

## **ESSENTIALLY PYRENEAN SHEPHERD**

As the Pyrenean Shepherd steps into the show ring his character should become apparent by his actions and in the manner that he is carrying his body and head. Of course, a greater excitement and commitment to his job at hand would be witnessed if the dog was entering the barn door to start a day of chores of controlling an unruly herd of sheep or cattle, but the conformation judge has only the small empty square of rubber matting or manicured grass to acquire a glimpse of the breed's character. It will be quickly apparent that the dog is devoted to his owner/handler as he frequently glances upwards and makes eye contact asking for further instruction on what the next move may be. This is a very deeply ingrained characteristic of the breed—devotion to the owner.

As the dog is placed upon the table for further review, the judge may sometimes notice a tensing of the dog's body or a wide-eyed glare from the dog, as his body language voices his displeasure at being handled by an uninvited stranger, yet his ease of training and great desire to please his owner will usually express itself in his haughty resignation to remain still despite these unwelcome indignities. The calm touch of the owner's hand on the dog will evoke a sensed relaxation, as the touch communicates their close bond and understanding.

Now the dog is asked to circle the ring to show off his utilitarian and economical movement, but it also clearly reveals his purpose and heritage. The curvaceous outline of the Rough-Faced variety now extends rectangularly, enhancing the lowered center of gravity needed to work tirelessly and with agility in the harsh, often steep, mountain terrain of the high Pyrenees Mountain ranges and valleys. A walk almost immediately becomes a trot. The head drops with a determination of destination, the obvious point of the dog's shoulder blades drop slightly, as the whole shoulder unit moves freely. The breed's svelte and lightweight body is carried with ease and totally unencumbered by any bulky musculature. Although he possesses great drive from his hindquarters, the strong loin muscle remains convex in anticipation of a change in direction, a pirouette, a leap up or down -- along the precarious sides of a rocky, unstable mountainside path. His nimble, slightly askew feet efficiently "shave the earth" on such a simple terrain as the show ring, and the added dexterity that the extra dewclaws provide goes completely unnoticed.

The Smooth-faced variety was more popular with the farmers living in the lower foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains driving larger livestock, ducks or geese to market. This environment dictated a structure moving in a slightly more concentrated manner, but with just as equal dexterity.

Prized for his problem solving abilities, his sprightly movement, alert expression, and his observational and problem solving skills, there is very little that goes unnoticed in his environment. Although removed from his country of origin, environment, and culture, his essence remains to be plainly seen by any of us if we choose to look deeper than only seeing him as 'just a pretty face'.