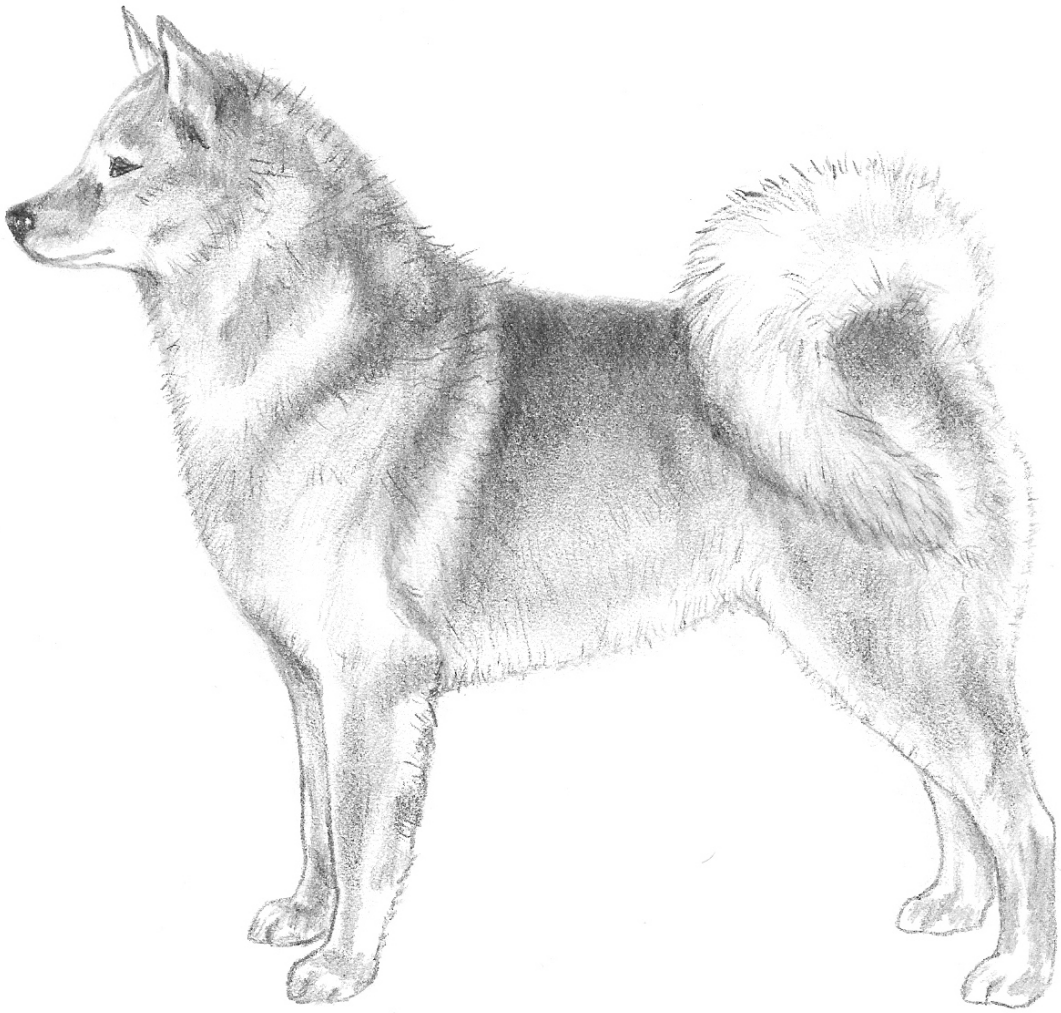
# Illustrated Guide to the Finnish Spitz



4/05/09 by the FSCA Judges Education Committee
Updated 5/20/22
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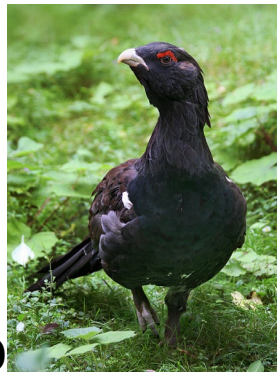


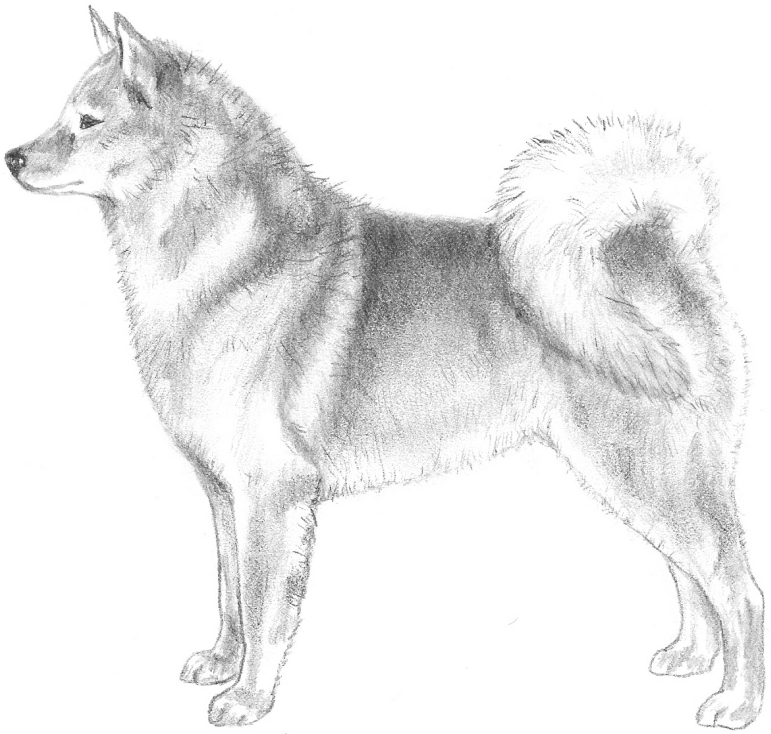
# HISTORY OF THE BREED

The Finnish Spitz is one of the groups of small hunting Spitz breeds and as its name implies was first bred selectively in Finland. While the origin of the Finnish Spitz is unknown, it is known that hundreds of years ago dogs of the same type as Finnish Spitz were already being used for all game hunting and as guard dogs over the whole of Finland. The original goal of the Finnish breeders was to develop a dog that barked well at game in trees and was also beautiful in appearance. Acceptance to the breed register in Finland started in the 1890s, individual dogs similar in type and usage were found mainly in the eastern and northern parts of Finland where there had been a limited opportunity for mixture with other breeds. The first breed standard was established in Finland in 1892 and named the Finnish Barking Bird Dog. While there are relatively few Finnish Spitz in North America, the breed is very common in both Finland and Sweden. It has been developed from pure stock and is an essential part of the Finnish culture. The Finnish Spitz (Suomenpystykorva) was named as the National Dog of Finland in 1979. Many consider the Finnish Spitz as a Finnish National Treasure.

The first known Finnish Spitz imported to the United States was Cullabine Rudolph, from Mrs. Price's kennel in England, in 1959. It is believed, however, that breeding of the Finnish Spitz in the US commenced in the mid-sixties from Finnish imports belonging to Henry Davidson of Minnesota and Alex Hassel of Connecticut.

Richard and Betty Isacoff with Margaret Koehler founded the Finnish Spitz Club of America in 1975. Mrs. Isacoff and Mrs. Koehler formulated the American standard for the breed in 1976, based on the Finnish standard. In November 1983, the American Kennel Club accepted the breed into the Miscellaneous Class. The Board of Directors of the AKC opened the studbook for registration of the Finnish Spitz on August 1, 1987. Assigned to the Non-Sporting Group, the breed became eligible to compete in AKC licensed shows January 1, 1988. The Finnish Spitz Club of America (FSCA) was officially recognized and became a member club of the AKC in 1992.

Except in its native land and Sweden, the Finnish Spitz is primarily a housedog, a faithful companion with particular fondness for children. In some areas of the US it is a prized hunting dog. The Finnish Spitz has functioned since earliest times as a natural bark pointer, who directs a hunter to the location of game by a distinctive bark or yodel, and points at the prey with its head and muzzle when the hunter approaches. As a general rule the Finnish Spitz hunts fairly close to the hunter. It seeks out the intended prey using sight, scent and sound, all the while keeping audio contact with the hunter. In Finland the hunting ability of the breed is so prized that no Finnish Spitz can earn a conformation championship without first proving its worth in the hunting woods and it cannot win a hunting championship until it proves itself in the show ring. Contests are held each year for both Capercaillie (grouse) and Hirve (elk). The Finnish Spitz that wins one of these contests is crowned "King of Barkers".



# General Appearance

***The Finnish Spitz presents a fox-like picture. The breed has long been used to hunt small game and birds. The pointed muzzle, erect ears, dense double coat and curled tail denote its northern heritage. The Finnish Spitz' whole being shows liveliness, which is especially evident in the eyes, ears and tail. Males are decidedly masculine without coarseness. Bitches are decidedly feminine without over refinement.***

***The Finnish Spitz' most important characteristics are its square, well-balanced body that is symmetrical with no exaggerated features, its glorious red/gold coat, bold carriage and brisk movement.***

***Any deviation from the ideal described in the standard should be considered a fault and penalized to the extent of the deviation. Structural faults common to all breeds are as undesirable in the Finnish Spitz as in any other breed, even though such faults may not be specifically mentioned in the standard.***

It is important that dogs can be distinguished from bitches at a distance. The most typical examples of the breed should have the look and behavior of their sex.

The essential characteristics of the Finnish Spitz are those that have enabled the breed to survive for centuries in Finland near the Arctic Circle. While the Finnish Spitz presents a stunning appearance, it is sufficiently substantial to stand up to the wolves and bear in northern Europe.

The general appearance is what can be seen of a dog from across the ring. It must be based on the correct functional type. The general appearance includes the outline of the dog, the structural proportions of the parts of the body in connection with each other, the expression of the dog, size, strength, bearing, color, movement and temperament.

# Size, Proportion, Substance

The Finnish Spitz is a hunting dog. It requires a body size that will allow speed, quickness and agility in movement. This active dog usually hunts alone using its swift movement to cover vast amounts of territory in search of the game being hunted. It must be quick and light on its feet. The Finnish Spitz must be able to keep up this pace from daybreak until dusk, day after day during the hunting season. Thus in the show ring the Finnish Spitz must be lean, firm and muscular without being massive or bulky.

The Finnish Spitz is a smaller than medium sized dog being of medium build. A square, well balanced, symmetrical body is of highest importance. Males may be noticeably larger and stronger, and carrying more coat than females. The aim for breeders with both males and females is towards the middle of the range described, and not to the extremes.

***Size: Height at the withers in dogs 17 ½ to 20 inches; in bitches 15 ½ to 18 inches.***

***Proportion: Square, length from forechest to buttocks equal to height from withers to ground. The coat may distort the square appearance.***

The outline of the breed is square, although guard coat of one or two inches on forechest and buttocks will cause the Finnish Spitz to appear slightly longer than tall.

***Substance: Substance and bone in proportion to the overall dog.***

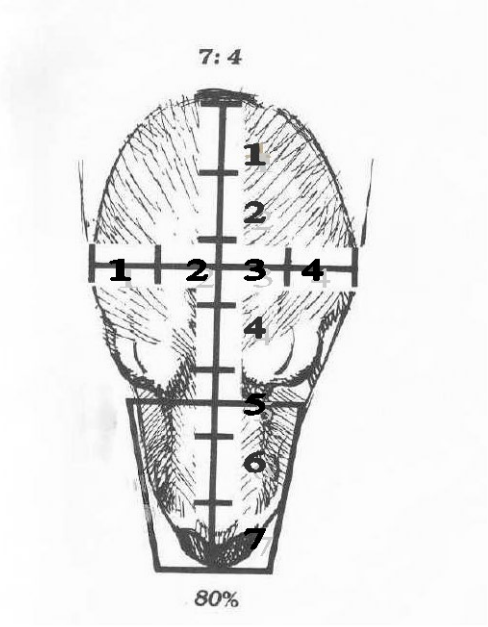
The Finnish Spitz should not have the mass of the Elkhound or even the Norwegian Buhund; nor should he be overly refined. It should always present the appearance of a compact, hard-conditioned hunting dog with medium bone.

# Head

Typical Male Head

Typical Female Head

***Head: Clean-cut and fox-like. Longer from occiput to tip of nose than broad at the widest part of skull in a ratio of 7:4. More refined with less coat and ruff in females than in males, but still in the same ratio. A muscular or coarse head, or a long or narrow head with a snipy muzzle, is to be penalized.***




The shape of the head reflects and sums up the uniqueness of the dog and can enhance the dog's general appearance to give the impression of beauty and nobility, and can be as individual as any other part of the dog.

The Finnish Spitz head must always be in proportion to the body, not too heavy or too fine. The width of the top skull should be equal to the length. There should be a clear difference between the head of a dog and a bitch. A dog's head is powerful and masculine, and a bitch's head is more feminine and refined, though it should not appear weak of lacking in strength.

A muscular or coarse head or a long or narrow head with snipy muzzle is to be faulted.

***Expression: Fox-like and lively.***

Correct Expression

The expression of the Finnish Spitz is very important. The fox-like appearance is lost if the head is too coarse, overdone or narrow and long.

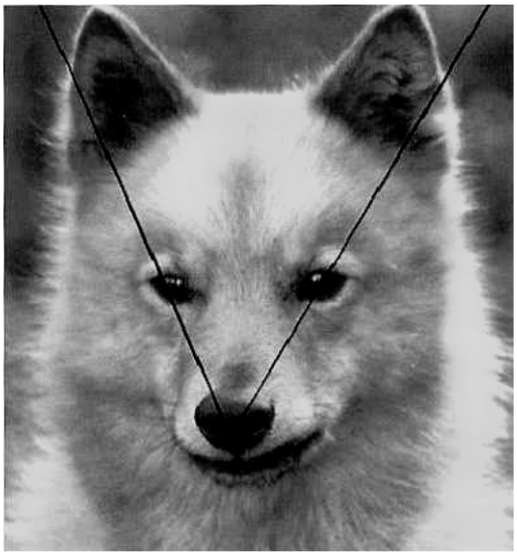
Most Finnish Spitz have a considerable range of expressions with a keen alertness to their surroundings.

***Eyes: Almond-shaped with black rims. Obliquely set with moderate spacing between, neither too far apart nor too close. Outer corners tilted upwards. Dark in color with a keen and alert expression. Any deviation, runny, weepy, round or light eyes should be faulted.***

The keen, fox-like expression of the Finnish Spitz is one of its most essential and distinguishing characteristics. A major factor in achieving this expression is the eye shape and color. The Finnish Spitz eyes are dark, almond shaped and slightly slanting. The black "eye liner" around them emphasizes the eyes.

Eyes that are too light will have a hard and staring expression. Yellow eyes are incorrect. Pale or liver eye rims greatly detract from the desired expression as well. Dark eyes are desired.

The eye must be almond shaped and properly set obliquely in the head. The eye should not be round or too prominent.



Ears Correctly Placed – Set on High

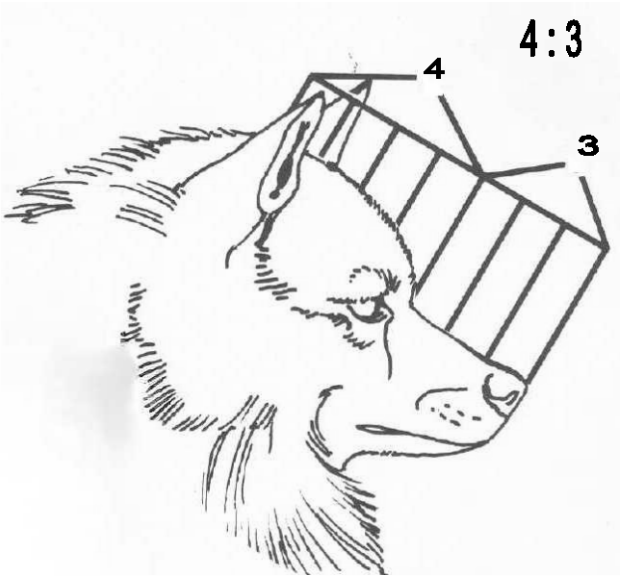
***Ears: Set on high. When alert upward standing, open to the front with tips directly above the outer corner of the eyes. Small, erect, sharply pointed and very mobile. Ears set too high, too low or too close together, long or excessive hair inside the ears are faults.***

Correct ear set can best be assessed when the dog is fully animated. When it is alert the tips of the ears should be directly above the outer corner of the eyes. As the dog relaxes, greater distance between the tips of the ears can be seen. The generally accepted basis for the description of the ear set must begin with a defining line that runs straight from the center of the nose, crosses the center of the eye and ends at the outer edge of the ear. The Finnish Spitz ears should be clearly above this line.

The Finnish Spitz ear is triangular and sharply pointed with minimal rounding of the tip. The ear should be in proportion to the head, and, therefore, should not be too large or too long.

Long hair or excessive hair inside the ears impede the hearing and is to be faulted. Any form of drop, button ear, semi-prick ears, or hooded ears is a fault.

When judging the Finnish Spitz, providing that correct ear carriage has been determined, one should not penalize a dog for failure to 'use' its ears continually. Nor should the Finnish Spitz be penalized for having independently mobile ears which quickly change direction to monitor his environment.




***Skull: Flat between ears with some minimal rounding ahead of the ear-set. Forehead a little arched. Skull to muzzle ratio is 4:3.***

From the front, the head is a perfect blunt wedge shape, fairly broad between the ears and tapering evenly to the end of the full muzzle. There should be no flaring at the cheeks or narrowing at the muzzle. The tapering should be continuous and the end of the muzzle should be blunt and rounded, not sharp and pointed. There should be no appearance of elongation.

The skull is flat between the ears, with some minimal rounding ahead of the ear set. The forehead is slightly arched.

The ratio of skull to muzzle is 4:3 so that quite simply, the muzzle is slightly shorter than the skull.

The skull may be more refined with less coat or ruff in females than in males, but still in the same ratio.

Good Side Profile

***Nose: Black. Any deviation is to be penalized.***

The nose is always black. Whatever the season no change in the color of the nose is permitted.

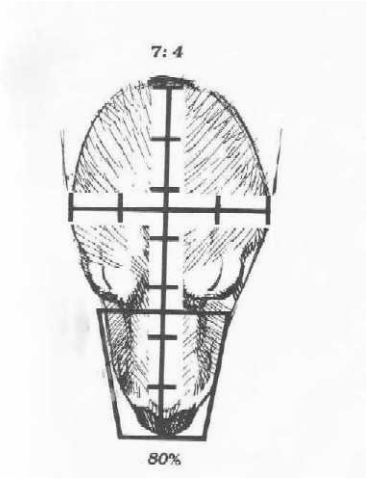
***Lips: Black, thin and tight.***
***Bite:* Scissors bite. *Wry mouth to be severely faulted.***

Overshot or undershot bites, as well as other bite abnormalities are a fault.

***Judges are not required to and should NOT check for full dentition. Check the front only.***

***Stop: Moderate.***

The angle between the nasal bridge and the skull is clearly marked but not exaggerated. The stop should be a harmonious part of the head, and not too deep or square. The stop is well-defined but not abrupt.




***Muzzle: Narrow as above and from the side; of equal width and depth where in insets into the skull, tapering somewhat, equally from all angles. Circumference of the muzzle where the nose begins is 80% of the circumference of the muzzle at its origin.***

The nasal bridge should be straight and slightly tapering. The lower jaw is clearly visible. A weak underjaw, coarse or snippy muzzle or arched nasal bridge is incorrect.

# Neck, Topline, Body

***Neck: Well set, muscular. Clean, with no excess skin below the muzzle. Appearing shorter in males due to their heavier ruff.***

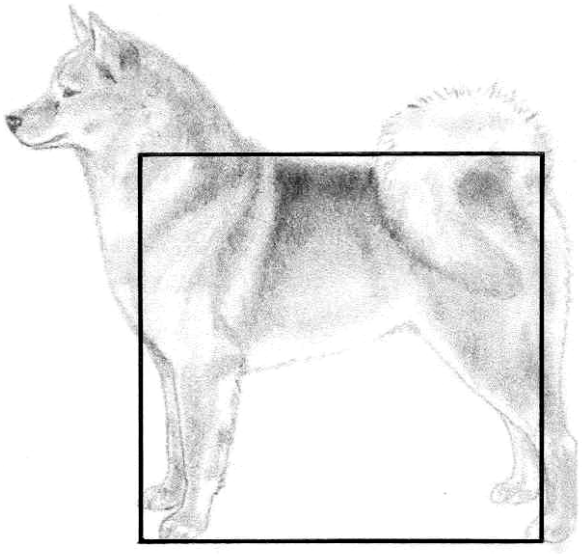
The neck must be in proportion to the rest of the dog. It should be of sufficient length to give the dog an athletic and well-balanced appearance. There should never be an impression of heaviness or stockiness, nor of insufficient strength or weediness. The neck must be powerful and well muscled, as a strong muscular neck is an essential to a dog that is bred to hunt. The thick protective hair of the male Finnish Spitz may make the neck appear shorter and thicker than it actually is.

The throat should have no excess skin below the muzzle.

***Topline: Level and strong from withers to croup.***

The back is level and short. A back that is too long will tend to be soft and weak. This will be apparent both when the dog is standing and when the dog is moving. In movement, the back is steady and level.

***Body: Muscular and square.***

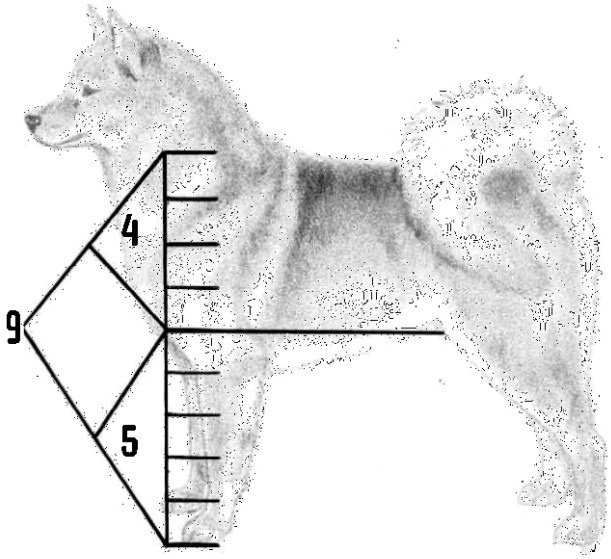


The Finnish Spitz is a square built dog. The height of the dog at the withers should be equal to the length of the body from forechest to buttocks. Nothing is exaggerated. The square build provides the possibility of quick efficient movement, endurance, agility, flexibility, and the ability to turn 'on a dime.'

The Finnish Spitz is a muscular dog, and should not be soft. The muscles are not as prominent as in some breeds, but they should be well developed. A Finnish Spitz should always appear fit, never soft or flabby.

It is important to remember that the Finnish Spitz is a breed that develops very slowly, and is usually not mature until at least three to four years of age.

***Chest: Deep, brisket reaches to the elbow. Ratio of chest to distance from withers to ground is 4:9.***



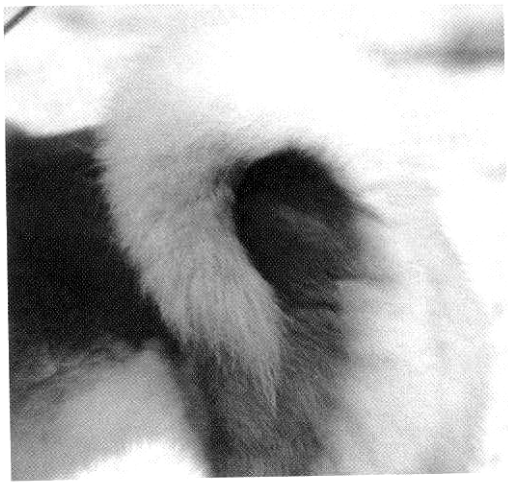

The chest should be sufficiently deep and broad. The forechest should be clearly visible but not protruding. Too much width of chest interferes with efficient usage of the shoulder blades and upper arms, and interferes with proper front movement. A too narrow chest will also cause incorrect movement and incorrect positioning of shoulder. **The Finnish Spitz has a slightly longer leg than depth of body**.

***Ribs: Well sprung.***

The ribs should be slightly arched but should not be barrel shaped, too shallow, too narrow or flat.

***Tuck-up: Slightly drawn up.***

***Loin: Short.***



*A perfect shaped tail in every respect.*

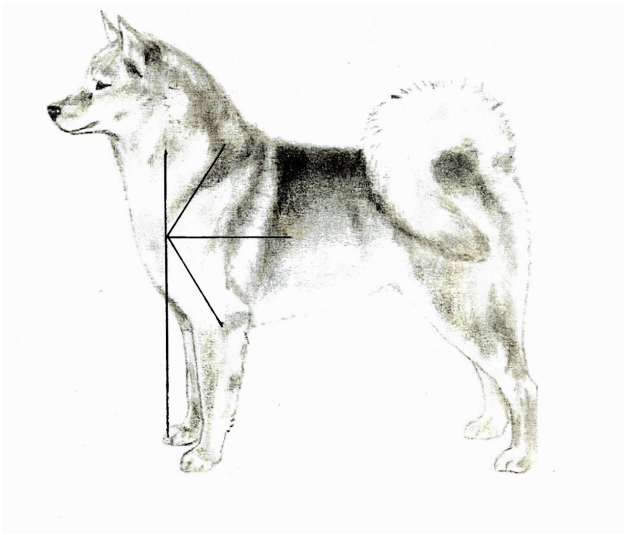
***Tail: Set on just below the level of the topline, forming a single curl falling over the loin with tip pointing toward the thigh. Plumed, curving vigorously from its base in an arch forward, downward and backward, pressing flat against either thigh with tip extending to the middle part of the thigh. When straightened, the tip of the tailbone reaches the hock joint. Low or high tailset, too curly a tail or a short tail is to be faulted.***

The tail has been called the '"Crown Jewel of the Finnish Spitz." Although the tail completes the picture, it is important to consider the overall dog when making your decisions. It should curl forward immediately from the root, and continue in a tight curve until the tail turns and lies tight against the upper thigh with the tip pointing to the back of the thigh. The tail should not hang straight down, neither should it curve so much that it becomes a full circle. It is not necessary to pull the tail down to the joint to assess length of tail. Tail length can be ascertained by visual inspection upon location of the end of the tail bone.

The tail is not merely an appendage set on as an afterthought. It is an integral part of the dog's body construction, the finish of a short, strong topline. An incorrect tail may indicate other structural faults.

The tail carriage is also indicative of the dog's character. A dog that carries its tail down and tucked is insecure or fearful. The Finnish Spitz is a dog that is cautious of strangers and strange surroundings by nature, and is not a dog that usually enjoys crowds and the commotion of the show ring. It cannot be expected to carry its tail curled at all times, and should not be faulted if it does not. For assessment of correct tail curl, the dog ***must*** carry its tail fully up over its back at some point during the judging.

The tail must be well coated. Lack of coat on the tail or excessive tail furnishings is undesirable.



# FOREQUARTERS

***Shoulders: The layback of the shoulders is thirty degrees to the vertical.***

Elbows should be close to the body, neither tied in nor loose, both when the dog is standing and when it is moving. Correct front angulation is essential to correct movement.

Angulation in the Finnish Spitz is moderate and again the key is balance. Over-angulation may appear very attractive and flashy in a dog that is standing still, but results in poor movement, over-reaching, and lack of flexibility and agility. Under-angulation prevents sufficient reach.

***Legs: Viewed from the front, moderately spaced, parallel and straight with elbows close to the body and turned neither out nor in. Bone strong without being heavy, always in proportion to the dog. Fine bone, which limits endurance, or heavy bone, which makes working movement cumbersome, is to be faulted.***

***Pasterns: Viewed from the side, slope slightly. Weak pasterns are to be penalized.***

Viewed from the side, the pasterns must not be too upright, i.e. rising straight from the ground, nor should they have too much slope. Correct pasterns with a slight slope are especially important in the working environment of the Finnish Spitz as they bring lightness and smoothness into the movement. They are also important in preventing injury to the dog while it moves over rocky or hard terrain.

***Dewclaws: May be removed.***

***Feet: Rounded, compact foot with well-arched toes, tightly bunched or close-cupped, the two center toes being only slightly longer than those on the outside. The toe pads should be deeply cushioned and covered with thick skin. The impression left by such a foot is rounded in contrast to oval.***

Flat, splayed, long feet are all incorrect and should be faulted.

The forefeet have to absorb the force from the hind limbs, direct it to the ground and translate it into forward movement. For this reason the toe bones should be arched, the paw tight and well constructed.

# HINDQUARTERS

### *Angulation: In balance with the forequarters*

The hindquarter angulation must be in balance with the front angulation to enable the dog to move correctly and efficiently, without wasted energy. The angulation is moderate, but in proportion. Strength and muscular development are essential.

### *Thighs: Muscular*

### *Hocks: Moderately let down. Straight and parallel.*

A Finnish Spitz requires an explosive speed in order to follow the bird that it has forced to fly. It also requires the endurance to be able to work all day. These requirements have resulted in the development of a 'medium' hock as opposed to the high hock of animals with tremendous speed or the low hock required for long and exhausting work.

### *Dewclaws: Removed.*

### *Feet: As in front.*

# Coat

***The coat is double with a short, soft, dense undercoat and long, harsh guard hairs measuring one to two inches on the body. Hair on the head and legs is short and close; it is longer and most dense on the plume of the tail and back of thighs. The outer coat is stiffer and longer on the neck and back, and in males, considerably more profuse at the shoulder, giving them a more ruffed appearance. Males carry more coat than females. No trimming of the coat except for feet is allowed. Whiskers shall not be trimmed. Any trimming of the coat shall be severely faulted. Silky, wavy, curly, long or short coat is to be faulted.***

The correct Finnish Spitz coat is of great importance. The coat provides protection from the extremes of the climate and sub-freezing winter temperatures. The coat must protect the Finnish Spitz from heavy rain and snow. Its coat must also provide protection from the prickly vegetation, thorn bushes and the heavy undergrowth of the Finnish forests, and from attacks of other dogs or animals.

The length of the coat varies on different parts of the body. The outer coat and under coat should be in correct proportion to one another in such a way that the soft undercoat supports the outer coat.

The undercoat, which is extremely thick and wooly, provides insulation from cold, heat, rain and snow, and little can penetrate it. Complete absence of undercoat is a serious fault, however the Finnish Spitz should not be severely faulted for lack of undercoat during the normal shedding process provided that the condition of the coat does not distract too much and the quality can be assessed.

Feathering on the buttocks, the ruff on the neck, and the plume on the tail are a bit longer than the rest of the coat, but should not be too long or of a soft texture.

***The Finnish Spitz must be presented in a natural state. ANY ALTERATION OF THE COAT BY COLORING, DYING, TRIMMING, SCISSORING OR OTHER MEANS MUST BE SEVERLY FAULTED. No trimming of the coat except the hair on the bottom of the feet is permitted. The whiskers are NOT to be trimmed.***

# Color

***Varying shades of golden-red ranging from pale honey to deep auburn are allowed, with no preference given to shades at either extreme so long as the color is bright and clear. As the undercoat is a paler color, the effect of this shading is a coat, which appears to glow. White markings on the tips of the toes and a quarter-sized spot or narrow white strip, ideally no***

***wider than ½ inch, on the forechest are permitted. Black hairs along the lip line and sparse, separate black hairs on tail and back permitted. Puppies may have a good many black hairs which decrease with age, black on the tail persisting longer. Muddy or unclear color, and white on body except as specified, is to be penalized.***

The coat should be bright and sparkle in the sun. There must be no trace of "muddiness" (uniformity of color) or dullness in the coat. The coat should not give the impression of a solid color as there should always be lighter shades present.

The undercoat is always lighter in color. The undercoat can be as light as a deep cream, but never actually white.

Hairs on the inner sides of the ears, on cheeks, throat, chest, abdomen, inside the legs, at the back of the thighs and under the tail are a lighter shade.

The Finnish Standard permits a limited amount of white and black hairs. While the permitted white markings and black hairs are not considered faults, an essence of the breed is its red-gold color.

# Gait

***The Finnish Spitz is quick and light on his feet, steps out briskly, trots with lively grace, and tends to single track as the speed increases. When hunting he moves at a gallop. The angulation called for permits him to break into a working gait quickly. Sound movement is essential for stamina and agility.***

In the show ring Finnish Spitz should be gaited on a loose lead at a moderate trot. At a trot the typical Finnish Spitz gait is quick, light and agile. Its topline should remain steady and level when moving. There should never be an impression of heaviness, sluggishness, or effort. The Finnish Spitz does not move in a long loping stride. It is able to change direction instantly, to leap effortlessly over or on to any obstacle in its path, and to keep going for hours without tiring.

Due to the straighter front and rear angulation which is necessary for its working gait, the gallop, it does not cover as much ground per stride at a show ring trot, but compensates through the desired quickness of movement.

Lack of correct balance in angulation may cause gait faults such as pacing or overreaching. From the front and the rear, the movement of the legs is parallel and straightforward, moving under the center of gravity of the dog as the speed increases. Should the dog break into a gallop while gaiting, it should not be faulted, as this is its natural working gait.

Because the Finnish Spitz is a hunter that trees its game, it has a tendency to stand with its rear legs spread in a jumping stance, especially if bait is being held too high. This may give the appearance that the dog is cow-hocked. Whether or not a Finnish Spitz is cow-hocked should be determined when the dog is moving away at a moderate gait, not when it is standing still.

# Temperament

***Active and friendly, lively and eager, faithful, brave but cautious. Shyness, any tendency toward unprovoked aggression is to be penalized.***

They are intelligent and adaptable to wide extremes of lifestyle and climate. Finnish Spitz are vigilant and alert; quick to react; and cautious of strangers, both human and animal. They are not naturally aggressive toward humans and should not be feared by judges. Finnish Spitz are extraordinarily devoted but consider themselves the equal to those with whom they live. Finnish Spitz raised with children are very gentle with children.

While the Finnish Spitz is initially cautious with strangers, this should not be mistaken for shyness.

# Ring Presentation

***Finnish Spitz are to be examined on the ground or ramp optional.***

***Individual examination of the Finnish Spitz is never to be conducted on the table.***

The Finnish Spitz is keenly aware of its handler and may not easily be distracted by a judge who whistles or makes other sounds to attract its attention.

The Finnish Spitz should always be shown on a loose lead.

It is recommended that a judge have the handler show the bite. Only the front is assessed.

The more animated the dog becomes, the more likely it is to bark while in the ring. Barking should be neither encouraged nor faulted. **Please do not ask the handler to make the dog bark!!!**

In group judging situation, if the judge rearranges the order of breeds for gaiting, the Finnish Spitz should be placed in the section behind the Dalmatian. The Finnish Spitz' quickness of movement allows it to cover ground rapidly.

# Acknowledgements

Finnish Spitz Breeds Society (Finland) – Finnish Spitz pictures
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Paula Powers, AKC staff artist – Drawings of Finnish Spitz Heads

***Additional Information on Finnish Spitz, and links to other Finnish Spitz sites can be found at*** WWW.FINNISHSPITZCLUB.ORG.

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