An Interpretation of the Rough Collie Standard

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In deciding upon what approach to take to the seminar, I attempted to consider the potential audience - a mix then of experienced breed specialists and novices alike and from not only the rough collie fraternity, but beyond. Including those either exploring an interest in a new breed with aspirations to eventually perhaps judge it or those who are progressing and broadening their knowledge.

As we all know, it can often be the case that 40% of a dog show takes place before the actual day – i.e. in speculation or prediction, 40% in the obligatory “post mortem” and 20% for the actual event itself. In terms of speculating on what the results of a day may be, regretfully, from time to time as exhibitors we may “pigeon hole” a forthcoming judge as being either “a head” judge or perhaps a “movement only” judge. The tendency then being exaggerated by a perceived difference between what a so called “breed specialist” may do in the ring as opposed to an all rounder. It’s unfortunate because we should all be looking for exactly the same thing and like most things in life where differences lie it is usually down to miscommunication or lack of same. What I would hope to do is, if not eliminate, then at least blur those perceived lines that separate the specialist from the all rounder so that we have a clearer understanding of not only the standard but of each other.

In studying any breed standard I would like to suggest to you that for as long as those words lie flat on a page for you - then those words remain meaningless. The text of a breed standard ought to lift off the page for you; a picture ought to be created - which one can readily identify with. The standard only becomes real when we put flesh to bones - breathe life into illustration. For this reason, studying text alone cannot compete with doing so in conjunction with at the very least examining visuals/ stills or better still actual exhibits.

We refer to the standard for the rough collie - one standard only. EXCEPT – there is more to be said on this matter alone. In no way am I suggesting here that one should be dispensing with the current approved FCI text in favour of any previously revised version. But I point out to you that six standards that have existed since 1881. In revising the text in 1988, the kennel club, and I’m referring to the English Kennel Club now (that being the recognised country of origin) sought to create a more coherent, less wordy account for exhibitors and judges. In other words their aim was to standardise the standards. The kennel club only took ownership of the standard in 1950, prior to that it was the breed clubs who were the custodians of it. So in all - six British standards, one FCI standard and the American one have existed. All of them with slightly different wording but with the exception of the American one on the matter of size and acceptable colours, all legitimate in that they
all have the same intent.

As an all rounder I suggest that one comes to an understanding of a breed from studying the current standard of that breed whereas a specialist brings to the table a vocabulary, if you like, which does not necessarily exist within the confines of a strict standard but has been handed down from generation to generation. And herein lies the potential for miscommunication, for misunderstanding. Consider if you will some of the terminology we use to describe a specimen in any one of our breeds - whether it be a collie or corgi - whatever. The words we choose to use are in fact our attempt to paint that word picture. The words we use, even subconsciously, are actually inherited - inherited from previous generations of breeders - our mentors if you like, those who within a breed have handed down to us their experiences and knowledge. For example up until 1969 the word “pasterns” appears in the standard - thereafter it does not. It is not the case that pasterns showing flexibility without weakness are no longer required!

My point then is this - it is nothing more than the use of terminology or simple descriptive turn of phrase which separates the specialist from the all rounder. In an ideal world in attempting to get under the skin of, of seeking to achieve a real understanding of a breed, of appreciating the need to lift those words of a standard off a page and make them real - an all rounder will engage in an event like this today’s seminar.

Today is not about having you come along here in the expectation that you will value OUR opinion. Rather, it is about the fact that we value YOUR opinion, that we welcome you into our breed and that we acknowledge your ability to assess our stock. The best mentors I ever had in dogs were those of whom one could ask a question safe in the knowledge that they were without ego and could offer their opinion without the requirement of “holding court”. The very best mentors were those that in answering a question can turn the tables on one thereafter and ask - “what do you think?”

The Society today attempts to live up to that ideal, today is about encouraging you to think for yourselves, to develop your own eye - to paint that ideal picture of a rough collie for yourself. We are here to acknowledge only that your opinion is as valuable as anyone else’s, our responsibility lies in providing you with the tools to do just that. So the aim is to present information in three different formats, the audience takes from that what they will and then we say - now - “what do you think”

So before you engage in the “hands on” section of the days events, where you will have just exactly
that opportunity to assess and evaluate for yourself, let’s take a look at the four corner stones to becoming a judge of the rough collie - and yes - rather than complicating things - I am suggesting that you consider just four key points!

Here we go………..

Once a class has gathered in a ring, one’s first assessment and initial impression of each individual dog will be based upon and formed by how that exhibit scores in terms of balance. Having handled each dog and considered them in terms of head properties, conformation and movement - one will automatically, now armed with a more detailed opinion - return to that overall impression - in other words - to that which is the product of balance - first and last then in judging a class - one word - key point number one - **BALANCE**.

**Balance**

How is this achieved?

Consider for a moment the manner in which the collie is presented to a judge. It is not “stacked”, nor over posed to use a term from the American standard. Rather, ideally, it falls naturally into a four square stance, ears in use, possibly encouraged by baiting. The latter remember is not only to display the expression of the dog, it is to display the outline to best advantage - if the dogs attention is captured, the neck then will be arched , the symmetry of the animal evident - **Balance**.

The Rough Collie is an average or medium sized breed, at the withers - 20-22 inches for bitches and 22-24 inches for dogs. The standard does not suggest that preference should lie with specimens which are either at the top or the bottom of this range. With regard to bone one is looking for an animal with only average - (not heavy) round bone and sufficient substance. Then the frame of the dog is covered with a double jacket which is fitting, enhancing - yes, but obscuring - no. In other words right from the very start one is looking for an exhibit free from exaggeration, an average sized, moderately boned , nicely coated breed which is harmonious in its proportions - or as the standard says “with no part out of proportion to the whole”

So what are correct proportions? Well, the standard calls for a Collie to appear to be somewhat longer than it is tall - yet it is somewhat scant in stating the correct height to length ratio. A previous
standard referred to the length as being a “trifle” long in comparison to height. A mathematical equation is not however the order of the day, rather seek to identify sufficient length with no exaggeration.

Remember, one measures the height of the dog from the withers down, and the length from point of forechest to point of buttock.

With regard to the photographs if you are look closely you will notice some subtle differences between them all - but what they all have in common is that they can all be reasonably described as collies which are good examples of balance, dogs of beauty, standing with impassive dignity, showing indications or potential for activity.

What sets the rough collie apart? - What is it that makes it unique? - Its particular, distinctive headpiece perhaps? We have made available to each of you a copy of the FCI standard. Note that physical structure on lines of strength and activity is called for in the section titled general appearance. In the photos then you can see some examples of just that. But could the wording produce for you a fuller more complete picture? Consider this then - the wording of the standard which existed from 1950 to 1988. Just the first line - “to enable the collie to fulfill a natural bent for sheepdog work………..” Or to be far more descriptive - this perhaps - the American standard, under General Character... “the collie is a lithe, strong, responsive, active dog, carrying no useless timber, standing naturally straight and firm. The deep, moderately wide chest shows strength, the sloping shoulders and well bent hocks indicate speed and grace and the face shows high intelligence. The collie presents an impressive, proud picture of true balance, each part being in harmonious proportion to every other part of and to the whole……..” It actually goes on further, but even without the full version - clearer now what the overall impression of balance ought to be? A more specialised point of view emerging perhaps?
Upstanding is often a word attributed to the collie. Interestingly the word does not appear in the standard. If applying it, remember that “upstanding” in a collie ought to refer to the somewhat noble bearing which is imparted to a dog that is balanced with arched neck and proudly carried head - upstanding should not infer bulk.

If you take one word away with you - let that word be - BALANCE. I am making a very conscious point of using either actual photographs or else illustrations of actual dogs. Remember “flesh to bones” - make it real for yourself.

Before I continue it would be opportune to point out that in selections of photographs I am also very deliberately choosing to show you dogs, which in my opinion at least, represent good examples of the breed. I cannot deny that faults exist. HOWEVER for my money a fault is anything which is a departure from what is correct - the standard tells us this. In speaking about balance and the correct balance of a dog, it is a reminder to us that balance is in our own viewpoints and judgment is essential. Therefore my preference is to illustrate to you qualities which we aspire to - far more effective than encouraging the practice of fault judging. Faults will become evident, we can certainly discuss them later if you wish but it is essential to have first an understanding of that which is correct.

So with the aid of the illustrations overleaf I would like to continue and suggest to you that the second key point to consider in judging the rough collie is - ANGULATION.

Angulation.

The current standard in relation to the forequarters states - “shoulders sloping and well angulated “. Ok to a novice, to someone from a different breed - in what way is that description explaining to you what good angulation is? Note that although the word angulation is of course there - no mention is made of what the angle of the shoulder blade relative to the upper arm actually is. In fact the phrase upper arm doesn’t exist. The words radius and ulna do not exist. The angle at which the shoulder should meet the upper arm is at 90 degrees. The importance of the front assembly of a dog can be appreciated when one remembers that a dog carries 75% of its entire weight right here.
Next I would suggest to you that in evaluating angulation you draw with your minds eye a line running perpendicular from the front foot up in a straight line and notice now where that line cuts through, notice now where the head of the dog is in relation to this line, it is up and forward of the sternum - yes?

The standard - the neck - “muscular, powerful, of fair length, well arched”. Remember now the first impression of the dog - “great beauty” - “impassive dignity”. That one word - “dignity” - consider it most carefully - what about the dog could impart the impression of dignity - clearly it is that arched neck for one. How well arched can that neck be if the angulation of the shoulder is not correct? Again remember - “no part out of proportion to the whole”. One is judging the dog as a whole and thus we are back to where we started - balance.

The rear quarters - the required angulation here, “well bent stifles” almost the entire rear assembly then described in three words. What do they mean, what picture are they painting for you? The hock is carried in the collie beneath the tail set not to the rear of it. The well bent stifle with muscular thigh is to propel the dog soundly, and soundness itself? - It is all of the bones and joints in correct alignment and functioning properly.

Remember everything we have spoken about so far you have in fact made in an initial assessment or with your first impression. Ones hands have not even been laid upon the dog - all of this you have considered with your eye. Now as you approach to examine the dog in more detail, remember that your hands are not to merely float over the dog in order to create the illusion that you are considering key points for the benefit of the ringside, nor are your hands there to dissect in minute details through the application of physical pressure every last bone and sinew. There are after all 319 individual bones all connected by ligaments and surrounded by muscles. Your hands are there to confirm or deny whatever it is your eyes have told you. Use them accordingly.
The space between these two points of angulation - the body -“back firm with a slight rise over loins”. Relate those words now back to the general characteristics, remember the requirement for “physical structure on lines of strength and activity”, remember it says back firm, not level - or rather not totally level - that slight rise over the loins must be there, there is a certain roundness to the croup but without a powerful broadness - the collie is after all an active breed but also an elegant and agile one

“Ribs well sprung, chest fairly deep”. Ribs well sprung, so not “slab sided” or flat. Chest fairly deep, but not barreled. This then to allow for heart and lung room. Heart and lungs to provide for strength and activity. But don’t forget in assessing these points return again and again to balance for one is considering a breed that is medium, moderate, not exaggerated. Remember to judge these points as they specifically apply to this breed. A rough collie will not move with the power of let’s say an Australian Shepherd - it’s not required to……... A rough collie will not gait or even stand with the charisma of an Afghan. A rough collie will not have the bristle and attitude of a Kerry Blue - its not required to……... So we consider angulation, but angulation as a test of construction, and our hands feel for that construction.

Then we watch that in motion, but we apply it to the specifics of the breed we are judging not any other breed. Occasionally, given a ring of good size one might as a judge move a class round together but more often than not the real assessment of movement is carried out individually and therefore the first view one has of the exhibits movement will be the rear movement. Note the description of the rear quarters - “hocks well let down and powerful” - what does “well let down” actually mean - are these words which fly off the page?

If the rear angulation is correct, the turn of stifle sufficient, the bone correct for the size of the dog and adequate muscle is present then all will combine to produce if you like “a motor” a mechanism to propel the dog forward. In stating that the hock ought to be well let down we are merely saying that in order to propel the animal in the desired manner (by not being overly long, in other words by not being exaggerated so that they might incur weakness or injury) the hock is combining with the rest of the rear assembly to produce an animal which on the move appears then to drive with those hocks as it goes away rather than if you like “swing from the hip”. Think about it - the hock is the powerhouse of the dog, if of correct strength, all be it in a moderate unexaggerated fashion,, then the animal can move in an economical manner, without overstretching itself, without tiring unnecessarily - this then is the sound dog. The end result is the impression of a dog whose movement is light and effortless just as
the standard calls for. Remember the reason the hock is well let down is to enable the dog to move that joint sufficiently under its body to drive it forward.

Remember also now that if the opportunity exists (seldom in a small ring!) for the dog to reach speed on the move what commences with sufficient breath between the hocks will now diminish to “single tracking” this is economical movement at this pace. It is not to be confused with a dog which is narrow at the rear with hocks too close together.

Now you will watch the dog move in profile. Return again and again to balance, it is never more evident than at this point. Return to angulation. Watch how the front leg extents. If a reasonably long stride is required (and it is) then the well angulated dog will achieve this. Note the topline and how it is maintained, note the tail, you will have already checked its set, that its length reaches the hock, now its carriage - “low when quiet” but may be carried “gaily” when excited but not over the back. Note the left front leg strikes the ground at the same time as the right rear leg.

Note how the dog now moves towards you, front feet are permitted to be comparatively close together without the dog being out at elbow, the stride is still evident, the complete balance of the dog clear, the correct angulation enabling the dog to move as it was designed to do. And consider this - consider the history of the breed - the standard does not in fact allude to it at all. But think about it. Imagine a collie at work. The movement one sees in a show ring is not in fact representative of how a Rough Collie at work would move. At work the dog will shift its own points of balance - as the conditions, its flock or its master dictates. It shifts its own weight either forward onto its shoulders, ready to proceed and direct or backwards onto its rear, with pasterns flexible. It has the ability to change gear if you like; to mix its pace as appropriate, to move sideways and to turn left or right in an instant in order to take control and direct its flock. So how does this relate to what we see in the showring? Soundness - the sound dog moving in a collected fashion with good forward extension and driving hock should suggest to us that it has at least the ability at least to move lightly when required and swiftly when required.
But a word of caution - speed, speed in itself, of itself is not the essence. One often hears an exhibitor leave the ring and check with a partner or friend as to how their dog moved. The feedback they often receive appears to relate more to the speed at which the dog went around the ring and back to the judge or whether or not the dog and handler were moving at the same pace. Personally it doesn’t trouble me to structure or write critiques after judging. If one, for example, were to read a critique I might pen where I do not refer to “good” movement but merely state that the “dog moved at one with the handler” then I have to confess that I may be suggesting between the lines that rather than being impressive on the move - both dog and handler may well have been moving as badly as each other! Rather than being preoccupied with speed I suggest one attempts to focus on the actual foot fall of the dog. In the sound dog ones own eye if quick enough can potentially draw in ones mind a line of action that the sound dog will follow, in other words one can predict where the foot should fall. The degree then to which the line of actual movement deviates from the ideal is what one is watching for - not the speed at which it is all over.

A few final points on movement before we proceed. Here I’m going to suggest something which will be challenging for half the population - I’m going to suggest one attempts to do two things at once.

Whilst maintaining focus on what the dog is actually doing with its feet, try not to dispense with ones own peripheral vision. What else affects movement? You have already handled the dog. How much weight is the dog carrying relative to its other proportions, how might this affect it’s movement. How well muscled or toned is the dog, well enough exercised to enable it to move at maximum capacity? One is there to judge the dog not the surroundings and yet - what is the floor surface like, is the dog gaiting on a loose lead, tightly strung up, what’s the scope of the ring allocated to you, does it allow for the dog to find it’s pace, to extend and to drive. I come to Cloghran some Tuesdays and I see puppies being schooled in these wonderful large rings in the centre of the hall, then on a Saturday we return on a show day and the same puppy is crate-bound in the far corner of the hall and when moving it is required to move directly into a wall before turning. Not a criticism of a facility we all appreciate and value but nevertheless a reality when it comes to the judgment of movement, something to think about…….
Take charge of your ring and seek to find the best in each dog present.

And now the third point!

**Expression…**

Important - **expression** is not about the eye - or at least not solely about the eye, the standard is in actual fact quite explicit in that regard and yet it is a point occasionally missed or misunderstood. Expression is the end product, it is the sum total of many facets which align uniquely to create it. As movement is the test of structure, so too is expression the test of head structure in the collie and as such is therefore worthy of particular attention given that it is so breed specific, so breed defining.

Consider first the actual eye itself.

Size - that word again “medium” and straight away there is the evidence that it is incorrect to label any judge as for example an “eye fanatic” or someone only taking account of expression. For what is “medium”? It is medium in relation to the headpiece surely, and the headpiece in all its dimensions is judged only relative itself to the body of the dog so at all times then one is considering the merits of the dog as a whole. It is impossible not to – and ought to be so. Shape - “almond” technically, according to the oxford English dictionary, oval and narrow. Narrow does not mean small and the standard states “never very small”. And yet to be absolutely technical about it - is “almond” an exact shape? I say this for from dog to dog precise shape and size of the eye is not always identical and furthermore the exact level of “obliqueness” may also differ. “Oblique” - again oblique to what, relative to what…. - so one simply cannot evaluate eye placement independently, at all times one is looking for how the size, shape, colour and setting of the eye relates to the head as a whole.

Colour - with the exception of course of blue merles (to which I shall return) we are looking for “dark brown” - again you will find from dog to dog some very slight differences in the actual shade. Occasionally I find an exhibitor who will say that they felt a particular way about a dog’s eye and yet couldn’t quite put their finger on what it was. Or express their confusion. For all of the detail in the standard there is perhaps a word missing which could assist here - pigmentation. I’m not necessarily pointing here to a lack of pigment which can occur on the nose or lips for example but to the
pigmentation in the eye rim itself, framing, if you like the actual eye and therefore has the ability to alter or seemingly alter what one is seeing. So the depth of pigment has relevance no matter how small. Even the eyelash itself, minute a detail as it is, can be a contributing factor towards the differences we witness apparently only in the eye itself and then sometimes struggle to articulate. - The devil is in the detail!

Now the position of the eye relative to the length of the dogs head. A mid point at the inside corner of the eye dictates where the mid point of the head length occurs - this as the standard says is the “centre of balance”. Furthermore the point of balance occurs at the centre of the correctly placed “stop”, the element which breaks or separates the top of the skull and the muzzle, that skull being flat .that muzzle being smooth and of equal length to the skull lying in two perfect parallel planes. Too little the stop and the appearance of the eye is altered one way, too deep - equally so.

There was a successful kennel some years ago, well known for the consistency of the quality in head, eye and expression. Said line, tightly line bred, had a particular moulding to the area around the stop, a certain cleanness to the stop (not necessarily deep) but in tandem with that - an eye that if taken alone might be considered “full” but which relative to the headpiece worked perfectly well to create a complete expression which was pleasing. Interesting thing about the line was that once out crossed, comment might be drawn to the fact that the breeder had “lost” the eye, or the quality of same. It wasn’t actually the case. It turned out that the line - regardless of how tightly line bred it was - proved dominant for the eye itself but not the particular moulding about the stop which could disappear in one generation once one went outside of the “family”.

The appearance then of the eye is determined by a multitude of factors. And naturally not least of which will be the shape of the head. That wedge shaped head that is required. “Wedged” - literally V shaped - BUT caution - sides taper gradually and smoothly to an end which is not a pointed “V” but well blunted and supported by good under jaw.

As the headpiece sits into your hand, in those which are close to ideal, there is a ‘velvet’ like quality. The palms of the hand sit flat to the sides holding cleanly that wedge shape, not too narrow, and equally with ones palms not diverging against cheeks which flare. As your hand supports this
framework consider again the slight but perceptible stop, the point of balance in relation to head length, the head length in relation to the overall dog. Now turn the head sideways and consider the same points in profile and in addition now the depth from the skull to beneath the jaw. The words lipline do not appear in the standard but a tight lipline of sufficient length is desired. Although the scissor bite is required to be complete, the standards assume one is aware that complete means 42 teeth!

Now the ears, small, although relatively small might be more accurate. When in use the top third tipping forward. (Curiously the standard for the smooth collies asks for ears “moderately large”). How do their size and placement affect expression? "Not too close together, nor too far apart". Dare I say it - “medium"! Move the placement a little higher onto the top of the skull, the more alert the expression appears, fractionally down and possible more soft than alert, further down and perhaps more sleepy than soft. The headpiece now framed by that coat, carried on a neck of fair length, well arched and the look - that almost indefinable look - intelligent, alert, sweet. This then, all of it, all of it in unique combination - this is expression. Interesting to note that the word “sweet" only appeared in the standard for the first time in 1969. One will hear specialists make use of the word dreamy sometimes. A word lost from the standard since ‘69 but handed down through the generations of breeders nonetheless. Remember the word “moulding" is not included in the standard but again is often referred to by specialists - and here they are referring to a muzzle which is well filled without being heavy, rounded, and clean, all enabling the hand to almost flow over the whole right through to that flat clean skull.

I should return to eye colour now and note that in the case of blue merles either one or both eyes may be blue or blue flecked. And here is an opportune moment then to mention body colour also. In the gallery you have observed each of the three colours, the sables ranging from light gold to mahogany, the tri’s with usual white markings but otherwise predominantly black and with rich tan, and the blues, clear silvery blue. The standard notes that one may penalise tricolours with a rusty tinge and blues with large black markings or rusty tinge. A word of caution - should one choose to do so be mindful in your haste not to simultaneously place highly a sable which in itself is insipid in colour. Remember the coat is abundant but for all the density and permitted feathering the coat should ideally accentuate the outline of the body - not disguise it.
So you take four words from the presentation - **Balance, Angulation, Expression** – and so to the fourth corner of the square into which all of the points should fit....

**Decisions**

It is quite some years ago now but the Society was once in the enviable position of holding its breed club show in conjunction with the annual “Spring Show” agricultural event in the RDS. It was an idyllic setting for our breed and it placed us in the company of some suitable peers - “stockmen”. As an exhibitor it is vital to maintain the attitude that regardless of how great the bond between man and dog is for that period of time when one is in the show ring - ones dog is “stock”. “Stock”, present by ones own choice, for evaluation by another and therefore not an extension of ones “self”. The ability to make that distinction is a most useful commodity. In time, when invited to judge, the greater then the chance now of separating dog from handler, present tense from past form, the greater the ability to judge without fear or favour. Memorising the words of the standard, painting for yourself a picture with those words - what does it all amount to without the courage to translate all of it into decision.

If you take four things away with you today, then let the first be **Balance** - the outline and symmetry of the dog. The second be **Angulation** - angulation as a test for conformation, conformation as a test for movement and then movement itself as the ultimate test.

The third be **Expression** - expression as a test for the entire head properties of the dog

And the fourth - the **courage of your own convictions**.

There is one more element I would choose to offer for your consideration.

**Type**

Having raised the actual decision making process it would be remiss of me to ignore the fact that one is not judging a dog solely against the standard, but also one dog against the other. For the novice and for those from outside the breed one topic which at some point is likely to raise its head it the subject of “Type” and what constitutes correct type. Those of you in the breed..... how many of you have bred a litter, from parents not especially dissimilar and not showing extremes and yet have produced a litter; one puppy exhibiting the make and shape you sought, another exhibiting the promise of good head properties? And one, in frustration, wonders why one could not have had all of the required points in the same puppy. Rather than being disillusioned by such a scenario, take heart. In that litter is in fact the evidence that either you or the breeders before you have not been satisfied to do what is easiest and breed at extremes but instead have attempted to achieve the best balance of all properties.

Consider a scales if you will. At the centre point of that scales lies the perfect point of balance - lies the perfect collie - **EXCEPT** - the perfect collie has not arrived yet! The reality - most exhibits lie
either slightly left of centre or slightly right of centre and then gradually there is a continuing divergence until one comes to either one of the two extremities. The first - we will call it DOG A, a collie which appears, shorter, smaller, thicker set, possibly with less reach of neck, usually shorter and stronger in head. The second - DOG B, the much longer, leaner dog, possibly higher in the hock, less balanced or less sweet in eye - again remember I’m talking extremes here, the vast majority are positioned much closer to the elusive centre point.

My point - the collie for me shows a genetic predisposition towards a divergence of type. Some enthusiasts will use the word “modern” to describe DOG A. This is a purely personal issue but I will never subscribe to the use of that word in that way and I will tell you why……Firstly, for me it seems too easy to fall into the trap of eulogizing that or those which are in the past simply because they are in the past. The breeders of today, of this generation are also deserving of some credit but more so, some encouragement, as it is they who will deliver the breed to the future. So I’m much more inclined to attempt at least to use the word modern in a positive, affirming way. And later I would like to show you an example of just that. The second reason I’m reluctant to use the word “modern” in a negative sense is that I don’t believe it to be accurate. Think of some of those points again, short, cobby, deep though, deep stops.

Look at photographs of Rough Collies from the past. These dogs are in fact the “pillars of your breed”. Move forward and look how a more recognisable type is emerging and bear in mind all of this is happened in very limited time frame. Yes these dogs lived over one hundred years ago so you may well wonder what possible relevance do they have to the collies of today? What I am attempting to illustrate here is that the collie has made a rather rapid progression, so much so that it is possible that that propensity towards a certain divergence in type has remained with us throughout. Remember the collie (and how many breeds can this be applied to) - beautiful as it is, is not as perfect as something which nature itself might have created because in reality nature did not create her - we did. The breeders who travelled this road before us and with every mating that you do - you are recreating her - that is the responsibility you carry.

Now consider the opposite extreme, and if remarking upon dogs so far in the past seems irrelevant, then let’s fast forward 60/70 years. In 1969 after 10 years of work a revised standard was produced which made reference now to “firm” back with slight rise over the loins” - the word firm relevant here as it was an attempt to counteract the problem of “sway backs”. Remember a dog can be over-angulated also. Too great the length of back - and this in itself will present problems, seek to address this by maintaining balance and increasing height to go with it; then the next step will logically be an increase in bone, a longer, heavier head to follow. Certainly thirty years ago there existed debate on type but it is entirely conceivable to me that one hundred years ago breeders just like us were gathered in much the same manner discussing much the same issues.

So my point - should the question of type arise, the question being - which is correct - DOG A or DOG
B - quite simply - the answer is a resounding - NEITHER. The answer and this brings me back to where we started - the answer is always Balance. In the absence of complete balance or complete perfection then the answer lies in that middle

Section if you like but the exact manner in which you as a judge negotiate that territory will be up to you. It is literally akin to one of those old fashioned scales, the point where you apply weight in order to arrive at a decision which satisfies your requirement for balance - that must be up to you and that is why it is vital that following a presentation of this nature we provide that hands-on element. This is literally where we say to you - now - "what do you think?"

I mentioned I would return to the word modern in a positive sense. One final set of three photographs for you.

Number one - a collie at home. And I’m glad to have the opportunity of using this picture as it allows me to touch upon one aspect of the standard I have not yet mentioned –

Temperament - the fact that I have left it until last does not suggest it as an after thought; just the opposite. I deliberately leave it until this point in the hope that it is not forgotten as ultimately, what could be more important?

Photo number two - this is the same collie bitch, this photo taken just after a show where she completed one of the eight show titles she holds.

And finally photo 3
Again the same bitch - this time - at work!

The relevance?  This bitch does not belong to a bygone era, she is alive and well right now, her pedigree - nothing significantly different from the pedigree of any other collie in the ring today.  In other words this, this all round collie - this is achievable.  This for me is therefore a modern collie.  But it is so because I choose to refer to it as such.

If I had one piece of advice to the novice it would be this…- Reclaim the word modern and apply it to something positive. By actively and consciously using words like, balanced, correct, free from exaggeration - then there is greater hope to at least move the conversation forward.  To the prospective judge - the standard of the rough collie can appear a challenging one to get to grips with, the visuals, the illustrations - they have all said far more than I ever could - be guided by them and trust your own instinct.