spotted tongue, and the drop ear or ears remain the basic disqualifications in the 1925, 1941 and the 1986 standards.

In the 1950's and the early-1960's, the Chow's popularity dropped considerably. In 1965, for example, the Chow's AKC registrations were 54th. Today, Chow registrations are seventh, perhaps, even sixth, but that phenomenon is another story.

It became obvious in the 1960's that many Chows were being bred and shown which were short-legged, exaggerated in head, too heavy boned, unsound and unhealthy. For those Chow breeders who continued to breed

and show the more upright, squarely balanced Chow, who was not "overdone in any aspect," the rallying cry for these breeders was the famous description of Will Judy: "A short-legged Chow is an abomination!"

When American Chowists liked the advent of more scowl, and more wrinkles on the forehead, even on the nose, and perhaps more deep set eyes, these characteristics coming from European, most notably Dutch Chows known as "Continental" Chows, they do what often is proverbially "human." If Chow breeders and exhibitors like a few wrinkles and perhaps even a shorter muzzle, then more wrinkles are better, and the shortest muzzle possible is an asset. The only problem with such thinking is that excessive wrinkling and the usual more deep set eyes (often with entropion) can become very soon a health problem. The exaggerated head often produces soft palates and resulting breeding problems. If some Chow breeders, to put it a different way, like coat, then even more coat seems better, more beautiful. Often, for some unknown genetic reason, the Chow with the exaggerated head, with a very short muzzle, and exaggerate coat often accompany the short-legged Chow.

Such a combination of "exaggerations" produce a Chow that is not healthy, not agile, nor flexible. Such an animal can sometimes, scarcely walk around the ring, let alone walk a mile or romp and play as other hunting dogs do. And, of course, it is obvious that the exaggerated Chow is often a poor risk in the heat and during surgery. The exaggerated Chows of the 1960's and 1970's that developed by inbreeding to the import Chows, often themselves very beautiful, and important in giving the American Chow more head, more scowl, perhaps even more bone, became a serious problem in American Chowdom. These "overdone" Chows proliferated in various parts of our country, but not in all. Granted that the "exaggerated Chow" was a fad, and some of these Chows did make their championship, true. However, if one studies the lists of the Top Ten Chows from 1960 through 1973 in both the Chow Chow Club, Inc. and in the KENNEL REVIEW System, not one Chow who was Number One in

any year was an exaggerated Chow in the sense that is being developed here.

Following is a partial list of top winners; that is, the Number One Chow for any one year. None of these was exaggerated to the point of being an unhealthy abomination: Ch. Ghat De la Moulaine, Ch. Loy-Jean's China Boi, Ch. Ah Sid's The Dilettante, three years top Chow; Ch. Ah Sid's The Aide De Kamp; Ch. Lakeview's Han Sum, two years top Chow; Ch. Five Ash Vicki Jo; Ch. Eastward Lontamer Of Elster, three years top Chow; Ch. Gotschall's Chang Kou Chian; Ch. Lakeview's Mr. Lu-Kee; Ch. Tamarin Midnight Idol.

So, for all of the exaggerated Chows who won their championships, it is extremely important to note that not one of those "Basset-like or Bloodhound like" Chows was ever top Chow in the country. That fact speaks well for the American judges and for the Chow standard of 1941, which did insist that the "*Chow was a square dog.*" However, the exaggerated Chow became a serious problem.

When the problem of balance was the greatest, perhaps in the early-1970's, the first article to address this issue was published in *Popular Dogs* (August, 1974). The piece, "Chow Chows in the United States Today: The Problem Of Balance," by Dr. Sam Draper, included an excellent figure of a Chow created by Carol Morland-Marshall, *demonstrating the height of the Chow should form a square with the length of the body*, and several photographs of well-balanced "square" Chows and two photographs of Dr. Draper's own Chows evaluated by him as "unbalanced." From that time on, Dr. Draper wrote a half-dozen articles or more on this serious problem of the short-legged Chow, or to put it another way, a long-backed Chow. This distortion in balance does not make a square but a rectangle which is obviously quite different. And other Chow writers did the same regarding this unacceptable Chow. Those articles and the talk and concern among the majority of Chow breeders and exhibitors helped identify the dilemma. To put it simply, *the problem became noticed.*

Several editors from KENNEL REVIEW attended a Chow symposium in Ventura in 1979 when the leaders of

the discussion pinned up squares on the walls marked, "Right," and rectangles marked, "Wrong." That simple act told the story about Chow balance, that the Chow is a square dog, not a rectangle. That issue is *squarely* attacked and met "head-on,"—if one allows a pun—in the newly approved Chow standard, accepted by the AKC in December, 1986. Under "Size and Proportions," of the new Standard, one reads: **Serious Fault**—profile other than square.

Therefore, the new Chow Standard addressed several points which make explicitly clear what kind of healthy, well-balanced, flexible, agile, working-type dog the Chow should be. Here are some of those considerations, only excerpts, true, which when allowed will eliminate most of the grossly exaggerated specimens of the 1960's and 1970's.

"Characteristic—an ancient breed of northern Chinese origin, this all-purpose dog of China was used for hunting, herding, pulling, and protection of the home. While primarily a companion today, his working origin must always be remembered when assessing true Chow type.

"Muzzle—the muzzle is short in comparison to the length of the top skull, but never less than one-third of the head length.

"Eyes—serious faults: entropion or ectropion, or pupils wholly or partially obscured by loose skin.

"Expression—excessive loose skin is not desirable. Wrinkles on the muzzle do not contribute to expression and are not required.

"Body—short, compact, close coupled, strongly muscled, broad, deep and let down in the flank.

"Serious Faults—labored or abdominal breathing, not to include normal panting, narrow or slab-sided chest."

In order to clarify the fact that the Chow is *not* a head breed often subscribed to when defending the excessive Chow, the Chow Chow Club, Inc., has included an extremely explicit description of Chow gait or movement which is the final test of the Chow's conformation, balance and soundness.

"Gait—proper movement is the crucial test of proper conformation and soundness. It must be sound, straight moving, agile, brief, quick

Although many Chows became short-legged and were seen to have heavy-wrinkled heads, Ch. Balthazar Lontamer Avril, born in the early-1970's, was a beautifully balanced bitch with no physical characteristic exaggerated. This bitch conforms to the 1986 standard which reads in summary: "Exaggeration of any characteristic at the expense of balance or soundness shall be severely penalized."



This champion Chow (unidentified, owing to the fact that it is still living) is a product of 1980's breeding. He represents well the new standard that calls for "a powerful, sturdy, squarely built, up-standing dog of Arctic type, medium in size with strong muscular development and heavy bone." His head is not exaggerated with excessive wrinkles and his eyes, although deep set as the standard calls for, have neither entropion or ectropion, serious faults, and his pupils are not partially obscured by loose skin.



An unbalanced Chow—legs too short and/or body too long. Will Judy, a great Chow authority, wrote in his definitive book that a "short-legged Chow is an abomination!" Notice, too, how the wrinkles on the head and muzzle are over-done so much so that this Chow's eyes are not visible, but are under the folds of the forehead. In the 1986 standard, this Chow has two serious faults: rectangular outline, and eyes (or pupils) obscured by loose skin.



and powerful, never lumbering...somewhat lacking in speed, the Chow has excellent endurance because the sound, straight rear leg provides direct, usable power efficiently.

"Proportions—square in profile and close coupled. Distance from forechest to point of buttocks equals height at the highest point of the withers. **Serious Fault:** profile other than square.

Summary—faults shall be penalized in proportion to their deviation from the standard. In judging the Chow, the overall picture is of primary consideration. Exaggeration of any characteristic at the expense of balance or soundness shall be severely penalized. Equally objectionable are snipey, fine boned specimens and overdone, ponderous, cloddy specimens...Type should include general appearance, temperament, the harmony of all parts, and soundness especially as seen when the dog is in motion. There should be proper emphasis on movement which is the final test of the Chow's conformation, balance and soundness."

Although only excerpted here, the standard provides excellent guidance to breeders and judges in laying to rest the old myths that suggest that the over-done Chow is correct, that a Chow may move in anyway it likes, that it does not have to be sound, that a Chow is a head breed, etc. The new standard is written in great detail, at somewhat great length, but the reasons for the detail and the length are that the Chow is a difficult breed to judge, and certainly, wide misinterpretations have been prevalent. Had the new standard been in place several years ago, one Chow which did some winning, though not a great deal of winning, would not have won several Groups and all-breed BIS. First, the breeder was at fault who subscribed to the idea that "more, much more, is better" and that a Chow does not have to be sound, just wobbly. Second, the Group and BIS judges were equally at fault. They were not following the then present standard written in 1941, insisting that the Chow is a square dog, well-balanced and not overdone. But they were following the vogue of the "fad" Chow. This particular Chow was the most crippled Chow ever seen in the ring. He dragged his back legs across the ring as if displastic, the hocks were double-jointed, the stifles slipping, in short, a cripple. Yet, he won the supreme award at any dog event, an all-breed BIS, at which many far superior specimens were exhibited. That kind of Chow, it is hoped, cannot ever win again to any great degree, for the Chow breeders and the Chow judges will not allow such Chows to win, for they are outlawed, excluded if you will, by the excellent new Chow standard which took many years of planning, writing, discussing and rewriting.

According to the parent organization, the Chow Chow Club, Inc., two different committees concerned with the new standard worked six years with the input of all the members of the Chow Chow Club, itself. So one gives credit to Joel Marston, Clifton Shyrock, Sam Draper, Paul Odenkirhe, JoAnne O'Brien, Carmen Blankenship, and two Boards of Directors, as well as the membership at large, for contributing to the new standard, one, which according to several AKC officials, "is among the very best."

Hopefully, the Chow is protected from the rampant "fadism" of the past. **KR**