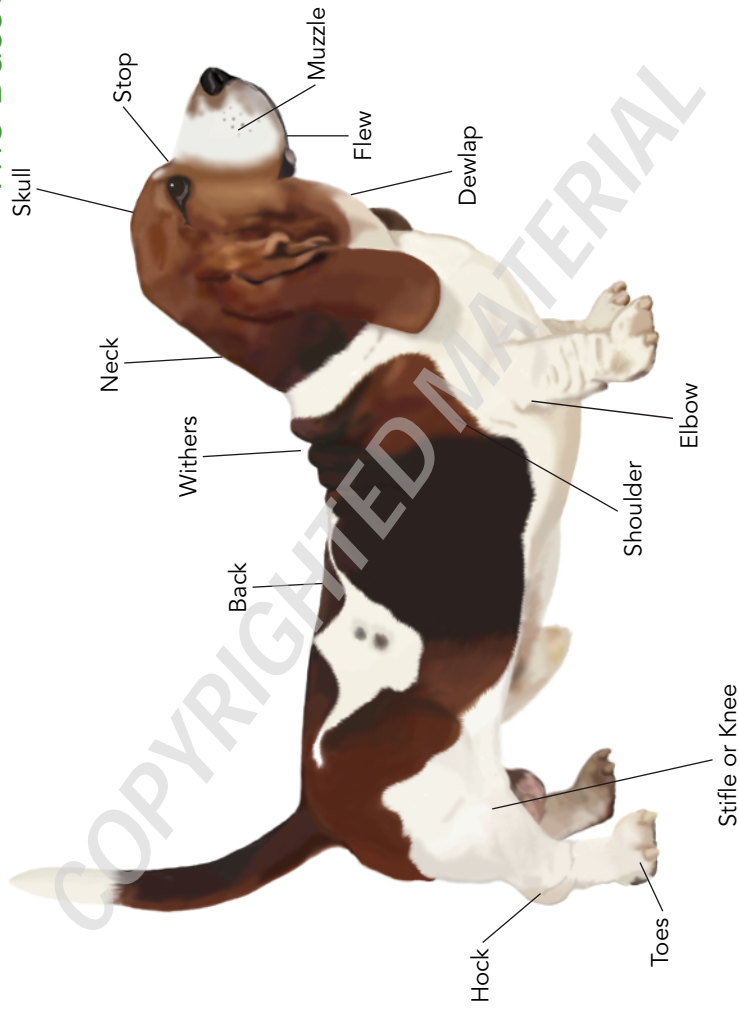


The Basset Hound





Chapter 1

What Is a Basset Hound?



The Basset Hound's looks belie his personality at almost every turn. Often called “the clown of the dog world,” the Basset's greatest joy comes in making family and friends laugh—unless, of course, he's engaged in another favorite activity, like snoozing on the couch or following his nose in pursuit of a rabbit.

As with most breeds, the Basset Hound's form relates directly to its function, although that form will differ to some extent from one dog to another. However, certain physical characteristics combine to define a dog as a Basset Hound. He was bred to follow the scent of a rabbit or hare along the ground, to pursue his quarry single-mindedly. For this purpose, early Basset breeders chose breeding stock that fit their blueprint for both a dedicated and focused personality and a strong, low-slung physique.

The Basset Hound's good temperament has made it a popular breed today, when a dog is much more likely to be a pet than a hunter. You can count on a Basset Hound to be both a strong scenthound and a loving companion.

A Scenthound

When you look at the dogs in the American Kennel Club's Hound Group, you will find scenthounds (dogs who use their outstanding sense of smell to follow game), including Basset Hounds and Beagles, and sighthounds (dogs who hunt by sight as they run down their quarry at great speed), such as Borzoi and Greyhounds. The Basset nose is among the keenest of all breeds—second only to his cousin, the Bloodhound—enabling him to easily follow his quarry.



First and foremost, a Basset Hound is a scenthound who hunts with his nose.

A hunting pack of Bassets finds a rabbit's scent and follows the line (trail) of the scent on the ground. The fleeing rabbit will often change directions suddenly, causing the dogs to sometimes lose the line and have to search until they pick up the scent again. The hunters follow on foot, which is why the Basset's slow pace is an advantage.

The short legs are no deterrent to the Basset Hound's agility. Despite their low stature, these hounds are capable of following a scent over all terrain, through thick brush and shallow streams (although they are not too fond of water). Following the scent is everything to a Basset, and he will go for miles, never giving up on his quest to find the rabbit at the end of his hunt.

Built for Hunting

The Basset Hound breed standard originally used in the United States was written by Sir Everett Millais of Britain in the late 1800s, and was followed until the Basset Hound Club of America approved its own breed standard in 1955. Revised in 1964, it has served since then as the blueprint for the Basset Hound's appearance. The box on page 13 explains what a breed standard is.

Why does the breed standard matter to you? Your hound's personality and physical characteristics are directly related to his role as a hunter. You will better understand what to expect from him, even though he may never hunt for more than a biscuit under the bed. The breed standard is what makes a Basset a Basset.

What Is a Breed Standard?

A breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect dog of that breed. Breeders use the standard as a guide in their breeding programs, and judges use it to evaluate the dogs in conformation shows. The standard is written by the national breed club, using guidelines established by the registry that recognizes the breed (such as the AKC or UKC).

Usually, the first section of the breed standard gives a brief overview of the breed's history. Then it describes the dog's general appearance and size as an adult. Next is a detailed description of the head and neck, then the back and body, and the front and rear legs. The standard then describes the ideal coat and how the dog should be presented in the show ring. It also lists all acceptable colors, patterns, and markings. Then there's a section on how the dog moves, called *gait*. Finally, there's a general description of the dog's temperament.

Each section also lists characteristics that are considered to be faults or disqualifications in the conformation ring. Superficial faults in appearance are often what distinguish a pet-quality dog from a show- or competition-quality dog. However, some faults affect the way a dog moves or his overall health. And faults in temperament are serious business.

You can read all the AKC breed standards at www.akc.org.

Size and Weight

The Basset Hound was developed to perform a specific task with optimum efficiency, and his appearance relates directly to this assignment. He was developed to be a trailing hound who could find and follow the scent of a rabbit on the ground through dense brush over great distances. This required a somewhat low dog, so the Basset should be twelve to fourteen inches tall at the withers (the top of the shoulders). Taller than fifteen inches is a severe fault in this breed.

Although short, he is by no means a small dog. Bassets weigh anywhere from fifty to seventy-five pounds at maturity. In reality, a Basset Hound is a large dog on



The Basset is a dwarf breed. He carries two-thirds of his weight in the front, and his forearms curve under him to support his heavy body.

short legs, and the standard reflects this, describing “a short-legged dog, heavier in bone, size considered, than any other breed of dog.” (*Heavy in bone* means substantial—large bones on short legs.)

Body

The Basset Hound is a dwarf, a man-made breed, and his large body may look awkward compared to other breeds. Robert E. Booth, a prominent Basset Hound breeder and judge, wrote in *The Official Book of the Basset Hound* that a true dwarf is characterized as “smaller in size, in which the cartilage of the bone ends grows improperly. The results are stunted limbs, curved bones, large joints, stubby paws, and large heads. . . . [B]ecause of man’s intervention

we have many dwarfed breeds, of which the Basset Hound is one.”

The Basset carries two-thirds of his weight on his front end. The forearms are crooked, and the front legs are under him to support the deep, full chest. His heavy paws have tough, thick pads to protect him as he moves through thorny brush. A long, full rib cage supports his long, low back, and strong hindquarters propel his heavy body through the field.

The Basset Hound’s tail usually has a white tip and is carried up and gaily like a flag, in typical hound fashion, so the hunter can see it and follow him through the underbrush.

Head

A Basset Hound’s head is an elegant piece of art. Here again, form follows function. When his head is lowered, those marvelous wrinkles and low-set, long ears stir up the scent on the ground and bring it up to his nose. Under his neck there is a pronounced dewlap (folds of skin) that also helps him gather in the scent of his prey.

The standard calls for soft, sad, dark eyes, and that is part of what makes a Basset’s expression so endearing. A prominent hawk, the sagging lower eyelid, is normal.

Coat and Colors

The standard states “the coat is hard, smooth, and short, with sufficient density to be of use in all weather.” The wash-and-wear coat does shed, however. It is also somewhat oily, to repel dirt and water. This sometimes causes a hound odor, or doggie smell, that is more prominent in Bassetts than in other breeds.

The Basset Hound can be any recognized hound color. What does that mean? It doesn't matter what the markings are, as long as he is some combination of black, white, and brown, with the brown ranging from rich mahogany red to a pale lemon. Tricolor is most common, followed by red and white (with no black in the coat).

Tricolor Bassetts can be brown with a black saddle marking, like a Bloodhound, or the pattern can be open, meaning random patches of brown and black on a white dog, or random patches of white on a brown and black dog. He can have ticking (freckles) anywhere on the body and legs. A red dog can be red with almost no white, or white with red patches.

So-called lemon coats are very rare, and these puppies are born pure white with a pale tan color appearing at a few weeks of age. A Basset's pattern will continue to change slightly until he is an adult, so don't buy a puppy solely because you love his markings.

Beware of breeders who offer a “rare” blue Basset Hound. The blue (actually gray) is a recessive genetic trait, and some inherited health problems are associated with it, such as allergies. A blue puppy might occasionally be born, but anyone who breeds specifically for the blue color is not a responsible breeder.

A Surprising Athlete

The breed standard tells us the often-forgotten truth about the breed: “It is capable of great endurance in the field.” A good hunter needs physical stamina, so a Basset will be very active when young, and capable of long walks and energetic play as he matures. The couch potato image makes for great family photos, but the real Basset Hound emerges after his nap, ready to play and follow his nose wherever it takes him, however long it takes him to get there.



A Basset's head is designed to channel scent to his formidable nose. The sagging lower eyelid is normal.



The Basset was bred to be a hunting dog and is a surprisingly able athlete.

Temperament

His determination is equal or superior to his athletic ability. The Basset's role as a scenthound is responsible for many of the breed's personality characteristics, including independence. There is little we humans can do to assist the Basset Hound (or any scenthound) in carrying out his mission to hunt using his keen sense of smell.

This same characteristic makes him a challenge to train, since pleasing you is not his number-one motivation. Basset Hounds are known to be loyal and devoted to their owners, and this devotion, along with a few treats, will help you overcome his less endearing stubbornness.

Bassets are meant to hunt in a pack. Therefore, their good nature extends to friendship with other canines.

Although the official breed standard doesn't address the Basset Hound's distinctive voice, it is expected that while on the trail of game, the hound will "give tongue"—in other words, howl—so the hunter knows he is following the quarry. In your home, that same deep voice announces the arrival of visitors or demands that you open the back door to let him in.

No matter what he looks like, your Basset Hound will be noble in carriage, kind in demeanor, and distinguished in his every aspect. Except maybe when he's wearing his bunny suit.