

The Finnish Lapphund

Illustrated and Explained



History and Purpose

Native to the arctic regions of Western Europe, this breed is descended from the dogs that followed the Saame (also spelled Sami) people of ancient Lapland. They have no known dog breeds as predecessors, or which were mixed with the native dogs. The dogs were primarily camp followers, who have changed their purpose as the lifestyle of the Saame people evolved. In the earliest of time, the dogs helped their masters hunt and guarded the nomadic tents. As time progressed, the Saame began to keep reindeer herds as their primary food source, settled into a less nomadic existence and their dogs became reindeer herders. It is important in understanding the breed, to also understand this primitive lifestyle. To survive, the dogs had to be very hearty and able to withstand extremely cold temperatures. In general, reindeer herds are not driven in the same sense as sheep or cattle, so the herding abilities of the dogs are somewhat different from most modern herding breeds. The dogs were used to keep the herd together, not direct it, so they have a strong instinct to “gather” but not to move the livestock.

Lapphunds, as a breed, were recognized in Finland in the early 1920s, and efforts began to register and preserve breeding stock. The Lappish dogs actually evolved into three distinct breeds, still considered cousins in their native lands. These are the Finnish Lapphund, the Swedish Lapphund, and the Laponian Herder.



The Laponian Herder



The Swedish Lapphund

The Swedish Lapphund is quite similar to the Finnish Lapphund, but was developed by breeders in Sweden from original breeding stock acquired from the portion of Lapland which is primarily in Sweden. Swedish Lapphunds are nearly always solid black, and slightly smaller than Finnish

Lapphunds. Laponian Herders were descended from the same stock as Finnish Lapphunds, and at first were considered to be the same breed. Laponian Herders have a short, dense coat, as compared to the Swedish and Finnish Lapphunds. The Laponian Herders now have a tendency to have a greater length of leg than Finnish Lapphunds, and a more intense work ethic. Today, the breed still primarily kept by the Saame tribe, to aid in reindeer keeping, are the Laponian Herders.

Type is distinct yet variable

The Finnish Lapphund is not a true spitz. It is a herding dog which has descended primarily from spitz-like, wolf-like ancestors. The result is a dog which has some spitz-like characteristics, and some herding dog characteristics. The overall picture of the ideal Finnish Lapphund should be a dog that is quite strongly built, and that strength of body is accentuated by a long, thick coat. Despite this strength of body, there should be an expression of softness. The gentle temperament of the breed should shine through. The genders should be easily distinguishable, with males masculine but still retaining a “teddy bear” look. Bitches should look feminine, without sacrificing the strength of bone and body.

Although a Finnish Lapphund should be easily recognizable as a member of its breed, this is not a cookie-cutter breed. Each dog is unique in its own way. This is particularly emphasized by color, as the wide variety of colors available leaves few dogs that are identically marked.



A male Finnish Lapphund



A female Finnish Lapphund

An ideal male stands 19.5 inches at the shoulder and an ideal female is 17.5 inches. The acceptable range is a variation of 1.5 inches in either direction from these ideals. However, there is no size disqualification and the overall quality of the dog is much more important than the size. Bigger is not better in this breed, and the best specimens are often in the bottom half of the size range.

Balanced, Sound, Strong

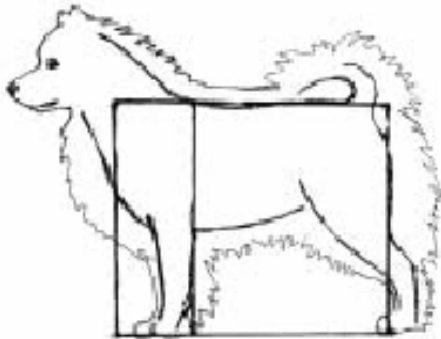
A Finnish Lapphund should be able to work all day, in gruelingly cold temperatures, in deep snow, at a rapid pace, and constantly avoiding danger. This lifestyle requires, above all else, a sound dog that is well balanced and able to adjust easily.

The body should be 10% longer than tall, a ratio of 11:10. This proportion absolutely requires a hands-on examination, as the heavy coat can distort the body proportion and length of neck, giving the illusion of cobbiness. However a truly cobby body is highly undesirable, as it would limit the dog’s ability to make quick turns and leaps required to negotiate in the snow.

Substance should, again, be verified by a hands on examination. Heavy coat can give the impression of “bone” and “body” which is not actually there. A mature Finnish Lapphund is not light of body. A heavy body is a warm body and a warm body is essential for survival in the Arctic. Although never fat, the body will often feel denser and broader to the touch than expected. Care should be taken to ensure that a dog is not faulted for being fat when it is actually broad of body.

Keep in mind that this breed bounces for a living. Not a typical low herding style, the dogs bounce and bark to herd. Reindeer are not easily intimidated by a dog, and Lapphunds do not have “eye”.

Topline should be reasonably level, with a slight rise over the shoulder blades, and a less pronounced rise before the croup. The body is not exaggerated. Neck is medium in length. Loin is medium, croup is slightly oblique, stifle is moderately let down. The chest should reach almost to the elbow, but never beyond, and should be moderately wide. A narrow chest is more tolerable than a broad chest, as a too broad a chest can restrict free and agile movement.



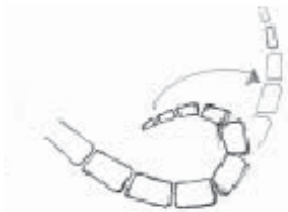
This sketch shows proportions



A male with good body proportions

The Tail

The tail is not tight to the back. It is over the back when moving, but may drop when standing. It is set on slightly lower than the topline, so there is a discernable rise above the tail. It should never be kinky, but may have a J hook in the end.



Correct J-hook, which can be straightened



Incorrect fused bones

A Finnish Lapphund which is standing, at ease, is calm and serene. This dog will quite likely drop its tail, as the breed does not have a tight tail set. Dogs (males in particular) can be taught to stand and bait with their tail over their back, but it is not a fault for a standing dog to drop its tail. In females, this is even more common. Both sexes should carry their tail over and touching their back or side when moving. It is important in distinguishing this breed from other spitz-type dogs, to understand that the

tail does not “snap” to the back. Even a tail which is carried over the back does not need to be so tight that skin touches skin. The tail lays gently on the back without “nesting” in the hair of the back. It is relatively high set on a slightly sloping croup. A too tightly curled tail is undesirable. However, a tail that is too low set will not bend all the way over the back, and is also faulty. The tail should be loose and lively and indicate the dog’s mood.

A correct tail, when hanging down, will reach almost to the hock (the actual tail, not the hair) and will not be curled or curved. A J-shaped “shepherd’s hook” at the very end of the tail is permissible, but not preferred. It should be possible to straighten it out with the fingers. A kink in the tail, caused by the fusion of two bones, is a very serious fault.



Children and Lappies go together well

Temperament

The most essential characteristic of the Finnish Lapphund is patience. This breed was used at a time when reindeer herds grazed great ranges and were continuously followed and watched by their herdsmen. The dogs were used to watch the herd and keep it together. This type of work requires long periods of waiting, interspersed with short burst of intense activity. In addition, winters sometimes meant long periods of no activity at all. The dogs had to become accustomed to easily changing from a very low activity level to a very high one, often with little warning.

Like any breed which lived closely with human in the harsh arctic environment, Lapphunds share a strong natural bond with people. Unlike the sled dog breeds, however, this bond more clearly places the human in a superior position. Lapphunds love people and are eager to be with them, but they always expect the human to be in charge.

Temperament can hardly be evaluated in the show ring. However, it is important to remember that Lapphunds are never harsh. They are not snappy or sharp, and they are not fighters. Although males may occasionally grumble at each other, particularly around a bitch, they should still tolerate each other. A mature Lapphund interacting with a human stranger should be open, friendly, but not overly so, and clearly acknowledge the human as superior. Inexperienced dogs and particularly puppies, may roll over, belly up. A Lapphund, particularly a bitch, which lowers its head, body, and/or tail, should never be faulted for shyness, as this is typical of the normal temperament of the breed.



A Lapphund male with lovely expression.



A Lapphund female with lovely expression.

Head and Expression

General impression of the head, particularly when looking straight into the face, is very soft. The expression should be tender and rather like a teddy bear. When viewed from the front, the face has a rounded appearance. The frontal furrow, between the eyes, is clearly visible, even in a heavy coated dog. Coloring in the face varies tremendously. Markings may or may not be present and may vary considerably in color. Nose leather, lips, and eye rims should be black in dogs which carry black pigment, but are, by necessity, brown in brown dogs. Blonde dogs often have pale or flesh colored noses, and this should not be considered a severe fault. Butterfly noses are common and are also not considered a severe fault.



Example of a butterfly nose

Bite should be scissors. Level bites are tolerated. Overshot or undershot are serious faults. Missing premolars are uncommon, but do occur. At this point, missing teeth are not considered a fault. (Note: After all, the breed never bites for a living. It is considered totally unacceptable – if not insane – for a dog to “grip” a reindeer. And, of course, they should never even consider biting a person.)



Two examples of good heads, proper eyes and ear set.

Eyes and Ears

Eyes are placed rather broadly and are almond in shape, not round. The color of the eyes is preferably as dark as possible, but lighter colored dogs often have lighter eyes, which is tolerated.

Ears are medium in size, somewhat rounded at the tip and well furred, but not so small as to be lost in the heavy ruff around the face. (Note: large ears are very common in the breed, but not considered ideal.) The inner edge of the ear should be set on at a level even with the center of each eye. Ears may be erect or tipped. Both are perfectly acceptable. Tipped ears break at approximately mid-ear, so that the folded ear just covers the erect portion. Drop ears are a fault.



Faulty drop ears



Ears too large

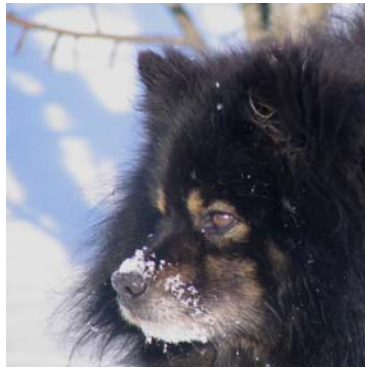


Correct tipped ears

Proportions of the skull

The skull is broad and slightly convex, the stop is well defined, and muzzle is strong, broad, and shorter than the skull.

It is essential to check the physical proportions of the head with the hands, as heavy coat can easily hide a light head.



The head in profile

When looking directly down on the head from above, the skull is roughly square, being approximately the same distance from stop to occiput as from side to side. The length of the muzzle, from tip of nose to stop, should be slightly less than the length of the skull. This is by no means a snub nosed breed, so an extremely short muzzle is uncharacteristic. The muzzle should taper slightly from tip of nose, blending smoothly into the broad skull. The muzzle is not pointed, but neither is it square.

When looking at the dog in profile, the depth of skull and muzzle, from top to bottom, should be clearly defined. The skull should roughly form a cube, being the same dimension from the top of the slightly domed skull, to the jawbone, as it is from stop to the occiput. The stop is well defined. The underjaw is well developed and the chin is visible.



Structure – Standing

Standing, from the front and from the rear, limbs are parallel. Front and rear angulation should be well balanced, clearly marked, but not over angulated. A properly laid back shoulder results in front legs which are well under the body, giving the dog a visible, but not pronounced, forechest. Pasterns are slightly oblique and flexible, neither too upright nor too bent. The rear should appear powerful, with well defined angles, muscular thighs, and a rather short hock.



Movement

Strong, well timed, easy, single-tracking, well balanced, suggesting agility. At a trot, legs on each side move in the same plane, feet pointing forward. The movement of the Finnish Lapphund is not unusual or extreme. It is the movement of a good general purpose working dog. As the dog starts to trot, observation from the front or rear will reveal that the limbs gradually angle toward a center line, so that when it is at a full trot, the footsteps would appear in a line. Front and rear legs on the same side should move in the same plane, so watching the dog coming or going, the further limbs are obscured by the nearer ones.



Side Gait

Good reach and drive. Not low moving, but the head should drop. Tail over the back. Side gait is effortless and ground covering. The front legs should be seen to be reaching out as far as the lowered muzzle of the dog. The rear legs should kick enough that the pads would be visible to someone standing behind. It should always be kept in mind that working Lapphunds do not trot, they gallop.



Coat

Important points: The Finnish Lapphund is presented naturally, Feet trimmed to tidy, only. Coat is profuse and double, stand off. Coarse, weather resistant. Males have more ruff.

Finnish Lapphunds are presented NATURALLY. Except for tidying of the feet and hocks, coats should not be trimmed, nor should it be sprayed with substances intended to hold the hair erect.

The coat must be thick, profuse, harsh and weather resistant. The outer coat is not particularly shiny, but has a matte like look to it. This is the proper water resistant coat which will insulate the dog. Undercoat should be profuse and cause the outer coat to stand up. Outer coat may have a slight wave, which is not preferred, but is permissible as long as it is still harsh. A wavy coat is common on younger dogs, less than two years of age, and will often “mature” to a straight coat. Outer coat should not be so long that it hangs. A flat coat is quite faulty, and would put the dog at a disadvantage in an Arctic environment. Coat on the face, forehead, and fronts of legs is shorter, length of the ruff is more pronounced in males than females, ears are well furred.



Blonde or cream color



Black color



Brown color



Not a brown, this is a richly colored blonde

Color

The charm of a Finnish Lapphund is in the rainbow of colors available. No single color is considered ideal, although there are certainly some colors which are more common than others. Color is defined as

a single primary color on the body, with secondary color or colors allowed on the head, neck, chest, belly, legs, feet, or tail. The primary color must cover at least 51% of the dog. If secondary colors are found in all the areas described, then it is possible that the amount of secondary color would actually exceed 49%, which would be unacceptable.

Solid primary colors are black, brown, or blonde. Black is the most commonly seen, but this does not make it preferred over other colors. Brown is a self colored dog. These dogs are genetically incapable of manufacturing black pigment, so will have brown skin pigment as well as brown coats. Brown coats often fade easily if the dog is in the sun a lot. Most typical browns are quite dark, chocolately, but may be a paler tan color. Blonde dogs (also called tan or cream) can actually range in color from a dark rich tan which is almost red to very pale almost white. Most commonly, they are a light tan. Lighter nose leather pigment in blonde dogs is very common, and should not be severely faulted, although black pigment is preferred. Shading in the coat of all these colors is common and acceptable.

The Finnish Lapphund gene pool includes three genetically distinct types of “sable”. These three color patterns are all considered “solid colors” even though they are actually bands of different colors on each individual hairshaft. In the descriptions below, black pigment may always be replaced with brown pigment, so every where the word “black” is used, it can be replaced, correctly, with “brown”.



Wolfsable. This is a very common, genetically dominate color pattern. Individual hair shafts will have three or five bands of color, always starting with black at the base and ending with black at the tip. The alternating color is lighter, a shade of tan. Like the solids, wolfsables come with or without pattern markings.



Domino. Distinctly different when they are born, this color can actually be difficult to distinguish from a black and tan at maturity, depending on how dark it is. The color is most easily described as similar to

the most common color of a Siberian Husky. The coat is predominately white, with black (or brown or blonde) tips on the longer body coat. The tips may actually be very long, more than 2/3 of the hair shaft, which leaves the dog looking like it had a black body coat unless you part the hair to view the white “roots”. All domino dogs have white on their face, legs and tail, which is quite similar to the tan pattern markings described in the “secondary markings” section.



Fawn Sable. This is the type of sable seen most commonly in collie-type dogs. The body coat is a light shade, usually a tan or fawn color, and the longer hairs are tipped with black. Often, the black tips fade away and the dog will look like a blonde dog. Most often, black hairs can only be found in the tail and round the ears.



Secondary markings

Important points: No markings is fine, may have tan pattern markings, partial tan markings, Irish white, spectacles.

Markings are NOT required. Single color dogs should never be faulted for their color.

Tan pattern markings. This type of pattern marking is common in quite a number of other breeds, such as Doberman Pinchers and Rottweilers. The dog is primarily one of the colors described above, with a lighter color on its face, chest, legs, and tail. Markings on the face include tan spots over the eyes (“eyebrows”), tan on the inside of the ears and tan muzzle except for a dark strip along the top of the muzzle, with the tan extending to the cheeks and down as a bib. There is typically a barbell of tan across the chest. Tan is on all four legs, extending up the back of the front legs to the elbow and up the front of the back legs. A streak of tan runs down the underside of the tail, so is visible when the tail is carried over the back. Incompletely marked dogs are common, with “dark face” black and tans particularly common. The intensity of the tan color may vary from a rich red to almost white. Pattern markings may be present on blonde dogs but are often difficult to distinguish.



Irish white markings. This is the same pattern that is commonly seen in a number of herding breeds. White may appear on the chest and belly, as "socks" on the feet and legs, on the tip of the tail, as a collar around the neck, in a circle around the front half of the muzzle (often called a "milk mustache"), and as a blaze down the forehead and across the center of the muzzle. The extent of Irish white tends to be limited in this breed. A blaze on the chest/belly, some white feet, and the milk mustache, are all quite common. A full white collar and a blaze on the face is uncommon, but acceptable. Dogs with noticeable white markings, plus tan pattern markings, are called "tri-color" in England. In Finland, white markings, even extensive ones, often go without any mention at all.



Spectacles. Highly characteristic of the breed. The absence of spectacles is actually uncommon, and they are preferred in solid black dogs as they add to the expressiveness of the face. Spectacles are formed by a lighter color hair surrounding the eyes in a halo. The extent of the spectacles may vary from a few light hairs to very obvious circles of light color.

Undesirable colors

Saddle – a tan dog with a large patch of black on its back, similar to the color often seen in German Shepherds. In this case, the secondary color, black, is present in an unacceptable area (the back)

Piebald – a white dog with patches of a secondary color. Again, in this case, the secondary color is on the body, which is undesirable.

Brindle – "stripes" of tan alternating with black. Because of the long coat, this color often looks rather mottled. Individual hair shafts are one color or the other, so this is not considered to be a solid color.

Merle – this color does not exist in the breed.



Undesirable Saddle color



Undesirable Piebald



Undesirable Brindle

The overall picture

In the short amount of time available for assessing a dog in the show ring, it is important to understand how to prioritize the various aspects of the picture presented. First and foremost, a Finnish Lapphund should be sound. The dog should look like it could thrive in the arctic, living outside and running much of the day. Although temperament is difficult to assess, it is the second most important aspect of the dog. The head and expression should give the impression of a soft, gentle dog, and the dog itself should appear friendly and cooperative. Keep in mind that the breed is quite submissive to humans. An effort needs to be made to overlook any influence that comes from colors, and presentation should be natural. Minor faults should be overlooked in favor of a dog that give an overall impression of good breed type.

