

THE FINNISH SPITZ

(Suomenpystykorva)

FROM A LECTURE TO TRAINEE JUDGES BY MRS DOREEN DUFFIN

WEDNESDAY 8th FEBRUARY 2006



This picture shows a light but strong dog that is pulling slightly on the lead but exhibits all the correct characteristics of the breed and was, in fact, chosen as the breed's representative dog when Finnish Spitz was formally selected as the national breed of Finland.

The Finnish Spitz belongs, as the name implies, to the Spitz group - that is, he has:

- a sharp pointed ear
- a ruff around the neck
- a high tail usually carried over the back
- comparatively straight hind legs

The Finnish Spitz, or "Finkie" as he is affectionately known, is Finland's National Dog. It is an honour significant to the Finns and he is the only hunting dog of its kind in the world.

The origin of the Finkie is largely guesswork and hangs on presumptions as there is hardly any historical evidence in existence. The first actual written evidence was made by the French explorer Pierre de la Martiniere in his travel notes of 1675, but the breed has been known since Finland was first settled.

The Standard of the "Finnish Barking Bird Dog" was approved in 1892 and the first breed show was held in Oulu, Finland that same year. For centuries, the Finns have used their dog for

hunting, requiring of it a combination of specialist abilities: Pointer, Setter, Retriever and occasionally Hound, though the dogs never combine forces on a bird - they only do so for large game. So this breed, in reality, should be in a special Spitz group, or even the Gundog group.

They are mainly used to hunt Capercaillie, a large bird found in Finland. The dog ranges well ahead of the hunter to seek the bird, tracks it until it is treed, then proceeds to attract its attention, almost hypnotising it by running to and fro waving its tail loosely. Hypnotised or not, the bird is not disturbed when the dog starts to bark, softly at first then gradually increasing in volume until it is loud and ringing, carrying enormous distances to bring the hunter and his gun to the spot. The most experienced dogs actually draw the bird's attention away from the direction of the hunter's approach so that he is unobserved and can get a clear line from the rear. Should the bird take off before the hunter arrives, the dog will stop barking and follow the prey until it settles once again, then repeat the whole performance.

Before a Finnish Spitz can attain the title of Champion in the show ring in Finland, he must prove himself in the field in trials. When he has earned his working certificate he can try for his "beauty" certificate.

The Finnish Spitz is one of the minority breeds in the Hound Group, so please do not overlook him because of that. As with any dog, if he is a good example of the breed and conforms to the Standard, please consider him for an award. A good Finkie is a beautiful animal.

With acknowledgment and thanks to:

Mr David & Mrs Angela Cavill (UK)

Ms S Tarrant

Mr Vuolasvirta (Finland)

FINNISH SPITZ

(Suomenpystykorva)

Revised F.C.I. Standard No 49 dated 12/03/99. Effective in Australia from 1st January 2000.
Country of Origin: Finland

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY - The origin of the Finnish Spitz is unknown. However, it is known that, hundreds of years ago, dogs of the same type as Finnish Spitz were being used for all game hunting over the whole country. Originally, the main goal was to develop a dog which barked well at game up in trees and was also beautiful. When acceptance to the breed register started in the 1890's, individuals, similar in type and usage, were found mainly in the eastern and northern parts of the country.

The first standard was established in 1892. The first speciality show was held the same year and the first bird-hunting trial in 1897.

Today the breed is very common in both Finland and Sweden. It has been developed from pure natural stock and is an essential part of the Finnish culture. The Finnish Spitz was named as the National Dog of Finland in 1979.

GENERAL APPEARANCE - Smaller than medium sized, almost square. In conformation, lean and firm. Carries itself well.

Important proportions - *The length of the body is the same as the height at the withers. The depth of the chest is slightly less than half the height at the withers. The ratio between the muzzle and the skull is approximately 3:4. The skull is a little broader than long; its breadth is the same as its depth.*

CHARACTERISTICS - [Not specified. Classified by the F.C.I. in Group 5, Spitz and primitive types, Section 2, Nordic Hunting Dogs.]

TEMPERAMENT - Lively, vigorous, brave and determined. Possibly a little reserved towards strangers but never vicious.

The Finnish Spitz is not a lap dog. He has been bred to hunt, and that is uppermost in his mind. He does not take too kindly to the show ring, and to judge a Finkie correctly, one must bear that in mind. He is a courageous dog, being a creature of the forest. He risks nothing; he is very suspicious, very cautious. When chasing a bird in the woods, if the bird flies over a stream or a lake, a good Finnish Spitz splashes in the water without hesitation. If when out hunting in his native Finland, he happens to meet a bear (and this could still happen in the North East part of the country), he should have courage to attack the bear from behind so that the owner has time to take out his gun. A glimpse of caution can often be caught in the way Finnish Spitz reacts to the judge's approach - warily but not aggressively. Just watch his eyes and ears for confirmation.

He is a lively and intelligent dog. It seems to shine through every fibre of his body, especially the ears, eyes and tail. This is not to say that a dog which goes round the ring with his tail down or which does not prick his ears at the judge's funny noise lacks intelligence - far from it. He is more than likely bored stiff with the whole proceedings and is clearly displaying a "been there, done that" attitude.

As well as having breed type, the Finkie should have sex type, with the dog being considerably larger and more heavily coated than the bitch. These sexual characteristics are quite specific, with the dog looking masculine while the bitch looks feminine, i.e. she is more slender, delicate, softer and less splendid in coat and stance; she should have an essential femininity. One should be able to tell from across the ring whether it is a dog or a bitch.

They are excellent house and guard dogs. They are small enough to live indoors (and exceptionally clean) yet they have a king sized and winning personality. They must, however, be gently but firmly handled during puppyhood as their innate habit of barking needs to be curbed.

HEAD AND SKULL

CRANIAL REGION:

Shape of Skull - Viewed from above, egg-shaped, broadening gradually towards the ears, broadest between the ears. Viewed from the front and in profile, the skull is slightly convex [rounded]. The upper axes of the skull and muzzle are almost parallel. The frontal furrow is very shallow. The superciliary ridges and the occiput are slightly visible.

Stop - Not very pronounced, the angle between the nasal bridge and the skull is clearly marked.

FACIAL REGION:

Nose - Rather small, jet-black.

Muzzle - Narrow, lean. Viewed from above and in profile, evenly tapering. The nasal bridge is straight. The lower jaw is clearly visible.

Lips - Tight, rather thin and close fitting. Good pigmentation.

Jaws - The jaws are strong.

Cheeks - The zygomatic arches are slightly emphasised.

EYES - Medium sized, almond shaped. Slightly oblique and preferably dark. The expression is lively and alert.

EARS - Set rather high, always erect. Rather small sized, pointed, very mobile and covered with fine hair.

MOUTH - The teeth are well developed and symmetrical. Normal dentition. Tight scissor bite.

The head must not be coarse, as a dog with a coarse head is usually coarse all over. He has a medium sized head, in balance with the rest of the body. In judging the Finnish Spitz head, first look at the ears - see if they are obviously too large; if the tips are rounded or otherwise faulty (the inner and outer edges are not matched to each other); if they are not properly positioned on the head (too far apart, too low or too close together); if they point wrongly (too much forward or sideways or backwards or curved); or if they are soft, too thick, or on the other hand, too dry and thin - so called 'paper ears'. The ears of a Finnish Spitz are very mobile and covered with fine hair. As with any prick eared dog, do not expect his ears to be pricked all the time, but do endeavour to alert him once during judging to see the expression.

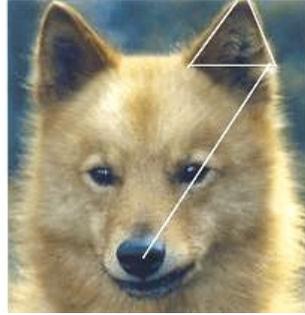
After the ears, attention directs itself to the curvature of the forehead. Examine the head from the side and full front to make sure it is not too domed and that he has some stop. We require a slightly rounded skull and the stop is not very pronounced, but it is there. At times, one sees a distinct lack of stop and this is usually accompanied by a roman nose effect. This is not desirable and gives a staring expression to the face. The ratio between the muzzle and the skull is approximately 3 : 4, with the skull being a little broader than long, and the breadth the same as the depth. The muzzle is narrow, lean and evenly tapering with the nasal bridge straight and the cheeks are slightly emphasised. The muzzle is not so narrow as to be snipey and, of course, we want a tight scissor bite. The lips are tight, rather thin and close fitting, with good pigmentation. The nose is rather small and must be jet black.

The eyes are almond shaped, medium size, set slightly oblique and preferably dark. The expression is lively and alert.

The expression of the Finkie is very alert and friendly and it must be remembered that no two heads will be alike. Also remember that the dog must be masculine and bitch feminine, as in this breed particularly, this is very important.



A beautiful head



These ears are excellent. They are in exactly the right position, the size is just right and they are set correctly too. It is important that they are upright and pointed. They should not be hooded as in the Basenji. They should be almost an equilateral triangle and if you take a line from the nose through the centre of the eye it should pass through the bottom right hand (or left hand) corner of the triangle.

NECK - Muscular. It appears to be rather short in males due to the thick ruff and of medium length in bitches. Throat without dewlap.

The Finnish forest is undulating, and uneven, therefore the Finnish Spitz needs to be able to lower its head right to the ground easily, lift it to point the birds and have a not too long but very strong neck to be able to carry the weight of the shot bird. He does not need a long neck, but it is firm and muscular. Again reference is made to the difference in the sexes, as on the male the neck appears to be rather short due to the thick ruff.

FOREQUARTERS - General Appearance - Viewed from the front, straight and parallel. The bone is of medium strength. The upper arm is a little shorter than the shoulder blade and the forearm.

Shoulders - Firm, very mobile and relatively straight.

Upper arm - A little shorter than the shoulder blade. Slightly sloping and strong.

Elbows - Placed in front of a vertical line drawn from the highest point of the shoulder blade; pointing straight backwards.

Forearm - Rather strong, vertical.

Pastern - Of medium length, slightly sloping.

It is absolutely correct that the Finnish Spitz shoulders be more upright than in other hounds, especially those developed for galloping. The legs should be straight and the bone of medium

strength, neither too heavy nor coarse. The shoulders are firm and relatively straight with the upper arm being a little shorter than the shoulder blade, slightly sloping and strong. The elbows are placed in front of a vertical line drawn from the highest point of the shoulder blade; pointing straight backwards. Due to the shoulder angulation, the Finnish Spitz does not have a long stride - in fact the gait is light and springy.

BODY

Withers - Clearly defined, especially in males.

Back - Rather short, straight and muscular.

Loin - Short and muscular.

Croup - Of medium length, well developed and slightly sloping.

Chest - Deep, reaching almost to the elbows, not very broad. The ribs are slightly arched; the forechest clearly visible, not very broad.

Underline - Slightly tucked up.

This is a square breed - length of body the same as height at the clearly defined withers. Due to the furnishings on the back of the thighs he may look slightly longer than tall, but when the frame is measured, the dog should be square. Bitches are often forgiven a little body length but Finnish statistics show a mere 1cm difference in length to height. The back is rather short, straight and muscular, and the loin is also short and muscular. The croup is of medium length, well developed and slightly sloping. The chest is deep, reaching almost to the elbows, not very broad, and the depth is slightly less than half the height at the withers, and thus we want a dog with more leg length than body depth. The belly is slightly tucked up. The shape of the dog allows it to work through thick undergrowth, jump lightly over obstacles and its coat protects it from damage as well as from the elements.

HINDQUARTERS

General Appearance - Strong. Viewed from behind, straight and parallel. Moderate angulation. The bones are of medium strength. The upper thigh is slightly longer than the second thigh.

Upper Thigh - Of medium length. Rather broad with well developed muscles.

Stifles - Pointed forward, moderate angulation.

Second Thigh - Muscular.

Hock-joint - Set moderately low, moderate angulation.

Hock (Metatarsus) - Rather short, strong and vertical.



Hindquarters are strong and muscular, with the upper thigh slightly longer than the second thigh. As in most Spitz breeds, only a moderate turn of stifle is required. Hock joints set moderately low, with moderate angulation. Young dogs are often high over the croup due to the muscles and tendons not being developed rather than because their bones are too long or too angulated.

FEET - Forefeet - Roundish cat-feet. Toes tight and well arched. Pads elastic, always black, the sides covered with dense hair.

Hindfeet - A little longer than the front feet, otherwise the same. The dewclaws should be removed.

The Finnish Spitz moves on his toes and a roundish cat foot with tight, well arched toes is required. The pads are elastic, always black and covered with dense hair. The hindfeet are a little longer than the front feet.

TAIL - Curved vigorously forward from the set-on, tightly along the back, down and slightly backwards, pressed against the upper thigh. The tip of the tail reaches to the middle of the upper thigh, when straightened, reaches approximately down to the hocks.

The tail is the crown of a Finkie. It has a great bearing on his expression and is a pointer to the mood and character of its owner. They can relax their tails quite often and easily - and often do when they get bored with the show ring - but it should be up when in motion. The set of the tail is quite clear. The end of the tail should not make a full circle - it curls vigorously forward from the set-on - with no gap between the tail and the back - then tightly along the back, then down and slightly backwards, pressed against the upper thigh. It is not a curly tail as in the Elkhound or Basenji, and the tip of the tail should not make a full circle, but reaches to the middle of the upper thigh. When straightened, it reaches approximately to the hocks. It is immaterial which side the tail falls to, although it must be admitted that a tail which falls to the judge's side can be advantageous. The dog usually has a bigger tail with longer hair than the bitch.



GAIT/MOUMENT - Light, covering the ground effortlessly. Changes easily from trot to gallop which is the most natural style of movement. The legs move parallel. When rushing after game, he bursts explosively into a fast gallop.

As previously mentioned, the Finkie moved on his toes. Due to his more upright shoulders he does not have a great sweeping stride, yet his movement is not hackneyed. It is a light, springy, quick and graceful gait and covers the ground effortlessly.

COAT - **Skin** - Tight overall without wrinkles.

Hair - Rather long on the body, semi-erect or erect, stiffer on the neck and back. On the head and legs, except at the back of the hindquarters, short and close-lying. The stiff hair on the shoulders, especially in males, is noticeably longer and coarser. On the back of the thighs (trousers) and on the tail, the hair is long and dense. The undercoat is short, soft, dense and light in colour.

The Finnish Spitz has a double coat. The undercoat should be very dense and thick so that it makes the hairs stand out half erect. With such a thick and warm coat the Finkies are able to withstand the extremely cold temperature sometimes reaching minus 30 degrees Celsius in Finland. The longer outer coat forms a mantle against dampness, dirt, thorns and stings. It is likely that we would not see the quality of coat as found in Finland because of our warmer climate, so that would have to be taken into consideration when judging.

COLOUR - The hair on the back is red or golden brown, preferably bright. A lighter shade inside the ears, on cheeks, throat, chest, belly, inside the legs, back of the thighs and on the tail. A white stripe on the chest and small white markings on the feet are permitted.

The colour is a clear "red" although this can vary from a deep gold to dark chestnut. He is not a solid colour dog. The light undercoat which helps the outer coat stand out is responsible for lifting the colour and the gold tips really make the whole coat glow in the sunshine. The hair of

the undersides, back of the thighs and on the tail is lighter and there are usually lighter markings along the shoulder blades. Puppies are usually dark grey with a good deal of black and it is often not until after the second change of coat that colour can be said to be stabilized. A small white stripe on the chest and small white markings are permitted, but they must only be small markings.

SIZE - Height at withers: Ideal height for males: 47 cm [18 1/2 ins]

Ideal height for females: 42 cm [16.1/2 ins]

With a tolerance of +/- 3 cm [just over 1 in.]

Weight Males: 12 - 13 kg [26 1/2 lbs - 28 1/2 lbs] Females: 7 - 10 kg [15 1/2 lbs - 22 lbs]

There is a range of 4 inches between the smallest bitch and the tallest dog, and quite a varied weight difference - the lowest bitch weight is 15 1/2 lbs, while the highest dog weight is 28 1/2 lbs. I feel this once again demonstrates the importance of realising the difference between the sexes of this breed and how very masculine the male should be and how very feminine and dainty the bitches are.

FAULTS - Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.

Heavy head, coarse muzzle, weak underjaw.

Ears pointing forward in a sharp angle, leaning sideways or close together at the tips, curving backwards or ears that are longhaired inside.

Slack or too tightly curved tail.

Too flexible in pasterns.

Long, soft, too short or close-lying coat.

Clearly defined diversity of colours.

DISQUALIFICATIONS - Flesh coloured nose.

Over or undershot mouth.

Eyes bright yellow or wall eye.

Ears with drooping tips.

Wavy or curly coat.

Colour shades differing clearly from the basic colour.

Large white markings on the chest and/or a white sock.

Clearly aggressive disposition towards people.

NOTE - Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.



