

The first real definition of gait or movement in the Chihuahua did not appear in the AKC standard until 1990. Until that time the statement "A graceful, alert, swift moving little dog" was the only real reference to movement in the standard. The following was added in 1990, and I have always felt that it explains the breed's movement quite well:

*Gait- The Chihuahua should move swiftly with a firm, sturdy action, with good reach in front equal to the drive from the rear. From the rear, the hocks remain parallel to each other, and the foot fall of the rear legs follows directly behind that of the forelegs. The legs, both front and rear, will tend to converge slightly toward a central line of gravity as speed increases. The side view shows good, strong drive in the rear and plenty of reach in the front, with head carried high. The topline should remain firm and the backline level as the dog moves.*

Take special note of the topline/backline statement. If bounce is perceived in the topline/backline during movement, the reach and drive of the dog are not in balance. Movement should be fluid, smooth and quick, but the topline/backline should remain level at all ring speeds. The Chihuahua is a double tracking breed, and while the legs, both front and rear will tend to converge as speed increases, the dog should never single track or cross.

Movement is one of the best indicators of soundness, and sound healthy dogs should be the goal of all purebred breeders. Soundness is essential in toy dogs, as their purpose is to serve as a longtime companion. Over the years, I have seen Chihuahuas that were well into their teens, still moving just as soundly as they did at the age of three. I have always described the Chihuahua as "a dog that wants to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible with a minimum of effort". With the head held high with an almost questing attitude, and the tail up for balance, a Chihuahua with good reach and drive will almost seem to float.

When proper movement, proper type, and proper temperament are present, the result in the show ring can be stunning. Moreover, these three elements must mesh if the dog is to compete in the group ring and beyond. Those new to the breed would do well to study the movement exhibited by champions that have done well in the group ring. These dogs have gone under a great many judges from different breed backgrounds to amass their records, and generally will exhibit the most desirable movement.

The Chihuahua, being a toy dog and companion animal, has never been known for its movement; however, if they all moved as described in the standard, that might change. In fact, if one looks back at the number of group placements and best in shows won by Chihuahuas in the last few years, the breed is beginning to be perceived as one that can move, and move beautifully.

For more information on the Chihuahua, go the parent club website at <http://www.chihuahuclubofamerica.com>. The Chihuahua Club of America National Specialty will be held in Chicago, Ill. Oct. 5,6, and 7, 2007.

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