Your first look at the lineup will include noticing size variances. The only numbers our standard articulates are those relating to size and weight. Size should never outweigh all the other attributes necessary to proper breed type. So, “When all else is equal, the dog closest to the desired freighting size is to be preferred”. At this point one needs to remember that as an endurance dog he must be only slightly longer than tall. In order to negotiate through snow drifts he must have some leg length. We generally expect the leg length to be about ½ the total height at the withers.

As you begin your evaluation the Malamute head should be of considerable importance as it is a defining breed characteristic. The standard states it is broad and deep. The dog cannot possibly have the proper ear set if the skull is narrow and shallow. The ears are placed wide apart at the outside back edges giving the appearance of standing off from the skull when erect. They are small in proportion to the head. There is a slight break downward between the skull and the muzzle (stop). The word “slight” does not mean no perceptible stop. The cheeks are flat smoothly joining the muzzle which is large and bulky. Judges sometimes ask about length of muzzle as it relates to back skull. Here is our first example of thinking “balance”. Is the muzzle in balance with the back skull ? The correct balance between the two will be apparent giving the head a blending without sharp edges. There should be under jaw. The teeth are large meeting in a scissors bite. Remember this breed survived mostly on frozen food so needed a strong jaw with strong teeth. Dropped lower middle incisors are not considered a fault in an otherwise correct bite. The eyes of the Malamute are almond shaped obliquely set but not so much so as to give an extremely oriental appearance. The Malamute has a soft inviting expression. His brown eyes and black pigment add to that look. The red Malamutes will have a lighter eye and brown pigment but their expression is no less soft and beautiful.

**Blue eyes are a disqualification.**

As a sledge dog the Malamute must be compact yet not short coupled. He must have a strong neck blending smoothly into the withers. The neck needs to be moderately long and strong in order to carry the head forward when working. We ask for a moderately sloping shoulder. The topline is firm and strong sloping gently to the hips. This breed must be well muscled and carry no excess weight. He is a substantial dog but substance is bred not fed! His chest is deep and ribs well sprung but not barrel chested. He must have sufficient lung capacity to do his job. The Malamute tail is a distinct breed characteristic different than the Siberian, Akita or Samoyed. It is most often carried over the back as a waving plume but it is not uncommon for the tail to trail when moving. This breed may drop its tail in the ring at some point. Bitches may drop their tails when in season. On the other hand, males may tighten their tails when in the ring with other males. It is desirable to see the tail carried naturally at least once while in the ring.

It is often said the Malamute is built from the feet up. Without proper feet they could not perform their task for long. The foot is snowshoe shape; toes are well arched with thick pads compact in appearance. Flat, splayed or feet of an incorrect shape are not consistent with proper breed type. The pastern is short and only slightly sloping. The forelegs are straight with heavy bone. The rear legs are very well muscled, stifles moderately bent with well let down hocks. This combination enables the power needed to perform effectively.

The Alaskan Malamute has a coat unlike its counterparts. It is a standoff coat consisting of a thick harsh guard coat and a dense woolly undercoat. It can be described like something a golfer might wear. The guard coat acts like a rain resistant wind breaker over a warm wool sweater. The length varies slightly but never long and soft. There will be more length around the neck, down the back and on the pants and tail. It is natural for Malamutes to shed out much if not all their undercoat at certain times of the year. Please do not discount an exhibit just because he is “out of coat”. This breed is shown in its natural state. Trimming is not acceptable except to provide a clean cut appearance to the feet.

The movement of the Alaskan Malamute is very important. As we said earlier, he is a powerful sledge dog and must denote that power when moving. On the down and back the legs will tend toward the centerline but we do not specifically ask for single tracking. There should be no crabbing, padding, or any other movement fault that would interfere with his ability to negotiate the extreme terrain in his native Alaska. From the side you will see all the parts working together. The powerful drive in the rear, the firm topline, the head carried forward and slightly above the withers and the front legs reaching in a straight line from the shoulder to touch the ground just under the chin. There is no roaching, dipping, rolling or other tiring action in the topline. There is no pounding at the shoulder, the pastern is flexible yet not weak and the overall motion is effortless, balanced and tireless, all vital to endurance. Your impression is that of a dog covering the most ground with the fewest steps. He should never appear to be his own load!

It is a complete package of a powerful, athletic, beautiful dog capable of performing his duties in unforgiving weather and terrain.

The essentials discussed above encompass breed type. Without these characteristics the dog is not a correct Alaskan Malamute. It is imperative for judges to get their hands into the coats to properly evaluate the structure of this breed. Coat can totally distort size, substance, topline, head shape and angles. If you think the topline looks dippy, check with your hands. It could be coat. If you think the head has too much stop, feel to be sure. Our exhibitors are good groomers - it’s up to judges to get beyond cosmetics.

When we consider color we are thinking more of a style characteristic than actual breed type. This breed comes in several colors and variations of those colors. Some judges have asked if gray is the preferred color. Absolutely NOT!! There is no preferred color. Those mentioned in the standard are anywhere from light gray to black, sable, red and the only allowed solid color, white. All can have white, cream, gray or sable undercoat and shadings of these colors. The gray, black, sable, white dogs will have black pigment and brown eyes, the darker the better. Reds will have brown pigment and a light color eye. All are totally acceptable. A snow nose is not to be faulted in any color.

Face markings are another example of style characteristics. An open face, one having no other color than white often makes the head seem broader and muzzle heavier. Heavy face markings such as a bar and mask of a dark color can give the impression of a narrow and/or longer muzzle. You may see very heavy markings covering most of the face. The expression is still inviting and beautiful.

All colors will have varying shades of white on the under belly, tail, legs and some part of face markings. You may see a white collar, half collar or nap spot. There could be a blaze on the top skull. You may also see dark colored streaks down the back of the hock. All are acceptable. What is not are body splashes or broken colors over the body.

A word about temperament… He is confident, smart, alert and determined. In the Malamute world there is a leader and all others follow. However the breed is great with both adults and children. He is not a guardian breed normally. He has a tendency to verbalize which is different than growling! Normally dogs in the show ring are very well trained and totally happy to be admired and have special attention. Often when approaching, you will see tails wagging and almost a smile on their face. But there can be times when males in particular get agitated with each other. There may be a bitch in season or another dog may have grumbled even if you didn’t hear it. Should you be faced with this, give them room. Separate them as much as possible. If a bitch in season, allow as much space as reasonable possible between the girls and boys. Never bunch them all up in a corner. Split the class if need be to prevent an incident. Most handlers know their dog and know when to keep separation. Having said this, if a Malamute does growl or snap at you, immediately send it form your ring. There is no excuse for it and never tolerate it, even if it’s a puppy! The way to a Malamute brain is through his stomach. Please allow the reasonable use of bait. Because food is a motivator, any leftover bait from other breeds needs to be cleaned up before the Malamutes enter the ring. Most of the time a ring with 50 or 60 dogs will present a picture of waving tails and happy expressions. Just a little awareness may help prevent an incident.

The Alaskan Malamute is a majestic beautiful breed. His heritage is to be respected and his virtues rewarded. It is the job of breeders and judges to protect this heritage.