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PROUD or ALOOF ?

These are the most exclusive and unique terms we can read in a Breed Standard; they speak for themselves identifying the essence of the Afghan Hound.

I wonder whether we have ever gone into their true meaning just like the authors of the Standards meant and described it in the beginning of the 20th century, or whether we breeders, judges, owners, are just accepting such terms as they were the description of a superficial appearance.

Proud and *aloof* are the perfect terms to describe how the dignified look of an Afghan Hound fits its inner personality :when you own an Afghan you learn very soon that we don't own its mind and soul.

Some of those present here and others who attended the 2005 Congress held in South Africa maybe are in the know of the "Proposal for a International United Standard of The Afghan Hound" I have worked on. We could also consider it as a "Standard Extension", summing the FCI and AKC Standards up, without changing any features of their original texts. Those who have never heard about it, are invited to have a look at its official version in the AIALA 30th Anniversary Book.

(Afghan Hound It.Club)

When I was examining in depth our breed's morphology according to the Canine Morphology Science, I found out that both Standards use different words to describe the same substance of type and most of its body characteristics. They are actually very similar and a very few differences do not cause damages to the true Type of the breed but must be welcome because they leave enough room to a personal interpretation of the different "*strains*" or "*ideal models*". Of this we must be grateful as our breed has its roots in very few original bloodlines, carrying a limited variability of genetic pool.

But if we go deeper into the inner meaning of the terms, we can realize how they are able to influence the future of the breeding more than other factors: we are talking about a couple of short, simple words, and now we are going to definitely be more aware of their implied potential.

This is what we are going to talk about with some preliminary statements.

Both Standards (including the Australian one, which is very close to the FCI/KC Standard) reads as follows as General Appearance: "head held proudly", which is not surprising, as this is a natural attitude for a Sighthound, unlike for other hunting dogs, gundogs or sheepdogs. A Sight hunting dog must hold his head higher to catch sight of the prey in the distance sharpening his view as far as possible.

Such attitude was not and still is not just a beauty item but is meant to develop a given ability.

Can we imagine a tribal Afghan Hunter admiring the beautiful gaze of his hunting dog "looking through one"...?

That's true, it looks through one with eyes gazing in the distance, not just in memory of ages past (that is true indeed, due to their thousand years old, wild heritage)... but also trying to catch sight of every living being to run after.

I am pretty sure the hunter would better appreciate the keen ability to intercept the escaping game, the instant reactions to its actions, the strength, the speed and the spring of its Tazi or Ghazni hound in the chase of it.

We are aware that a Standard is issued to be the only guideline for breeders, fans and judges.

Both Breed Standards "seem" to have changed the original breed in some ways, resulting into different personal interpretations in Europe and overseas.

I deeply believe that the many differences of "Strains" or *families of Type* we have got and we can see in different countries is one of the most amazing and fascinating thing in the breed, to be treasured as they provide us with a wider range of their phenotypic pool differences.

The natural *pride* of the Afghan Hound is bound to its ability to do the best job on its own with no man's help, obviously influencing and making up its temperament and behaviour.

The variability of environmental conditions in its native country (pretty similar to those of its "relatives & colleagues", Eastern and Arabic Sighthounds) where the Afghan lived, and the many jobs it was asked to accomplish by its tribal commander or by its Hunter owner, made up its body conformation and made its brain, mind and self

determination sharper.

A dog that is able to catch the prey on its own and to survive without the need of a man's feeding hand, which often used to live outside of a nomad's yurta away from humans:

this rustic dog soon learned to use its brain without showing submission to the human's will, just sharing with him the dignity and the *pride*, that is that sense of nobility and aloofness which are typical traits inherited from their native land, that imprints both the human and the canine.

That's where the *pride* and the *aloofness* merge.

Because of those living conditions and the jobs the Afghan was up to, it became a multi purpose dog for different activities, bringing up some substantial differences, that is the well known difference between the Desert Type-Tazi and the Mountain Type-Ghazni : differences in body and mind.

The Tazi Desert type seems to have had better inspired the American AKC Standard, while the FCI one seems to have been inspired by the Ghazni Mountain type,even considering the varieties of their interactive influence.

The Tazis were employed first as desert hunters in wide open fields and were asked by their owners to be able to pursue and chase a special kind of prey, like *partridges* or *dushties* (a small gazelle).

They had to be well adapted also to the local climate therefore they developed a smart and lean body, a little longer back, moderate quarters angulations, and were sparsely coated.

The loneliness of the environment, the wildness of their living condition and the separation from their owners homelife brought up a natural mistrust towards foreigners that later was going to turn into the typical attitude that both Standards describe with the word *aloof*.

It's clear that the *aloofness* is a temperament trait which is strictly connected with all those original conditions and which the breeders tried to mild after taking the breed to the "civilized" way of life of Western countries, both Europe and USA.

In the beginning an "aloof" behaviour could hide or be mistaken for an inborn kind of shyness towards the human handling and touch, besides an expression of a high rate of independence and self protection.

After less than one century of breeding the word *aloof* is still often misunderstood by many; when looking at the Afghan's "snooty" attitude, they think they are apathetic and cold, even silly or foolish.

Needless to say that we all know very well this is way far from being true!

It's funny when we see that often nowadays the natural "aloof" Afghan behaviour is not so appreciated when it happens turning down at some Judges' unwary touch in a show ring!

Both Standards agree on, ask for and consider the "aloof" attitude a typical feature of the breed: an Afghan "has" to be *aloof*, and the clever breeders all over the world have always had to and still have to try and treasure this peculiarity of the Afghan Hound when breeding.

We have to underline that some temperament traits have been more or less successful according to the favourite trends in countries. Therefore different breeding stocks have been showing various trends in behaviours according to their country of breeding. Wondering why this occurred?

Now I am asking you to pay attention to a significant difference resulting from what I have been describing.

When we are talking about the terms *proud & aloof*, we know without a doubt that it is a renowned concept shared by enthusiasts.

But when we analyse other important words that are strictly related to these terms, we have to take into account the weight of their meanings together.

"*Dignified and aloof... with a certain keen fierceness*" is what we read in the FCI/KC Standard, while the AKC Standard replies with "*aloof and dignified... yet gay*".

I am sure we are all aware and agree on what a *gay*, happy temperament is, though maybe it's not the same for the *keen fierceness*.

What is then a temperament that shows a certain *keen fierceness* in an Afghan Hound? Can it still be in step with a *gay temperament*?

Back to the Ghazni Hound: it also had to be able to catch preys, bigger than Tazi's and was often facing climate challenges to survive. Occasionally, the game to face could be the snow leopard or other bigger animals like a kind of local wolves or foxes, and at the same time they also happened to be guard or shepherd dogs according to the needs of their so called "owners", mostly mountain shepherds from nomad tribes following their flocks.

A keen view and a muzzle strength were compulsory, as well as a strong, compact body with enough spring but less speed than what they should need in wider open fields.

The body was more square and stronger, the quarters more angulated, the paws bigger and stronger enough to sprint and jump on the rocks, head with powerful jaws was also stronger than the Tazi's, coat was thicker and heavier.

What the Ghazni Hound needed more than Tazi's did, was that certain *keen fierceness* allowing it to accomplish its job of catching a bigger and fiercer prey as well as to protect its "owner's" home or flock from the attacks and wild threats. We can also deduce that the Ghazni Hound probably had an atavistic temperament inherited from a distant ancestor, maybe a Koochi Dog...?

The loneliness and wildness of its environment, and the isolation from human beings were a pretty similar condition to the Tazi's and that is why they both showed a similar *aloofness* towards strangers. At the same time they showed *pride* for their own independence and their self-government necessary to survive.

The *keen fierceness* characteristic of the native Ghazni breed was highly appreciated by breeders from the beginning in several countries from Central to Eastern Europe: for instance Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Eastern Countries that strongly wanted to carry on the original Ghazni Model in their breeding.

Some of the aboriginal imports from Afghanistan to Netherlands together, and through the mixed Tazi and Ghazni stock from India and Afghanistan to Uk, have been the foundation of most of the classic bloodlines behind many breeding plans in Europe.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Manch , English breeders gradually gave it up, (the

keen fierceness) despite of what the Standard was saying. After mixing the two aboriginal Types together into one breed, they chose to mild that "oldfashioned" fierceness and look for a meeker temperament. It was an easier behaviour for a smoother life as a family pet, allowing to enhance and deepen the potential of a wonderful, sharp mind and the emotional feelings that are so fascinating and that we love so much in our soul mates.

In spite of its primitive multipurpose attitudes, in the Afghan Hound we don't actually look for a guard dog, nor for a hunting, shepherd, or obedience dog: we look for a sweetest and most intelligent soul mate and for a smart sensitivity not distant from something like a mystic interaction with our deepest feelings.

Without denying a strong mind and temperament and a smart athletic body!

Then, what about the *aloof, dignified yet gay* Afghan of the AKC Standard?

While *pride* and *aloofness* had been shared and were influencing the breeders' views all over the world, that *keen fierceness* of the FCI Standard had been almost overlooked by the North Americans.

After mixing the first British stock with some new imports, the US breeders realized what great potential this charming breed had as a glamorous companion pet dog and above all as a Show Dog of incomparable look.

How to reach such goals with such an *aloof* temperament which is not always appreciated, of a dog with such a selfish and independent temperament not always easy to handle?

The remedy would have been to increase and enhancing that *gay* temperament through the right breeding choices which had to become the solution to improve and promote the relationship between the Afghan Hound and its family member or "owner". This feature was fitting very well the trends and minds of the US breeders who wanted to enhance the showing attitude of the Afghan Hound, but neither was it denied by British breeders who wanted to make the Afghan the perfect family companion, or by European breeders working on English bloodlines.

This said, while in Europe the goal of most breeders was to develop their breeding focusing on a meek, well balanced temperament, good for showing and for family homes, others chose to breed that strong determination keeping up with what called

back that hunting fierceness on the fields, or more recently the smoother Lure Coursing or Racing Competitions where keen determination is a key factor. Meanwhile breeders also focused on a playful and happier behaviour, getting along with the *proud* and *aloof*, dignified attitude.

Who can resist and not fall in love with a happy, *gay*, monkey faced Afghan puppy, with its playful and clownish behaviour, who even at the youngest age perfectly suits the most ancient soul of the breed: that PRIDE and ALOOFNESS that make the identity of the true Afghan Hound up.

If the *gay* temperament of the *The King of Dogs* (as perfectly described by the AKC Standard) could seem so contradictory related to the *aloof* and *proud* attitude, its happiness and humour give the breed the more familiar reputation of *clown*, so that it could be called *the Clown of the Dog's Kingdom*

Two opposite yet amazing realities which wonderfully coexist in the same body and in the same brain. More souls in a sole mind and in a sole heart of the Afghan Hound all over the world.