



Dogsteps: A New Look

Rachel Page Elliott

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Legendary breeder and world authority on canine movement Rachel Page Elliott's classic volume Dogsteps has been the definitive manual on canine movement for four decades. Dog show judges and breeders around the world have relied upon this straightforward text and its "cineradiographic" illustrations to gain a more complete understanding of canine gait. Even with the passing of its famous author in 2009, no other volume has stepped in the path of Dogsteps.

Upon its publication in 1973, the Dog Writers Association of America bestowed upon Dogsteps its highest award "Best Book of the Year." More than an analytical look at canine gait, the book teaches the reader about canine anatomy and how each body part contributes to a dog's correct movement. In the show ring, judges evaluate a dog's movement to determine whether or not the dog is correctly structured: Dogsteps explains what the judge is—or should be—looking for in lay man's terms, making this book essential for all breeders, judges, exhibitors, and students of purebred dogs.

The book begins by explaining the terminology commonly encountered in describing canine anatomy (e.g., stop, occiput, withers, hock, croup, etc.) and showing three comparative skeletons (dog, horse, and human), pointing out critical similarities and differences between each. The author describes the eight natural gaits of dogs and how each is accomplished in specific dogs; these include: walk, amble, pace, trot, hackney gait, suspension, canter, and gallop.

Individual chapters are devoted to the topics of angulation, toplines and tails, front assemblies, and shoulder assemblies. Each chapter is illustrated with "moving x-rays" to give the reader a clearer picture of how each anatomical region affects the dog's gait, pointing out common flaws, the importance of correct structure, and how balance and ease of movement are achieved in a properly put-together dog.

In an effort to provide dog breeders with a manual for breeding sound dogs, Rachel Page Elliott makes a case for correct structure as the most important aspect of keeping a breeder's line going strong. Recognizing faults in movement and structure, while not the primary intent of the book, allows the reader to be more aware of the many structural pitfalls that threaten the quality of many purebred dogs today. Beyond having a great breeder as a mentor, Dogsteps is the single best source for learning all there is to know about canine anatomy, structure, and movement. The author concludes, "Experience is a good teacher, but knowledge—with a little luck!—steers the shortest way to lasting success."

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