



# Judging the Schnauzer

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This discussion is based on the ANKC breed standard for the Schnauzer which can be found at the [ANKC's](#) website. The copyright to the standard is held by the ANKC and is reprinted for discussion purposes only.

This article is my opinion on judging the Schnauzer. First off, let me emphasize three things.

**One** - when I use the name "Schnauzer" I am referring to the breed known as the Schnauzer in countries such as Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand. In some countries, such as the USA and Canada, it is referred to as the "Standard Schnauzer" and elsewhere it is the "Mittelschnauzer".

**Two** - everyone interprets breed standards slightly (or significantly) differently and places emphasis on different criteria. Therefore others may have very different viewpoints to the ones I am expressing here.

**Three** – in Australia we use the English Kennel Club's breed standard as last updated in 2009, other countries use other standards, they are all very similar but this article must be read with that fact in mind.

Most of the dogs photos used to illustrate this article are of dogs that we own or bred. Where I have used someone else's dogs to illustrate a fault I have tried to do so in a way that does not identify the dog or its owners.

## **HISTORY**

Judges must always have in the back of their minds a breed's original purpose. This provides context and provides reference points when interpreting the standard. Like so many breeds, the exact origins of the Schnauzer are lost in time. It is widely held that the Schnauzer was once called the Wire Haired Pinscher and hails from in or about the fourteenth century and in or around that part of Europe we now know as the Austrian Tyrol. Dogs were used in this mountainous region by local folk, mainly shepherds, who brought together several breeds to help them with their flocks and for other general purposes associated with farm based lifestyles. These dogs developed into a multi-purpose breed used to tend flocks and herds, guard the flocks, herds and homes from predators of all kinds, watch over property and control vermin. The Schnauzer's shape and form are matched to the job it had to do. The Standard Schnauzer needed to be: a compact dog (so it could be easily carried in wagons as a guard); reliable in temperament yet with guarding instincts; intelligent and able to tell friend from foe; hardy; and mobile. These needs have all influenced what the dog should look like and are as important today.

## **JUDGING AS AN ART**

Judging requires a practiced eye and good observation skills, it is important to see the dog as a whole dog and not as a sum of its parts. Avoid placing emphasis on faults but be aware of their existence and significance. Judges are looking for the *best* overall specimen of the breed and not the *least worst* one. Concentrating on faults can lead to placings going to mediocre dogs with no major faults but no outstanding virtues. It is said that a good judge looks for type, then for temperament and then for soundness and then he forgives. Knowing what can be forgiven is as important as knowing what is a fault.

It is the breeder's job to understand the faults in their dogs and their lines and to strive to breed them out. Good breeders receiving considered feedback from good judges take the breed forward, kennel blind breeders and fault judges will only take us backward.

When the dogs first enter the ring allow them one full lap of the ring. This allows the dogs and handlers to settle and allows you, as the judge, to



make some key decisions about what part of the dog needs to more closely examined with your hands. This is not a breed that should be expected to stand immobile in the ring waiting for a judge to make up his or her mind. They are active and interested in what is happening around them.



### **GENERAL APPEARANCE**

*Sturdily built, robust, sinewy, nearly square, (length of body equal to height at shoulders). Expression keen and attitude alert. Correct conformation is of more importance than colour or purely 'beauty' points.*

### **CHARACTERISTICS**

*Strong, vigorous dog capable of great endurance.*

### **TEMPERAMENT**

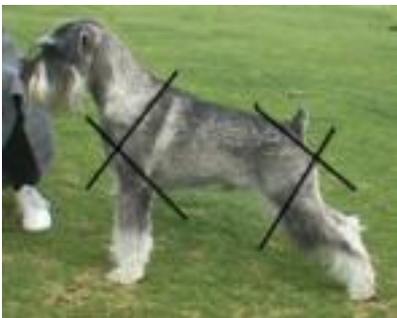
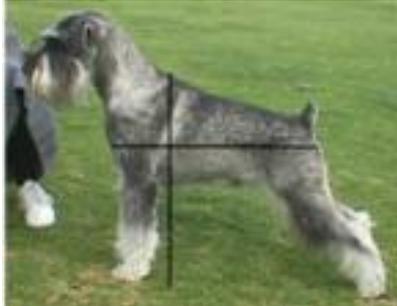
*Alert, reliable and intelligent. Primarily a companion dog.*

As with many breeds' breed standards the "General Appearance" section of the Schnauzer breed standard does not offer a reasonable expectation of what you will see in the ring. However, it does give the judge some important information which must be borne in mind and an indication of which virtues are important enough to be stated up front.

The Schnauzer is sturdy, square, keen, strong, vigorous and alert. And, most importantly, you are to judge the whole dog and look for correct conformation. Beauty points that do not contribute to the dog's ability to do its job are secondary. Colour, provided it is correct, is secondary. Judges should not express a preference for a black over a pepper and salt, or vice versa, the amount of furnishing or the skill of the groomer.

So, what is a square dog? As many judges will know, in the dog world various breed standards refer to square and mean different things. With the Schnauzer, square means that the height at the withers is the same as

the length measured from the point of the shoulder to the point of the rump. While the standard also says "nearly square" this does not mean that you are allowed to accept a long bodied dog or a short legged dog. It means that you are not to look for a perfectly square dog and ignore everything else. Remember that the standard says that height equals length in two places.



When judging, it is also worth considering why a dog that appears longer than high (or shorter) gives that appearance. The first question is, is the appearance correct? In the "Hindquarters" section the breed standard gives you a helpful way of determining this. Would a line drawn from the stifle to hock be an extension of a line back up along the upper neckline? Another point to consider is that the length of the back (that section starting just behind the wither and ending at the start of the loin - ie total half length of the topline) is, ideally, approximately the same length as the total head.

Not all dogs that appear long are in fact long: some are the correct length but are short on leg. The height of the forelegs to the elbow should be equal to the height from the elbow to the wither.

So, you are standing in the ring waiting for your first class of Schnauzers to enter. You are looking for a square dog that is alert, robust, sinewy and square.



## GAIT/MOVEMENT

*Free, balanced and vigorous, with good reach in forequarters and good driving power in hindquarters. Topline remains level in action.*

A range of gaits are shown for comparison purposes. They are not all correct.



The Schnauzer is a square dog and moves like a square dog should, the shorter body does not allow for the flying trots that are seen in longer backed dogs. Therefore do not expect the Schnauzer to move like a Siberian Husky or a German Shepherd. This is a mistake increasingly being seen by judges who are looking for generic rather than breed specific movement. Correct movement in the Schnauzer is reach and drive with the rear following the fore, square and in balance.

Speed is not a requirement in the standard, don't confuse flashy movement with legs going everywhere at high speed for efficient ground-covering gait. Tell the handler to slow down and then watch. The two most common reasons for over-fast gait are inexperience and guile. The novice knows no better, the master is out to trick you. Judging is often a contest between the judge and the handler/groomer. You have to find the real dog, they have to accentuate the assets and disguise the faults. The best dog should not get beaten by better handling. It is a dog show not a showmanship contest. As an aside, don't let experienced handlers bully novices in the ring. This includes "running over" dogs from behind, moving dogs forward in lineups, baiting off of other exhibits (we don't show terriers), crowding novice handlers into corners etc. Remember, you are there to find the best dog not the best handled dog.

When a dog doesn't move as it should, its movement is telling you a lot about its construction. Movement gives you some pointers as to what you should be looking for when examining the dog.



A dog that does not reach or drive might be under angulated, or be too short in leg. A dog that crabs might be too short in body and its back legs move in a parallel line to the forelegs to stop them hitting. A dog with a weak topline on the move may have too much length through the loin or be lacking in body, chest and ribs. The movement of the Schnauzer is exactly what you would expect from a square built well angulated dog. It is smooth and, as a result of good reach and drive, ground covering. The rear pads should place on the same spot that the forepad has just lifted from, the Schnauzer does not single track but there is a definite convergence as speed increases. The hind and forelegs move in straight and parallel lines and the rear pads show but only from directly behind the dog. Elbows are held in close to the body.

A well moving powerful dog will move without roaching or rolling, with the back staying straight, approaching level. When judging the gait beware of "wasted" movement, side-gaiting, crabbing, paddling etc are all ways that the dog finds to "wash off" unwanted movement.

When a dog is not balanced it essentially takes different length steps forequarter compare to forequarter, it balances this by washing off some of the movement at the other end. For example, when a dog oversteps at the rear compared to the front it runs the risk of hitting its paws, so it crabs or sidegaits so that the line of the hindlegs is to the side of the fore. The movement of the furnishings can make it hard to tell what the legs are doing, in this case look at the feet. The feet should move in line with the elbows, for example, a dog out at the elbow will cause its forepaws to move in toward each other. Its feet, therefore, will move on a line inside of the elbow.

## **HEAD AND SKULL**

*Head strong and of good length, narrowing from ears to eyes and then gradually forward toward end of nose. Upper part of the head (occiput to the base of the forehead) moderately broad between ears. Flat, creaseless forehead; well muscled but not too strongly developed cheeks. Medium stop to accentuate prominent eyebrows. Powerful muzzle ending in a moderately blunt line, with bristly, stubby moustache and chin whiskers. Ridge of nose straight and running almost parallel*

*to extension of forehead. Nose black with wide nostrils. Lips tight but not overlapping.*



The head of the Schnauzer is strong, rectangular and elongated. There is a slight narrowing from the ears forward to the muzzle but this is only slight. The total length should be about one half the length of the back. The overall head is balanced and proportioned with the general construction of the dog. The head of the dog a little stronger than the head of the bitch. The keys to balance are firstly the breadth of the head compared to the length of the skull and the length of the skull compared to the length of the muzzle. Look for a broad skull that is slightly longer than breadth to make it elongated. The muzzle is less broad than the skull but of a similar length. Make sure you measure these as a skilled groomer can change the balance of the head with a single cut of a pair of scissors. The muzzle ends in what is essentially a moderately blunt wedge. It is a powerful muzzle running parallel to the line of the forehead. The stop is defined but not deep. The stop is exaggerated by the prominent eyebrows – the grooming if the eyebrows can change the appearance of the head. The head is well muscled but the cheek development is not prominent.

## **EYES**

*Medium sized, dark, oval, set forward, with arched bushy eyebrows.*

The eyes are in balance with the head and should appear neither large nor small, nor should they appear either round or prominent. Light or yellow round eyes are seen in the breed and are most objectionable but no more than a bad temperament or a non-banded salt and pepper coat. The arched bushy eyebrows should not cover the eye.

## **EARS**

*Neat, V-shaped, set high and dropping forward to temple.*

Ears should be small and of moderate thickness. They are set and carried high before dropping forward to the temple. The ears should be even and balanced.

## **MOUTH**

*Jaws strong, with a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite, i.e. the upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to the jaws.*

The teeth of a Schnauzer should be strong and even being well developed and neatly set. A bite will move with age and a less than perfect bite, especially on an older dog, should not be the cause for that dog being dismissed out of hand. A typical dog with good coat, square, balanced and with breed type should not be placed behind a mediocre dog with a perfect bite. The mediocre dog will add nothing to the breed whereas the good dog bred properly can still make a contribution. Of course if the choice is between two dogs of good type and soundness put up the better bite. The caution above applies to bite, be far less tolerant of wry mouths, missing teeth where there is no gap for the tooth to have been lost from and small teeth. A wry jaw or the tiny little stumps of teeth often seen in Boxers these days are far worse than a slightly overshot or undershot bite.

## **NECK**

*Moderately long, strong, and slightly arched; skin close to throat; neck set cleanly on shoulders.*

Again the neck is balanced with the overall dog, it is moderately long and thick. The nape is curved upward to give an elegant and noble crest. The skin is unwrinkled and fits tightly giving a dry neck.

## **FOREQUARTERS**

*Shoulders flat and well laid. Forelegs straight viewed from any angle. Muscles smooth and lithe rather than prominent; bone strong, straight and carried well down to feet; elbows close to body and pointing directly backward.*

The forequarter of the Schnauzer fits into the overall construction of the dog as a square, strong and well-angulated dog. The shoulders are set back at an approximately 90 degree angle from the upper arm. The shoulder and the upper arm are of the length with the result that the elbow sits directly below the withers. Upper arms are straight are well muscled and lithe yet flat. The angulation of the shoulders allows the full extension of forelegs that is critical to strong ground covering movement.

Elbows are held in close to the body and point straight back. The forelegs are straight without any curving seen from any angle. The forelegs are set moderately well apart with strong bone. Pasterns are firm and vertical seen from the front and slightly angulated seen from the side.

A skilled groomer can hide inadequately boned, curved or “east-west” fronts. A good judge will check the legs by hand to determine the bone, the shape and the texture of the furnishings.

### **BODY**

*Chest moderately broad; deep with visible, strong breastbone reaching at least to height of elbow and rising slightly backward to loins. Back strong and straight, slightly higher at shoulder than at hindquarters, with short well developed loins. Ribs well sprung. Length of body equal to height from top of withers to ground.*

The moderately broad, deep chest if gives a body that, if seen in cross section, would be oval. The breastbone is clearly evident and is groomed in to make it stand out, this is another point of the dog which must be checked by hand. The elements of the body are clear: the chest reaches to the elbow which should be at half the overall height. The chest is moderately broad without giving a barrel chest. The topline slopes down high and clearly defined withers to the croup through a short, strong, firm back. The Schnauzer is short coupled with the length of the body coming mainly from the ribcage and not from the croup. The croup is slightly rounded. Beware of dogs with either excessive tuck up or squirrel tails. These are signs of poor construction and will show up in the movement.

### **HINDQUARTERS**

*Thighs slanting and flat but strongly muscled. Hindlegs (upper and lower thighs) at first vertical to the stifle; from stifle to hock in line with the extension of the upper neck line; from hock, vertical to ground.*

The Schnauzer hindquarter should balance harmoniously with the forequarter. If the forequarter and the hindquarter do not balance the dog will not present the correct outline and will not be able to move as it should. The hindquarter must always be set below the height of the wither, the croup is full and slightly rounded, the thighs are broad, flat yet strongly muscled and lead into well bent stifles. Remember, the dog should present a profile through which a line drawn from the neckline continues along the second thigh. Hocks should be well let down, vertical and parallel. Watch out for dogs with long backs or that are high in the hindquarter being stacked with their hocks stretched back (and sloping forward instead of vertical) as this is a classic way of trying to hide construction faults.

**FEET** - Short, round, cat-like, compact with closely arched toes, dark nails, firm black pads, feet pointing forward.

**TAIL** – Docked: Set on and carried high, preferably docked to three joints. Undocked: Set on and carried high, of moderate length to give general balance to the dog. Thick at root and tapering towards the tip, as straight as possible, carried jauntily.

The tail is set on at the base of the slightly rounded croup, this gives a high set and it is carried high. Beware of squirrel tails which indicate construction faults or for tails clamped low and tight as this indicates a temperament fault. When judging undocked Schnauzers the length, shape and breadth of the tail are not taken into account.

**COAT** - Harsh, wiry and short enough for smartness. Closer on neck and shoulders; clean on throat, skull and ears. Harsh hair on legs. Dense undercoat essential.

The coat of the Schnauzer is a breed characteristic and does not constitute a mere beauty point as referred to earlier. The coat is a double coat that is tight, hard, thick and wiry. The outer coat is harsh and wiry, the undercoat is soft and close. Note the requirement for a dense undercoat is essential. The outercoat retains its colour and texture only through stripping or plucking. The topcoat of the Schnauzer does not moult, when the hair is ready to be removed it lifts, separates and opens, exhibitors refer to it as a "blown coat". At this time it is removed by hand in order to promote the growth of a new hair. The coat should be kept at about 4cm to keep it in show trim, this can be done by removing the dog from the ring for a full strip or through the art of "rolling" in which a proportion of the coat is removed on a regular basis. The coat on the chest, neck, head, ears, belly and below the tail is kept very short, either by regular plucking or by clipping or scissoring. While clipping or scissoring these areas is accepted in Australia this is not necessarily the case in all countries. Similarly in Australia we scissor the leg furnishings rather than plucking them. This means that Australian leg furnishings contain more undercoat and less regenerating topcoat and may feel not as harsh as some European dog's furnishings, this is regarded as one of the "beauty points" referred to earlier in the standard and not considered a major fault. Soft coat in the stripped area, especially on the back and flanks is considered a major fault. Despite the stories told to some judges, there is no reason at all to expect one coat colour to have a softer coat than the other.

**COLOUR** - Pure black, (white markings on head, chest and legs undesirable) or pepper and salt. Pepper and salt shades range from dark iron grey to light grey; good pigmentation. Hairs banded dark/light/dark. Facial mask to harmonise with corresponding coat colour.



The colour is a breed characteristic. Although the breed standard says "*Correct conformation is of more importance than colour or purely 'beauty' points*" this is not to suggest that the correct colour is not important, far from it. The standard is saying that one shade of pepper and salt is not preferred over another and the amount of colour in furnishings is not a significant issue. However, that the dog is an acceptable colour is a key issue and is part of conformation (ie, how well the dog "conforms" with the standard). Only two colours are allowed: black; and pepper and salt.

In the blacks white markings on the head, chest and legs are undesirable and are serious faults if found anywhere else. However, a few white hairs scattered throughout the coat is perfectly acceptable (in fact I get suspicious if a black has absolutely no single white hairs! Nor is the black always an even jet black, the sign plays an effect on the blacks as does saliva staining and the odd grey hair on the temple and muzzle as a dog ages. It should also be remembered that the chest, legs and under the tail are not stripped but scissored, scissoring will cause the colour to lighten.

In the pepper and salt, the dog is not grey. Its coat is given colour by banded hairs, individual outercoat hairs will be banded dark/light/dark. Similar to a chinchilla rabbit or cat but with more banding than just the tip. The higher the proportion of banded hairs to non-banded hairs the more correct the colour. A dog with light coloured and dark coloured but unbanded hairs will produce an effect similar to pepper and salt but this is not the correct pepper and salt. The lighter and darker shades of pepper and salt are created by different proportions of dark to light banding on the hairs. The effect is not produced by red in either coat. Red, tan, fawn or sandy coloured undercoats or banding in the topcoat are faults. A hair banded brown instead of dark or light grey is offensive to most Schnauzer breeders.

What the standard implies but does not actually say is that there will be white on the chest, the head and the legs. When the standard says "**Facial mask to harmonise with corresponding coat colour**" it means that the head is masked in with the same pepper/salt colouring of the coat, but for there to be a mask there must be a different background for it to sit on, this is where you see the white. Similarly, the legs are not all pepper/salt and will be lighter fading out to a grey or silver white in the eyebrows, beard, cheeks, on the throat and chest, under the tail, in leg furnishings and

inside the hind legs, (note that white on legs, chest and face is not listed as "undesirable" in a pepper/salt as it is in a black). Again, it should be remembered that these areas are not stripped but are scissored and scissoring causes the colour to lighten and the texture to soften. We do not consider this change in colour and texture as faults (to my mind, this is where the caution about "purely beauty points" should be remembered).

**SIZE** - Ideal height: Dogs 48.3 cms (19 ins) at withers

Bitches 45.7 cms (18 ins) at withers

Any variations of more than 2.5 cm (1 inch) in these heights undesirable.

Size is incredibly important, in most parts of the world over or under size is a dis-qualification, not in Australia, here it is a fault but not a disqualification. Put bluntly, if you see a Schnauzer and cannot be certain if it is a large Mini or a small Giant, then there is a problem. However, it must be remembered that a Schnauzer is not a big dog and a 17 inch (and therefore correct) bitch appears very small as does an 18 inch dog. Too many judges allow oversize dogs whilst penalising correct small dogs. If a dog looks large, it probably is but if it looks small, stop and think about how big it really is.

**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.

**NOTE** - Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

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