

# MASKOTTI

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Tuomarin vaikutelmia – Judge's Impressions  
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## **Finnish Deerhound Specialty August 4, 2007 – Judge's Impressions**

A National Specialty is a time to celebrate your chosen breed with people whose passion mirrors your own. The conservators of any breed are the breeders and a National Specialty is their forum to show how they are pursuing their vision. Therefore, it was with tremendous pleasure and excitement that I accepted an invitation to judge the Finnish Deerhound Specialty in Tampere on August 4, 2007. In a country with a population of 5.2 million people and about 150 Deerhounds, how onerous could that be? Arriving after a 6,606 km flight and landing in a country very similar to the one I left nine hours earlier, I was astonished to find that I was to judge an unprecedented entry of almost 70 dogs! And the decisions were very difficult indeed!

While the Finnish Specialty operates under FCI rules, with a full written judge's critique for every dog entered, the class divisions are organised exclusively by age. In a breed where physical development goes through some marked "stages" based on age, this is a useful way of evaluating individuals. There were no "Bred by Exhibitor" classes or "Champion" classes, although there was a "Working" dog class and the usual brace, team and progeny classes and a rather unusual "Tourist" class for the beloved pet that is not eligible for regular classes due to being neutered, permanently lame or handicapped in some way.

In preparation for this assignment, I reviewed the FCI standard for Deerhounds ... a clinical, stripped down version of the original standard which had been arranged and approved by the Deerhound Club (UK) in 1892 and finally endorsed by this Club in 1901. This 1901 standard was slightly changed by the Club in 1917. Up to that time the height for males was given as "From 28 to 30 inches (71.1 cm. – 76.2 cm.), or even more if there be symmetry without coarseness, but which is rare", and a height for bitches was given as "From 26 inches (66 cm.) upwards." After the 1917 changes, the standard read as follows: "Height of dogs should not be less than 30 inches (76.2 cm.) and bitches 28 inches (71.1 cm.), at the shoulder, respectively." The original (1901) standard had no statement "As tall as possible consistent with quality". That inclusion under the "Points of a Deerhound" was an addition that appeared in the modified standard of 1917 and after. The standard was rewritten, and approved by the British Kennel Club in 1986, and this version was accepted by the FCI in that year.

My familiarity is with the Canadian Kennel Club, and Scottish Deerhound Club of America/American Kennel Club (1935) standards that still remain mainly faithful to the original British Deerhound standard of 1901 but include the increased height alteration of 1917. The FCI standard drops some important points from these standards and the original British Deerhound standard that are critical in judging this breed. I would urge breeders not to lose sight of the original Deerhound standard developed in the closing era of the working Deerhound. It was disturbing to me that the FCI standard omits the "Points of the Deerhound" which is still included in the North American standards where it is called "Points of the Deerhound, Arranged in Order of Importance". This



listing clearly ranks “type” and “movement” above all other qualities. Missing as well is the discussion associated with size that covers the possibility that dogs may be “too big” to do their work effectively. There also exists a noted canine sexual dimorphism between the males and females in this breed. Charles Darwin himself corresponded with George Cupples (author of Scotch Deerhounds and their Masters, 1894) on this particular breed characteristic. The original standard comment of...“even at her greatest height she does not approach that of the dog, and therefore could not be too big for work as over big dogs are” is a telling observation on breed functionality and form in both Deerhound dogs and bitches that is missing from the FCI standard.

Each breed standard is a guide to provide the “conservators” with a description of the physical traits that individuals need in order to be efficient in the breed’s function, in other words, how “form follows function”. In Deerhounds, understanding function means knowing the quarry, terrain and hunting style of the breed. My epiphany in understanding form and function in Deerhounds came when I attended the Dava Quaich open field coursing meet in 1978 south of Inverness, Scotland. The quarry may not have been red deer, it was the blue hare, but watching thirty-six Deerhounds hunting at speed on the heather covered hills where the breed developed, gave me a better understanding of Deerhound structure than my now more than thirty years of attending dog shows. Over the years, that visit was followed by several more trips to the Dava Moor, the Borders, as well as hare coursing in Manitoba (Canada), the Dakotas and Colorado (USA), at NOFCA (North American Open Field Coursing Association) meets with my Deerhounds. I am indeed fortunate that open field coursing is possible where I live and my Deerhounds can daily run off lead in relative safety.

My quest to find or produce a Deerhound that is field worthy *and* excels in the show ring has made me realise that the adage “form follows function” is too simplistic. To work, a performance Deerhound must have passion and desire. It must also be in good physical condition. You cannot measure desire in a show ring, but you can assess fitness. While no judge expects a show dog to be in top hunting form, when the fitness of a dog affects its physical attributes, including its soundness moving, then this has to affect placements in the ring. Conditioning is worth discussing, as some misconceptions about rearing this breed still seem to exist.

Deerhounds are extremely difficult to raise well. The laid-back nature of the breed makes them poor at self-exercising. Puppies need in their first year of growth, a very large outdoor play area of sufficient size that they are able to challenge themselves physically. With this, is required a littermate or another high-energy breed to motivate them to play. If they are not raised in this type of environment, they tend to exhibit certain characteristics: no muscling, front legs seeming to emerge from the same socket, and toes that point outwards (“east – west feet”). A straight upper arm and no fore chest appear in many cases to accompany these characteristics. Without muscling running along the top of the ribs on either side of the back bone from the loin to the shoulder blades, a dog will often feel slab sided.

That first year of development is critical if the dog is to be a show specimen. In this breed, knowing whether certain structural problems (east – west front feet, no fore chest, “cow hocks”) are inherited or as a result of inadequate rearing practices has always been a conundrum for me. Many adolescent males that I was shown, being large boned and very difficult to raise, exhibited some of these weaknesses. Was this a result of inadequate rearing techniques? It was most noticeable in the presentation of what were clearly littermates, where one obviously led a sedentary life and the other was fit and well conditioned. In particular, it is frustrating to judge an unconditioned hound that may have exhibited better structural aspects than others in its age class, but was so unfit, that its movement “coming and going” was not true as required by the standard, and thus the individual could not be placed higher.

The front assembly of a Deerhound should be characterised by a long upper arm (humerus) that joins the shoulder at a moderate angle. While the layback of (angle between) the upper arm and shoulder (scapula) in a sighthound will not approach that of the trotting breeds and the even more extreme layback of the digging breeds, these two parts of the front assembly do need good length and breadth of bone as this is where the running muscles are attached. This muscling should be felt not just across the shoulder and upper arm assembly but also on the chest, between the front legs and along the loin. The length and position of the shoulder and upper arm affect reach. Those bones also support the body as well as the muscles, tendons and ligaments all of which act as shock absorbers in the gallop. The longer upper arm gives greater reach and greater capacity to absorb shock on impact. The pounding that results from a short straight upper arm is wearing and reduces stamina. The standard simply covers all this by stating ...“shoulders well laid...loaded and straight shoulders are undesirable” which is rather inadequate.

While I saw many poor front assemblies, there were a number of signs that indicated to me that what I was observing might be related to rearing and conditioning and not inherited structural faults. The issue of conditioning and its impact on structure and movement was also visible in the rears, but related mainly to movement. The rear in a galloping hound is the driving force and great breadth is needed in the Deerhound for uphill work and in springing through heather in that distinctive bound that Deerhounds. Invariably I was presented with a superb pelvic assembly, broad and strongly built, with nice low tail sets and good bend of stifle, but often there was no muscle on the thigh or second thigh (from stifle to hock joint). As the dog moved away, the hocks brushed each other or crossed; yet the rear assembly was beautifully constructed. It did make me think long and hard on the impacts of rearing on this breed’s overall structure and I still think that the development of the front assembly seems to suffer more when a pup is raised without adequate exercise than the rear assembly.

In a dog show, it is immaterial whether faults are inherited or result from husbandry. They are simply visually evaluated and affect show placements. However, as a breeder I think the distinction is critically important. Rearing

puppies properly and maintaining fitness in your hounds will reveal the structural faults that relate to genetics, not conditioning. Then their elimination can realistically become the focus of a breeding program... along with all those other essential attributes such as health and temperament!

I realise (from the travel brochures) that 83% of Finland's population is urban and many people live in flats or apartments. The onus then falls entirely upon the owner to ensure that their sighthound, which is after all a galloping breed, gets sufficient exercise. If ever there is a country where it should be easy to keep a Deerhound fit, it is Finland (and Canada!). However, there is no question that it requires a great deal of work to meet the exercise needs of a Deerhound. Some people (like myself) commute endless hours to enable their dogs to have a rural lifestyle and lots of acreage/hectares to run on. Once they are past the puppy stage, Deerhounds do not gambol about keeping fit on their own. For a novice owner they appear deceptively easy to keep without much exercise, as Deerhounds are laid back and appear a relatively undemanding breed. Don't believe this! They are probably one of the most difficult of all breeds to raise properly, as Deerhounds have to be motivated to exercise. Even with acreage to run on all day, we find that we physically have to take our dogs out for exercise off lead daily to maintain their condition.

For urban dwellers that are committed to owning a Deerhound, it is a huge time outlay to maintain a fit Deerhound. The lack of overall conditioning on so many individuals that I examined, indicated to me that very few owners were giving their dogs sufficient running time. Owners without the time, space, or stamina to give this breed what it needs physically should look for other methods to condition their dog. I saw wonderful hiking and biking trails wherever I travelled in Finland being used extensively by cyclists and joggers. If you do not have sufficient time to exercise your Deerhound properly, why not advertise locally for a dedicated daily fitness enthusiast and enlist their assistance in taking over this task? Your Deerhounds will be healthier, happier, and live longer, not to mention, be more competitive in the show ring.

Putting aside this concern over the lack of fitness of many of the Deerhounds shown, my overall assessment of the entries was as follows. First, I was very impressed with what I felt was the outstanding type of most of the entries. There was no question that breeders seem focussed on producing the large boned Greyhound that is called for in the standard, and not a small Irish Wolfhound. This is so important in maintaining that distinctive appearance that is our breed "type". It was delightful to look at so many beautiful lean unmistakably greyhound-like heads with lovely rosed ears. I should have selected many more heads for the "best head" competition!

Another striking quality of the entry was the side movement. The norm was light and easy, with an extension that was beautiful to see. Nor was this picture marred with high tail carriage or ring tails. It was the soundness coming and going that sorted out the placements in many classes. Toplines were appropriately placed, well arched and with good length through the loin. There were very few flat backs, although some arched topline flattened on the

move and a couple of topline would likely improve if the individuals were placed on a diet.

It was a pleasure to see so many short crisp coats with no need for stripping. Deerhounds today, as in the past, exhibit a variety of coats but all should be harsh to the touch and of sufficient length to meet the standard minimum. The graphic art of the 1700 and 1800s depicts the working Deerhound with short, wiry coats, never excessively coated, and with relatively smooth heads. Personally, I never fault a lack of facial furnishings, nor do I fault those heads with a profuse beard, rather than "some beard" or "a fair beard" as called for by the standard. Captain Graham recognised that "the well covered head gives much "character" and adds vastly to the general beauty of this magnificent dog". However, Graham also spoke in defence of the purity of the "smooth headed" Deerhounds<sup>1</sup>, generally acknowledging the cosmetic nature of facial furnishings. They contribute to "type" but have no contribution to functionality.

Sometimes there are traits rewarded in the show ring that are actually undesirable in a performance hound. Great height and excessive bend of stifle are traits that can easily creep into "show Deerhound" conformation. There were very few individuals that I felt were exaggerated in this way. A few pasterns knuckled over slightly. This problem needs watching as very upright pasterns seriously affect stamina in a galloping breed. A *slight* slope to the pastern is appropriate. The feet were generally compact, as is so important in this breed. Deerhounds cannot function on their home terrain with long flat feet. Norah Hartley in her book The Deerhound (1955, 1972, 1986) describes this well: "Feet are most important, the pads should be large and thick making the feet look as though they had little rubber balls under them" (p. 40).

As in all things relating to conservation of a breed and the maintenance of a performance hound, moderation is required. My **Best in Specialty Show** (BIS #1) winner, Sweetscot Calvin Klein (FIN Ch. Sweetscot Fernrigg X Int. Nord. Ch. Sweetscot Philadelphia) was exactly this. He was breathtaking in his balance, moderation and overall type ... the type of Deerhound that looked *and felt* as if he could do the job. He was in superb physical condition. Had he not come from the veteran class, I would never have guessed that he was almost 8 years old. As he ran around the ring he joined a small list of Deerhounds that have, in my forty years of watching Deerhounds, sent shivers of excitement up my spine. Bred by Ansa Assinen and owned by Virva Silvastri, I was told afterwards that "Cosmos" follows Ms. Silvastri on her daily horseback rides.

Overall, the bitches were better quality than the males (which is generally the case in Deerhounds) and soundness was less of an issue as bitches are easier to raise. There were many lovely bitches. I eventually selected Sweetscot Amazing Race (FIN MVA Kilbrandon Castor X Sweetscot Kitty O'Shea) bred by Ansa Assinen and owned by Carina Engman and Kari Valkeapää as my choice for Best of Opposite Sex (BIS # 2). While immature and thus lacking the depth

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<sup>1</sup> Shaw, Vero-Kemball. The Illustrated Book of the Dog, 1879-1881 p. 230

of brisket of some older bitches, she moved well in all directions and exhibited an lovely outline and correct type. BIS # 3 was the big dramatic moving male Ch. Mycroft's Lorenz Lander (POHJ MVA Fritzen's Dorian Gray X S. MVA Mycroft's Heather) bred by Helena Forss, Sweden and owned by Maria Nurmi. Undoubtedly a quality dog, I did prefer the more moderate size of my BIS # 1. BIS # 4 was FIN MVA Brokenwheel McArianrhod (FIN MVA Kerlake Achilles X Multi Ch. Vanessa von der Oelmühle) bred by Kimmo Roms and owned by Sissi and Tapio Hellman. The dam of this bitch, Ch. Vanessa von der Oelmühle was also a lovely bitch and one of my favourites. She won her age class, but lacked the fitness needed to give her movement coming and going the soundness that I was seeking. BIS # 5 was the 10 + year-old bitch Magbeth's Bianca (Ch Galerita's Tjakkeli X Ch Magbeth's Sarabande) owned by Anneli Kinnunen and bred by Anne Groenroos. This bitch, like my BIS # 1, had everything *and* still managed to keep it all as time marched on. Lucky her!

My sincere thanks and congratulations to all the dedicated breeders and owners in Scandinavia that presented their hounds to me. You are clearly producing Deerhounds of excellent quality overall.

The event was extremely well organised by show secretary Riita Koskinen ... great dogs, great trophies, great food, great weather and the biggest Canadian flag that I have ever seen fluttering in the middle of the show grounds. *Paljon kiitoksia!* to the many Suomi people that looked after me so well!

~Barb Heidenreich, Fern Hill, Bailieboro, Ontario, Canada K0L 1B0  
[bh@fernhill.com](mailto:bh@fernhill.com)



Best in Specialty Show 2007, Tampere, Finland  
***Sweetscot Calvin Klein*** on the move