See the highlighted lines on page 3

AT THE FOOT OF THE ROTTWEILER

By Steve Wolfson

"I cannot live with those feet", the judge privately exclaimed to me after placing a bitch first in a class of excellent specimens. The two bitches up for final placement of V-1 and V-2 in the working class were excellent in type, harmonious in their locomotion, yet had important differences between them. Both had superior heads, good bones, dark eyes, type, however, one was splayfooted with soft pasterns, the other was a bit soft in the topline. After pacing back and forth several times, the judge made a switch and gave the V-1 placement to the bitch that had the correct feet, strong, firm pasterns, well knuckled, tight fitting, cat-like paws.

The feet play a subtle but vital role in Rottweiler type. More importantly, they are a fundamental component in Rottweiler locomotion. Possessing correct feet is essential.

The standard specifies, **"Pasterns are strong, springy and almost perpendicular to the ground. Feet are round, compact with well-arched toes, turning neither in nor out. Pads are thick and hard. Nails short, strong and black".**

Despite these exacting words from the standard, one encounters with great frequency, sloppy feet, low on the pastern and splayfooted Rottweilers.

The foot is the contact point where the body meets the ground and where a great deal of torque, occurring from the torsion of gait is dampened. The feet are in essence, the canine "shock absorbers". It is valuable for an aficionado of the Rottweiler to understand the subtle yet powerful influence the feet have upon the entire musculo/skeletal workings of the dog.

To understand what is incorrect, it is important to start with a good example of what is correct. Fig 1, is an illustration of correct feet. In Fig 2, is correct feet in 3/4 view and profile.

Fig.1

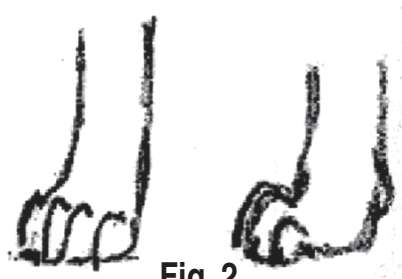


Fig. 2

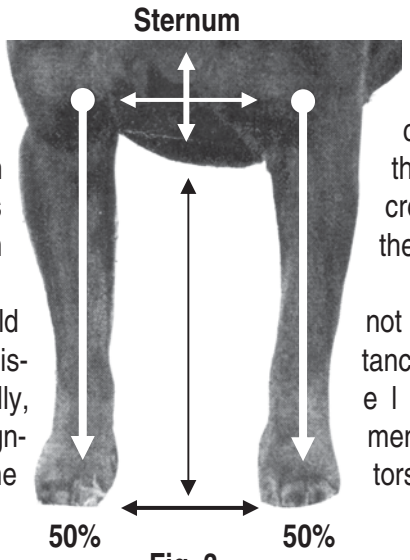


Fig. 3

When standing,(Fig 3.) the feet should be in correct alignment so the balance point of each leg runs directly in the center of the pastern through the center of the toes. This creates an equal distribution of body weight in the front section, through the radius, ulna, humerus and scapula (the front assembly).

When viewing the Rottweiler head on , one should not see the feet turning in or out. The legs must be straight, with a distance from the sternum equal to 50% the width of the chest . Additionally, elbows should be close fitting to the chest. With this correct alignment, the front assembly evenly distributes the torsion and shock created by forward motion.

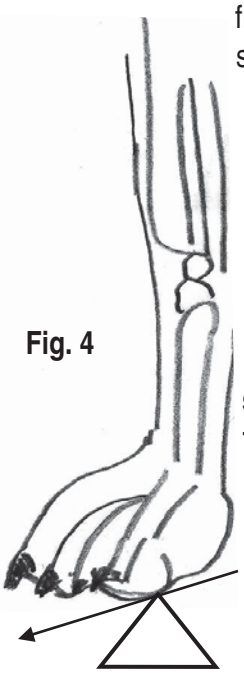


Fig. 4

From the standard, **"Pads are thick and hard..." "Pasterns are strong, springy and almost perpendicular to the ground… "Compact with well-arched toes..."** This is important for four reasons.

1. The foot helps initiate forward motion (Fig 4) by acting as a lever and fulcrum. As the weight of the body shifts forward, the ball (pad) of the foot becomes a fulcrum and the pasterns/toes become a lever. A flat pad and poorly knuckled toes lessens the angle of the fulcrum, therefore resulting in less lift .

2. Since the pads are the first in line to absorb the shock transmitted up the front assembly, it is necessary to have thick pads to diminish the shock.
3. The pasterns are part of the lever action of the foot and absorb shock from forward movement.
4. Well arched, compact toes also dampen shock and heighten lift.

Problem Feet

People with problem feet can have an adjustment made by an orthotic support in the shoe. For horses, a shoe can be tailored to adjust for specific foot incongruities. With dogs, a corrective device is not possible. Corrections can only be achieved in the next generation via a careful and thoughtful breeding program. Therefore, it is valuable to examine the anomalies found occurring in the field that effect the feet and pasterns of the Rottweiler.

The most common anomalies.

1. The primary occurring foot abnormality is not specifically a problem with the feet, but an outward turning of the pastern. This is commonly named *"east-west"* feet (Fig 5). Here, the foot on each leg turns outward in an east-west direction. It can be observed on pups as early as eight weeks old and may remain this way for the entire life of the dog or correct itself as the chest develops. Dogs or bitches with this anomaly should be avoided in a breeding program since this condition is passed on to the progeny.

2. In addition to *"east-west"* feet, a structural fault that may accompany it is a *"Fiddle-Front"* (Fig.6). Here, not only are the feet turning outward, but the elbows turn away from the body as well producing the appearance of a fiddle .

East-West feet

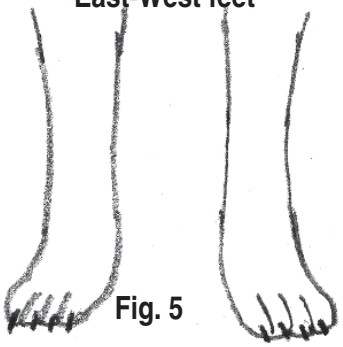


Fig. 5

Fiddle-Front

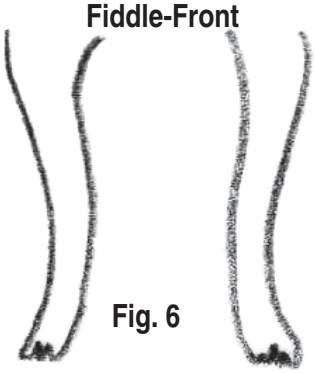
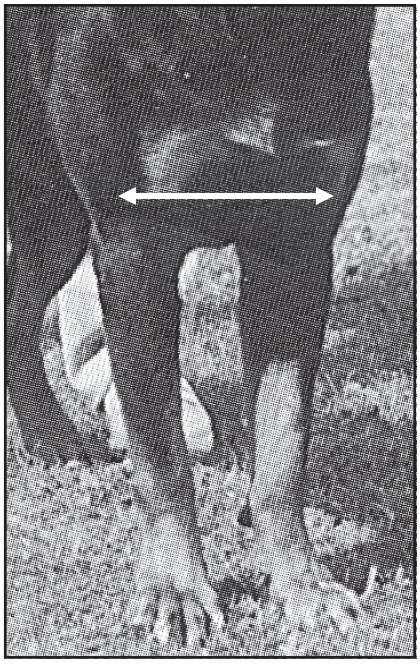


Fig. 6



Incorrect width of chest

Fig. 7

Interestingly, a major factor influencing the feet is not necessarily the feet, but incorrect construction of the chest in depth, width and placement of the sternum. When the chest is broad possessing the correct width, and a well pronounced sternum, it correctly supports the upper arm assembly (shoulder blade, humerus, see Fig. 2), producing a wide center of gravity. Each foot is positioned from the sternum, approximately 50% the total width of the chest . When the chest is narrow, possessing a close center of gravity (slab sided, pinched front, incorrect spring of rib) and or shallow in depth, the laws of physics forces the feet to turn outward, compensating for the incorrect width or depth (see Fig. 7).

3. Correctly constructed, the pasterns act like a shock absorber, dampening the impact while gaiting and help initiate lift. From the standard, **"Pasterns are strong, springy and almost perpendicular to the ground".** Nonetheless, incorrect pasterns are visible in the show ring.

Occasionally, the pasterns are observed to be soft ("broken down"). This is not a problem in the bones of the pastern but a laxity in the muscles of the radius/ulna and or a laxity in the ligaments and tendons of the forearm.

Common pastern problems

A. Too soft with too much slope (Fig 9), the dampening effect greatly diminishes in the pastern and the ability of the foot to help initiate lift is also significantly reduced. Often, this problem is accompanied by poorly knuckled toes and splayfooted.

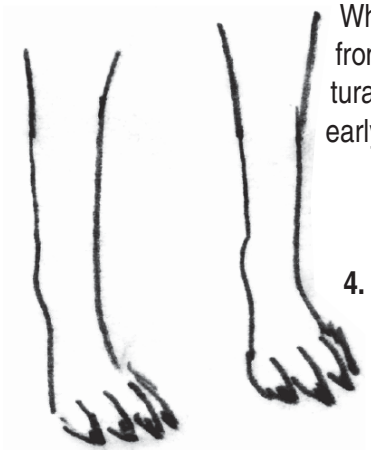
B. Too stiff and upright (90 degree angle to the ground) in the pastern. The opposite of too soft, the same effect results.

Fig. 8

Correct pastern, Correctly arched toes

Fig. 9

Incorrect pastern, poorly arched toes



When the pastern is too lax, the shock transmitted through the upper arm from gaiting cannot be correctly dampened. This results in possible structural damage to the upper arm assembly, poor front arm extension and early fatigue.

4. Splayfooted (Fig.10) is a problem frequently observable. This anomaly, too much space between the toes, is caused by a laxity in the ligaments and muscles of the phalangeal bones. When the dog is observed to be splayfooted, it most often has poorly arched toes as well.

Fig. 10

Nails

Nails are always thick, black and rigid. Occasionally, white nails are observable. It is not correct.

Additional anomalies

1. Too long in toes (Hare-like feet)
2. Insufficient thickness in the pads
3. Toes that curl to one side.

FUNCTION DICTATES FORM

Because the feet have a fundamental role in Rottweiler locomotion and share an importance to correct type, as breeders and exhibitors it is essential we understand that "Function Dictates Form" when discussing this area. The standard is specific in its blueprint for the feet. Deviations from the blueprint such as, soft pasterns, poorly arched toes, long toes, thin pads etc. impede the initial lift and the ability of the feet to be the first in line to absorb shock. Any incongruity in structure impedes its efficiency while gaiting.

The Rottweiler is a working dog and moves via the trot . Once around the show-ring or a short exercise can only result in a limited evaluation about its locomotion. Therefore, it is possible for an exhibit to go once or twice around the ring and be observed to gait reasonably well. A more thorough evaluation about the dog's entire structure must be determined with at least 5 minutes of gaiting.