

Is Type More Important Than Showmanship? Always!

Let's take a quiz: How many breeders would like to take the word *Basset* out of the PBGV's name? How many judges and breed connoisseurs think the Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen is only a bigger version of the PBGV? How many handlers think the more coat the dog has the better? How many breeders and judges know PBGV type, and what to look for in pups and adults?

I guess the best place to start is with the PBGV name:

PETIT means small, not fine or toy-like, still needs bone.

BASSET means low to the ground. That's it! Don't think long or heavy in any department.

GRIFFON means rough-coated. The French say coat should be goat-like! I don't know how many of you have felt a goat recently, but basically we don't want a brittle coat that would snap easily. Harsh is correct, with some undercoat. The coat should never be soft or woolly.

VENDEEN is the region of France where the dog originated. It has rough terrain and deep undergrowth.

Now, back to the questions at the top. Until Americans get the Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen AKC approved, and a number of breeders promote Grands for what they are (very different from PBGVs), there is going to be uncertainty over PBGV type. As for the Basset Hound, PBs could not be more different. In fact, some may argue that PBs are closer to the Beagle! In truth, the PB is nearer to the Basset Fauve De Bretagne, which America does not have yet. Basset Hounds have longer skulls, ears, backs, tails and are heavier boned. They are just so different from a PBGV that the word "Basset" should be forgotten altogether.

So the Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen is just a bigger version of the PBGV, right? Absolutely, 100 percent, NOT.

A Grand is basically a large dog on shortened legs, heavy in bone and substance. Grands also are longer in many



A Basset Fauve de Bretagne



Left: A Petit with its quarry, a hare. Right: A wild boar, a much larger animal hunted by the Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen.

areas; a Petit is smaller, a compact, busy little hound. Let's not forget the Petit's job is hunting rabbits while the Grand hunts wild boar. The size of the dog fits its quarry.

Now a bit about coats. How many judges would put up a Wirehaired Dachshund with a soft or long coat? None, hopefully. How about a Cocker Spaniel with a woolly coat? Again, hopefully, none. Coat is very important in Petits. After all, it's in the name — GRIFFON.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, the longer the coat, the softer it becomes. The French hunt, so their dogs are naturally stripped, and all their dogs have great coats. If we don't hunt, then breeders must strip the coat to maintain the harsh texture. I'm not getting into the whole trimming debate now, but to preserve harsh hair, it has to be stripped, either naturally or with grooming tools or fingers from time to time. And judges must not forget that a harsh coat, which will always be shorter than a soft or woolly coat, is more correct and true to type.

This is still a very new breed to everyone, and it has been only 30 years since a Grand and Petit could come from the same litter. This is partly why we still see PBGVs with Grand characteristics.

What we are looking for in Petit type is easy to remember. Just remember "The Four Shorts:" short ears, short muzzle, short back, short tail. All four go hand-in-hand.

How can you tell what's long or correct?

1. The ears should reach the end of the nose, never beyond.
2. The muzzle should be shorter than the back skull.
3. The back should never be long like a Basset, which should be 2 to 1. Ideally, a Petit is 1.3 to 1.
4. The tail should never reach beyond the point of hock. When standing, the tail should never be higher than the level of the skull.

You also don't want a PB to be square like a Beagle, but I have never seen a PB anywhere in the world that is square!

Always remember that a puppy PBGV will lengthen in body. A 10- or 12-week-old PBGV that has the body proportions of a two-year-old will end up way too long. The pups we keep are square like a Beagle; they will lengthen over the next few months.



Left: A PB that is too long in back, ear, muzzle and tail. Right: A PB with the correct length of back, ear, muzzle and tail.

In that six- to 12-month age range, don't heavily penalise a dog that has slightly longer ears and tail; they will grow into them. After that age, all four parts — ears, muzzle, back and tail — should be in unison.

Next time you watch or judge a class of PBGVs, remember those four breed type points. Long backs, muzzles, ears and tails are GRAND characteristics and should be heavily penalised. This is the only way these two breeds will achieve their own identities.

The French judges are educated to fault judge, which I personally disagree with. However, topping the list of faults are GRAND characteristics, more so than problems with teeth, movement and size. That shows the importance of the country of origin places on short ears, muzzle, back and tail.

THE PARTS OF A CORRECT PBGV

HEAD: Medium in length, not too wide

NECK: Long and strong

SHOULDERS: Clean and sloping

BACK: Of medium length, level topline

TAIL: Medium length, set on high

HINDQUARTERS: Strong and muscular with good bend of stifle

Until we see Grands show in the ring, it will be harder to see obvious differences. Size is a minor point. After all, the upper height of the Petit is the same as the lower height of a Grand. Use the four breed-type points to distinguish between the two; there is more to it than one merely being bigger than the other.

So, back to the title of the article: Is type more important than showmanship?

A PBGV should be a busy little breed. Never forget its function, to go through dense undergrowth on steep terrain. It needs to be compact and agile to get its game. FACT: Long ears and tail get damaged in the brambles!

Whilst you want nice construction, the PBGV should never move like a sporting dog with a nice, free, amble gate. And for breeders, the toughest thing is to get a nice layback of shoulder with a short body.

The PB should be active, happy, busy, outgoing and look capable of a day's hunting. Long dogs with long breed features and big, long coats are incorrect and will never manage a day's work. They are able to fly around the ring and look glamorous, but that is not correct.

Enjoy this breed for what it is, not what some people want to make it — a generic show dog with volumes of coat. ■

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