

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN PUPPIES

by Nem Elliott

I have been asked to discuss in these notes the stages of development of puppies, what permanent faults may appear early, and whether you can rely on an adult dog reverting to what he showed at seven or eight weeks old. I must start by saying that there are no hard and fast rules of development and that one certainly cannot rely on a dog turning out as good as he looked at eight weeks, but I would also say that if a puppy doesn't look up too much at eight weeks it is highly unlikely to improve out of all recognition. The only exceptions are when they look poor at eight weeks due to bad rearing. It is perfectly possible for a weedy specimen, which gets a good home to improve and mature into an average animal, but that isn't construction and it isn't what my correspondent wants to know.

The stages of development, broadly speaking, are like this:-

3 - 4 weeks:

very short legged, low to the ground and deep bodied, all look good.

5 - 6 weeks:

begin to show shape, but still too long and low.

7 - 8 weeks

correct proportions for the first time. Now is the time to see which are too low in leg length, or overlong in loin. At this stage they can be stood up and felt for lay of shoulder, angle of upper arm and length and position of croup. Most will misled you as regards hindquarters by crouching when handled, so watch them standing around before you fix opinions on this point. They also begin to gait, but bear in mind that the happy-go-lucky puppy seldom has as fleet and smooth gait as a windy one that gets down to it. This does not mean the resulting adult will not move well when controlled.

9 - 10 weeks

They start to grow, legs shoot up, and in a short while they can look to lack body.

12 weeks:

Top coat starts to come in.

14 - 16 weeks:

Body deepens, top coat becomes shiny, ears should be up by now.

5 months:

The best stage of all, they should look like miniature adults. A really good puppy is a dream at this stage.

6 - 9 months:

Anything can happen. This is the period when they grow fast and irregularly, and frequently go over built.

9 - 10 months:

They even out and become fairly presentable again, except for looking very square in croup if a heavy puppy wool is carried

12 months:

They usually cast their first coat and care is needed to see they don't cast all their flesh with it, as once lost it is very hard indeed to regain.

After the prolonged moult, at about 15 months, the sleek and beautiful young adult emerges and then and only then can you be sure how good it is! Very few indeed go through all these stages looking good all the way. The majority give you some doubtful moments.

As for what permanent faults appear early, I think nearly all constructional faults are visible at eight weeks, especially upright upper arm, short stifles, and overlong proportions. The sort of thing you cannot foretell are back lines, sufficient height at withers to give a nice slope, eventual size and ear carriage. Teeth can sometimes let you down unexpectedly even as late as 6 - 8 months. Soundness should be present from the start. A true moving puppy fore and aft is unlikely to change much unless badly reared and allowed to go rickety.