

The Canine Athlete: Weight vs. Condition

By Daniel Mack

A few years ago I had a discussion with a fellow exhibitor who owns a special being campaigned on a limited basis without consistent wins. In my opinion the dog is a sound specimen of the breed. The consensus of other fanciers is that the dog in question lacks proper conditioning. I brought this up to the exhibitor, who insisted that the dog was in proper weight. I've had this same conversation with others, and I also notice it as I judge dogs. It appears that some exhibitors do not comprehend the difference between appropriate weight and desirable condition, especially in the case of a special.

Special is a word that I've used when describing my brother, Tim Mack. At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, my family and I witnessed the payoff that can come from proper mental and physical conditioning. Tim was awarded the gold medal in the men's pole vault event, with an Olympic record of 19 feet 6 inches. Tim and I share two traits: We are both tall and of similar weight. Tim measures in at 6 feet 1 inch, and weighs 185 pounds. I am 6 foot 2 inches tall and weigh 190. I am the proper weight for my frame, but unfortunately I am not as muscularly defined as my brother. Without his physique I'm physically unable to do his job. Sadly, the only apparatus I've cleared is a three-foot puppy exercise pen.

The same comparison is relevant in the dog show ring. The official standard for the German Shorthaired Pointer says;

'the German Shorthaired Pointer is a versatile hunter, an all-purpose gun dog capable of high performance in field and water'.

These desirable attributes are obtained through proper conditioning, and are observed in the conformation ring by the judge's hands-on examination of the dog. While assessing structure, proportion and soundness, the judge is also inspecting musculature and substance. A dog possessing these breed character-



istics should be able to perform the job he was bred to do. A well-muscled dog, demonstrating consistent conditioning, should possess the ability not only to perform the task, but to do it better and do it longer.

I too experienced the confusion between weight and conditioning. Several years ago I lived in an apartment in San Francisco with my second GSP, CH Sonnenschein's Cousin' A Spec-tacle JH (Spec). Although a young dog, and in my opinion, an exemplary specimen of the breed, Spec lacked the musculature of his competition. Then, my good friend Suzanne Brown began exercising him several hours a day at the local leash-free dog park. Soon afterwards, while owner-handled, Spec was awarded an all-breed Best In Show.

WHAT MAKES A 'SPECIAL' IS A DOG WHO NOT ONLY POSSESSES BREED-SPECIFIC QUALITIES, BUT WHO RADIATES ENDURANCE THROUGH PROPER CONDITIONING.



Daniel Mack is a breeder-owner-handler of German Shorthaired Pointers. He has been involved in the sport of dogs since 1976 when he started in Conformation and Junior Showmanship with Yorkshire Terriers. He has owner-handled a GSP to an all-breed Best in Show and has bred National Specialty Show winning GSPs. Dan is approved by AKC to judge German Shorthaired Pointers, Yorkshire Terriers, and Junior Showmanship. He will judge dogs and intersex competition at the upcoming 2015 GSPCA National Specialty in Denver, CO.

Editorial note: We enjoy using pictures of members' dogs to illustrate our articles, and do the proud owners the courtesy of listing the dogs' registered names and ownership in the photo credits. We have not done that with this article, due to the fact that the author will soon be making some very important decisions regarding the merits of GSPs currently competing in conformation events. We confess we do not even know the name of the dogs used as illustration of the points being made, and we actually stole the images from somewhere out in cyberspace. We hope these wonderful animals do belong to members of the GSPCA and pray their owners will excuse the piracy under the circumstances.