

EVALUATING THE MINIATURE PINSCHER

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When the average dog person thinks of Miniature Pinschers, the first thing likely to come to mind is “Hackney” or Hackney-like action. As a successful Breeder-Judge of this great breed, I DON'T agree with this assessment. In my opinion, the most defining measure of the breed is the overall package. Breed type, which includes outline, balance, hackney-like action, soundness and correct temperament all make the Min Pin the unique and wonderful breed that it is. While hackney-like gait is ONE characteristic of the breed, it is not the ONLY important trait. After all, I have seen breeds as diverse as Chihuahuas and Salukis exhibit (incorrectly) hackney gait. This surely does not make them Min Pins!

When a Min Pin enters the ring, the judge should see an aristocrat. They are called the “King of Toys” and must look and act the part. The Min Pin is a square dog with a smart, sleek, well-balanced, alert appearance. All the parts should gracefully flow together; the well proportioned head, nicely arched neck blending smoothly into the shoulders, the level or slightly sloping topline, with level croup and high tailset in a muscular, wedge shaped body combine to form one beautiful package. The Min Pin is known for his alertness, spirited presence, self-possession, and fearless animation.

Please don't be annoyed by the very temperament traits that define the Min Pin. Don't expect these little dynamos to stand like statues on the table or the ground. Min Pins are NOT judged on the table. The dogs are judged on the ground, with the table used only for a quick examination to check bite, testicles on males, eye color, and for disqualifications. This is a short-haired, single coated breed whose physical features and condition are easy to see and evaluate without a lot of touching and fussing. Both dogs and handlers will be grateful if time on the table is kept to a minimum! Remember that Min Pins should not be faulted for moving or shifting impatiently on the table. Whether or not a dog stands on the table is a criterion that must NOT be used in the judging process; it has absolutely nothing to do with the quality of an exhibit.

On the ground Min Pins may become easily distracted and not stand still for very long. When I judge, I really don't care if they all stand in a perfect row like wooden toy soldiers, but I do want to see them “show off”. They may do this by baiting for the handler, focusing on a dog in the next ring, watching a bird or butterfly at an outdoor show, or who know what?!! They are active and curious, but have a short attention span. Not knowing what they will do next is part of their charm, and judges should learn to enjoy their antics. Please remember that Min Pins are not hand stacked on the ground, they should be taught to show themselves.

Min Pins often stop and shake at least once when they are moving. The Min Pin should gait with head and tail up. Ears may or may not be up while moving. Some handlers will tightly string up the dog trying to hide a poor front or in the mistaken belief that the dog will have better front action. Don't hesitate to ask for a loose lead. I like to see a Min Pin move out smartly ahead of the handler, but this is “icing on the cake” and not all of them can or will do this. A Min Pin who “slinks” around the ring or moves with tail down should NOT be rewarded, as this is incorrect breed temperament. A puppy may be a little unsure of itself, but an adult MUST have that great attitude that says, “Look at Me.”

The correct hackney-like action is often misunderstood. The Standard calls for a “high stepping, reaching, free and easy gait in which the front leg moves straight forward and in front of the body and the foot bends at the wrist. The dog drives smoothly and strongly from the rear.” Note that the Standard does NOT indicate that the higher the leg lifts the better. In fact, many dogs with extreme front action, when seen straight-on are out at the elbow, cross over or have “mix-masters,” all unacceptable. The side gait is correct if the dog moves in a straight line with good rear drive, front

reach and extension with the pastern bending before the foot comes down. The amount of lift and bend may vary from dog to dog. While flashy front movement is marvelous to see, it's NOT ENOUGH. Min Pins must also have breed type, be sound coming and going, and exhibit rear drive.

The Min Pin must be between 10 and 12 ½ inches at the highest point of the shoulder, with disqualification at both ends. All dogs within this height range should be judged equally. If there is any question about height, the judge should measure the dog. The exhibitors will respect you for this far more than putting a dog at the end of the line because you "think" it looks too big or too small.

A word about color; all colors are to be judged equally. Min Pins may be solid clear red, ranging from dark mahogany to light red. Stag red is a red base coat with an intermingling of black hairs, called Sable in some other breeds. In both cases, the medium to dark shades of red are preferred. The Black with rust-red markings and Chocolate with rust-red markings are often at a disadvantage because the broken colors create an optical illusion and may make the dogs APPEAR to be built differently than their red counterparts. Judges must be careful to assess these colors fairly.

I must mention "man-made" faults. Min Pins may be shown with natural or cropped ears, as long as the ears are erect. Both types should be given equal consideration. Among the cropped dogs, there are many that have less than attractive ear crops; i.e., short and wide, uneven lengths, missing tips. Obviously, this is man-made and should not be used to fault the dog. The same is true for tails docked too short or too long. Tail set and carriage are the important points, not length.

To sum up, judge the WHOLE dog, reward the virtues, penalize faults to the extent of the deviation from ideal and don't make Min Pins one-dimensional by only looking at their side gait!