

First impressions - Judging the Anatolian Shepherd Dog head and neck

Understanding the Anatolian Shepherd Dog head is important to judging the breed because this is where all the disqualifying faults (DQs) particular to the breed are found. The only DQs not associated with the head are the two that are universal to all breeds – those of stable enough temperament that the dog does not menace the judge, and the requirement for two testicles, normally descended, in male dogs.

Always remember when judging the Anatolian that while this breed hails from a country of climate extremes, the dog itself is a moderate animal and the standard states, when discussing the body, that the dog is “well proportioned, functional, **without exaggeration**”.

From the AKC standard for the Anatolian Shepherd Dog -

Head: Expression should be intelligent. Eyes are medium size, set apart, almond shaped and dark brown to light amber in color. Blue eyes or eyes of two different colors are a disqualification. Eye rims will be black or brown and without sag or looseness of jaw. Incomplete pigment is a serious fault. Ears should be set on no higher than the plane of the head. V-shaped, rounded apex, measuring about four inches at the base to six inches in length. The tip should be just long enough to reach the outside corner of the eyelid. Ears dropped to sides. Erect ears are a disqualification. Skull is large but in proportion to the body. There is a slight centerline furrow, fore and aft, from apparent stop to moderate occiput. Broader in dogs than in bitches. Muzzle is blockier and stronger for the dog, but neither dog nor bitch would have a snipey head or muzzle. Nose and flews must be solid black or brown. Seasonal fading is not to be penalized. Incomplete pigment is a serious fault. Flews are normally dry but pronounced enough to contribute to "squaring" the overall muzzle appearance. Teeth and gums strong and healthy. Scissors bite preferred, level bite acceptable. Broken teeth are not to be faulted. Overshot, undershot or wry bite are disqualifications. Neck: slightly arched, powerful, and muscular, moderate in length with more skin and fur than anywhere on the body, forming a protective ruff. The dewlap **should not** be pendulous and excessive.

Worldwide, all standards for the Anatolian call for a variation on the theme of a large head, proportionate to size, blockier in males than females, without pendulous flews, and with tight lips at the corners of the mouth. Sloppy, pendulous flews get in the way during a fight. While the standard also calls for a dewlap, which serves to protect the throat area of the dog, it specifically states that it should not be pendulous or excessive. This is not a wet faced, wet mouthed breed. You should never see an Anatolian sitting ringside wearing a bib as you do in some other breeds.

There will be a slight centerline furrow to the head. The backskull will not be flat between the ears. Eyes will range from golden amber to dark brown. The AKC standard does not link eye color to coat color – only requiring that both eyes be of the same color, and stating that blue eyes are one of the DQs.

The stop should not be sharply, deeply pronounced as in the Rottweiler, Mastiff or Boxer. Nor should it be non-existent as in the Bull Terrier or Borzoi. The Anatolian Shepherd Dog is not a breed of extremes of physical type. It is neither sighthound nor mastiff in type – although you will encounter dogs that lie in different places along the spectrum - it lies in the middle of the physical extremes of type.

All standards call for complete pigmentation of eye rims, lips and nose, either black or brown, depending upon coat color. Please remember that all coat colors are equally acceptable in this breed and dilute pigment should not be penalized so long as it is complete. Some dogs will exhibit snow nose and this should not be faulted.

The AKC standard allows for scissors and level bites. There is no requirement for complete dentition in the breed, so no need to count teeth.

All standards worldwide call for a pendant ear, triangular in shape and held higher when alert. The AKC standard has a DQ for erect ears and also states that the ears should not be set higher than the plane of the head. High set, terrier-like ears are not desirable. The United Kennel Club standard is the only one to mention that dogs coming in from Turkey may have ears completely removed. Until 2012 dogs imported from Turkey could not go directly into the AKC studbook without having three generations of dogs behind them bred here in the US, and, to date, no Turkish import with cropped ears has been shown in AKC so the issue is a moot point.

Perhaps the greatest frustration for judges unfamiliar with the Anatolian Shepherd is that the standard does not give any direction for muzzle to backskull proportions when judging the head. The Anatolian is a moderate breed so extremes of head type should be avoided. In the absence of instruction from the standard, it is acceptable to fall back on generic, mesocephalic proportions of muzzle equal to or slightly shorter than backskull. In fact, the standard in the UK and Europe both state that the muzzle is slightly shorter than the length of the backskull. Again, moderation is key.

It should be understood that the Anatolian is not a head breed like some other breeds have become. It is, overall, a robust working livestock guardian dog. Extremes of type and physical exaggeration are anathema to the breed.

- Anatolian Shepherd Dog Club of America : www.asdca.org