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Does Size Matter?

The Weimaraner standard specifically states the required size of our dogs: "Height at the withers: dogs, 25 to 27 inches; bitches, 23 to 25 inches. One inch over or under the specified height of each sex is allowable but should be penalized. Dogs measuring less than 24 inches or more than 28 inches and bitches measuring less than 22 inches or more than 26 inches shall be disqualified."

The language is totally objective and requirements measurable until you get to that pesky middle sentence about penalizing if the dog is one inch over or under. How do judges apply this wiggle room in our standard?

While I have my own opinions about this, I was curious about what others in the Weimaraner community thought. Using a totally unscientific sampling technique, I grabbed the current Weimaraner Club of America membership list and shot off an email to a few experienced, long time breeder/exhibitors, asking each person's opinion on the matter.

Many comments went beyond the initial question of the penalty zone and addressed how size is figured into the total judging process. Following are some observations that repeatedly showed up in the comments.

One prevalent conclusion is that a male 1 inch under the stipulated height range is penalized much more than the bitch who is 1 inch over. In fact, one breeder said, "I don't think dogs or bitches that are 1 inch over are penalized at all. Dogs particularly are probably given some extra credit."

There is concern about the breed becoming too large and instances were cited of this happening in foreign countries with more lenient height ranges. "If the dogs become too large or small they lose breed type and function." Having the one inch penalty zone was seen as a good vehicle for keeping the breed close to the size that is required in the standard. Remember that the Weimaraner standard defines general appearance with the words, "A medium sized gray dog...."

One rather interesting comment was that judges do not concern themselves with the "penalty zone" but they are paying more attention to the height disqualification. Is the "penalty zone" a subtle, hidden device to keep size in check?

A few of the folks said that they owned a wicket and reported some surprising results when using it on their own dogs. The next time you're sitting ringside and are so sure of a dog's size remember one breeder's story. "I had three brothers at that time and of course I knew which was the tallest, which was in the middle and which was the shortest. Much to my chagrin, the dog I thought was so obviously the shortest turned out to be the highest at the withers, and what I thought were the tallest dog and the next tallest dog were exactly the same."

Another wicket owner tells of a bitch special she campaigned with good success. However, people constantly told her that her special would do so much better if she was bigger. How big was she? The bitch measured in at exactly the middle of the standard.

After reading all the comments about how size figures into the judging of the Weimaraner, what conclusions can I make? First, that judging dogs is difficult and a mix of art and science. Secondly, that size is just one aspect of the total judging process and finally, that not only beauty, but also size is in the eye of the beholder.

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