

# Illustrated Standard of the Bracco Italiano

Illustrations & Analysis by Amanda Inman

## *Brief Historical Summary*

The Bracco Italiano has been called the oldest European pointer, and its history reaches back to the fourth or fifth century BC. While the exact ancestral origins are unknown, it is generally accepted that the Bracco Italiano was first a cross between the Segugio Italiano and the Asiatic Mastiff, which has since become extinct. The breed was developed in northern Italy, with two distinct varieties known to Piedmont and Lombardy, respectively.

By the medieval period, the breed was well established and the Italian aristocracy exported the Bracco across the Old World. This dissemination of dogs throughout the fifteenth century gave rise to new sporting breeds as the Italian Pointers cross-bred with local dogs, especially in France where similar breeds did not yet exist. The English Pointer, Brittany, German Shorthaired Pointer, and Portuguese Pointer are all thought to be descendants of the Bracco Italiano.

The breed's popularity peaked during the Renaissance, when they were bred by the Medici family of Florence and the Gonzaga family in Mantua. During this time, they were known as "bracchi of the net," for the practice of hunters throwing a large net over a covey of birds. The Bracco remained at healthy numbers until the turn of the twentieth century, when they faced a sharp decline.

By the end of the 1800s, the Bracco Italiano faced extinction. Over the years, crossing with hounds and poor breeding resulted in dogs that were too heavily built to perform their work, and the breed suffered from various health problems. At this time, Ferdinando Delor de Ferrabouc (who was also important in the history of the Spinone Italiano) rose to prominence reconstituting the Italian Pointer through diligent breeding selection and care, and he is credited for writing the 1949 Italian standard, although the standard had itself been around for years.

In the 1920s, it was decided to unify the two variations of the breed in order to preserve genetic diversity, a decision that did not come without criticism. In order to fully understand the history of the breed, and to be able to appreciate the Bracco Italiano's conformation and hunting ability, one has to have a strong understanding of the two types of dogs that contributed to its ultimate composition.

First, the Piedmontese Pointer was a dog of lighter construction and color, and it originated in the Piedmont region of Italy, as its name suggests. This dog was used for work in the mountains, which its conformation and temperament reflected. The Piedmontese dog was smaller than its counterpart in Lombardy, and its hunting style was reminiscent of some western European pointers in that it traveled with a jaunty gallop. One notable breeder of the Bracco Piedmontese was the Aschieri family. This dog was primarily white, with or without orange markings.

On the other hand, the Lombard Pointer was a rich brown roan and had a heavier body type. This dog was used for hunting in the marshy lowlands, and it was a trotting breed. These big dogs were bred both for their eye appeal and natural hunting ability. The Ranza family from

Piacenza, whose dogs exhibited a most elegant and efficient trot in the field, were marked breeders of the Bracco Lombardo in the early 1900s.

Let it be noted, however, that the breeding of two “light” Bracchi could produce “heavy” dogs, and vice versa. Also, “light” and “heavy” refer strictly to the dogs’ morphological characteristics, and not to height, as it was not uncommon for Piedmontese dogs to be as tall as those bred from Lombardic stock. Therefore, when the types were merged, the height chosen in the new standard spanned from the minimum height of the “light” Bracco to the maximum height of the “heavy” Bracco.

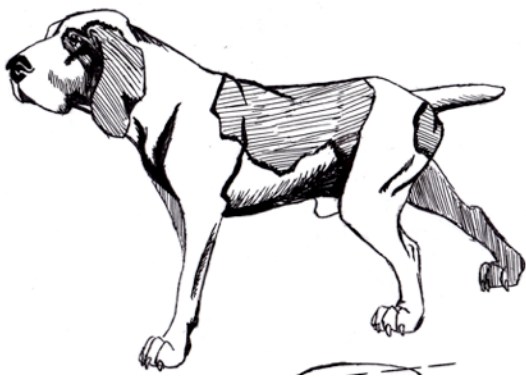
Shortly after the breed was officially unified, the working standard was written and released, and in 1949 the Societa Amatori Bracco Italiano was founded. When the Italian conformation standard was published, it incorporated aspects of both breed types, resulting in noted variability within the standard. All of this occurred before 1950.

The Bracco Italiano was brought to the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, however United States did not experience the Italian Pointer until approximately 1994. In 2001 the Bracco was accepted into the AKC Foundation Stock Service. In 2005 the first national “Gathering” was held, and two years later the Bracco Italiano Club of America was founded.

### ***Essence of the Bracco Italiano***

*The key to the Bracco Italiano is its adaptability as a working, versatile sporting breed. The Italian Pointer is used to track, point, and retrieve a variety of game animals and fowl from both land and water. The breed’s hunting style is methodical and efficient, characterized by an elegant, extended trot. These dogs are tireless in the field. The Bracco Italiano’s conformation is intrinsically tied to its function, and to preserve this breed as a using dog, this must be in the forefront of any judging decision.*

### ***the Bracco Italiano Standard***



**General Appearance:** Of strong and harmonious construction, power appearance. The preferred subjects are those with lean limbs, well-developed muscles, well-defined lines with a markedly sculpted head and a very obvious lower orbital chiseling, elements which all contribute to give distinction to this breed.

*In conformation, the Bracco cannot be directly compared to other sporting breeds. They have significantly heavier construction and greater skeletal dimension than most pointers. Despite this, these dogs should not be lumbering, and they should not be so coarse as to detract from*

*their unique elegance. Sexual dimorphism is highly valued: dogs should be “masculine,” and bitches should be “feminine.” Ideally, the Bracco should be an image of balance and strength, with a distinctly sculpted head.*

**Important Proportions:** Length of the body is the same or a little more than the height at the withers. Length of head is equal to four-tenths of the height at the withers, its width, measured at the level of the zygomatic arches, is less than half its length. Skull and muzzle are of equal length.

**Behaviour and Temperament:** Tough and adapted to all types of hunting, reliable, endowed with an excellent ability to understand, docile and easy to train.

*The Bracco should be calm and secure, without being timid or aggressive. The Bracco lacks the “the spirit or the will of the galloper, he lacks the galloper’s nervous activity” (Solaro, 1923), which produces to a more controlled, closer-working hunting dog.*



**Head:** Angular and narrow at the level of the zygomatic arches, its length corresponds to four-tenths of the height at the withers; the middle of its length is at the level of a line which unites the inner angles of both eyes; the upper longitudinal axes of the skull and muzzle are divergent, ie: if extended, the top line of the muzzle emerges in front of the occipital protuberance, ideally at mid-length of the skull.

*The head creates breed type and distinction and thus cannot be compromised. The divergent upper longitudinal craniofacial axes allow the Bracco to catch scent while trotting with his head held high. With the head carried erect, scent can be caught from a greater distance. The construction of the head is characteristic of a trotting dog, while parallel or convergent facial lines are typical of galloping breeds, such as the English Pointer. A dish face or parallel lines of the skull and muzzle are serious faults for the Bracco Italiano.*

**Skull Region:** Seen in profile, the skull shape is a very open arch. Seen from the top, it forms lengthwise an elongated ellipse. The width of the skull, measured at the level of the zygomatic arches should not exceed half the length of the head. Cheeks are lean, the bulge of the forehead and the supra-orbital ridges are perceptible, whereas the stop is not pronounced. The front groove is visible and ends at mid-length of the skull. The inter-parietal crest is short and not very prominent. The occipital protuberance is pronounced.

*Ideally, the elongated, elliptical shape of the skull (as seen from above) indicates less development of muscle to give the head width, instead pointing to more musculature at the back of the skull, allowing for attachment of strong neck muscles — making it easier for the dog to retrieve heavy game with his head held erect. The occiput should be visible, and the inter-parietal crest can be checked by running two fingers down the middle of the skull.*

### **Facial Region:**

- **Nose:** Voluminous, with large well-opened nostrils, protrudes slightly over the lips with which it forms an angle. Colour brown or from pale pink to more or less deep fleshy red depending on the colour of the coat.

*Consider Function: the Bracco Italiano is not strictly a pointer, he is also a tracking breed. The open nose allows for optimal scenting and easier breathing. When seen from the front, the nose should be wide enough as to account for most of the width of the front of the muzzle.*

- **Muzzle:** Foreface either straight or slightly arched. Its length is equal to half of the length of the head and its depth measures four-fifths of its length. Seen from the front, the lateral sides of the muzzle converge slightly, still presenting a foreface of good width. The chin not very apparent.

*From the front, the lateral sides of the muzzle should be nearly parallel. The proper length of the muzzle should be equal to the skull (from the stop to occiput). A muzzle that is longer than the skull indicates a “catching” dog, while a short muzzle indicates less olfactory development.*

- **Lips:** Upper lips well developed, thin and floppy without being flaccid, covering the jaw; seen in profile, they overlap the lower jaw slightly, seen from the front, they form an inverted "V" below the nose; the corner of the lips must be marked without being droopy.

*Seen in profile, the outer curve of the upper lip should not fall directly perpendicular to the muzzle (as with the Pointer, having a very square muzzle), but should be somewhat set back.*

- **Teeth:** Dental arches well adapted, with the teeth square to the jaw. Scissor bite. Pincer bite is also acceptable.

*Overbite and underbite are both faulted, as they can affect the dog's ability to properly handle and retrieve game, although the overbite is considered more severe.*

- **Eyes:** Semi-lateral position with a soft and submissive expression neither deep set nor prominent. Eyes fairly large, eyelids oval-shaped and close-fitting (no entropion or ectropion). The iris is of a more or less dark ochre or brown colour depending on the colour of the coat.

*Eyes that are too large or protruding are susceptible to injury in the field, and thus should be faulted. Likewise, very loose, ectropic eyelids can collect dirt and become irritated, being not only painful but also reducing the dog's productivity and efficiency as a working animal. The eyes of the Bracco should never be "hard," but rather deep, moist, and kind. "If there is a dog who has the prerogative of the sweetness of the look, this is the Bracco" (Solaro, 1932).*

**-Ears:** Well developed, in length they should, without being stretched, reach the tip of the nose. Their width is at least equal to half their length; raised only very slightly; base rather narrow, set rather backwards at level of zygomatic arches; a supple ear with a front rim well turned inwards and really close to the cheek is appreciated; the lower extremity of the ear ends in a slightly rounded tip.

*Recall that, similar to scenthounds, the Bracco's ears help catch and hold scent.*



**(Left)** Overall, face too snikey, eye is too almond shaped, the ear is too short and with a pointed tip.

**(Center)** Excessive skin and flews, the nose does not form a proper angle over the muzzle (which is too square) eye is too loose (ectropic).

**(Right)** Compare with the English Pointer: with moderate stop, parallel (or convergent) axes of the skull, square muzzle and long, dry neck.

**Neck:** Powerful, in truncated cone shape, length not less than two-thirds of the length of the head, well detached from the nape. The throat shows a soft double dewlap.

*A muscular, well-developed neck is essential for the dog to carry heavy game.*

## **Body:**

**-Top-line:** The upper profile of the back is made up of two lines: one, almost straight, slopes from the withers to the 11th dorsal vertebrae; the other is slightly arched, joining with the line of the rump.

- Withers:** Well defined, with the points of the shoulder blades well separated.
- Loin:** Wide lumbar region, muscled, short and slightly convex.
- Rump:** Long (about one-third of the height at the withers), broad and well muscled; the pelvic angulation (angle formed by the pelvic girdle with a horizontal line) is 30°. Pelvis wide.
- Chest:** Broad, deep and well down to level of elbows, without forming a heel, with well sprung ribs, particularly in their lower part, and sloping.
- Underline:** Lower profile almost horizontal in its rib cage part, rising slightly in its abdominal part.



**(Left)** Proper body type. Note the shoulder angulation, sloping pastern, deep chest with good width, short loin, and moderate hindquarter angulation.

**(Center)** Overall, lacking strength and substance. Shoulder is too straight, lacking depth in chest, the croup is too short, and too straight in the stifle. This dog will have a shortened, choppy, and inefficient gait. In the field, this dog's straight angulation will predispose him to impact injury.

**(Right)** Too coarse and lacking visual balance. The pasterns are too long and weak, splay-footed, topline is roached, croup is too flat, sickle-hocked. This dog will have an extended side movement, but lacks energy efficiency because of over angulation. Likely, this dog will exhibit a very "messy" movement from the front and from behind due to lack of unified construction.

### **Tail:**

-**Docked:** thick at the base, straight, with a slight tendency to taper, hair short. When the dog is in action and especially when questing, is carried horizontally or nearly. Should be docked at 15-25cm from the root.

-**Undocked:** Carried horizontally. May be slightly curved but never held high or carried bent over the back.

### **Limbs:**

-**Forequarters:** Shoulder strong, well muscled, long and sloping, very free in its movement; the upper arm sloping, fitting to the rib cage; forearm strong, straight, with



strong and well marked sinews; the point of the elbows should be on a perpendicular line from the rear point of the shoulder blade to the ground; metacarpus (pasterns) well proportioned, lean, of good length and slightly sloping; feet strong, slightly oval shaped, well arched and closed toes with strong nails well curved towards the ground. Colour of nails is white, yellow or brown, of a more or less dark shade depending on the colour of the coat: pads elastic and lean.

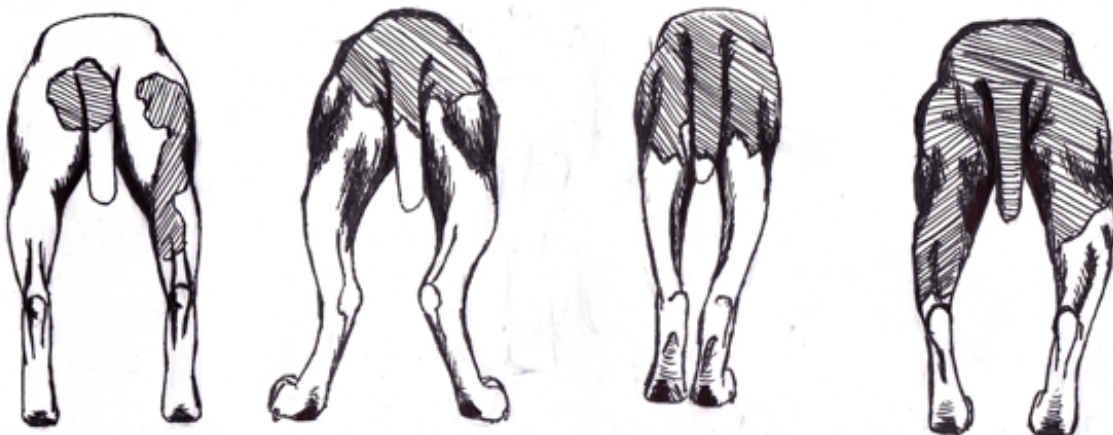


**(Left)** Correct front. Strong, straight construction and a deep chest of good width. Large paws. Note: This is a bitch, with skin folds on the chest and teats, however males will likely also have some wrinkles.

**(Center)** Lacking power, very narrow chested, lacking muscular definition in the shoulder, severely crooked legs with long and weak pasterns. The east-west forequarter conformation is more likely to experience impact and twisting injury in the field.

**(Right)** Too wide and lumbering, out at the elbows, pigeon-toed, chest too rounded. This conformation does not properly carry the dog's weight and will predispose it to injury while hunting.

**Hindquarters:** Thigh long, parallel, muscular, with a rear edge almost straight; strong limbs; hocks wide, metatarsals relatively short and lean. The feet, with all the characteristics of the front feet have dewclaws, the absence of which is not a fault. Double dewclaws is tolerated.



**(From Left) 1:** *Correct hindquarter, straight construction with good muscular definition. There is clear distinction between the upper and lower thigh, and the hocks are wide.*

**2:** *Weak rear, both sickle-hocked and cow-hocked. Lacking muscular distinction between the upper and lower thigh.*

**3:** *Very narrow and weak hindquarter. Lacking width and substance. Poor muscle, down in the hocks, tail set too high.*

**4:** *Too bulky, bow-legged, slightly down in the hocks, pigeon-toed, tail set too low.*

**-Gait/Movement:** Extended and fast trot, with powerful impulsion from the hindquarters; head raised, nose held high in such a way that, when hunting, the nose is higher than the top-line.



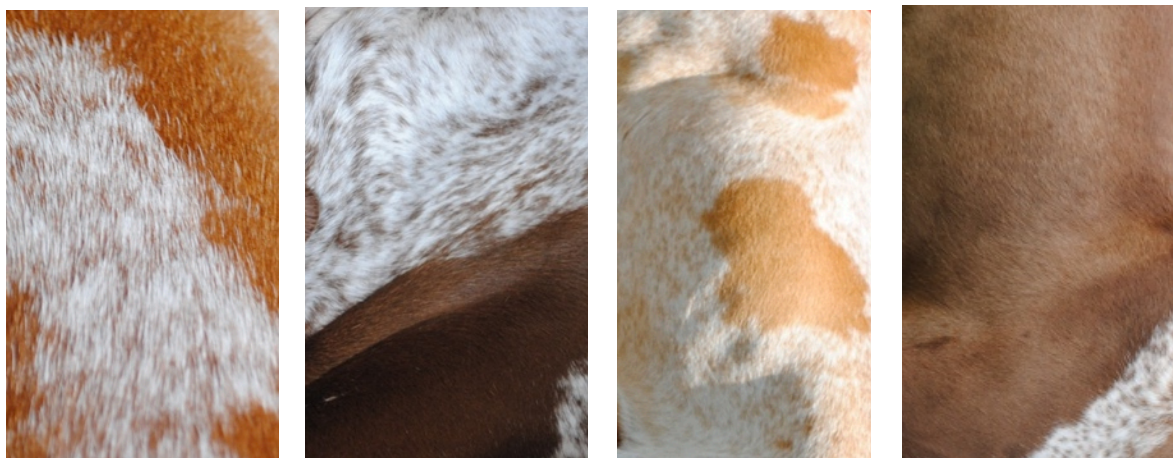
**-Skin:** Tough but elastic; fine on the head, the throat, inside the elbows and on lower part of the body. The visible mucous membranes must be a corresponding colour with the coat, but never show black spots. The mucous membranes of the mouth are pink; in the roans or white and chestnut coloured dogs they sometimes show brown or light chestnut spotting.

### **Coat:**

**-Type of Hair:** Short, dense and glossy, fine and shorter on the head, the ears, front part of the legs and feet.

**-Colour of Coat:** White; white with markings of varied size or an orange or more or less dark amber colour, white with more or less large chestnut markings; white with pale orange (speckled); white mottled with chestnut (roan-chestnut); in this last combination, a metallic sheen is appreciated, and a warm shade of chestnut is preferred, recalling the colour of a monk's tunic. A symmetrical facial mask is preferred but the absence of a mask is tolerated.





**Correct Coat Colors:** (Left to Right) white with orange markings, roan-chestnut, white with pale orange, chestnut. *Note: chestnut is not liver, amber not lemon, orange not red.*

**Size and Weight:** Height at the withers between 55-67cm. Preferred size for males: 58-67cm; preferred size for females: 55-62 cm. Weight between 25-40kg, depending on height.

**Faults:** Any departure from the foregoing constitutes a fault which when judging must be penalised according to its seriousness and its extension.

**Elimination Faults:** Accentuated prognathism. Size 2cm above or below limits indicated in the standard.

**Disqualifying Faults:** Split nose; convergence of cranial-facial axes; wall eye; upper prognathism; absence of pigmentation (albinism); black coat; white and black; tricolour; fawn; hazel colour unicolour, with tan markings, mucous membranes, skin and annexes with traces of black.

**NB:** Males should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.