

VIZSLA

THE VIZSLA TOPLINE

Although the term "topline" refers to the entire upper outline of a dog, starting at the occiput and ending at the tail (Spira, *Canine Terminology*, 1982; Jackson, *Dictionary of Canine Terms*, 1995), some breed standards, including ours, use "topline" to refer to that portion of the topline from withers to croup.

Our standard states that the topline is "broad, smooth, slightly arched over loin and croup to base of tail" with a "slight depression at juncture of withers and back." Leaving aside the awkward description of an outline as "broad," this wording fails to indicate whether the back should be level or sloping.

The AKC standard, unlike ours, specifies that the withers are "high," thereby requiring a slope from withers to croup. In an apparent contradiction, the British breed standard calls for a "level" back *and* for "high withers" at

one and the same time! Breed standard commentator Lynn Butler has given it as his opinion that in this case, "level back" means a straight back. While this is an idiosyncratic use of the terminology, it does eliminate the apparent contradiction in that standard.

While a few Vizslas have a level back – i.e., height at the withers equals height at the croup – most North American Vizslas have the correct *slight* slope to the backline. Based on the pictorial record available to me, I would say the same pretty well holds true of Vizslas in the United Kingdom. But things seem to be different in Australia and some Vizslas on that continent have a slope in the topline, from withers to croup, that is more than "slight." While this likely owes as much to ring presentation as it does to structure (more open angulation at the front, greater length of stifle and angulation), it seems excessive.

As a rough rule of thumb, I would suggest that a topline with the proper *slight* slope will never exceed 10 degrees off the horizontal plane and approximately five degrees off the plane would be ideal. But when the Vizsla moves at the trot, the topline should tend to level. "Moderate" should be a favourite adjective of all breeders of the sporting breeds and this applies to the topline as well as other parts of these hunting dogs. – François-R. Bernier, *42 de la Gravité*, Hull, Que. J9A 2Z2; e-mail: vizslas@bajnok.com