

Are Labradors Fat?

By: Jan Granneman (JanRod Labradors)

I had the pleasure of presenting the Labrador Retriever Judges' Seminar in Orlando, Florida this year for the AKC National Dog Show. During the Hands-On portion of the seminar, I was showing the judges how to do a breed specific hands-on examination. I had a nice black bitch on the ramp and was looking down on her, pointing out her nice spring-of-rib and short clearly defined loin, when a licensed AKC Poodle judge asked why I was showing them a fat lab?

The lab in question was in very nice shape. She was nicely muscled up, her loin/waist was clearly defined and easy to see, and her individual ribs were easy to feel under a correct double coat. There were no rolls over her shoulders. She was in excellent shape.

As I was saying, "she is not fat," it dawned on me. This is a poodle judge and their dogs have tuck-ups – labs do not. Are people and judges looking at our labs with their level underlines and immediately thinking fat? Is this why so many people comment that a winning Labrador on TV or in a picture, is fat? I had shown pictures of labs with no tuck up in the seminar. I also stated why labs do not have a tuck-up. Our standard, which should have been read prior to the seminar by all attending judges states, "The underline is almost straight, with little or no tuck up in mature animals."

The lack of tuck up is because the foundation of the Labrador Retriever was a water dog and as such needed to move their center of gravity back toward their rear. The Labrador is a swimming dog. In his book, "The Dog In Action," McDowell Lyon states these things about water dogs –

1. "Retrievers take us into water as well as over land. On land, their physical requirements are relatively those of the springer or quartering dog which would work at a walking pace and stay close to the hunter but in water, they meet entirely different problems which must be considered in their make-up."
2. "It is an advantage to the swimmer for the center of gravity in the body to be moved back toward its center, taking weight off the forehead. This distributes the weight more evenly over the submerged area and the front feet do not have to fight so hard to keep the head afloat. The swimmer's main drive comes from the back legs; the front feet add very little to this but do keep the animal from doing a head dive. When the dog is carrying heavy game, this is still more important."
3. "A dog's center of gravity depends on leg length, body height, and length and weight of the head and neck. A poor center of gravity requires more muscle power for movement and results in inefficient movement and wasted energy" (splashing with the front feet).
4. Lyon said that "it is important to move the center of gravity back in the swimming dog and this was done in the Labrador by having a relatively (my underline and bold print) smaller head, a shorter neck, and level under line. Whereas the Chesapeake Bay

Retriever has a larger head and a longer neck than the Labrador.” He also has a tuck up, so how does he move his center of gravity back? He does this by having a raised rear.

I have watched other breeds that are not water dogs swim. I am always shocked by the amount of splashing front feet and wasted motion as they head out to get their birds. They are working extremely hard to swim. I see this type of motion in Labradors as young puppies or older dogs learning to swim. But almost always when the lab reaches out to take ahold of the bird several things happen. First, they reach out to the bird by laying their head on the water. This normally brings their topline and rear end up out of the water. They are in balance and can level out and swim naturally. Their front feet are no longer used to keep their head above water. Their level topline and raised rear can now drive them forward and their otter tail can guide them where they want to go. All of this happens because they are water dogs and their center of gravity has been moved back.

I am tired of hearing about our fat labradors. Yes, some of them can stand to lose some weight and get in better shape. But I am going to make sure that I stress why Labrador Retrievers have a level underline when mentoring judges and other people about our breed! It is part of what makes our breed so special and allows them to do their job correctly while expending less energy. Plus, it is in our breed standard!