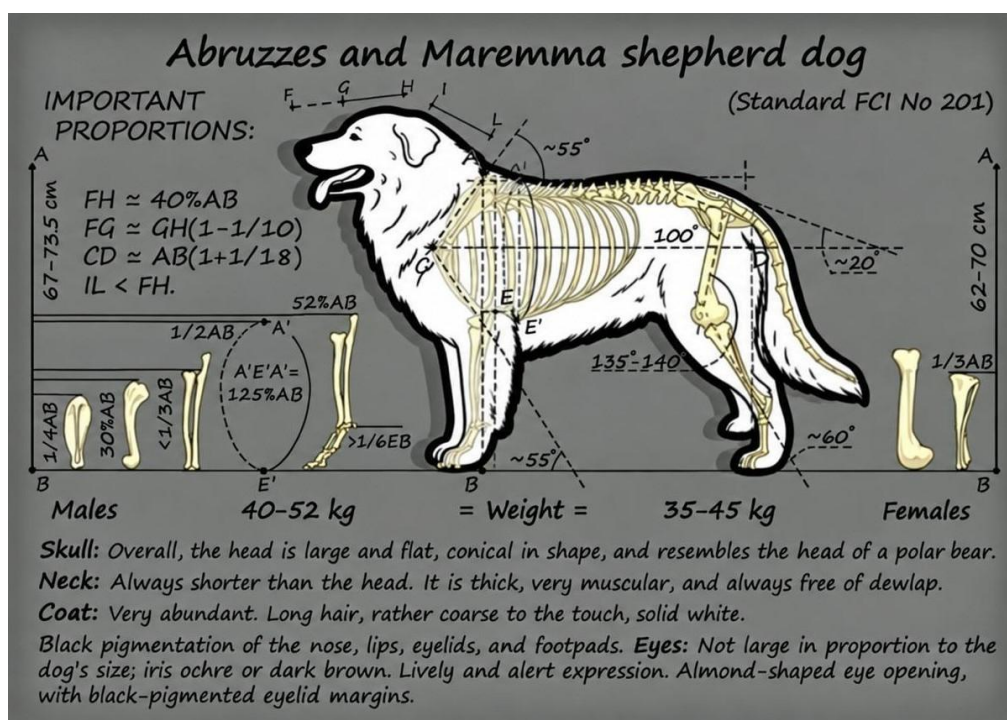




## Extended Standard of the Abruzzes and Maremma shepherd dog

by Gianni Vullo



### F.C.I. Standard N° 201

Published 25.09.2023 – in force from 18 gennaio 2024

#### ABRUZZES AND MAREMMA SHEPHERD DOG

The current Standard of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog (201) is the version revised and issued by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale on 25 September 2023 and brought into force on 18 January 2024. Subsequently, on 10 December 2025, the FCI accepted the request put forward by ENCI, upon the initiative of the Italian CPAM, to change the breed's name from "Maremma and Abruzzes Sheepdog" to "Abruzzes and Maremma Shepherd Dog".

#### ● UTILIZATION

*Shepherd dog used mainly for the protection of flocks and guarding of properties.*

For centuries, the primary task of the breed has been to escort flocks along the drove roads that connected the Abruzzes mountains mainly with the plains of the Tavoliere delle Puglie, partly with those of the Agro Romano and, more recently, also with the Tuscan Maremma. With the first autumn cold, before snow reached the high Abruzzes Apennines, the flocks were moved—over a period of several weeks—towards the coastal plains, where they grazed until late spring, at which point they returned to Abruzzo. Consequently, the work required of the dogs was that of escorting: walking for entire days alongside the sheep in order to protect them from predators along the route. It follows

that the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog had to be agile; certainly strong and robust, but never heavy, as it was required to be an excellent long-distance walker.

That form of transhumance is no longer practiced: the use of modern means of transport—on which the white dogs also travel—has replaced the ancient journeys on foot. Nevertheless, the white dog continues to carry out its valuable work as guardian of the flocks, today more than ever, now that the wolf has returned in large numbers throughout the national territory. This more sedentary form of flock guarding has led to a heavier, more utilitarian size and build. This is why preference should be given to subjects whose substance is closer to the upper limit rather than the lower one.

## ● FCI-CLASSIFICATION

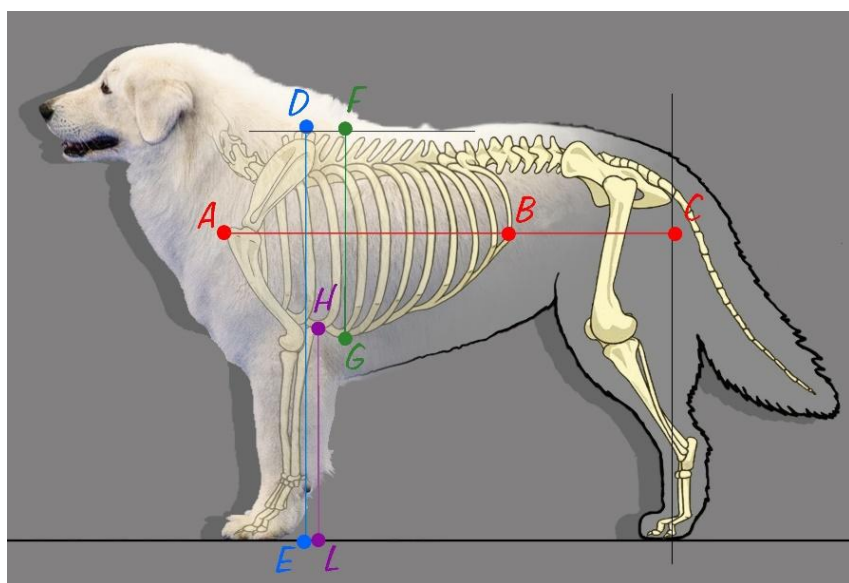
**Group 1 Sheepdogs and cattle dogs except Swiss cattledogs. Section 1 Sheepdogs. Without working trial.**

It should be noted that since 2018 in Italy, in order to obtain the title of Italian Champion of Beauty, an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must pass the Morphological–Temperamental Test (TMC). Managed by the Breed Club (CPAM) on behalf of ENCI, this test includes, in addition to a thorough morphological evaluation of the dog, anatomical measurements, certification of hip and elbow dysplasia, and—above all—a temperament test designed to assess the subject’s mental stability. Therefore, although a “Working Class” is not provided for in dog shows, the CAC should not be awarded in the ring to a dog that does not present itself calm and confident, nor to one that shows any sign of reluctance when the Judge approaches. It is certainly a dog that demands respect, and thus the approach must be carried out with care, avoiding excessive palpation of anatomical regions and always bearing in mind that one is entering the hypothetical protective space of a guardian dog.

## ● BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

*This ancient breed of dogs who guard flocks comes from shepherd dogs actually still used in the Abruzzes where the breeding of sheep is still thriving even in these days, and sheepdogs which existed yesteryear in the region of the Tuscan Maremma and in that of Latium. Especially since 1860, the seasonal moving of livestock from one region to another has favoured the developing of a natural crossing of those two primitive breeds.*

In fact, it must be stated that there was never any process of fusion—let alone a natural one—between two canine populations which were nothing more than the same Abruzzes dogs that changed their workplace seasonally, or which, originating from the same stock, were bred in other regions (in Calabria, Lazio, or the Maremma) where the wolf was an unwelcome presence.



AB: Profondità del torace =  $\frac{1}{2}$  DE

AC: Lunghezza del tronco > DE

DE: Altezza al garrese

FG: Altezza del torace <  $\frac{1}{2}$  DE

HL: Altezza gomito/terra >  $\frac{1}{2}$  DE

## ● GENERAL APPEARANCE

*The Abruzzes and Maremma shepherd dog is a big dog, strongly built of a rustic appearance, at the same time majestic is really typical. On the whole his shape, of average proportions, is that of a heavy dog, whose body is longer than the height at the withers; is balanced as much in size (heterometry = normal proportions between the size and different parts of the body) as to the profiles (alloidism = concordance between the profiles of the head and the body).*

This section of the Standard, which is unequivocally clear, holds fundamental importance in the evaluation of an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog. It indicates the general, overall impression that the subject—male or female—must convey. If the dog does not display the described outline, or deviates significantly from it, then we are faced with a specimen that is not fully typical and that will hardly be able to withstand, without difficulty, the harshness of work on the pastures. In other words: if the general conformation does not meet the requirements of the correct constitution, the subject cannot be considered of high quality and therefore is not deserving of the highest qualification.

The adjectives used in the Standard—large, strong, and rustic—describe a dog capable of facing the demanding work required in its harsh environment. The Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must be of substantial size, meaning that height at the withers should be preferred toward the upper limit rather than the lower limit set by the Standard, and the body must exhibit strong bone, well-developed and firm musculature, as well as advantageous transverse diameters. No part of the body should appear out of harmony with the rest, and each anatomical region must be well proportioned to the others so as to give the whole a clear impression of overall harmony. Examples of disharmony in relation to format include: a head too short relative to height at the withers or lacking volume compared to the trunk; a hindquarter insufficiently developed in relation to the forequarters; a neck too slender for the body or too short relative to height at the withers; a chest that is too narrow; a forearm too short in relation to height at the withers. In short, the assessment of harmony of format is placed by the Standard at the foundation of judging criteria, and determining whether an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog falls within the specified constitutional type—before even examining individual virtues and faults—is the basis for the initial qualification.

The definition of “heavy mesomorph,” present in the Standard since its first draft in 1924, completes and confirms the general picture just described.

It must not be forgotten that general appearance—synonymous with morphological or constitutional type—is the direct phenotypic consequence of the dog’s endocrine activity. Every puppy is born with a well-defined biotype that determines diameters, body mass, and substance. In other words, through a precise biological process, every Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog that displays the typical general appearance required by the Standard is born with the correct biotype that allows it, during growth, to develop the breed’s characteristic overall conformation. This refers to the constitutional type, which cannot be modified through treadmill training or special diets, because it is the result of anatomical development under hormonal influence and therefore depends on the subject’s endocrine profile. This is the so-called hormonal metabolism, which differs for each constitutional type, as there is a close relationship between external anatomical forms and physiological hormonal functions.

A predominance of anabolic metabolism determines the brachymorphic (short-lined) type, characterized by greater development of the abdominal cavity, short limbs, very developed transverse diameters, thick and abundant skin, and—very importantly—a hypo-reactive, slow, and lethargic temperament. One may think of the Neapolitan Mastiff. A predominance of catabolic metabolism, on the other hand, determines the dolichomorphic (long-lined) type, characterized by greater development of the thoracic cavity, long limbs, poorly developed transverse diameters, thin and tight skin, and a hyper-reactive, quick, and agile temperament. One may think of the Greyhound. The perfect balance

of the two metabolic types determines the mesomorphic (medium-lined) type, characterized by balanced development of the thorax and abdomen, limbs that are neither long nor short, moderately developed transverse diameters, skin of medium thickness, and a moderately reactive temperament—neither sluggish nor excessively energetic

Having established this, let us attempt to define more precisely—using constitutional terminology—the morphological type of our dog, since it is of vital zootechnical importance to value or devalue a subject according to how closely it reflects, or deviates from, the breed's morphological type. Its phenotypic habitus must unquestionably be that of a mesomorph, therefore harmonious in the proportions of all its formats, without excesses in length or height, and with medium behavioural reactivity. However, the mesomorphic category encompasses a range within which different body indices and thoracic indices may fall. Both the Giant Schnauzer and the Pointer, the Boxer and the Belgian Shepherd are mesomorphs, despite having different body and thoracic indices, yet all fall within the scale that defines mesomorphy.

Our Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog is rightly defined as a heavy mesomorph, meaning that its placement is closer to the brachymorphic than to the dolichomorphic conformation. Therefore, if one must choose, it is undeniable that a slightly heavier constitution—without exaggeration—should be forgiven or judged with greater leniency, whereas a drift toward the long-lined type is a far more serious fault. Young subjects under 18 months of age may certainly be excused for still being high on the limbs due to immature thoracic development, or for having head diameters that are still undersized; however, the harmony typical of the heavy mesomorph must be present even at a very young age.

#### **TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF THE PERFECT GENERAL APPEARANCE OF THE MALE OF ABRUZZES AND MAREMMA SHEEPDOG**





**TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF THE PERFECT GENERAL APPEARANCE  
OF THE FEMALE OF ABRUZZES AND MAREMMA SHEEPDOG**



*Male with good height at the withers, but of  
light constitution*

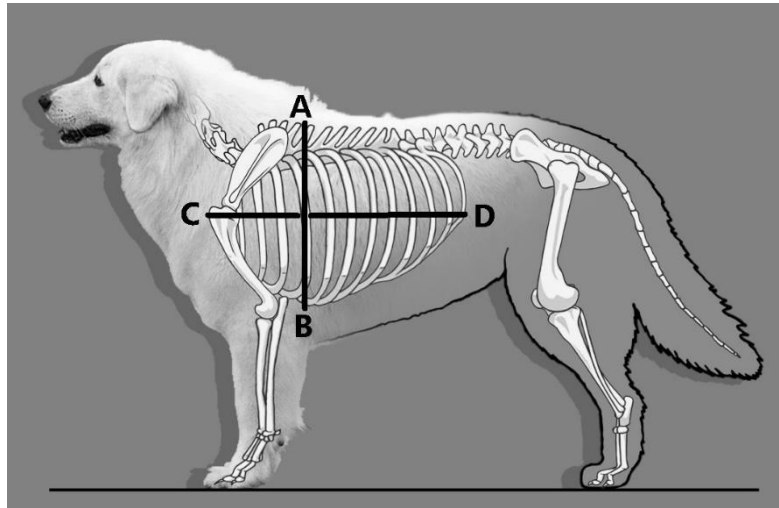
### ● IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS

*The length of the head reaches 4:10 of the height at the withers; muzzle slightly shorter than the length of the skull; the body length is more, by 1:18, than the height at the withers. Depth of thorax is slightly less than half the height at the withers.*

This paragraph provides us with precise values for the most important proportions of the head and body—proportions that must be assessed immediately and as a priority at first glance, as they give a clear idea of certain general characteristics. A head measuring  $\frac{4}{10}$  of the height at the withers represents, in theoretical terms, the highest degree of harmony for a mesomorph, regardless of the sex of the animal. The belief that the female should have lower cephalic proportions (Cephalic Index) than the male must be dispelled. It is the height of the skull and that of the muzzle which, as we know, mark sexual dimorphism—not their length nor their width in relation to height at the withers.

Regarding the skull-to-muzzle ratio, the Standard merely states that the muzzle is slightly shorter than the skull, leaving it to the evaluator to determine the extent of that “slightly.” Fortunately, earlier versions of the Standard assist us by indicating a skull-to-muzzle ratio of 10:9, meaning that in a head measuring 28 cm, 15 cm correspond to the skull and 13 cm to the muzzle. But beyond centimetres and millimetres, we can say that, when looking at the head of an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, the muzzle being shorter than the skull—without exaggeration—must be immediately evident. Another extremely important element of typicity is the length of the trunk. For the work it performs, our dog remains a pure long-distance trotter and therefore requires an absolutely rectangular trunk. The Standard indicates a length greater by  $\frac{1}{18}$  of the height at the withers; thus, a subject standing 70 cm tall should have a trunk measuring just under 74 cm. This ratio, likely undersized, nonetheless indicates a dog with a rectangular trunk rather than a square one, which is the most important aspect. Despite its length, however, the trunk must be solid, and for this to be the case, its longitudinal extension must never be borne by the loins, but rather by the back and croup.

An important clarification must be made regarding the improper use of the term “chest depth” in the Standard. This is a “cinognostic inaccuracy,” likely due to the fact that this latest version was drafted directly by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale by authors whose native language is English.



According to traditional Italian and French literature, three measurements of the thorax must be considered: width (transverse diameter), depth (sagittal diameter), and height (vertical diameter). It is useful to recall that while thoracic height (A–B) is measured from the top of the back, just behind the withers, down to the sternum, thoracic depth (C–D) is taken horizontally, from the tip of the sternum to the penultimate false rib. In other words, in cinognostic terminology, a tunnel is “deep,” whereas a well is “high.” Anglo-Saxon cynology, however—which, it must be said, has now influenced European cynology as well—uses the word *depth* to indicate both what we define cinognostically as depth (horizontal) and what we have always defined as height (vertical). This is how the misunderstanding arose during the translation of the latest FCI Standard from English into Italian.

It is therefore not a contradiction—although it may appear so in the Standard—that in this paragraph “chest depth” (understood as height) is described as “slightly less than half the height at the withers,” while in the paragraph dedicated to the “Chest” it is stated that chest “depth” (this time the true sagittal depth) “must reach half the height at the withers.” In this paragraph, then, chest depth must be read as chest height, which must be less than half the height at the withers. In the previous version of the Standard, a practical example was even provided: *‘in a dog measuring 68 cm at the withers, the height of the ribcage is approximately 32 cm’*, thereby making it unequivocally clear that the PAM must never be squat or low on the limbs.

## ● BEHAVIOUR/TEMPERAMENT

***The principal function as a guard and defence dog of flocks and property in general, asserts the manner in accomplishing these tasks, with perception and also with devotions to his master and all his entourage.***

This is a guardian dog—an excellent one—that is not, and could not be, submissive or servile toward anyone, given the autonomous work required of it. It does not express its guarding ability only when the owner is present to direct, reassure, or command it. It manages on its own, assessing situations independently and immediately understanding the boundaries of the property and what must be protected, even when facing the determined wolf. For each member of its family, it would give its life, never retreating in the face of any threat to the safety of its owner or household, especially when children are involved.

The temperament to be sought is serene, never nervous or edgy, as such traits do not belong to its constitutional type. The Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog is a dog that lives—or should live—with sheep, which, as we know, are animals that become easily agitated at the slightest sudden movement. Therefore, from our dog, even one raised in a garden, we must expect calm, relaxed, almost indifferent behaviour and movement, because that is the typical temperament of the breed. Any hyper-reactivity in the ring must therefore be penalised. There should be no illusions about this calmness, however, because when a threat arises—and our dog never fails to recognise it—it confronts it without hesitation.

## ● HEAD

***On the whole the head is large and flat, of conical shape, reminiscing of that of a polar bear.***

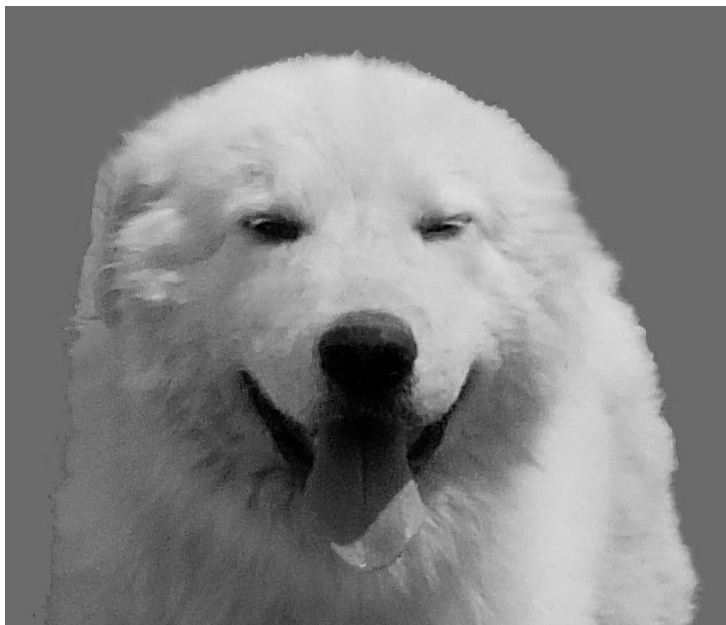
As with any other breed, the head of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog concentrates and expresses the highest degree of typicity. It is an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog above all because it has *this* head, and not that of a Kuvasz, a Cuvac, or a Patou. A large head must of course be understood as voluminous in all dimensions: length, height, and width. Its considerable volume, however, must not be exaggerated, otherwise the harmonious proportion it must maintain with the rest of the body mass would be lost.

The head (note: not the skull) of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog is defined as flat because, when viewed in profile, the muzzle joins the skull without the abrupt interruptions caused by a very pronounced stop or, more essentially, by excessive development of the frontal sinuses, which must be detectable but must never interfere with the clean profile of the frontal portion of the cranial vault. Care must be taken not to interpret the flatness of the head in an absolute sense, as this would imply the undesirable complete depression of the frontal sinuses.

The conical shape of the head, visible from a frontal view, is created by the convergence of the lateral axes of the skull and muzzle toward the nose. Naturally, this is a truncated cone, not a pointed one.

The essential squareness of the front face of the muzzle must never be lost, as it gives great power to the entire head.

Regarding the comparison between the head of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog and that of the polar bear, one must not be overly literal: the bear has a much narrower muzzle in relation to its skull, much smaller eyes, and so on. In fact, Solaro never spoke of true resemblance; he merely stated that *overall it should recall, evoke visually, or bring to mind the head of the polar bear*, nothing more.



#### ● SKULL

***Of great width with lateral sides slightly bulging. In profile also convex. The upper longitudinal axes of the skull and muzzle are slightly divergent, which makes the profile of the head slightly convex. The superciliary arches are moderately marked. The mediofrontal furrow line is slightly marked. The occipital crest is only just visible.***

As already mentioned earlier, the Standard does not provide a measurement for the width of the skull. That it must be broad is clear—but how broad? The indication comes from the 1958 Standard, which states that “the bizygomatic width of the skull must be slightly greater than half the total length of the head.” Since the length of the skull is also slightly greater than half the total length of the head, it follows that the skull of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog is almost as wide as it is long.

The slightly convex profile of the lateral walls of the skull implies that the temporal muscle, all auricular muscles, and the masseter must be developed enough to project slightly beyond the lateral margin of the forehead. However, the development of these muscles must not be excessive, and therefore the convexity of the profile must not be exaggerated, as hypertrophy of the masticatory muscles occurs at the expense of the overall length of the head. It is no coincidence that we observe significant development of the masticatory muscles in brachycephalic breeds.

The upper profile of the skull must also be convex, whether viewed from the front or from the side. This convexity must correspond to a large, clean arc, free of interruptions or edges. The convexity of both the lateral and frontal profiles of the skull necessarily implies a cranial vault that is itself convex—an essential condition to prevent excessive development of the masticatory muscles. This links back to the slightly convex lateral walls of the skull mentioned earlier.

Considering the lateral profile, a decisive role in ensuring its slight convexity is played by the moderately defined supraorbital arches and, above all, by the slightly divergent craniofacial axes. The Standard repeatedly uses the term “slightly,” thus domed skulls—or, even worse, straight ones—must be excluded. The upper profile of the skull is in fact one of the few distinctive features that set our breed apart from other white livestock guardian dogs.

The slight divergence between the upper axes of the skull and muzzle must be immediately emphasised, as it is of fundamental importance—a basic hallmark of type for the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog. Moreover, the position and shape of the eye, the definition of the stop, and the behaviour of the lateral axes of the muzzle all depend on this axial relationship. This is why no bodily virtue can ever compensate for an incorrect craniofacial divergence in a subject of our breed. On this point, I feel compelled to offer a recommendation: one must not assume that if slight divergence is a great virtue, greater divergence is an even greater virtue. Excessive divergence would visibly compromise breed expression, as the stop would tend to disappear entirely, the eyes would shift to an excessively lateral position, and the muzzle would become pointed. A far more serious fault—grounds for disqualification—is convergence of these axes.

The supraorbital arches must be modestly developed, yet visible and detectable. This clarification is very important, as we increasingly see heads with a markedly depressed supraorbital arch due to excessive development of the temporal muscle, which invades the arch and prevents its proper definition.

Excessive development of the frontal sinuses, on the other hand, is always accompanied by an **overly** pronounced median frontal groove, resulting in a conspicuous division of the forehead, as seen in the Kuvasz. The ideal metopic suture of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must be slightly marked in the anterior portion of the frontal region, gradually diminishing caudally until disappearing entirely by the midpoint of the skull.

The head blends into the neck by continuing the harmonious arc of the upper cranial profile, without a nuchal break or any other interruption. This occurs because the occipital crest is only barely visible. The occipital process, considered as the bony anatomical base, is always very prominent in all breeds, including ours. What varies according to head type is its degree of external perceptibility, depending on the lesser or greater development of the muscles that fill the deep temporal fossae. A lightly perceptible occipital crest—an indication of well-developed muscles and ligaments—will always correspond to a strong, muscular neck



*Head not typical due to: narrow and globose skull; eyes close-set, rounded, and almost frontally positioned; hollow suborbital region; large, low-set ears.*

## ● STOP

*The fronto-nasal depression only just accentuated and the fronto-nasal angle is always very open.*

The exact placement of the stop is on the frontal portion of the frontal bone, that is, along the imaginary line connecting the inner corners of the two eyes. It is therefore perfectly identifiable when

viewing the head from the front, whereas—from a lateral view—its identification is or may be affected by the three-dimensional development of the frontal sinuses, creating the impression of an overly marked stop. In the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, the stop is only slightly defined, as is appropriate for a head with slightly divergent craniofacial axes. This must not be interpreted as “absent,” as that would lead to a deviation from type. It is important that the depression be present, perceptible, and that the frontonasal angle not resemble a flat angle.

## ● NOSE

***Rather big, in line of the muzzle, with large well-opened nostrils, moist and cool, coloured black. In profile must not protrude beyond the front marginal of the lips.***

The nose is large, with well-open nostrils to allow excellent airflow and ensure a strong sense of smell. Today more than ever—given the FCI’s emphasis on traits linked to animal welfare—narrow (pinched) nostrils must be penalised without hesitation. The good volume of the nose also deserves attention, as a small nose is always found on a pointed muzzle with strongly convergent lateral walls. Not by chance, earlier Standards listed a small nose among the serious faults.

When viewing the head in profile, the upper margin of the nose must lie on the extension of the upper profile of the muzzle, creating a single straight line from the stop to the tip of the nose. Therefore, noses that are raised or depressed relative to the upper line of the nasal bridge must be penalised. In the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, the latter fault is less rare than the former.

It must also be checked with particular care that the front face of the nose does not protrude beyond the antero-vertical margin of the muzzle. In practice, when viewing the head in profile, both the nose and the chin must lie on the same vertical line.

The nose must be strongly pigmented in a deep, glossy black, although a slight seasonal reduction in intensity should be tolerated; this generally affects the upper edge of the nose more than the lower part adjacent to the median raphe of the upper lips. A far more serious fault—grounds for disqualification—is the complete absence of pigment on the entire nose (Dudley nose), as it is a degenerative defect and a warning sign of albinism. A nose mottled with pink (butterfly nose), although not leading to disqualification—though perhaps it should—must at least be heavily penalised with the lowest qualification, as it is the precursor to total depigmentation.



***Dog with excellent, full pigmentation, despite the seasonal “snow nose”.***

## ● MUZZLE

***The length is little less than that of the skull, depth is half of the length, lateral sides are slightly converging, decreases towards the front but still keeping a blunt surface seen from the front. The region under the eyes is slightly chiselled.***

The length of the muzzle in relation to the skull has already been discussed in the paragraph “Important Proportions.” The upper lateral profile of the nasal bridge must be perfectly straight—no exceptions. Any further comment is superfluous, since any other shape of this profile is a serious fault. A concave profile, even slightly so, as well as a markedly convex one, are faults that warrant disqualification.

Moving on to the depth of the muzzle—which, more correctly, should be defined as the “height of the muzzle,” as it was indeed called in the previous version of the Standard—it is indicated as being equal to half of its own length. This is an error!

This indication first appeared in the 1990 Standard. Such a ratio, for example, is typical of the Cirneco dell’Etna, which has a completely different head structure. A muzzle conceived in this way—duck-shaped—would deprive the entire head of the desired power, prevent the harmonious blending of muzzle and skull, significantly reduce the squareness of the front face of the muzzle, and diminish the strength of the jaws. Most likely—and I am convinced of this—the revisers of the 1990 Standard intended to indicate a muzzle height corresponding roughly to half the length *of the head* (not of the muzzle itself), but through simple oversight they forgot to write “of the skull.” The muzzle of our dog is therefore as tall as it is long, not half as tall as stated in the Standard. It is important that this height be produced by well-developed maxillary bones and not by an abundant lip.

Regarding the lateral faces of the muzzle, the Standard reiterates that their convergence toward the nose must be slight, so as not to compromise the important squareness of the front face of the muzzle. As soon as the convergence of the lateral axes increases even slightly beyond the minimum allowed by the Standard, the muzzle becomes pointed, the nose smaller, and the mandible narrower, resulting in incisors set in a very restricted space.

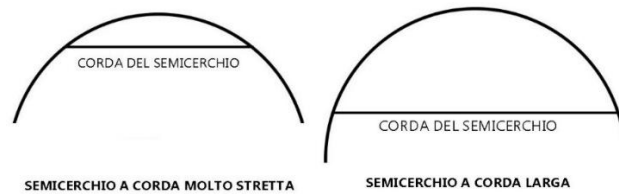
The Standard makes no mention of muzzle width, but it is enough to know that it must be very generous at its junction with the skull and still generous halfway along the nasal bridge, where its width should be measured. Approximately, we can say that the width of the muzzle, measured halfway along the nasal bridge, is about two-thirds of its length.

While the muzzle of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must be full, the suborbital region shows a limited chiselling, which is also detectable in the slight prominence of the zygomatic process of the frontal bone. All of this results in the slight groove that runs from the outer corner of the eye and fades toward the ear, giving the head great distinction. A deep chiselling, on the other hand—one that reveals very evident bony and vascular prominences in the suborbital region—is not appropriate for our breed and represents a dangerous drift toward an overly refined head.

## ● LIPS

***Seen from the front, the upper lips, at their junction point, determined by their lower edge a semicircle of very short radius. Slightly developed, they barely cover the teeth of the jaw, and, therefore, the corner of the lip is only lightly accentuated. Consequently, the lower lateral profile is only defined by the lips in its fore part, in its rear part it is defined by the lower jaw and the corner of the lip. The rims of the lips are black.***

The lips of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog are short and of medium thickness. The median raphe, along which the upper lips meet, has a very reduced height—generally no more than one-third of the height of the nose—leaving a good portion of the chin visible. It is also thanks to this structure that the upper lips are highly retractile. As a consequence, when viewing the head from the front, the arc formed by the separation of the upper lips appears as a very open semicircle (with a very shallow chord). Any inverted-U separation, which is typical of abundant and flaccid lips, must be strongly penalised.



From the lateral view, the upper lip is sufficiently taut, just enough to barely cover the teeth set in the mandible. The labial commissure is always closed and must lie on the horizontal extension of the upper lip line—this placement contributes to the breed’s characteristic “smiling” expression. Therefore, fluttering or loose upper lips must be penalised, also because our breed is not a gripping dog that, when the mouth is closed, requires additional ventilation through the lips beyond that provided by the nostrils.

The labial line is not particularly long. We can say that, with the mouth open and the head viewed laterally, the third—and sometimes even the second—lower molar is not visible. With the mouth closed, the lower margin of the upper lip rises from front to back, overlapping the lower profile of the muzzle only along its anterior half. Thus, the lower profile of the muzzle is formed anteriorly by the lower margin of the upper lip, and posteriorly—up to the labial commissure—by the mandible. The closed and well-stretched labial commissure ensures that the margin of the lower lip remains well-adherent, never turned outward nor drooping. Heaven forbid an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog that drools!



*Slightly abundant lip*

## ● JAWS/TEETH

***Strong jaws, normally developed, with incisors set straight, well aligned of good size and complete in number. Teeth white and strong, scissor bite.***

Since it is not a gripping dog, the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog does not rely on the power of its bite for survival; therefore, its upper and lower jaws have medium thickness, and the branches of the mandible are moderately spaced. The lower incisors, in fact, are set vertically along a very slightly curved line, allowing the two canines to remain sufficiently spaced and ensuring good squareness of the front of the muzzle.

However, since the thickness of the jawbones is only medium, the teeth must be expected to be very large, and their proper development is of fundamental importance when evaluating the mouth of the

Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog. Even if it is not always done, any sign of dental atrophy should be reported, so as not to end up with incisors resembling grains of rice and canines that are short and thin.

The Standard recommends that all incisors, upper and lower, be present in the dog's dentition, but it says nothing about the possible absence of the other thirty teeth. Therefore, the absence of any tooth other than an incisor cannot be considered a fault, since we Judges are obliged to adhere strictly and literally to the Standard. However, I believe that "complete in number" was intended to refer to all teeth, not only the incisors. In any case, the breed is healthy in both respects, and when evaluating dentition one may follow the guidelines of the FCI Scientific Commission, according to which dogs with incomplete dentition must not be excluded from the highest qualification unless explicitly stated in the breed standard—and ours does not state this—although they cannot be awarded the CACIB.

The upper and lower jaws fit together precisely, categorically excluding both prognathism—which the Standard defines as a disqualifying fault—and enognathism, which is not mentioned in the Standard because, being an absolute fault in all breeds, it is automatically a disqualifying defect.

Increasingly often, one encounters lower incisors set obliquely and slightly forward, thus not aligned with their upper counterparts nor with the rest of the lower incisors. This issue is not so much an indication of prognathism as it is a sign of insufficient chin width, which is not a minor concern.

A few words must be said separately about the pincer bite. It is a dental occlusion that still ensures contact between upper and lower teeth and, since it is not a degenerative defect, it should be penalised only by lowering the qualification. Not by chance, the pincer bite is not listed among the faults and, until 1990, it was considered equivalent to the scissor bite.

## ● CHEEKS

***Moderately visible.***

The masseter muscle, which together with the temporal muscle is the most important masticatory muscle, forms the anatomical basis of the cheeks. As mentioned when discussing the skull, the convexity of the profile of its lateral walls must not be exaggerated. The development of the masticatory muscles is, in fact, inversely proportional to the overall length of the head; therefore, the two masseters—i.e., the cheeks—have a moderately developed muscle mass.

## ● EYES

***Not large in relation to the size of the dog; the iris is of an ochre colour or chestnut brown. The eye, in lateral position, is neither deep set nor protruding. Lively and attentive expression. Eyelid opening is almond shaped, with black eye rims.***

The eyes must be of a colour ranging from ochre to dark brown, and both irises must be of the same shade; therefore, eyes of different colours (heterochromia of the iris), fortunately very rare in the breed, must be penalised. A light or blue eye is no longer listed as a disqualifying fault in the current Standard, but it remains an extremely serious defect in a white-coated dog like ours, because common sense requires us to interpret this omission as assuming it to be an almost absolute fault. A subject with even a single blue eye therefore cannot be disqualified, but must certainly be removed from judgement.

The eyes are protected by eyelids, thinner rather than thick, whose edges must be pigmented black. On this point the Standard is uncompromising, listing even partially depigmented eyelids as disqualifying faults.

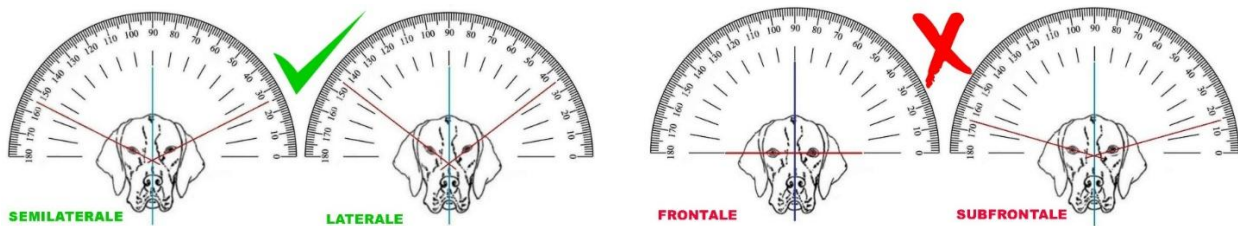
Another defect that may affect the eye is a globe that is either sunken or protruding. Both defects, even if only slight, are serious and must be firmly opposed. In the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog,

a slightly sunken eye recalls the Pyrenean expression, which does not belong to the breed, while a slightly protruding eye—typical only of dwarf or brachygnathic breeds—cannot be tolerated in a mesomorphic dog like ours, not to mention the increased risk of injury associated with a protruding eye. That the eye must not be large in relation to the head means that the sclera should be as little visible as possible. Care must also be taken to avoid the opposite exaggeration: eyes that are too small (microphthalmia), sometimes reduced to narrow slits, which constitute a fault to be heavily penalised because they significantly compromise breed expression and represent a functional limitation of the visual organ.

Strabismus, whether unilateral or bilateral, is a disqualifying fault.

The eyes of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog are well spaced due to the width of the frontal region. Eyes that are too close together must be discouraged, as they are often indicators of narrow skulls and pointed muzzles. As a practical guideline for identifying ideal eye spacing, when viewing the head from the front, the distance between the two inner eye corners should be approximately the width of two eyes. Between the outer eye corner and the lateral profile of the skull there must always be a space roughly equal to half an eye.

They have an almond shape, meaning the aboral (outer) corners are taut rather than relaxed, resulting in eyelids that adhere well to the globe, without inward rolling (entropion) or outward rolling (ectropion).

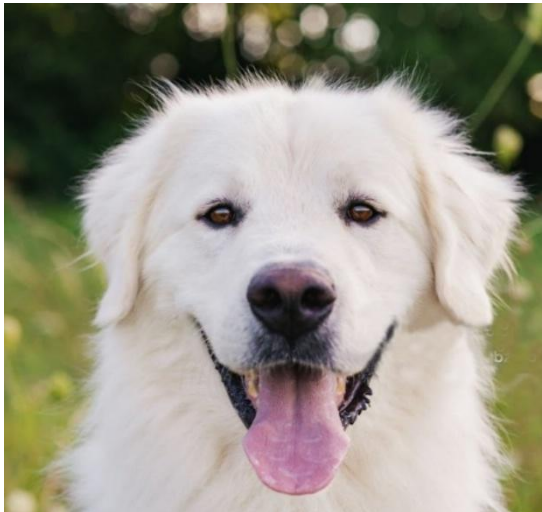


According to the Standard, the eyes are placed laterally, yet countless very typical subjects—with a beautiful breed expression—show the eye in a semi-lateral position. When the eyes are placed laterally, with the angle between the palpebral axis and the median axis of the head at about 35°, any shift toward an ultra-lateral position is accompanied by a narrow, elongated head and by a muzzle that begins to become pointed.

Conversely, expressions resulting from sub-frontal—or worse, frontal—eye placement must not be accepted as typical. These are associated with pronounced frontal bosses, high frontal bones, excessive stops, and often abundant lips.



*Eyes close-set and almost frontally positioned; ear set high; marked stop and pronounced median frontal groove; suborbital region overly hollowed.*



*Eyes in frontal position; metopic suture overly pronounced; ears set high.*

### ● EARS

*Set very high over the zygomatic arches, they are natural, hanging but very mobile. Triangular shape (in V), their extremities forming a narrow point never rounded; they are small in relation to the size of the dog. For a medium size dog their length must not go beyond 12 cm. The ear attachment is of medium width.*

When viewing the head from the front, the ears (which may no longer be cropped) must not be visible—especially in males—because their visibility is prevented by the long hair covering the parotid region and framing the entire face down to the throat. While the height of ear insertion is clear (well above the zygomatic arch), attention must be drawn to ensuring that the entire line of insertion is nearly horizontal and does not slope downward—sometimes drastically—toward the aboral side, as this severely limits the mobility of the entire auricular pavilion. The rose ear carriage, not being permitted by the Standard, results in a heavy downgrading of the subject.

### ● NECK

*Upper profile moderately arched. The neck is always shorter than the head. Neck is thick and very strongly muscled and always without dewlap; covered with long and dense hair forming a collar particularly obvious in males.*

Since the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog is not built as a galloper, it does not require a long neck; and considering that a neck is defined as long when it reaches the length of the head, the Standard emphasises that in our breed it must be shorter by one-fifth compared to the head. Just as excessively

long, swan-like necks—which prove weak and show an excessively arched upper profile—are not desirable, overly short necks must also be penalised because, besides diminishing the dog's distinction, they have clear repercussions on the ability to extend during fast trotting.

The neck must blend with the head and body without any visible demarcation at the nape or withers. It should almost give the impression that its points of fusion cannot be perceived. Its upper profile is moderately convex and must continue the convexity of the skull's upper profile uninterrupted, merging harmoniously with the withers.

The lower profile must be clean, especially at the throat, where there must be no trace of dewlap. Those two slight skin folds that extend from the branches of the mandible to the throat may be forgiven, provided they are not exaggerated. Nothing more.

The Standard makes no mention of the neck's angle relative to the horizon, so we clarify that it tends to form an angle of about 45° with the ground—an angle that proves most suitable for trotting, as it allows the greatest range of extension and flexion of the forelimb. As trotting speed increases, the dog tends to carry the neck increasingly horizontally, almost in line with the topline. Dogs that trot—often forced to trot—with the head held high “into the wind” are unjustifiable: their stride will be greatly shortened due to the impossibility of expressing proper extension.

The coat of the collar is long, especially in males, but in both sexes the nape must never appear exposed.

## ● BODY

*Solidly constructed.*

The body is inscribed in a rectangle, but it must not for this reason be any less solid than that of breeds inscribed in a square. This condition is achieved when the greater body length, compared to the height at the withers, is due to the back and croup, and not to the lumbar region which, if long, weakens the entire body.

## ● TOP LINE

*Straight from withers to rump where it becomes somewhat sloping.*

The topline of the body is straight, meaning parallel to the horizon. The withers must be slightly raised compared to the rest of the dorsal line, since the greater height of the five spinous processes of the withers, compared to all other vertebrae, is an absolute asset—valid for all quadrupeds—as it favours the action of the extensor muscles of the neck and head. The straight profile referred to by the Standard therefore concerns that section of the topline extending from just behind the withers to the iliac crest, just before the croup.

## ● WITHERS

*Slightly above the topline; wide because of the distance separating the shoulder blades.*

The prominence of the withers in relation to the rest of the topline has just been discussed.

## ● BACK

*Straight in profile, length reaches about 32% of the height at the withers.*

Regarding the length of the back, it should be remembered that the 32% proportion relative to the height at the withers does not include the section of the lumbar vertebrae.

## ● LOIN

*Merging perfectly with the topline and has a slightly curved profile with well-developed muscles and width.*

The lumbar region is the weakest part of the dog's vertebral column, as it is suspended between the thoracic vertebrae and the croup and has no ribs to support it. It is essentially a suspended bridge without supports, and as such, the shorter it is, the stronger it will be. This is why the shortness of this region is an absolute asset to be sought in all breeds, including ours. Moreover, for simple mechanical reasons, a long lumbar section would result in significant loss of impulse when the dog moves—especially in a rectangular body like that of our breed.

## ● CROUP

***Broad, strong and well-muscled. The inclination from the hip to the tail set is of 20° increasing to 30° and more, hence the rump is sloping.***

The croup must be broad, because its bony anatomical base must itself be broad. The longer and wider the coxal bones, the more space there is for the insertion of the many muscle bundles and ligaments anchored to them. As a result, the muscular masses involved can develop more fully, producing the characteristic external roundness of the croup. When the iliac wing or the ischial tuberosity appear prominent, protruding through the rounded profile of the croup, it means that its anatomical base is short or narrow, offering insufficient space for the muscle bundles, which therefore have not developed adequately.

As a typical long-distance trotter, the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog also requires a well-sloped croup. When the croup is correct in both inclination and length, the tail set will be low. Not by chance, a high tail set is almost always an indication of a poorly sloped coxal bone.

## ● CHEST

***Ample, descending to level of elbows, deep and well-rounded at mid-height. Decreases progressively downwards while retaining a good width in the sternal region. Its depth must reach half the height at the withers. The ribs are well sprung and oblique with ample lung space and good width; the last false ribs are long, oblique and well opened.***

It is essential that the chest be broad and well developed, as well as well let down, meaning that its lower margin must reach at least the level of the elbows—preferably slightly below. To accurately determine where the chest actually reaches, it is advisable to palpate the sternal profile, so as not to be misled by the coat, which in that region is particularly long and may deceive the eye.

The transverse diameters must be well pronounced, yet always proportional to the height at the withers, in order to ensure the body mass required of a heavy mesomorph such as our dog. Thus, the ribs must be well sprung so that the chest, measured in its transverse plane at about half its height, is at least one-third of the height at the withers.

According to the Standard, the ideal Thoracic Index of the breed is approximately 66. Care must be taken to avoid excessive rib spring, which would produce the so-called “barrel chest.” Besides negatively affecting the adherence of the elbows to the ribcage, it would cause lateral shifts of the centre of gravity that become parasitic movements detrimental to gait efficiency. The depth of the chest (measured from the tip of the sternum to the penultimate false rib) requires ribs that are well spaced and well slanted backward in order to reach half the height at the withers.

The thoracic circumference is considerably greater than the height at the withers. In this regard, the old Standard indicated an ideal thoracic perimeter approximately 25% greater than the height at the withers, resulting in an ideal Body Index for the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog (according to the Standard) of 85.

Although the Standard makes no mention of it, it is worth saying a few words about the profile of the forechest when the dog is viewed laterally. It is important that it be clearly visible beyond the profile of the humerus and that it show a certain convexity. This results from a humerus with the correct

inclination, a manubrium of the sternum slightly protruding forward in relation to the scapulo-humeral joint, and well-developed musculature—interdependent elements that must all be present in a high-quality subject.

## ● UNDERLINE AND BELLY

*The sternum is long and the sternal line is rising slightly towards the belly.*

The sternal–ventral line must be given great consideration because it is linked to the constitutional type of the breed. In the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog this line must rise slightly in the direction of the genitals. Not excessively (as in the “greyhound-type” outline), which would tend toward the profile typical of dolichomorphs, nor straight, as this profile belongs to brachymorphs. Generally, when the ventral line is almost parallel to the ground, the subject is also low on the limbs. The looseness of the abdominal wall must be evaluated separately in a female that has recently whelped or in an elderly dog.

## ● TAIL

*Low set due to the sloping rump, in normal stand reaching below the level of the hock. Hanging when dog stationary; carried level with back line with a rather strongly hooked extremity when the dog is in action. Well furnished with dense hairs without fringes.*

The tail is the final chapter of a novel—far more than a decorative element, it is a sort of commentary on the topline and the croup. A dog that trots well will certainly display a good tail set and carriage, just as a good novel will never have a disappointing ending. It is composed of about twenty vertebrae, and its length at rest—considering also the sloping croup—must extend beyond the point of the hock. Thick at the root and tapering evenly toward the tip, it must be well furnished with dense, long hair and free of fringes due to the presence of abundant undercoat. Naturally, while the hair implanted along the dorsal surface of the tail lies over it, the hair implanted on the ventral surface falls freely and may give the impression of a fringed tail. In reality, the difference is clear and depends essentially on the amount of undercoat, which is scarce in truly fringed tails, as well as on the type of coat, which in our breed must never be fine or silky. In other words, the thick, harsh texture of the outer coat, combined with the dense undercoat, will never allow an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog to have a fringed tail.

The tail set is low and joins the sacrum in a very harmonious way, without any visible emergence above the croup. The Standard describes the tail at rest as hanging, but it is worth clarifying that one should not expect a tail hanging like a “salami,” because it is normal for the distal third, even at rest, to be slightly raised. The Standard makes no mention of the hook-shaped (or “crook”) closure of the last caudal vertebrae, yet since the 1970s it has not been uncommon to encounter subjects with this feature, which inevitably recalls the tail of the Pyrenean Mountain Dog. On this point, two evaluations are possible: either the hooked tail is ignored because it is not listed among the faults, or it is penalised because it is not indicated by the Standard as a breed characteristic, as it is for its French cousin. In general, the hook is an anomaly affecting the distal caudal vertebrae and, unless explicitly recognised by the Standard as a typical feature, it should be penalised. Moreover, since the hook is ossified, the tail will never reach beyond the hock and will therefore be short.

In movement, the tail is carried on the same line as the back, with the last third uniformly curved upward. This carriage results from the length and inclination of the croup which, if correct, will never allow the tail to be flagged or curled. Thus, curled tails over the back— a serious fault that inevitably recalls the *arroundera* of the Patou—must be rejected, but the opposite defect should also be penalised: lifeless, drooping tails even in action (“dead tail”) are unnatural and do not belong to any canine

breed. The Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, especially males, shows the tail, moves it, and rarely manages to keep it hidden.

Unless a fault in the tail set is detected, a tail carried somewhat more cheerfully than described in the Standard—especially in males and provided it never invades the area above the topline—should be preferred to a tail carried lifelessly.

## ● FOREQUARTERS

***Straight limbs seen from the front and in profile; forequarters well balanced in relation to the body, and the various parts of the forequarters are well proportioned between them.***

Here the concept of harmony and substance—repeated several times in the Standard and essential for an excellent Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog—is reaffirmed. The length of the entire limb, from shoulder to foot, must be well proportioned to the body, and each individual bone composing it must be harmoniously related to the other skeletal segments of the limb.

In the section below the elbow, the forelimb allows an immediate assessment of bone structure, because it is primarily the thickness of the forearm that expresses its substance. In our breed, the bone must be strong and robust; therefore, the forearm must have a substantial diameter, though never exaggerated, otherwise the bone becomes *spongiosa*. Spongy bone is recognised by its perfectly cylindrical shape and the excessive swelling of the forearm and metacarpus. Despite this disproportionate thickness, the bone is hollow inside—therefore weak and prone to fracture. Spongy bone, by natural law, has a showy appearance but a low specific weight; otherwise, it would be extremely heavy, forcing the muscles to work harder to move it. To avoid this waste of energy, bone that is excessive in volume reduces its specific weight, becoming less substantial in order to lighten muscular effort. As the saying goes: *all smoke and no fire*.

What must therefore be sought is strong, solid bone—substantial if you like—but never out of harmony with the dog's overall balance. Those accustomed to seeing lines of Maremmano-Abruzzes Shepherds working on pastures for generations know exactly what strong, dry bone looks like, generally accompanied by a large, round, high foot.

The Standard requires that the limbs be perfectly straight, which is obvious for a breed still used for hard work on pastures. Certainly, no degree of toeing-in or toeing-out can be forgiven in the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog. However, when speaking of forelimb alignment in general, reference must be made to the guiding axis of the entire limb, consisting of the imaginary line drawn from the centre of the shoulder suspension to the centre of the foot. Only when the entire forelimb overlaps this axis will the dog distribute its weight evenly, without forcing the joints into damaging strain.

## ● SHOULDER

***Long, oblique with powerful muscles. Must be really free in movement. In length measures about 1/4 of the height at the withers. Its obliqueness below the horizontal is 50°– 60°.***

The shoulder must always be long, because only in this way does it provide a greater surface area for muscle attachment and allow a wider extension of the limb during reach. The Standard states that the length of the scapula must be “at least” 1/4 (25%) of the height at the withers, clearly indicating that this is the minimum limit. An excellent shoulder in the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog measures almost 3/10 (30%) of the height at the withers, perfectly reflecting the principles of Cynognostics regarding the ideal ratio between scapula and humerus.

Well-laid-back scapulae are considered optimal for trotters, in which the ideal shoulder angle is around 55–60 degrees relative to the horizon. A straight shoulder covers, with its outer tip, part of the cervical vertebrae, giving the clear impression of a short neck. Naturally, the number of cervical

vertebrae is always the same; only their orientation changes. As a consequence, the dog will be unable to express proper reach, covering little ground with each stride.



*Gomito non aderente al torace con conseguente dispersione di forze.*

The scapula, like the upper two-thirds of the humerus, must be firmly attached to the body, which occurs—besides being aided by correct rib spring—only if the muscle bundles surrounding it are toned and well developed, giving the shoulder a sculpted appearance. The tips of the scapulae must be well spaced from each other, and for this to occur, the chest must have significant transverse diameters, though without becoming barrel-shaped.

#### ● UPPER ARM

*Set close to the body in its upper two thirds, with powerful muscles. The obliqueness below the horizontal varies between 55° and 60°; its length measures about the 30% of the height at the withers. Its position is more or less parallel with the median plane of the body. The scapulo-humeral angle varies between 105° and 120°.*

Cynognostics tells us that in a trotter the upper arm must be slightly longer than the shoulder, and the Standard specifies for the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog an ideal humerus length—its anatomical bony base—equal to 30% of the height at the withers. The Standard also states that its inclination relative to the horizon forms an angle of 55–60 degrees, but in fact the ideal inclination of

the humerus in our breed can reach 65°. According to a rule of animal kinematics, the scapula is always more oblique than the humerus; that is, the angle it forms with the horizon (50°–60° in our breed) is always smaller than the angle formed by the humerus with the horizon. For this reason, the ideal inclination of the humerus relative to the horizon ranges from 55° to 65°. The ideal scapulo-humeral angle therefore varies from 105° to 125°. Consequently, the average reference scapulo-humeral angulation should be placed at 115°.

A slightly shorter upper arm causes the dog, when standing, to be thrown forward onto the forehand, and its gait will appear abnormal due to the reduced reach during movement, with a tendency toward a “stepping” action reminiscent of the Andalusian horse: the forelimb, driven by an ideal hindquarter, is unable to extend forward, and so the dog, in order to maintain balance, “corrects” the movement by lifting the forearm upward instead of projecting it forward, ultimately covering less ground. In light of this, a dog that tends to step must be heavily downgraded.

#### ● ELBOW

*Normally close to the chest, covered with soft loose skin. Parallel to the median plane of the body. Point of elbow must be on an imaginary vertical line from the rear angle of the shoulder blade. The humero-radial angle varies between 145° and 150°.*

The elbows must lie close to the ribcage, which results from what has already been said regarding the correct alignment of the entire forelimb and the proper rib spring. The Standard provides a clear description for correctly assessing forelimb alignment: the imaginary line dropped perpendicularly to the ground from the caudal tip of the scapula must pass through the tip of the elbow and skim the entire posterior profile of the forearm.

A barrel chest, with excessively sprung ribs, pushes the scapula and humerus outward, and the elbows inevitably cannot remain close. The opposite defect occurs when the chest has insufficient

transverse diameter, causing the elbows to be too tucked in and sunken; in movement, they almost always wobble due to the lack of support from the ribcage.

Since the forearm must always be perpendicular to the ground, forming a 90° angle with it, and considering the humerus inclination of 55° to 65° relative to the horizontal, the 145°–155° humero-radial angle follows naturally.

## ● FOREARM

*Straight and vertical, heavily boned. The length slightly supersedes the length of the upper arm.*

The forearm must always be perfectly perpendicular to the ground, both when the dog is viewed from the front and from the side. The forearm allows an immediate assessment of the dog's bone substance; therefore, from a lateral view, the carpal–cubital groove must be clearly visible—especially in the section closest to the carpus—as it provides a clear indication of the dryness of the tissues and of the strength of the tendon (of the flexor carpi ulnaris muscle), which will consequently appear well detached.

The length of the forearm must be approximately 35% of the height at the withers. This is a very important measurement to prevent short-legged subjects and excessively long bodies. A short forearm, in fact, results in limited ground coverage during movement. In the current version of the Standard, the information regarding the height of the forelimb from the elbow to the ground has inexplicably disappeared; however, given the importance of this cinometric value, we can borrow it from previous versions of the Standard, where it was set at nearly 53% of the height at the withers. An Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must therefore never be low on the limbs, but harmoniously long-legged, giving the impression of an agile animal with effortless movement. A short-legged dog can never be considered a subject of quality.

## ● CARPUS/WRIST

*In extension of the vertical line of the forearm. Strong, clean, smooth and of good thickness; the pisiform bone is clearly protruding.*

During the dog's movement, the carpi act as shock absorbers. Thanks to their many small bones, which allow a certain degree of compression, the carpus also functions as a cushion between the bones of the forearm and those of the metacarpus. On its posterior surface protrudes the pisiform, an accessory bone of great importance in movement, as it represents the main lever arm for the flexor muscles of the metacarpus and the insertion point of the medial ligament. For this reason, the more prominent it is, the greater the power of the muscle that uses it as a lever. This explains why, when the pisiform bone is well pronounced, the forelimb is well furnished with muscle.

## ● METACARPUS (PASTERN)

*The length neither too short nor too high. Lean with a minimum of sub-cutaneous tissue. Seen in profile is slightly oblique towards the front.*

The metacarpus must show a slight inclination, with a bit of elasticity, because in this way it provides a degree of shock absorption during movement. When this region, viewed laterally, appears perfectly perpendicular to the ground, it is rigid and therefore unable to perform the cushioning action required during trotting on uneven terrain. Generally, a straight, non-inclined metacarpus is also short, and the dog is described as short-jointed. In such cases, the vertical line of alignment falls at the centre of the foot. However, the metacarpus must not be excessively slanted either, because such weak tendinous support would lead to wasted energy during movement and make the dog prone to injury. In this case, the vertical line of alignment falls far from the posterior margin of the foot, and

the dog will inevitably lose endurance, as the carpus becomes painful in a short time. In a trotter such as the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, the metacarpus has the correct inclination when the vertical line dropped from the elbow joint, running along the median line of the forearm, reaches the ground skimming the back of the foot.

## ● FOREFEET

***Large, of roundish shape, well closed toes, covered with short thick hair, nails preferably black, but brownish tolerated.***

The foot, rounded in shape—known as “cat-foot”—with well-arched toes, has a greater capacity for flexion and extension compared to the “hare-foot,” whose toes, already partially extended, offer less shock-absorbing ability. In fact, the entire forelimb has the primary function, during movement, of absorbing the impact the dog receives at each step on uneven ground, and the foot is the first structure to perform this function.

Fully pigmented black pads are essential when assessing the overall excellence of a dog’s pigmentation. For the same reason, black nails are considered ideal; however, on this point one may be tolerant in judging, rewarding subjects that have them without penalising those with white nails.

## ● HINDQUARTERS

***Seen as a whole: limbs are straight when seen from behind and in profile. In proportion to the body and with the various parts harmoniously connected.***

From the lateral view—except for the metatarsus, which is always perpendicular to the ground—all other bony segments are inclined, because their inclination determines the functional elasticity of the limb in motion. Viewed from behind, the hindlimb must be vertical to the ground. The vertical line dropped from the tip of each buttock to the ground must divide the limb into two equal parts, and all the bones of the pelvic limb must lie on a plane parallel to the sagittal plane of the trunk. Any deviation from perfect alignment constitutes a fault, as it dissipates the propulsive potential of the push. The severity of the fault is proportional to the degree of deviation.

When the hindlimb is viewed laterally, the perpendicular dropped from the tip of the buttock to the ground must skim the tips of the toes. The harmony required for all components of the hindlimb—both in relation to the body and among the segments themselves—derives from the general concept, repeated several times, that the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog must appear a highly harmonious dog in every respect, with no exception for the hindlimb.

## ● THIGH

***Long, slightly oblique, broad with protruding muscles and the rear edge slightly convex. The coxo-femoral (hip bone) angle is about 100°.***

The length of the thigh—and therefore of the femur, which is its anatomical base—is always an asset in working breeds such as ours, because greater length corresponds, in the dynamics of movement, to a wider swing of the entire hindlimb, both in extension and in flexion. However, there is a limit of functional economy to this length, and that limit is determined by the femoro-tibial angle. The longer the femur, the more inclined the tibia must become in order to allow the dog to stand. This automatically results in an excessive reduction of the femoro-tibial angle, which will therefore be much more closed than the 135–140 degrees that, as indicated by all previous Standards before the current one, is the ideal measurement for our breed. In short, the correct femoro-tibial angle represents the limiting factor for the length of the femur.

The ideal inclination of the femur in trotters relative to the horizon is established at approximately 70°, which, added to the 30° inclination of the croup (also relative to the horizon), produces the ideal

coxo-femoral angle of about  $100^{\circ}$ . Great attention must be paid to this point in judging, because from this angulation all other angles of the hindlimb follow in cascade.

The muscular substance of the thigh must show its muscular prominences as much as possible, despite the long coat of our breed. The correct development of the thigh muscles can nevertheless be assessed from the latero-posterior profile, which—when important muscle masses and a correctly inclined croup are present—will appear clearly convex. The so-called flat thigh is not suitable for a working dog such as the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog and should always be highlighted as a fault. In such cases, the latero-posterior profile of the thigh appears straight or, in more severe cases, concave.



*Correct angulations*



*Open angulations*



*Short metatarsus*

### ● STIFLE (KNEE)

***Firm, well placed in the vertical axe. The femoro-tibial angle not excessively angulated.***

The stifle must lie, together with the entire hindlimb, on a plane parallel to the sagittal plane of the trunk, never protruding either inward or outward. In fact, in a dog placed in a forced stance, a very slight outward deviation of the stifle may be forgiven, provided it does not increase during movement, as this would dissipate the propulsive force of the hindquarters.

### ● LOWER THIGH

***The length is a little less than the thigh. Obliqueness below the horizontal is about  $60^{\circ}$ . Strong bone, muscles lean and the groove in the leg well marked.***

The tibia is a very important connecting bone because it lies at the centre of the bony segments of the pelvic limb. The importance of its length is crucial both for the reasons repeatedly mentioned regarding the thigh and because, along the posterior margin of the lower leg, lies the Achilles tendon, which must be strong, taut and clearly visible. The tibial groove, in fact, is always evident. However, the length of the tibia must not be exaggerated, because the longer it is, the more inclined it becomes and, consequently, the more closed the femoro-tibial and tibio-metatarsal angles will be. The correct length of the lower leg—allowing the dog to stand without having to strain one muscle or another—is slightly shorter than the length of the thigh.

### ● HOCK JOINT

***Quite thick and broad. The angle varies between  $140^{\circ}$  and  $150^{\circ}$ .***

The hock joint must always have very strong bone structure in all breeds, with well-defined bony prominences to allow for solid tendon attachments. The ideal tibio-metatarsal angle is approximately  $145^{\circ}$ , therefore not an excessively closed angulation. It must be penalised if greater than  $150^{\circ}$ , as this

would indicate a tibia that is too short, or if less than 140°, as this would be associated with an excessively long tibia.

### ● METATARSUS/REAR PASTERNS

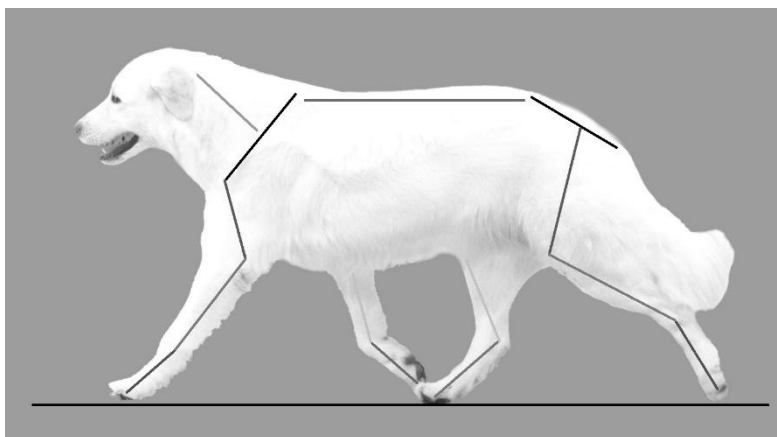
***Strong, lean and broad, neither too long nor too short. The presence of dewclaws is tolerate.***

Its surfaces must be dry, and the point of the hock must appear sharp and prominent, because the powerful gastrocnemius muscles act upon it, playing a crucial role in the propulsion of the hindquarters. This is why a weak, fine hock must be penalised without hesitation. What has been said regarding the circumference of the bone applies here just as it does for the forearm. The ideal length of the metatarsus—which corresponds, for clarity, to the height of the hock—is 31% of the height at the withers, a measurement we derive from previous versions of the Standard. The metatarsus must therefore never be low, so as to complete the hindlimb harmoniously and ensure maximum propulsive potential. The Standard allows the presence of dewclaws; therefore, unlike in the past, when their presence resulted in disqualification, today a dog with one or both dewclaws must not be penalised in any way.

### ● HIND FEET

***Large, not as roundish in shape as forefeet, well closed toes, covered with short thick hair, nails preferably black, but brown is tolerated.***

The hind foot is slightly more elongated than the front foot because it does not need to absorb the impact with the ground.



### ● GAIT/MOVEMENT

***Walk and extended trot.***

The Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog has a body inscribed in a rectangle, and its angulations and proportions predispose it to the trot rather than the gallop. According to the Standard, continuous pacing is always a serious fault. Certainly, the construction and proportions of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog do not naturally lead it to pace; however, the dog—just like the wolf—may adopt the pace as an energy-saving gait, and this should not be considered surprising.

The Standard dedicates very few words to movement, and this has been the case in all its versions since 1924. The only recommendation it gives is that at every step and at any gait the dog must cover a great deal of ground. But this is insufficient to evaluate the correct and typical gait of the breed, which must above all show great ease of movement, without any hesitation, never giving the impression of dragging itself. It is a heavy mesomorph that is agile, not a light brachymorph with a heavy trot; therefore, its movement is never clumsy. It certainly does not have a feline gait, but it must never struggle after only a few laps of the ring. Let us remember that the breed is required to walk

for entire days, with few breaks, over terrain that severely tests bone structure, angulations and topline; therefore, it cannot become fatigued after just a couple of laps on a carpeted floor.

Another very important aspect to observe in an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog in motion is its attitude: never over-excited or overly animated. Its demeanour is free from nervousness, as if what happens around it does not particularly disturb it. To use a mechanical comparison, our dog moves like a diesel engine, not like a petrol turbo, and this stems from its correct constitutional type.

Its movement is correct when it shows, with regular rhythm, strong propulsion from the hindquarters, with steady hocks and hind limbs that contract and extend fluidly, without jerks or interruptions; a firm topline, without dips or swayings that would directly cause a noticeable rolling of the trunk's skin; a reach capable of collecting all the thrust from the hindquarters, with a natural forward—not upward—extension of the forelimb segments; the neck almost horizontal, in continuation with the topline, with the nose aligned vertically with the forward footprint of the forelimb. It is unacceptable for an Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog to show faults in movement because, if a guardian working as a defensive escort for grazing flocks loses ease and power of movement, much of its functional value is lost.

## ● SKIN

***Tight in all parts of the body; rather thick. Black pigmentation of the third eyelids as well as the pads.***

The skin of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog has a thickness that cannot be described as thick like that of a Neapolitan Mastiff nor thin like that of a Pointer. Over the entire body it has a moderate thickness, yet it must never form folds nor show any sign of dewlap. On the face, however, it is thinner, to the point that there is not even the hint of wrinkles, and the sub-orbital region appears slightly chiselled. With the correct thickness, the skin is also well-fitted to the body. As we have seen when discussing the relevant regions, the Standard requires black pigmentation for all mucous membranes (nose, eyelid rims and lip margins). In this paragraph—though it would have been more appropriate to place it under the section on the eyes—black pigmentation of the third eyelid is also recommended. Depigmentation, even unilateral, of the nictitating membrane should be taken into consideration because it forms part of the dog's overall pigmentation pattern, and it also disrupts the typical breed expression, making the gaze appear less reassuring, especially when unilateral due to the disturbing asymmetry.

## ● HAIR

***Very well furnished. Hair long, rather harsh to the touch, close to straight horsehair. Flat lying on the body, slight wave is tolerated. The hair forms an important collar around the neck and fringes of limited length on the edge of the hindquarters. But the hair is short on the muzzle, on the skull, the ears and front of the limbs. On the body the length of the hair reaches 8 cm. The undercoat is only abundant in the winter.***

The adherence of the coat to the body must not be interpreted in an exaggerated way, and above all it must not be confused with a falling coat, which is generally associated with scarce undercoat and with a different texture of the guard hair. A sign of this defect is the faulty and non-functional central parting that, running along the entire back, divides the coat into two sections. In such a case, the dog can never be considered of high quality, as it lacks protection from water and cold. The very dense winter undercoat, woolly and compact like felt, traps the base of the hard guard hair, preventing it from lying flat against the body. Only the apical portion, which emerges from the thickness of the undercoat, settles along the body. The adherence of the coat referred to in the Standard therefore concerns the undercoat layer, not the dog's body itself, and this is why the typical coat gives volume to our dog.

The texture of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog's coat has always been described as "semi-vitreous," a term that, although accurate in Italian, has disappeared from the current Standard because it is not easily understood internationally. We can therefore say that the coat of our dog must be sufficiently firm and almost straight, not curly. A slight wave is permitted, especially in the regions where the coat is longer, whereas a generally curly coat results in disqualification.

Thus, the typical coat of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog has a very dense undercoat (in winter) and a guard coat of good substance, with sufficient thickness, rather harsh to the touch, straight or at most slightly wavy, resting on the dense undercoat without being drooping. Shaggy and voluminous, it gives the dog fullness without altering its natural outlines. The rich collar of hair is typical of males and is therefore a secondary sexual characteristic; it cannot be expected to be equally prominent in females, which show longer and more noticeable hair in that region, but without exaggeration. A soft, dry, thin, goat-like coat does not belong to the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog and must be penalised just like curliness.

## ● COLOUR

***Solid white. Shades of ivory, pale orange or lemon is tolerated but only in certain limits.***

To better understand the colour of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, some premises must be made. Solid white is the colour of domestication and symbolically of valuable animals. According to shepherds, it is also the colour that characterises the dogs most attached to the flock, as it distances them from the wild canid. For the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, the solid white coat is a hallmark of typicity, being the only colour allowed, and it is difficult to select because any shade of a different colour must be avoided while maintaining a very high degree of pigmentation of the mucous membranes.

It is essential to emphasise first of all that, within dog breeds, there are different types of white, and that this colouration is not the result of a single mutation but of the action of multiple genes, since in dogs there is no single mutation responsible for white. Put simply, we can say that solid white is a colour "constructed" by humans by combining various mutations which, interacting together, produce the desired chromatic effects.

To better understand the typical white of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog and the mechanisms by which this colour is genetically transmitted, we must mention the two different combinations of genes that lead to a solid coat that is nonetheless defined as white.

The "sw" white has been obtained by selecting black-patched dogs with progressively smaller patches until their complete disappearance. The resulting white is never dirty, and the coat may show only a few small, well-defined black spots, generally around one eye, on an ear, or at the base of the tail; however, the white itself remains absolutely pure because the "sw" allele inhibits eumelanin completely, effectively emptying the hair of any pigment. There is therefore no lightening process involved. This is the so-called "snow white," typical for example of the Dogo Argentino, but it does not belong to the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog. Dogs with "sw" white typically show more or less extensive areas lacking pigment on the lip margins, eyelid rims, and pads, and in more severe cases, on the nose. This is why the presence of depigmented areas in the mucous membranes must be grounds for disqualification in the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog, as it represents a genetic background foreign to the breed, whereas in the adult Dogo Argentino it is considered only a fault.

The "ce" white, instead—the one typical of the Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog—is determined by a gene that causes maximum lightening, though not elimination, of pheomelanin. Dogs with "ce" white are therefore genetically fawn or cream, obtained through extreme lightening of the coat without ever making it transparent. In the selection of this colour, imperfections may occur because ivory

or isabella shades can appear, especially on the ears, as a genetic legacy of the fawn. By consistently selecting breeders that are white without shading, it is possible to maintain a very clean white, which however can never have the same brilliance (transparency) as the “sw” white. For this reason, our white is defined as “milk white,” to distinguish it from the “snow white” of the “sw” type. This is why our Standard, unlike that of the Dogo Argentino: 1) considers slight ivory shades in the coat of our breed acceptable; 2) prescribes disqualification for even a single small black spot.

Abruzzes and Maremma Sheepdog with a yellowish coat—generally with more intense shading on the ears—although showing the correct genetic background for the colour, are the result of poor selection and are therefore faulty; they must never be presented as high-quality subjects. One should not be misled by excuses such as “the dog lives outdoors in the mud” or “it turned yellowish after I started feeding that particular kibble,” all of which are merely attempts to avoid losing a qualification point.

Even “ce” white dogs are exposed to pigmentation issues of the mucous membranes, but (unlike “sw” whites) their nose, lips and eyelid rims tend to fade towards a uniformly brown or reddish colour, never showing flesh-coloured depigmented patches. And it is no coincidence that weak pigmentation is found precisely in those dogs whose coat is not truly clean white, but yellowish or with ivory shading—thus genetically closer to the ancestral fawn.

## ● HEIGHT AT THE WITHERS

***Males 67-73,5 cm. Females 62-70 cm.***

The current measurements are the result of the recent Standard revision requested by ENCI from the FCI. The previous ones were 65–73 cm for males and 60–68 cm for females.

## ● WEIGHT

***Males 40-52 kg. Females 35-45 Kg.***

These weights are also the result of the recent Standard revision requested by ENCI from the FCI. Previously, they were 35–45 kg for males and 30–40 kg for females.

## ● FAULTS

***· Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog and its ability to perform its traditional work.***

***· Repeated pacing.***

The different assessment of the severity of each fault is, or should be, the only subjective aspect of judging, and also the only reason why different qualifications and classifications of a dog may occur without causing any controversy. What must instead remain an objective element—identical and shared by all Judges—is the verification of the breed-type characteristics and the identification of virtues and faults.

### ● SEVERE FAULTS:

***· Convergent cranio-facial axes.***

***· Tail rolled over the back.***

***· Constant pacing.***

***· Size over or under the standard limits.***

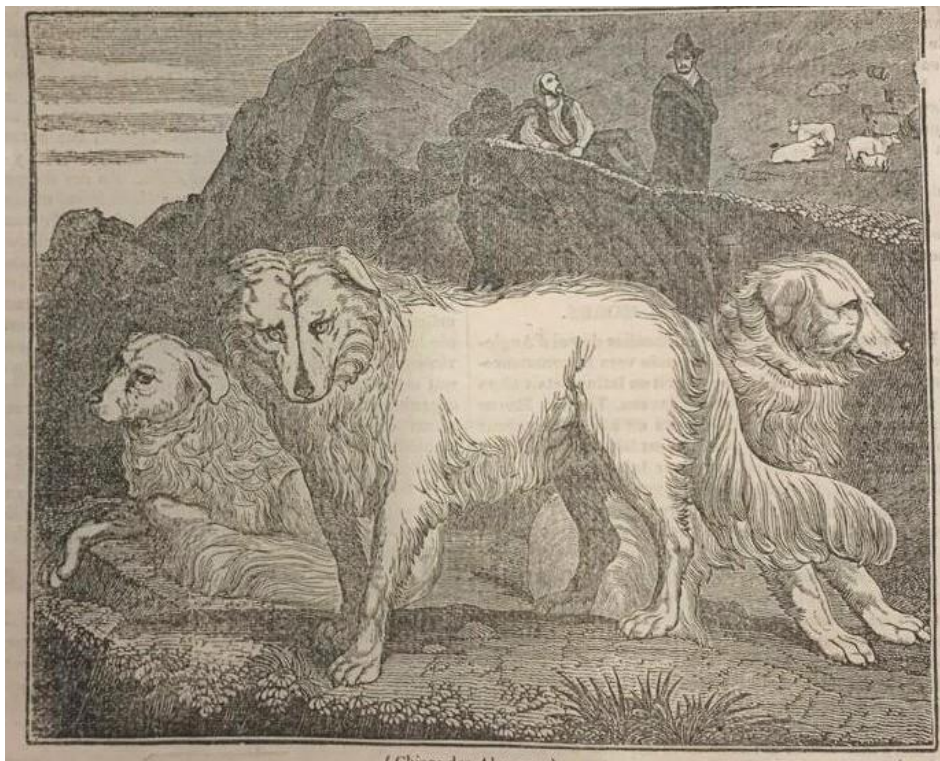
### ● DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:

***· Aggressive or overly shy dogs.***

- Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities.
- Nose completely non-pigmented.
- Muzzle definitely convex or concave.
- Eyelids moderate or bilateral non-pigmented. Wall eye. Cross-eyed.
- Undershot mouth.
- Tailless or short tail, whether congenital or docked.
- Curly coat.
- Colour that is a solid isabella or ivory or have well defined patches of isabella or ivory colour. Black shadings.

**N.B.:** Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum. Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.

## HISTORICAL ICONOGRAPH



First half of the 19th century: from the French magazine *Magasin Pittoresque*



"Calabrische hond of Abruzzzen hond" - Calabrian dog or Abruzzese dog (at the time, 'Calabria' referred to the geographical region corresponding to present-day Apulia).

*Canis lupus familiaris* - 1834 - Print - Iconographia Zoologica - Special Collections University of Amsterdam.

# FAUNA

DEL  
REGNO DI NAPOLI  
OSSIA

## ENUMERAZIONE DI TUTTI GLI ANIMALI

CHE ABITANO LE DIVERSE REGIONI DI QUESTO REGNO  
E LE ACQUE CHE LE BAGNANO

CONTENENTE

LA DESCRIZIONE DE' NUOVI O POCO ESATTAMENTE CONOSCIUTI

CON FIGURE RICAVATE DA ORIGINALI VIVENTI E DEPINTE AL NATURALE.

DI

ORONZIO-GABRIELE COSTA

P. P. DI ZOOLOGIA NELLA REGIA UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI.

DOTTOR IN MEDICINA, E SOCO ORDINARIO DELLA R. ACCADEMIA DELLE SCIENZE,  
DEL R. ISTITUTO D'INCORAGGIAMENTO ALLE SCIENZE NATURALI, E DELL'  
L'ACCADEMIA PORTANIANA DI NAPOLI; DELLA SOCIETA' ECONOMICA DI TERRA  
D'OTRANTO, E DI QUELLA DE' SPECOLATORI DI LEGGE; SOCO CORRISPONDENTE  
DELL'ACCADEMIA DI STORIA NATURALE DI PARMIGI, DELLA FISICO-MEDICA DI  
WUTTENBERG, DELLA GIORNATA DI CATANIA, E DI MOLTE SOCIETA' ECONOMICHE  
DEL REGNO — TRA GLI ARCAI AL CUNTO TIMBRE. CC. CC.

NAPOLI

DALLA STAMPERIA DI AZZOLINO E COMPAGNO  
Strada S. Giov. in Porta N.° 40.

1839.

GEN. Cane; *Canis*, Geoff. <sup>RUSS.</sup>  
Cane familiare; *C. familiaris*.

Var. C. da Pastore od Apruzzese.  
Chien de berger, Fr.  
C. Placco od Alano.—Ch. Braque, Fr.  
C. Danese.—Ch. Danois, Fr.  
C. Levriere.—Ch. Levrier Fr.  
C. Bolognese.  
C. focato.  
C. Riccio, o Barbone.—Barbet, Fr.  
C. Mastino o Corso.

1839, Prof. Oronzo Gabriele Costa of the University of Naples, in his monumental work *Fauna del Regno di Napoli*, within the section 'Gen. (Genus) Dog; *Canis*', classifies the variety 'Var. C. da Pastore od Apruzzese. *Chien de Berger*, Fr.'. This constitutes the earliest known mention in Italy of a shepherd dog with a precise and identifiable denomination in a scientific publication.



*A young donkey attacked by wolves*

Painting by the Abruzzes painter Filippo Palizzi, 19th century.



Filippo Palizzi: *Animals at the fountain*



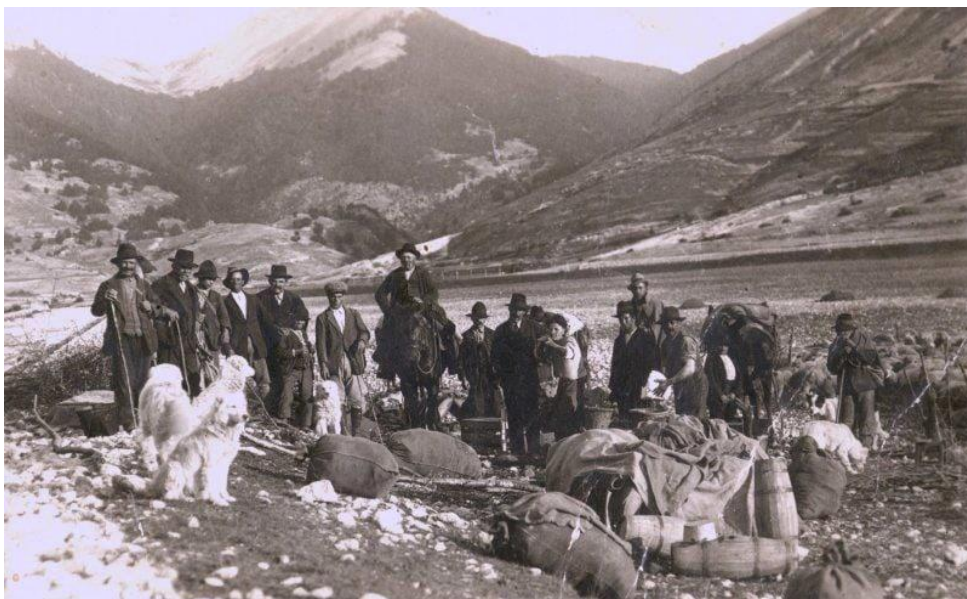
Abruzzes shepherds preparing for the transhumance: late 19th century, near Pescocostanzo (AQ), Ricciardi family archive.



Shepherd on his way to the Tavoliere pastures, early 20th century.



Transhumance departing from Villetta Barrea (AQ), c. 1910–1913. Courtesy of Tarcisio Di Ianni).



Iacone Collection, Museum of Transhumance, Villetta Barrea – AQ