

the
RHODESIAN

RIDGEBACK

THE NATIONAL DOG OF SOUTH AFRICA



“Ridgebacks hunt lion” they say... { No they didn't ! }



'Narrow Miss' by Marilyn Farmer Rhodes.

Hunting mainly in groups of two or three, the original function of the Rhodesian Ridgeback, or Lion Dog, was to **track game**, especially lion, and with great agility, **keep it at bay until the arrival of the hunter.**



'Ridgebacks Holding Lion at Bay' by Marilyn Farmer Rhodes.

History



Ancestors can be traced to the semi-domesticated dogs accompanying the indigenous people, the Khoi-San, who lived near the southern tip of Africa.

History

The Rhodesian Ridgeback is one of only two registered breeds indigenous to Southern Africa, the other being the Boerboel.



When the Portuguese discovered the Cape in 1487, and the area was later colonised by Dutch Settlers, these dogs were bred to early pioneers' dogs and used for hunting and guarding.

History

From around 1830, when the British colonised the Cape, the Dutch Settlers, fed up with this new governance, began the great migration – “die Groot Trek” into the hinterland, discovering new areas eastwards and northwards as far as the later-named, Rhodesia. These “Voortrekkers” (travelling pioneers) took their dogs with them, which became popular for their hunting capacity.



History



In 1879 **Rev. Charles Daniel Helm** brought two dogs from Kimberley (a small diamond-mining town in central South Africa) to his mission near Bulawayo in Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe. These two bitches are regarded as the origin of what is known today as the Rhodesian Ridgeback.

A hunter, by the name of **Cornelius van Rooyen**, who operated mainly in Matebeleland (now Botswana), mated these two rough coated, grey-black dogs to his pack and the famous ridge emerged.



History

Van Rooyen crossed several breeds to create his African Lion Hound because of its ability to keep lion at bay while awaiting its master to make the kill:

- Bloodhound and Pointer – for good scenting
- Bulldog and Bull Terrier – for courage and tenacity
- Airedale and Irish Terrier – for dash and spirit
- Deerhound – for stamina
- Smooth Collie – for herding skills
- Greyhound – for speed

The brown-nosed variety is related to the Pointers that were used and the problem of a kinked tail goes back to the Bulldog ancestry. The dog's usefulness far outweighed its looks or adherence to any particular type, but the ridge continued to manifest itself in most of the litters.



History

In 1922, a veterinarian, **Francis Richard Barnes** gave recognition to the Rhodesian Ridgeback as a breed. Barnes asked owners to bring their dogs to a meeting to be held at a Bulawayo Kennel Club Show to endeavor to formulate a breed standard with the object of later recognition by the, then, South African Kennel Union.

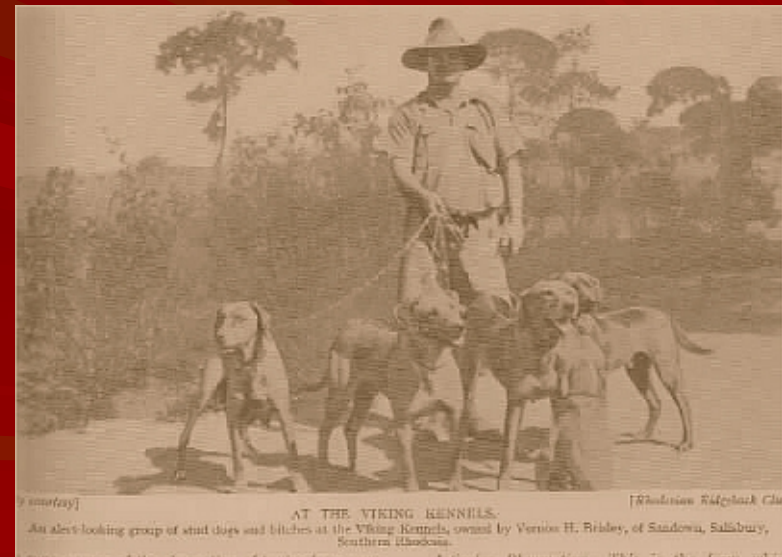
A large number of owners attended the meeting and well over 20 dogs were paraded. They were of all types and sizes, and several different colours; reds and brindles predominating. The dog owners were keen to form a club, but reluctant to agree too readily on a breed standard.



History

Finally, **Mr. B.W. Durham** – the only All-breeds Judge in South Africa at the time, and possessing some knowledge of the breed, took a dog and suggested that its size and conformation be adopted; then chose another specimen for its head and neck; a third for legs and feet; and, making use of some five different dogs, they built up their aims based heavily on the Dalmatian standard.

Francis Barnes then set down the breed standard and it was adopted by the Kennel Union. This, with some later amendments and alterations is the standard in use today.



[Courtesy] AT THE VIKING KENNELS. An able-looking group of stud dogs and bitches at the Viking Kennels, owned by Vernon H. Biddle, of Sandown, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. [Wholesale Ridgeback Club]

History

In 1924, the first two Rhodesian Ridgebacks were registered with the newly renamed Kennel Union of Southern Africa (KUSA). By the end of 1928, there were already 13 registered breeders with kennel names.



Eskdale Leo & Eskdale Connie (F.R. Barnes)



During World War II, the Rhodesian Ridgeback declined in popularity and almost ceased to exist.

Utilisation today

The Hound that is both Sighthound and Scenthound, has found favour in most countries around the world as companion/house dogs, family pets, and watchdogs.

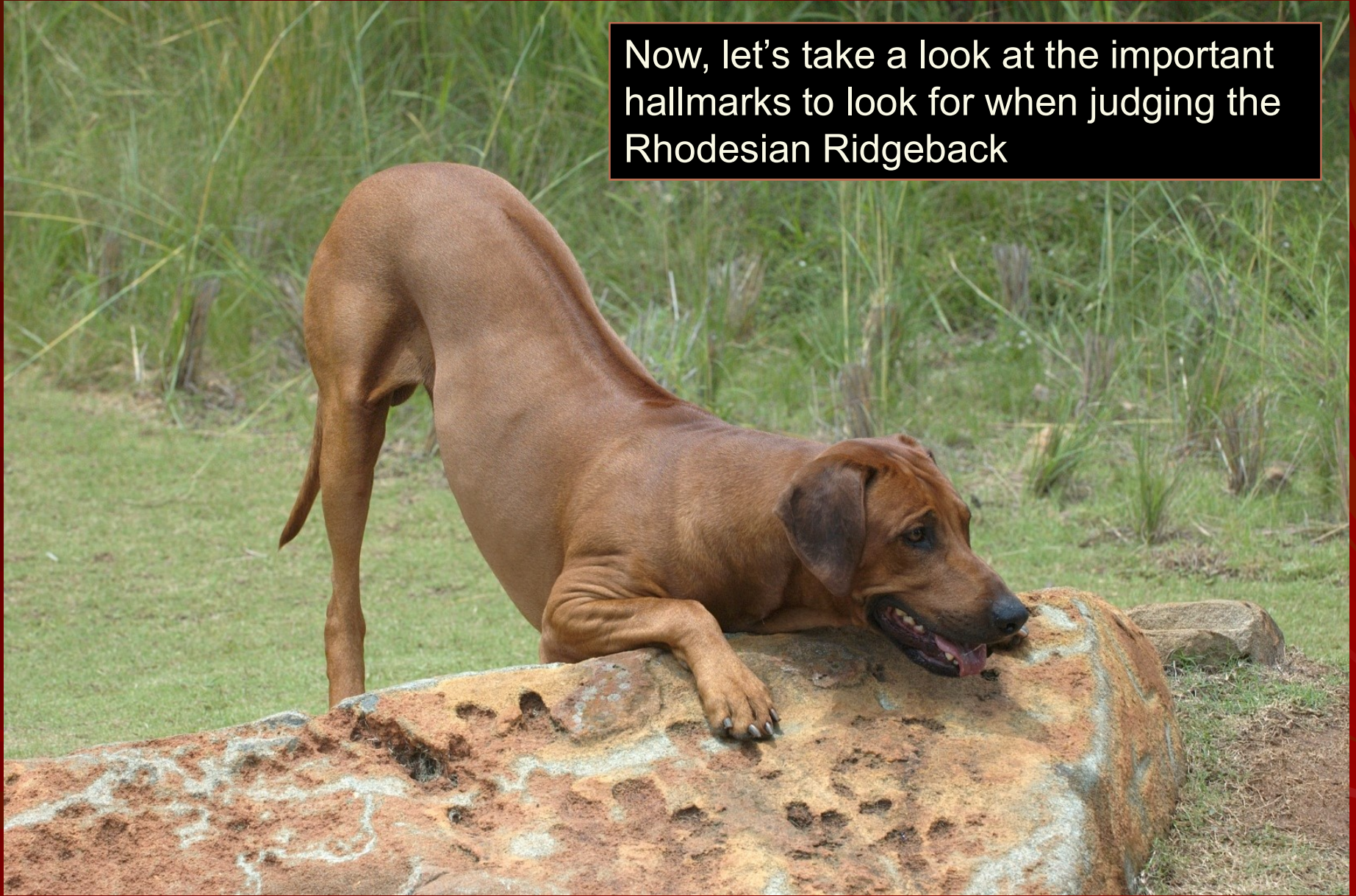


Utilisation today

Today there are only a few lion left in the wild, and hunting is no longer practised the way it was. In a few game parks, Rhodesian Ridgebacks serve a useful tracking purpose in conservation programmes.



Now, let's take a look at the important hallmarks to look for when judging the Rhodesian Ridgeback



What to look for when judging



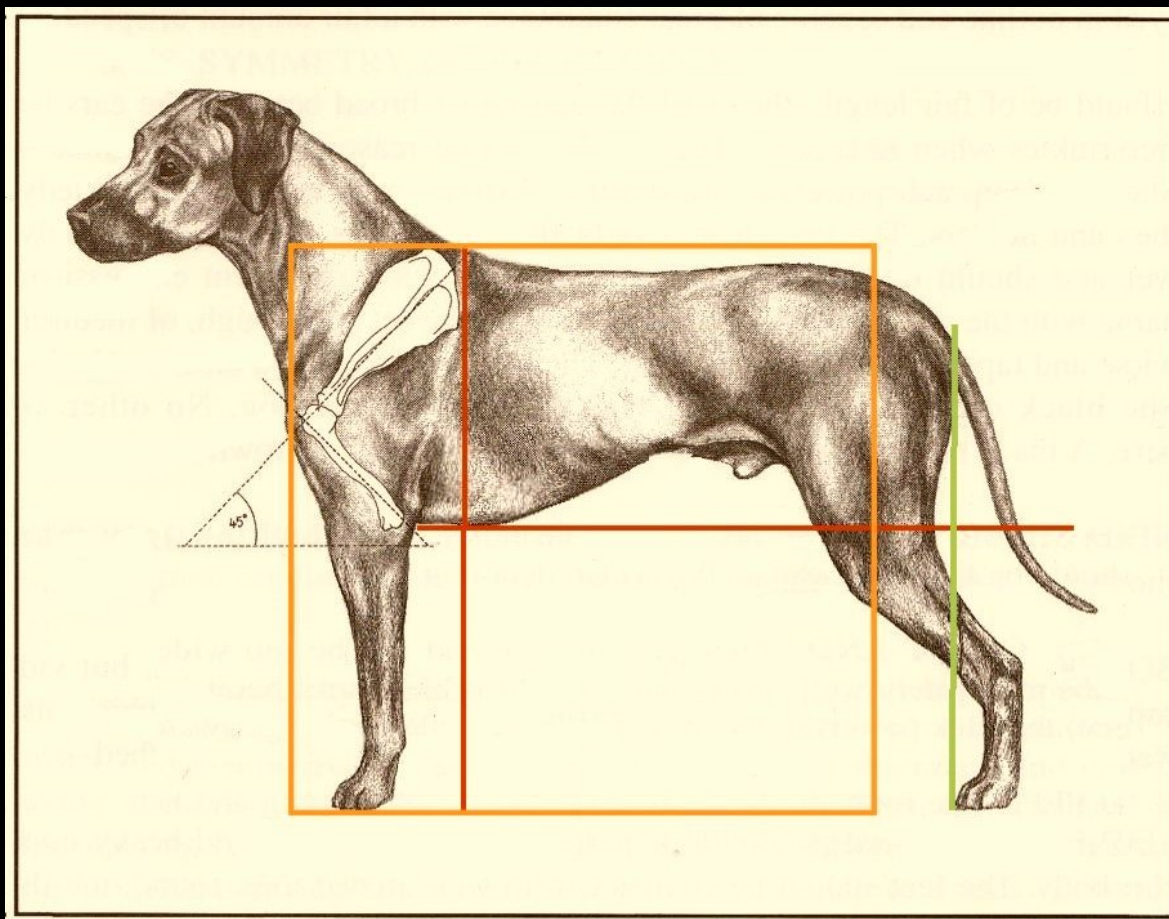
first impression

First, gain a general impression of the whole dog, look for balance

- eye catching, elegant, yet showing substance
- ***neither too racy nor too heavy in bone***
- must look athletic, able to run all day and find speed when necessary

by the way...

- slightly longer than tall (10:9)
- brisket at half the height at withers
- toes in line with buttocks line
- sloping shoulders well laid back



- level topline (not sloping) with slight rise over loin
- balanced proportions

“symmetrical in outline”

by the way...

Height:

- dogs : 63cm (25") to 69cm (27")
- bitches : 61cm (24") to 66cm (26")

Weight:

- dogs : 36.5kg (80lbs)
- bitches : 32 kg (70lbs)



What to look for when judging



parallel planes

- head is of fair length, in balance with rest of body - parallel planes
- clean, 'dry' appearance - ***no wrinkles on skull***, except when alert
- foreface is a blunt wedge, neither too sharp nor too blocky

What to look for when judging



cheeks

- cheeks clean, flat or slightly rounded – ***never prominent***
- sufficient fill under the eye – ***no fall-away***

What to look for when judging



nose & chin

- black or brown - neither colour should take preference over the other
- black-nosed dogs may have a darker muzzle and darker ear tips
- ample, well-expanded nostrils – ***definitely not pinched***
- sufficient chin

What to look for when judging



stop

- reasonably well defined, not too deep
- creates a neat step up to the forehead – ***never too shallow***
- muzzle plane is flat - ***never concave (dished) or convex (Roman)***

What to look for when judging



length of muzzle

- muzzle same length as the skull – *neither snipey nor coarse*

What to look for when judging



length of skull

- skull is flat, free from wrinkle unless the dog is alert

What to look for when judging



squareness

- width of skull between the ears is equal the length of the skull from stop to occiput and length of muzzle from stop to tip of nose – thus, roughly a square

What to look for when judging



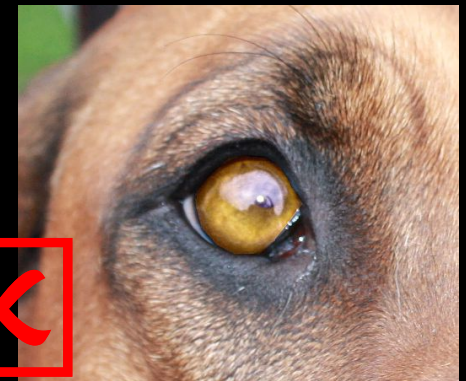
eyes

- round eyes – *neither protruding nor sunken*
- expression reflects temperament – confident, stable, dignified, intelligent
- eyelids close-fitting – *no haw showing*

by the way...



- dark eyes and rims on a black-nosed dog
- amber eyes with lighter eye rims on a brown-nosed dog
- *light eyes undesirable*



What to look for when judging



ears

- medium-sized drop ear, set fairly well back and rather high
- carried flat, close to the head in repose, but very mobile

by the way...



- *rose or fly-away ear unacceptable*
- *fold of ear not to be above the top of the skull*

What to look for when judging



bite

- strong scissor bite - the upper teeth closely overlap the lower teeth and are set square to the jaw

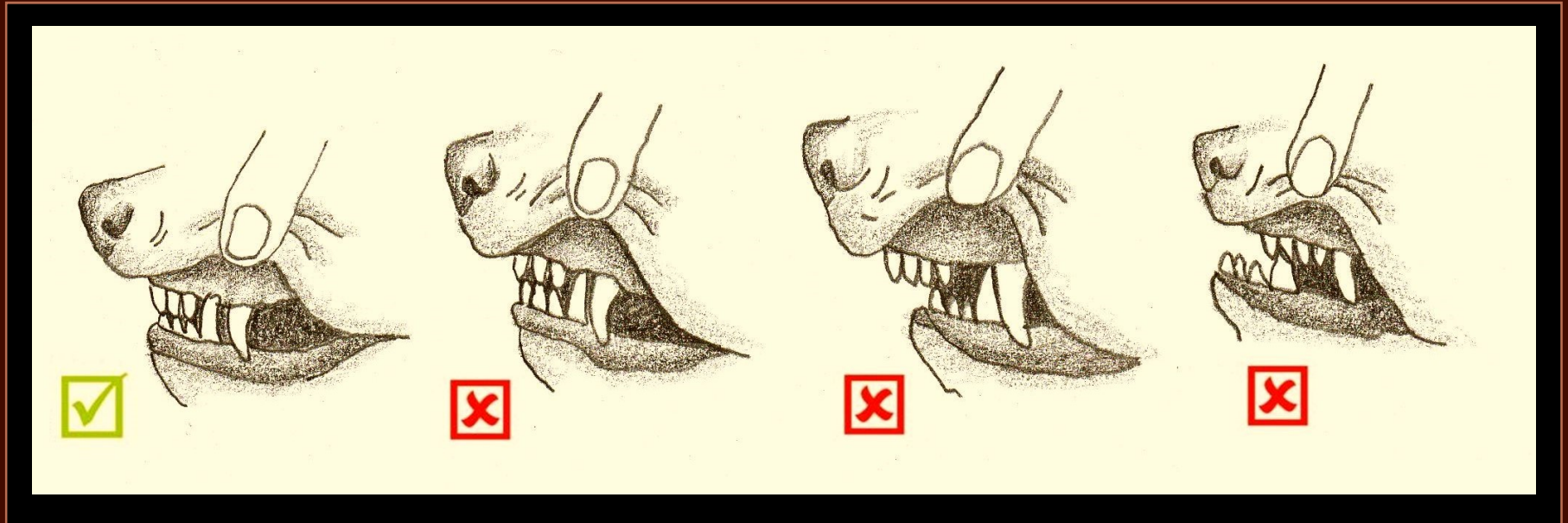
What to look for when judging



dentition

- teeth well developed, especially the canines – *no missing teeth*

by the way...



scissor bite

level bite

overshot bite

undershot bite

What to look for when judging



neck

- fairly long, elegant neck – ***short neck usually indicates straight shoulder***
- good (but ***not too much***) thickness, clean – ***free from throatiness***
- must allow agility of the shoulder and carriage of head for the dog to use his senses

What to look for when judging



withers

- neck should blend smoothly into well-laid shoulders
- ***bumpiness at the wither indicates a problematic shoulder assembly***

What to look for when judging



upper arm

- sufficient (but *not excessive*) muscling over the upper arm
- *look out for short, straight upper arms – an indication of poor balance*

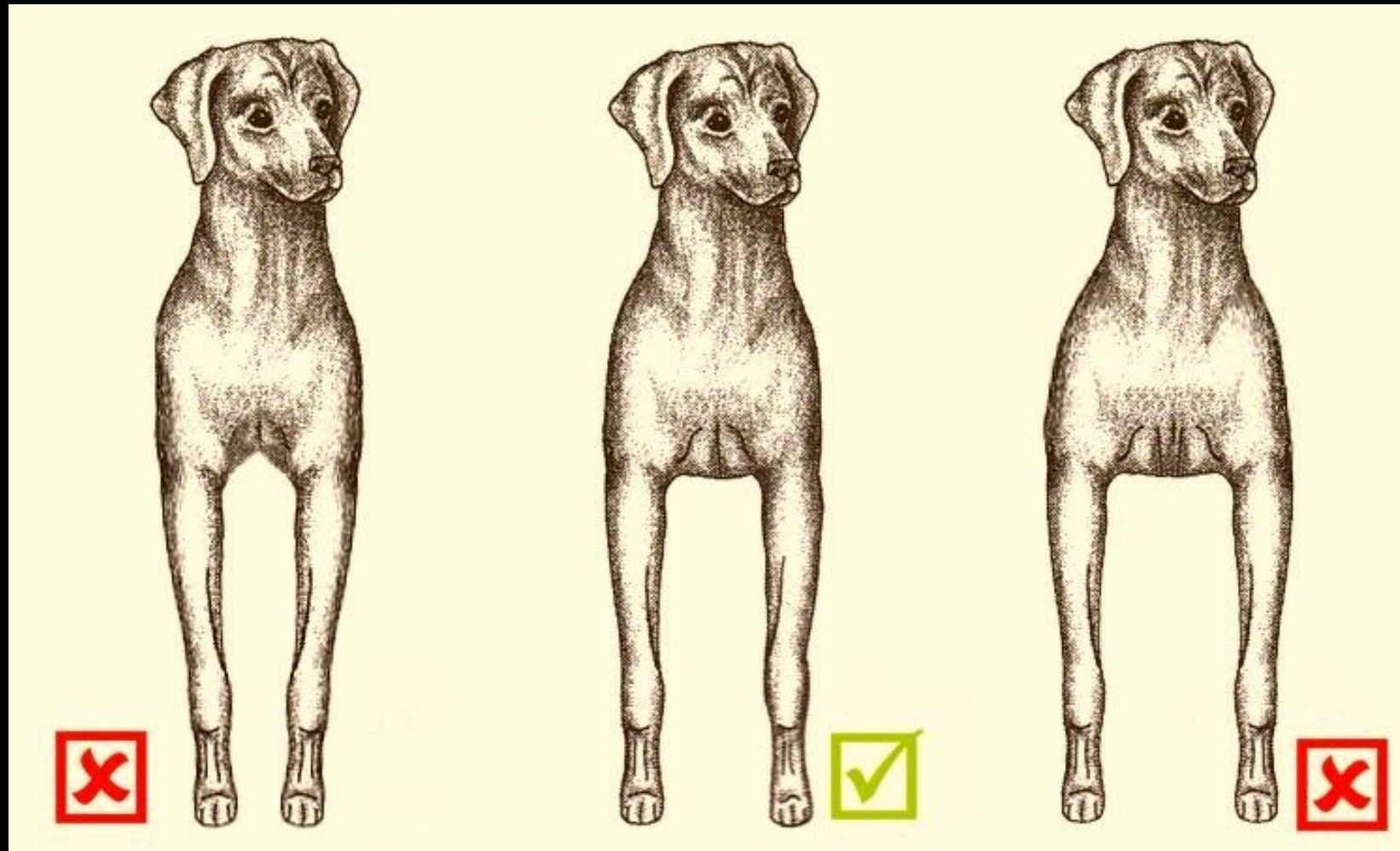
What to look for when judging



width of chest

- distance between forelegs – ***neither too wide nor too narrow***
- floor of the chest should be visible from the front
- ***'cathedral peak' (inverted V) indicates faulty shoulder assembly***

by the way...



cathedral peak front
too narrow

correct

too wide

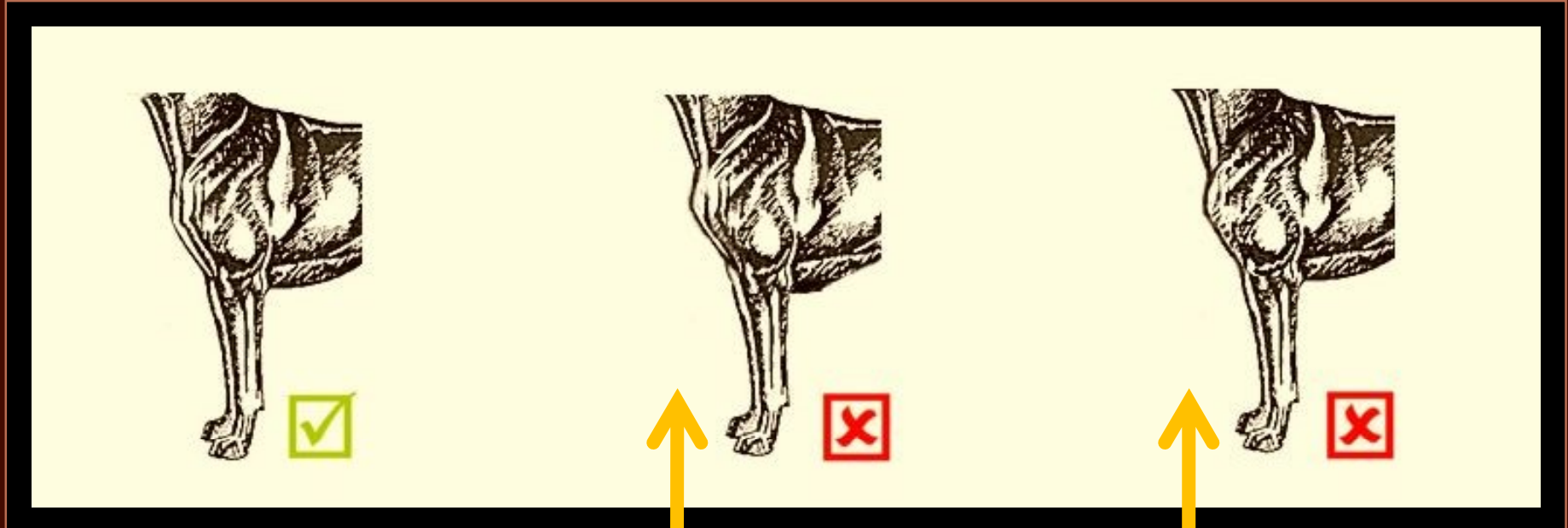
What to look for when judging



forechest

- reasonable forechest protruding in front of the front legs, as viewed in profile

by the way...



➤ *if prosternum is too high, angle to brisket is too sharp, leading to clipped keel*

➤ *if shoulder assembly is set too far forward, prosternum is not visible*

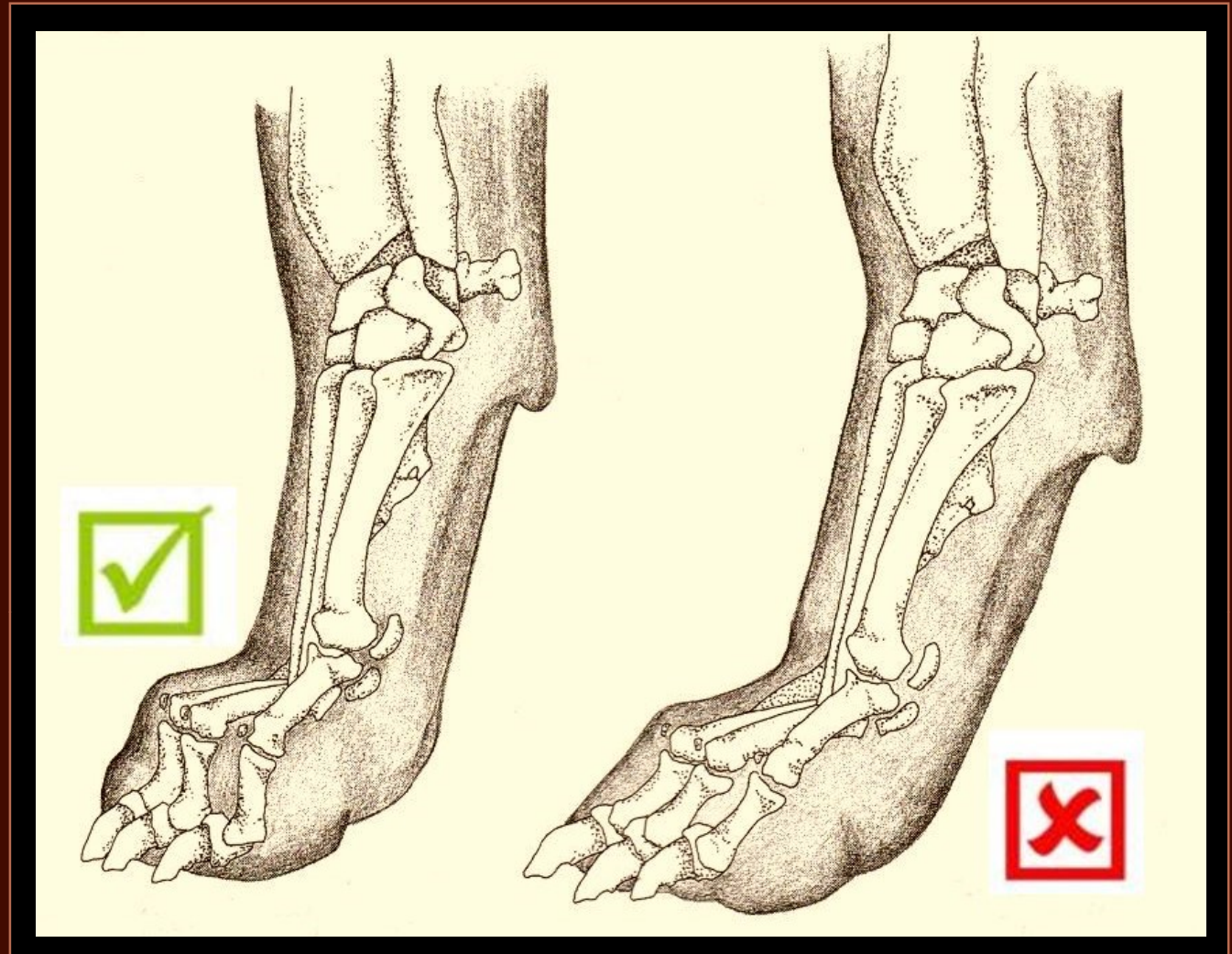
What to look for when judging



foreleg

- straight viewed from the front, dropping straight down from shoulders
- from side, forelegs wider near elbow than at pastern
- oval bone – ***never round or coarse***

by the way...



compact,
well-arched toes

*flat, splayed foot, long toenails
and weak pasterns*

- pastern is strong and slightly angled – *upright pastern is a fault*
- feet face forward

What to look for when judging



shoulder assembly

- shoulders are well laid back, sloping, with clean, powerful, long muscles
- shoulder blades fairly close together at withers, elbows tucked firmly
- test the stability of the elbows by gently rocking the body sideways and back at the withers – ***weak elbows will pop out of alignment***

What to look for when judging



depth at brisket

- deep chest produces good heart room and lung capacity
- brisket should reach to or nearly to the elbows

What to look for when judging



spring of rib

- ribcage should extend well back, giving length to the body (the length of the dog is in the length of ribcage, ***not in the coupling***)
- capacious – ***not barrelled***

What to look for when judging



coupling

- coupling is moderate – ***neither too short nor too long***
- bitches typically slightly longer-coupled than dogs
- ***if too long in the coupling, it may show weakness in the back***

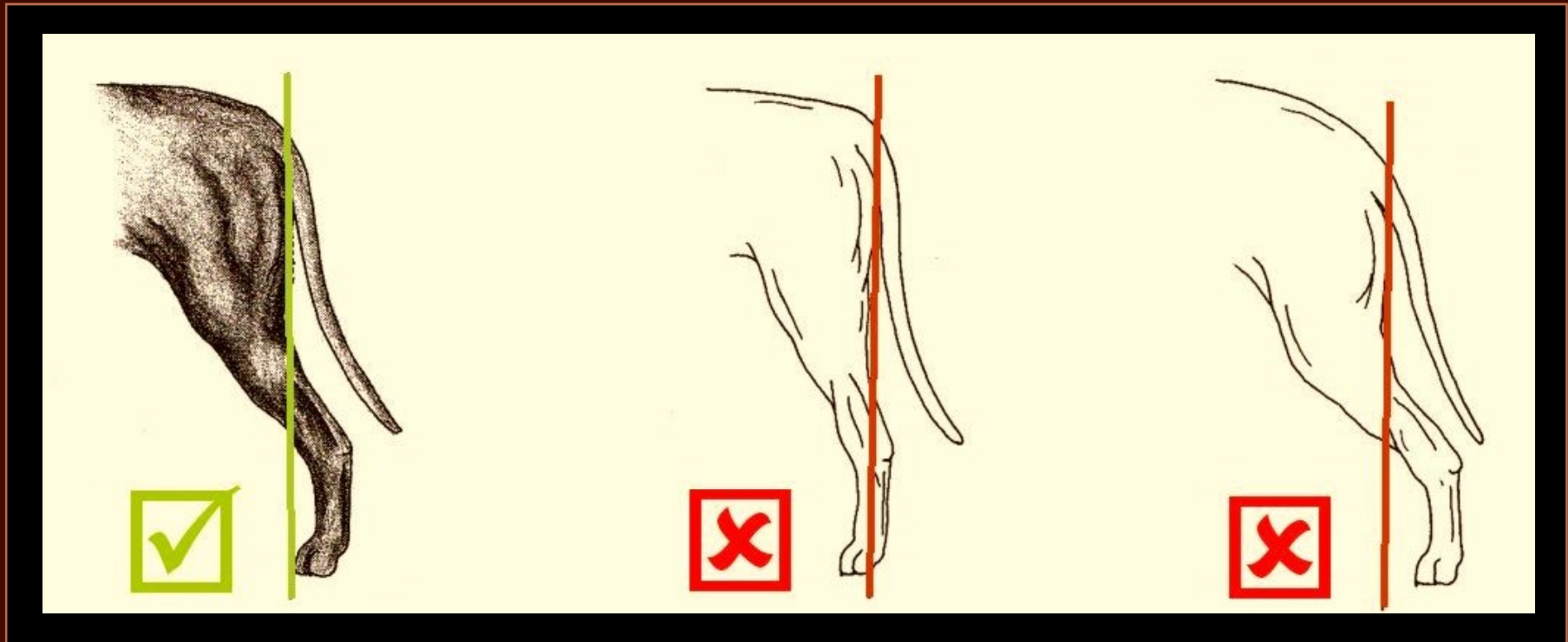
What to look for when judging



stifle

- moderately angulated for efficient endurance movement
- feel for firm muscle tone in the upper and lower thigh

by the way...



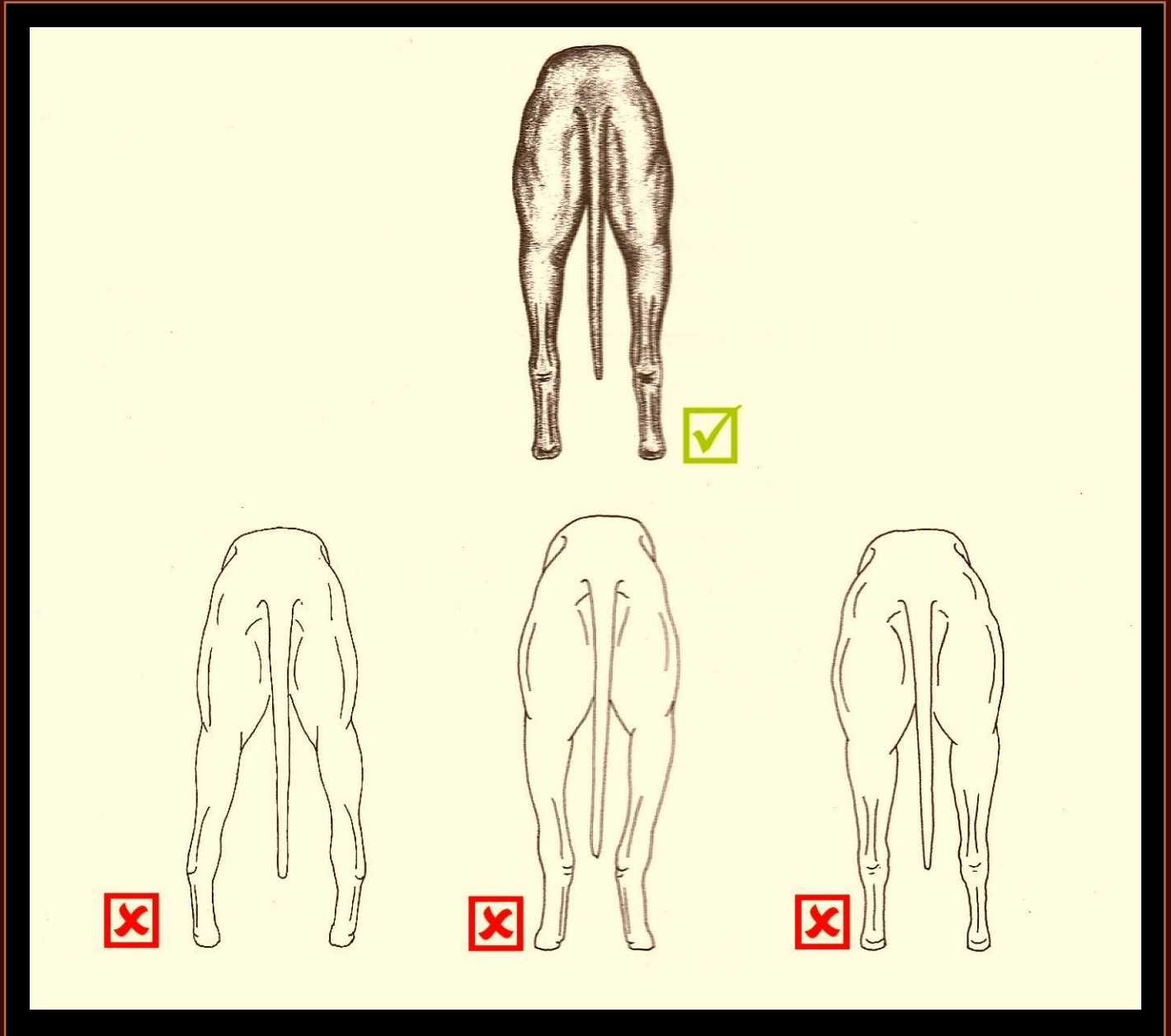
correct stifle

straight stifle

over-angulated stifle

- *over or under angulation is highly undesirable*
- *when over angulation occurs, the upper arm is usually shorter and straighter to compensate for the hind leg that drives to far forward*

by the way...



open-hocked

cow-hocked

muscle bound

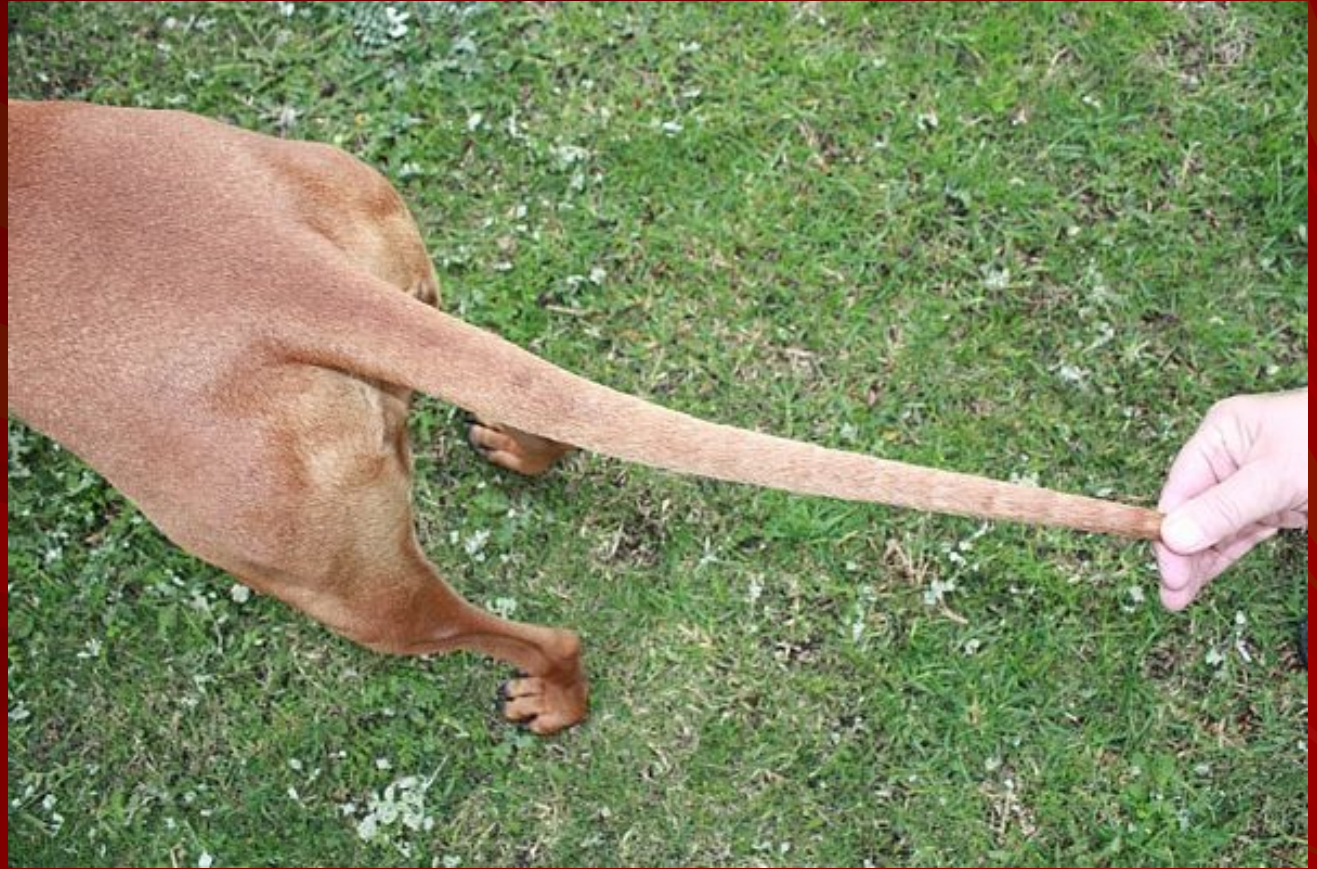
What to look for when judging



tail insertion

- thick and strong at insertion point

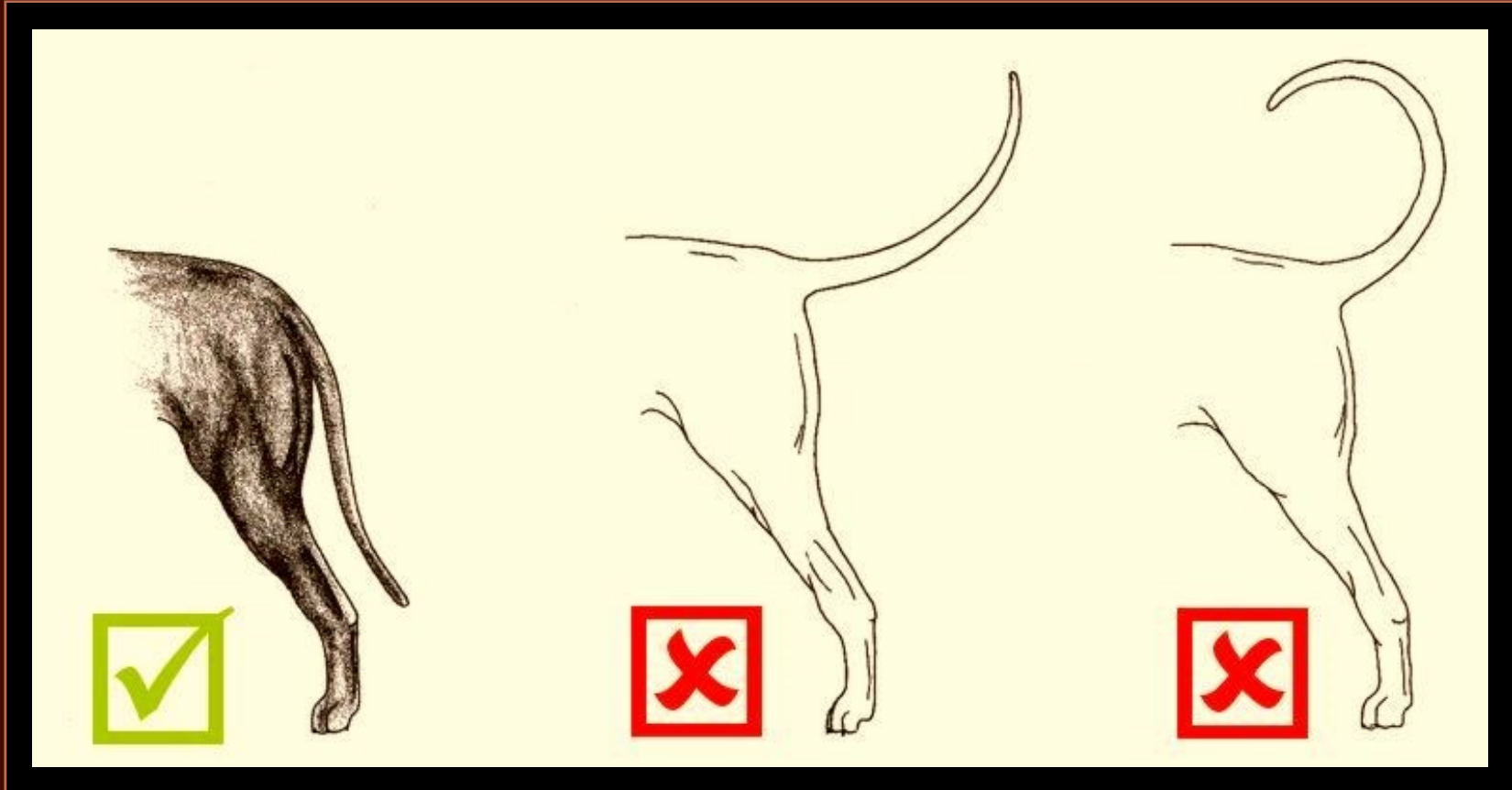
What to look for when judging



tail

- check for correct length – it should reach the hock
- a kinked tail is a serious fault

by the way...



correct

acceptable in movement

gay tail

Let's look at that elusive wheaten colour

Colour

colour is light wheaten to red wheaten

“wheaten” = reddish, banded hair where the root is lighter and the tip is darker

- genetically, called “agouti”



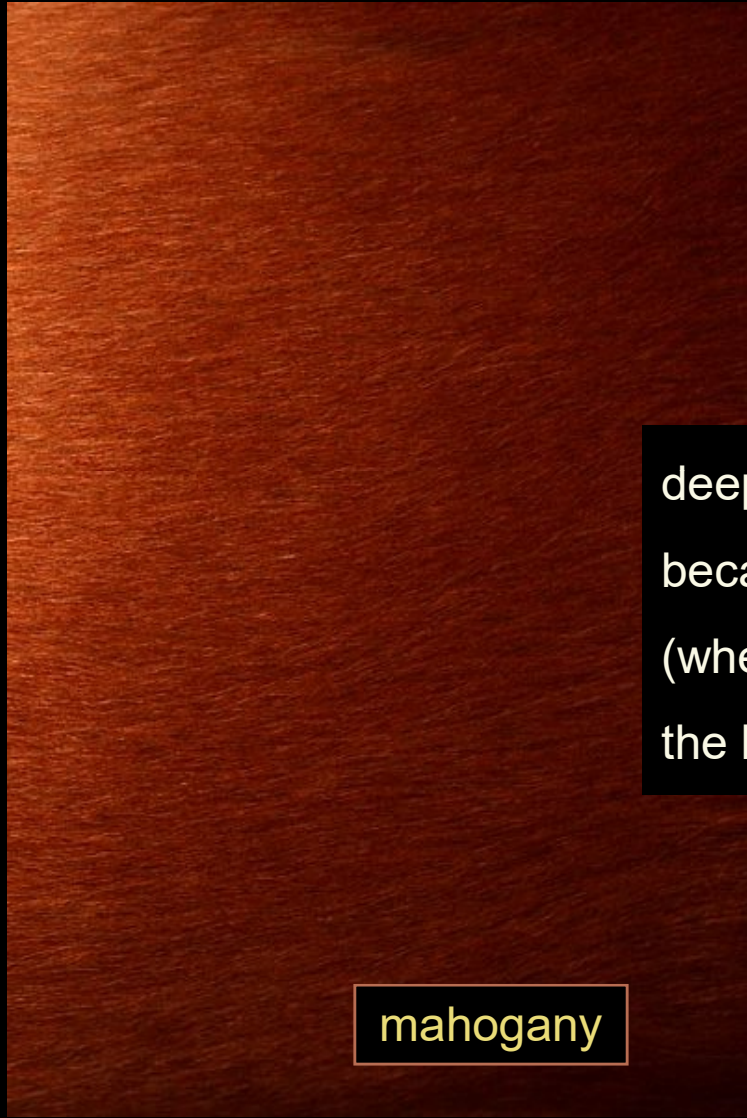
light wheaten

mid wheaten

red wheaten

- a little white on chest and toes – not on body or above toes
- dark muzzle and ears permissible - no excessive black hairs in coat

Colour



mahogany

deep red/mahogany is not a correct colour because it lacks the banding of the agouti (wheaten) hair shafts - without the banding, the hair is solid red

Colour

these other diversions are also incorrect:



blue: sometimes progeny of two dark dogs – coat has a blue-grey tinge; born with blue eyes that go grey/amber



Images courtesy of www.kalaharirr.com

Colour

more unacceptable colours

black and tan



brindle



mosaic



black wheaten

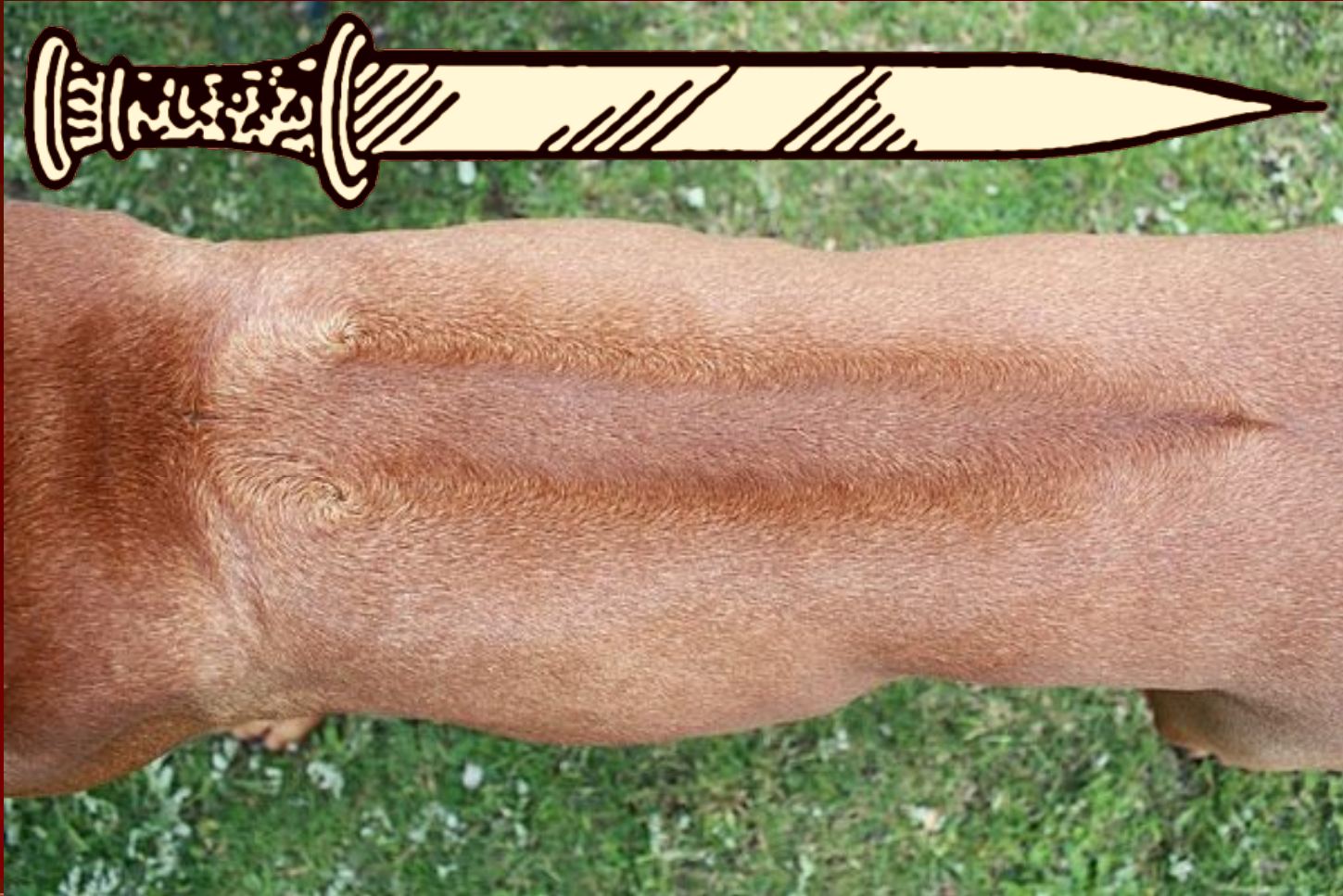


sable



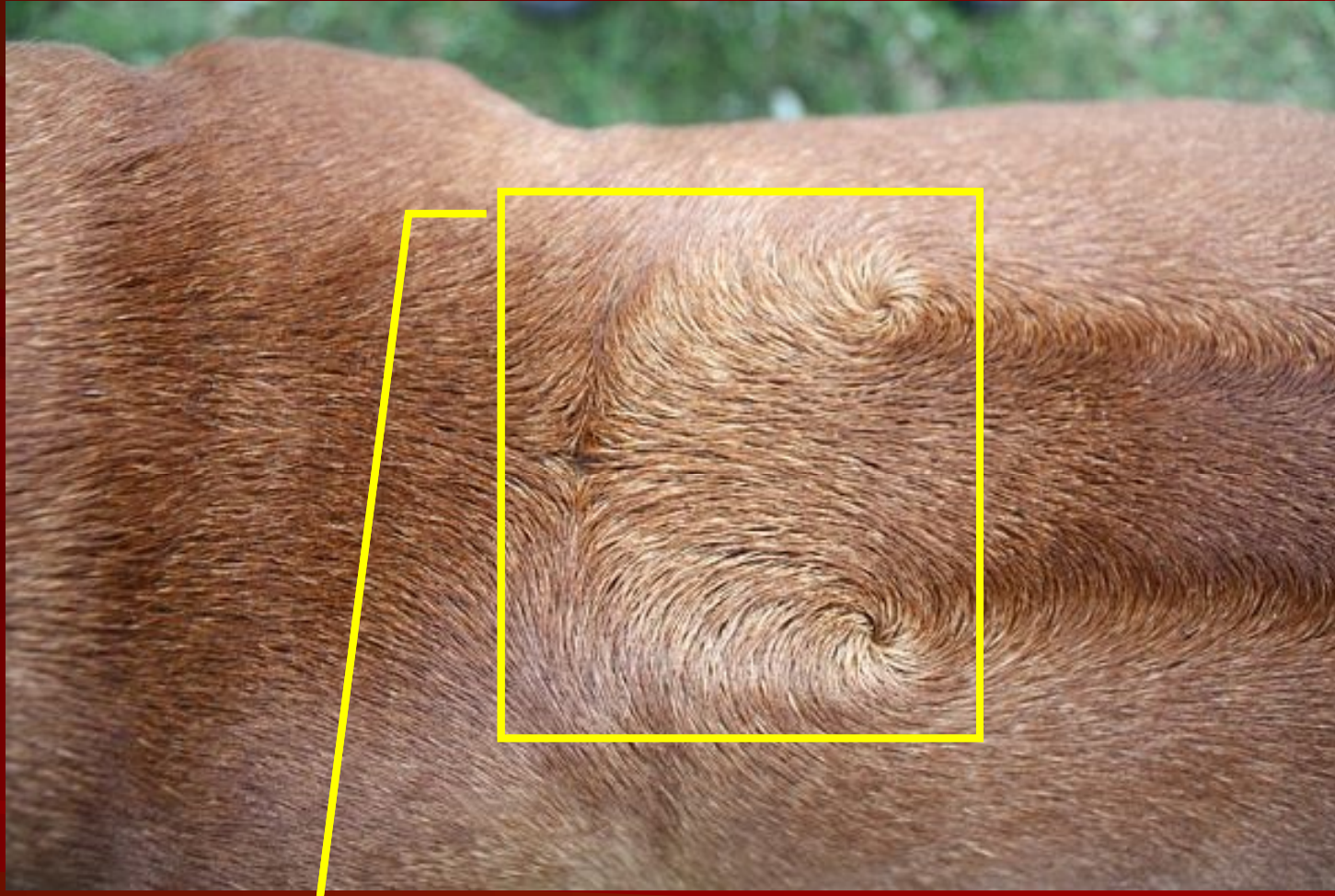
Now we examine the escutcheon of the
Rhodesian Ridgeback

The ridge



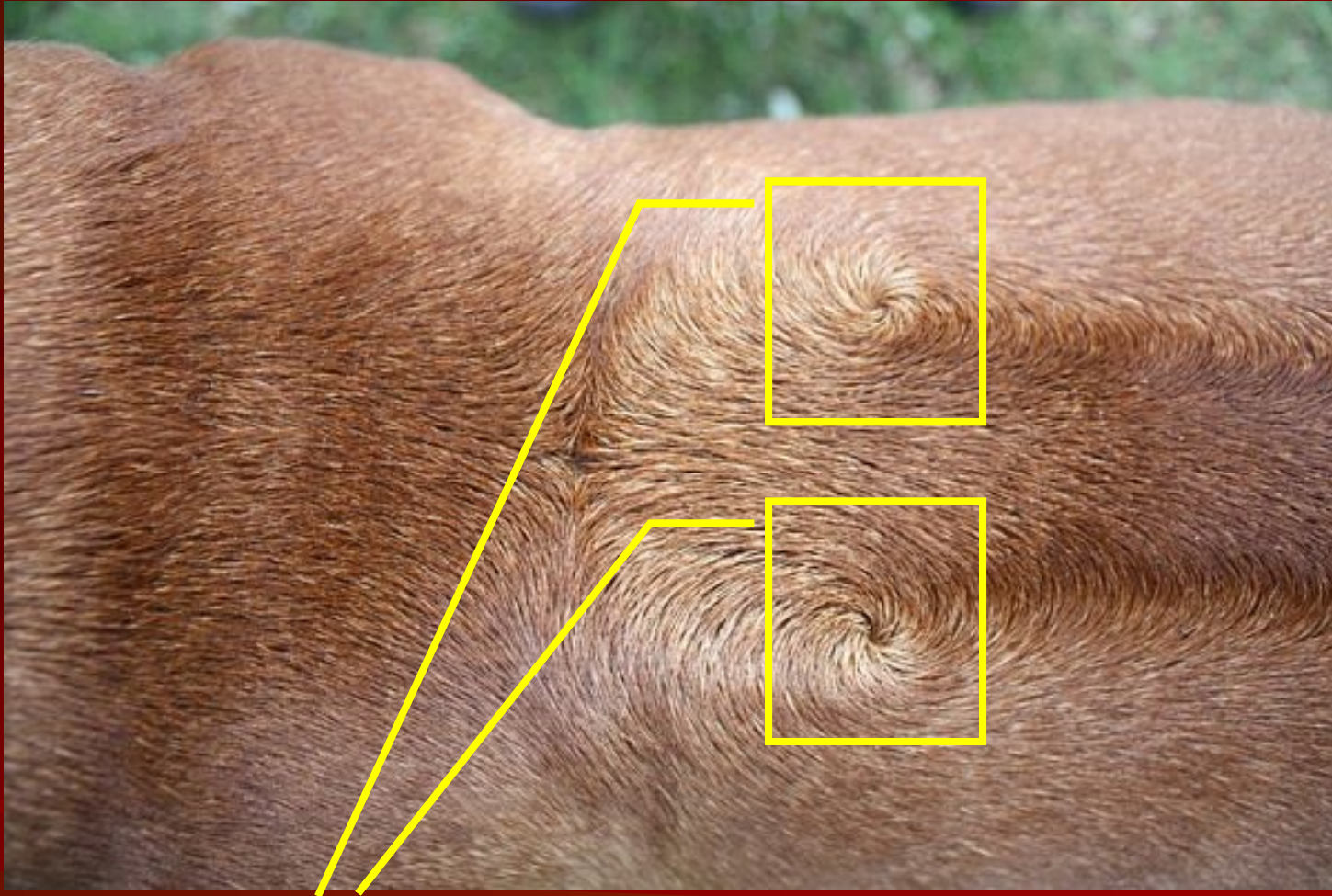
- shaped like a dagger – ideally 5cm (2”) wide, tapering to a point
- should extend from immediately behind the shoulders to the hip bones

The ridge



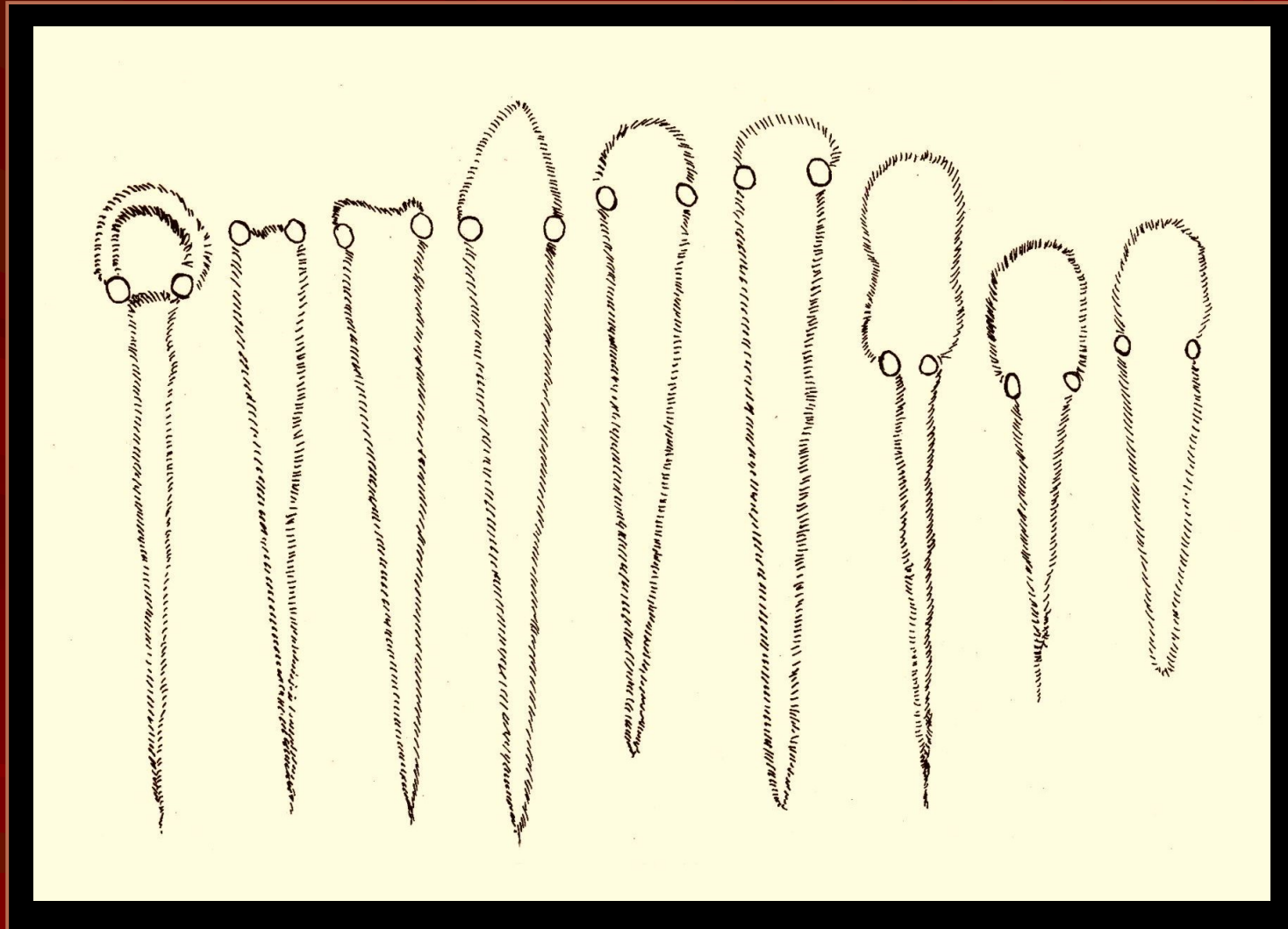
- examine the box (if there is one) without stretching it
- a broken or heart-shaped box acceptable as long as there is no third crown
- the box may not extend further than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total length

The ridge



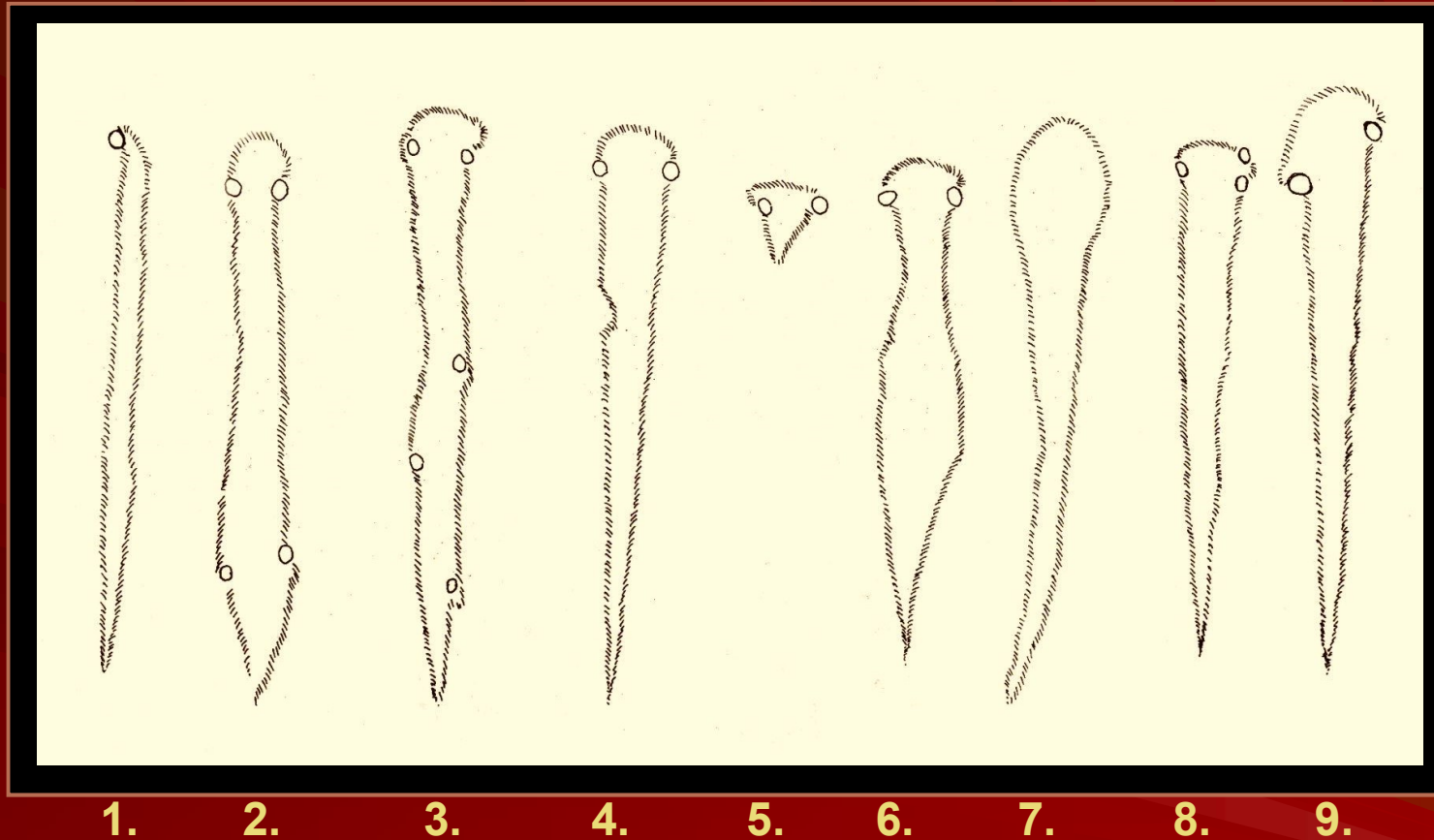
- two crowns, symmetrically placed and perfectly formed
- size of the crown depends on the length of hair

The ridge



acceptable ridge patterns – crowns are all opposite each other

The ridge



Incorrect ridges:

1. single crown
2. & 3. multiple crowns
4. nick in the ridge
5. ridge too short
6. ridge irregularly shaped
7. no crowns
8. third crown
9. off-set crowns

The ridge



very broad ridge



off-set crowns



three crowns



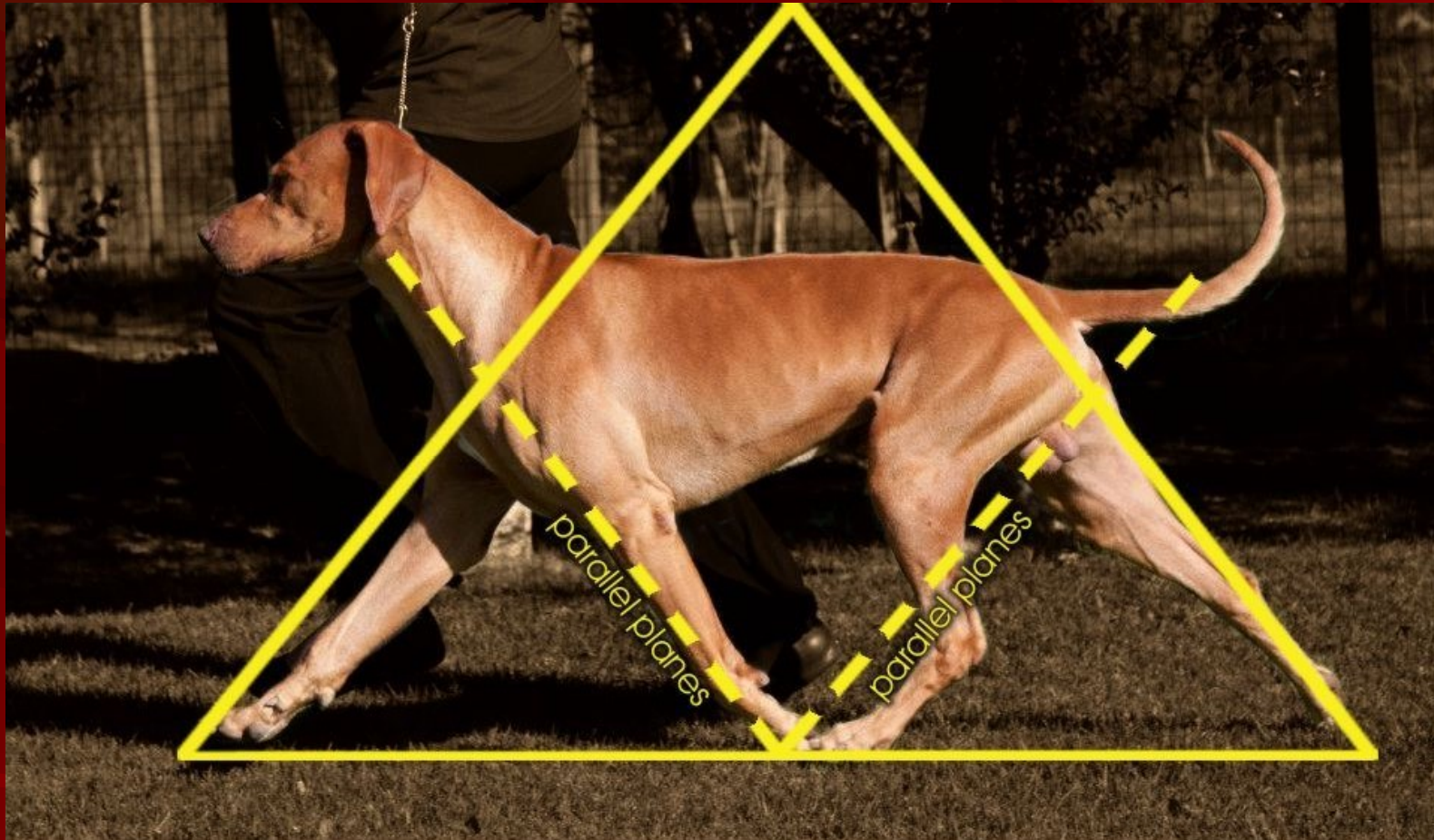
Let's take a look at movement

Let's talk about movement



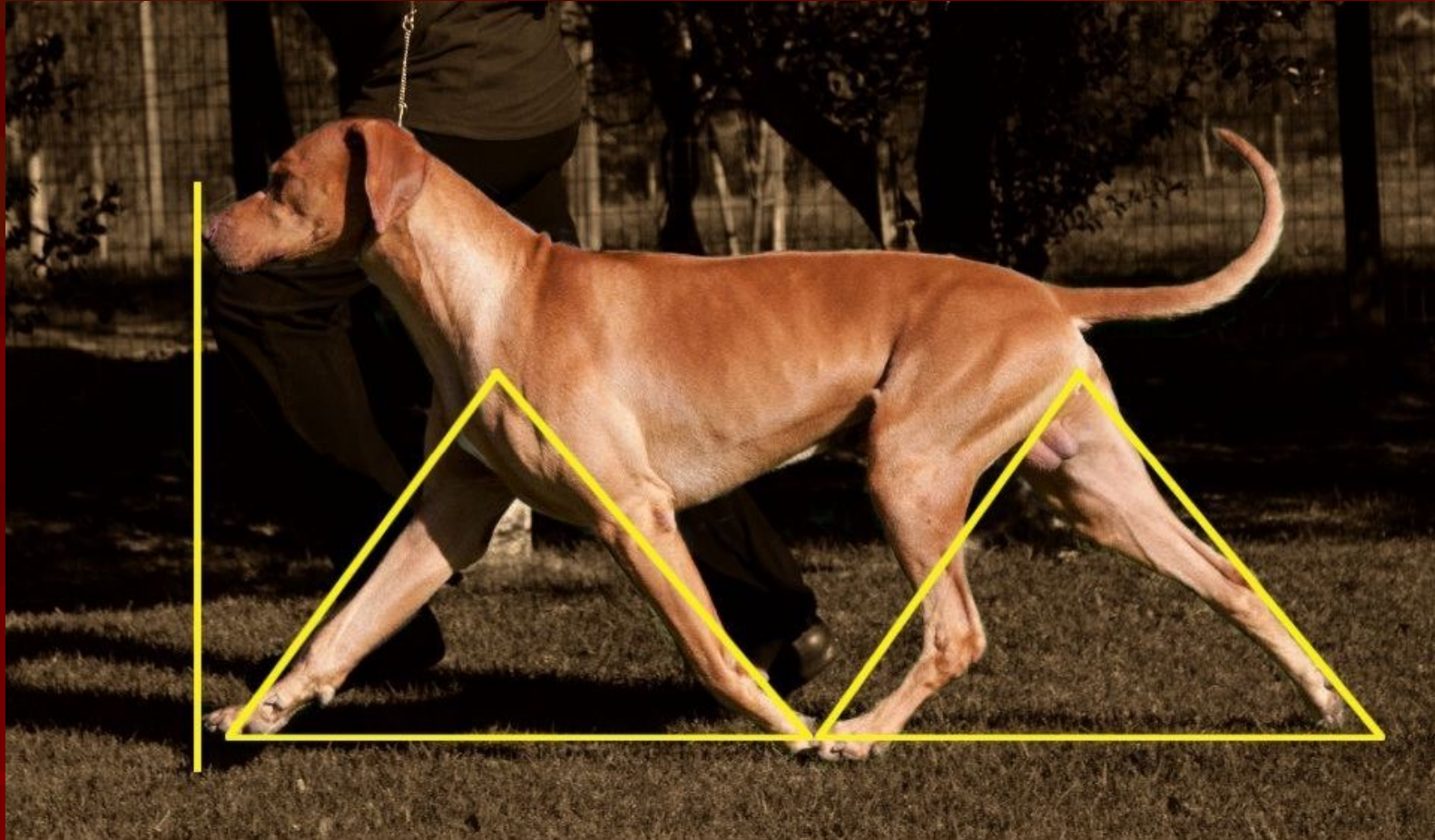
“Once around, please ma’am”...

Let's talk about movement



- look for balance in movement – equal reach and drive

Let's talk about movement



- balance calls for identical triangular action in front and back
- reach should not extend beyond plumb line from nose

Let's talk about movement



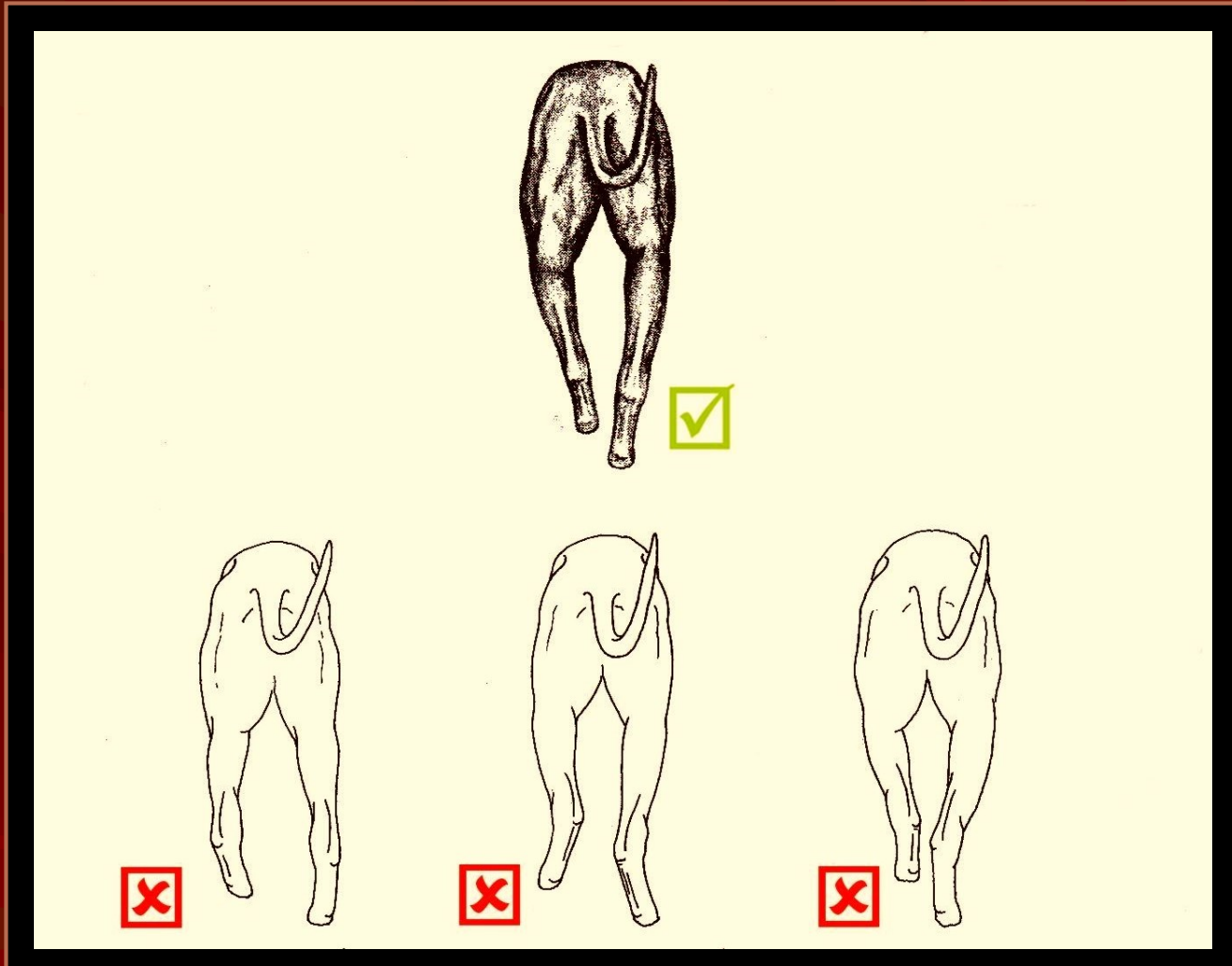
- hind foot steps into impression made by front foot – penalise over-tracking or under-tracking

Let's talk about movement



- it's acceptable for them to drop their heads when gaiting
- pacing is a natural, energy-saving gait (but obviously undesirable in the ring)

Let's talk about movement

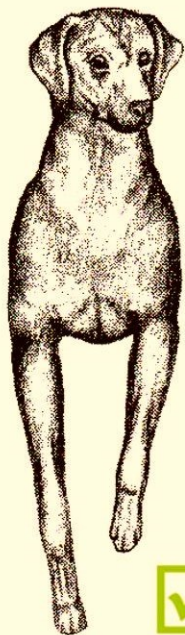


open-hocked
too wide

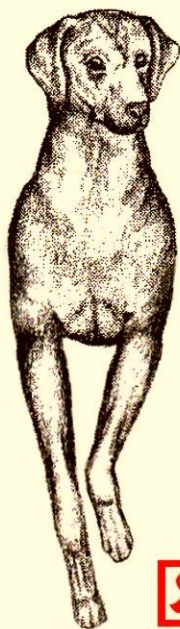
cow-hocked

close behind

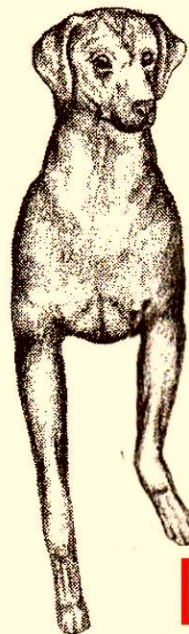
Let's talk about movement



converging



close gait

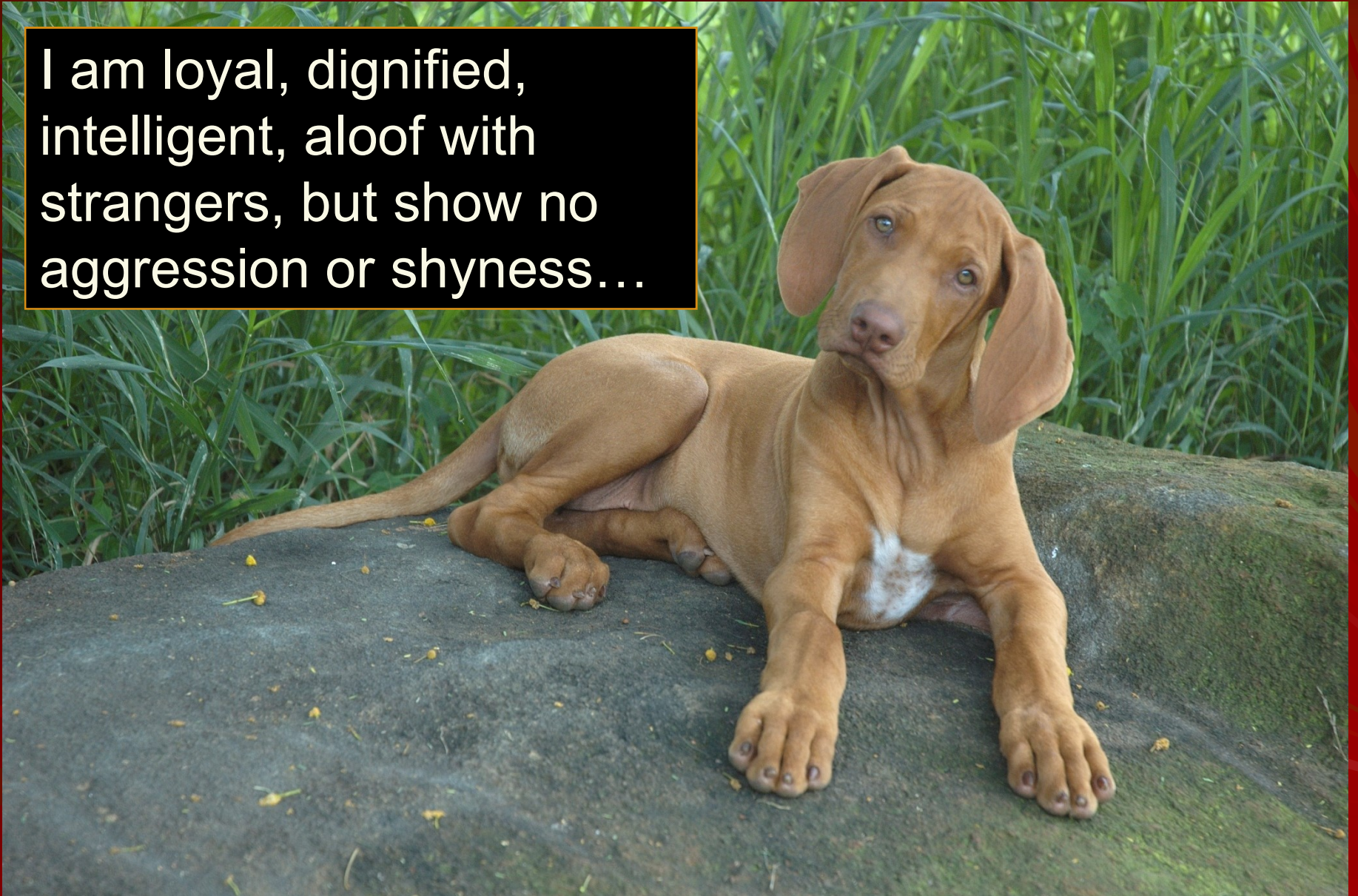


toeing out



paddling

I am loyal, dignified,
intelligent, aloof with
strangers, but show no
aggression or shyness...



I am

Rhodesian Ridgeback



Further reading and acknowledgements

- *Rhodesian Ridgeback: Guide to Judging* by Monika Tusanova
- *The Definitive Rhodesian Ridgeback* by David Helgesen.
- *The Rhodesian Ridgeback, the Origin, History and Standard* by T C Hawley.
- *The Rhodesian Ridgeback Indaba* by J N Murray.
- *The Rhodesian Ridgeback Today* by Stig. G. Carlson.
- *The Complete Rhodesian Ridgeback* by Peter Nicholson & Janet Parker.



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