

# Judging the GWP: Why Temperament Counts

by Laura Reeves, Parent Club Approved Mentor

## “Temperament

Of sound, reliable temperament, the German Wirehaired Pointer is at times aloof but not unfriendly toward strangers; a loyal and affectionate companion who is eager to please and enthusiastic to learn.

“...the German Wirehaired Pointer is an intelligent, energetic and determined hunter.” — *AKC Standard*

Wirehairs were developed by the German “middle class.” They were created purposely to be the “super dog” that could do anything well. Dispatch small predators (feral cats and foxes, for example, that can decimate the wild bird populations) and guard hearth and home were amongst their duties.



1967 National Best in Specialty Show  
CH Dondi V Schnellberg

These dogs were meant to be tough, stand-up, alert family protectors as well as hunting dogs to help put food on the table.

The early dogs in the U.S. were often “sharp” and more dog than the average pet owner could manage. But they were \*reliably\* so. If the dog communicated an intention to guard, it would do so. My first ever GWP, in the ‘80s, was primarily German bred. She was very fierce in her protection of me and her “domain.” Experienced and knowledgeable dog people gave her a wide berth.

Over time, as some breeders tried to soften the edges of dogs who were not going into working homes, that toughness occasionally acquired something of a twist. It lost the steadiness and calmness and kept the fierceness. So we started seeing dogs who were lacking innate confidence, scared, and yet still willing to show inappropriate aggression.

From a breeding and owning position, the balance point is keeping the dogs solid minded enough to work, but biddable enough to adjust to a lower-key environment.

From a judging standpoint, the components of the standard which describe temperament are critical pieces to judging the breed, as they address basic, defining breed character and thus type.

When I give Judges Education presentations, I always bring five points to the table. Even if you only remember these five things, you still will not go far wrong in judging the breed. These items are prioritized by **\*function\*** and based exclusively on the standard. Coat, Temperament, Movement, Structure and Outline.

The Standard says, “A dog must have a correct coat to be of correct type.” Boom. That goes first. This piece is what, literally, defines the breed.



2008 National Best in Specialty Show  
GCH CH Ripsnorter's Mt View Lookout JH ROM

Temperament is a close second because a successful versatile hunting dog must have the desired temperament. A dog which responds to the comparatively mild stressor of a dog show ring with ears pinned, tail tucked and eyes spinning counter-clockwise is not aloof, it is terrified. This makes the dog unlikely to be functional when it comes to a showdown with a predator or an intruder. Nor will he be willing to endure the rigors of gunfire, retrieving a screaming, scratching rooster pheasant to hand, following a blood trail for hours, chasing a diving, dodging duck until captured, searching at great distances from the handler for the scent of his quarry and so much more.

Simply because not every dog is asked to fulfill these tasks in today's world is no reason to ignore the essence of the breed as envisioned. Our job as breeders and judges is to protect and preserve the breed. It doesn't matter how beautiful a dog is in structure, if its mind isn't up to the task at hand he's \*functionally\* useless.

These first two components are imperative in awarding a correct exhibit. A dog which is lacking in either of these areas in any appreciable way fails to meet the basic requirements of the breed standard.

Movement demonstrates the ability to cover the most ground with the least effort that enables a dog to work all day. Structure identifies balanced angles, depth of body and solid top line to hold up to long years of productive work in the field. Outline creates a silhouette showing the correct slightly longer than tall proportion, perceptibly sloping topline, parallel head planes and elegant but powerful construction that say this is a GWP vs a GSP or WPG or Spinone.

So, let's have a dog show! We'll imagine you are judging a significant entry, which in this breed is anything over 10 exhibits. You have an imaginary Open Bitch class of four animals. The descriptions below are very realistic for the dogs you may see.

**#6** is correct in outline, beautiful front assembly, balanced angles, floats around the ring, but is very narrow going away and gives an overall impression of "wispy." Her coat is soft and open and blowing in the wind with noticeable clipper marks on head, ears and throat. She stands for exam, although appears nervous when free-stacked.

**#8** is long in proportion, at the very top of the height limit, a bit sloppy coming and going, but has a powerful stride going around. She has textbook perfect coat — harsh, dense and flat lying, with naturally short hair on the head and ears. She is happy, if a bit silly, in presentation and has lovely brown eyes. Substantial bone, well-matched angulation fore and aft, although a bit long in hock.

**#10** is square, moves like a machine down and back, but shows no reach or drive and bicycles a bit on the go-round. Coat is put down to absolute perfection, but the beard and leg hair are softer in texture. A solid, deep bodied girl, she is in the middle of the height standard. She is able to be examined, if only barely. Did not offer to bite, but her body language made it clear she was thinking about it.

**#12** is correct proportion, but has a flat back. She is on the small end of the height standard and light in bone. Her shoulders fit smoothly but are set forward, with minimal upper arm return. Her head is pretty, although the round yellow-green eyes are a distraction. The rear is well-angulated. Her movement is clean down and back, and adequate going around. Her back coat is well presented, although obviously scissored and clipped elsewhere. She is a happy, confident show dog and "makes the picture."

Coat, Temperament, Movement, Structure and Outline. Prioritize by Function. How do you place the class? And why?

Contact Judges Education Coordinator Judy Cheshire, [heywiregwp@gmail.com](mailto:heywiregwp@gmail.com), for details regarding the National JE seminar, ringside mentoring and more.

As always, this is JMHO.