

Judging The Schipperke

--Written by Kristin Morrison and Geri Gerstner Hart, Copyright 2025

We wish to thank you for your interest in our fun “little black dogs”. We applaud you for seeking to expand and enhance your judging knowledge base.

“The Schipperke is curious, interested in everything around him, and is an excellent and faithful little watchdog. He is reserved with strangers and ready to protect his family and property if necessary. He displays a confident and independent personality, reflecting the breed’s original purpose as watchdog and hunter of vermin.”

This excerpt from our Breed Standard refers to a heritage as hunters of vermin on barges and as trusted guard dogs of shopkeepers in the provinces of Belgium where this breed originated. Bred to work independently of human direction, their small size and large dog personality made them ideal in these roles. Schipperkes stay true to that heritage and will swiftly alert owners of visitors, be it people or animals anywhere within their domain.

When judging this breed, please be mindful that they are cautious of strangers and exhibit a large degree of independence by their very nature. In respect for this heritage, it is important to approach these dogs from the front for table exams rather than from the side which would otherwise elicit a cautious response from the dog.

During the exam, some stiffness or shyness can be tolerated, but they should easily recover once back on the ground. As with most breeds, we ask that you please do not stare directly into the dog’s eyes when approaching, and certainly do not take the dog by the cheeks and try to be cute with them; this can make a Schipperke uncomfortable. Be complete, but do not linger over the dog.

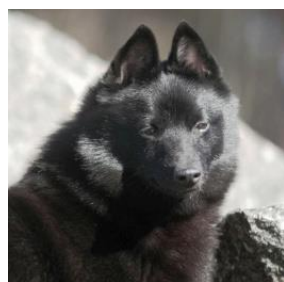
The Schipperke should be alert and may or may not present with upright ears on the exam table. Some younger dogs are just mastering the “stay” part on the table, but they should have the alert expression on the ground with upright ears. **Expression** – *“The expression is questioning, mischievous, impudent and alert, but never mean or wild.”*



Schipperke Expression

The Schipperke Head

When examining the Schipperke head, each individual element is essential. It is, however the combined attributes, the harmony in which each element flows together, that creates the look of “breed type”. The medium width of the **slightly** rounded skull narrows



Female schipperke head

smoothly toward the muzzle to the tip of the small black nose. The eyes, which are dark brown and oval in shape, are placed forward on the head. When viewed from above, the muzzle and skull blend together to form a tapered wedge. When viewed from the side, length of the muzzle is slightly less than the length of the skull; those skull and



Male schipperke head

muzzle proportions, combined with the small triangular shaped erect ears and the high placement of the ears, create the breed’s unique profile. If any of these proportions are off, or placement of ears or eyes are not correct, then the dog may either look wolf-like or toyish, neither of which present the proper Schipperke breed type. It is of note that until the most recent AKC Standard change, level bite was our “preferred” bite. The head of the Schipperke goes through many changes as the dog matures, therefore it is not uncommon to see a superior specimen of the breed being campaigned with a level bite, especially since we are looking for a wedge-shaped head tapering smoothly from skull to the tip of the nose, not a snipey, pinched in muzzle

that may be accompanied by lack of underjaw. A strong underjaw should accompany both a scissors and a level bite and each are equally acceptable. The Standard clearly states “*The bite must be scissors or level. Any deviation is to be severely penalized*”; therefore, wry teeth or misaligned teeth should be penalized.

The Schipperke Body and Structure

The Schipperke should be a thickset, square dog. You will be able to appreciate this once you get your hands on the dog during the exam. The neck should be of moderate length, arched and in balance to give the correct silhouette. Too short or too long of a neck would inhibit their original purpose as vermin hunter. It is important that the chest be broad and deep, extending to the elbows, and form a modified oval where it tapers slightly toward the sternum. The Standard does not describe a round or barrel chest, nor does it describe a narrow or slab-sided chest; therefore, neither is ideal. The forechest extends in front of the well laid-back shoulders. The front legs extend straight down from the body when viewed from the front with no bow-legged structure. They are not fiddle fronted with a “break” at the carpus, nor are they out at the elbows. When viewed from the side, the front should be placed **well under the dog** due to the well laid-back shoulders. There is a slight, flexible bend to the short, thick and strong pasterns. The pastern should neither be broken down, nor too upright. The Schipperke foot is small, round and tight allowing them to maintain their balance on a moving barge.

The loin is short, muscular and moderately drawn up which adds to the thickset appearance of the Schipperke. Too drawn up of a loin, or too long of a loin, will make them appear too light and is not within the Standard. The croup is broad and well-rounded with the tail docked. No tail is visually discernible.

The hindquarters typically appear slightly lighter than the forequarters but should still be well-muscled and in balance with the front. The hocks are well let down with balanced length of hock, and the stifles are well bent without over-angulation. The rear legs should extend straight down from the hip through the hock to the feet when viewed from behind. Cow-hocks or bowed-legs are not acceptable. Rear dew claws must be removed.

The Schipperke Coat

Now that we have discussed the structural attributes that make up a Schipperke, we will go on to the important characteristics of the Schipperke coat. Without the appropriate distinction of pattern, the Schipperke would not be within Standard. Taken directly from the AKC Standard so there is no confusion as this is such an important characteristic of the breed:

Pattern – “*The adult coat is highly characteristic and must include several distinct lengths growing naturally in a specific pattern. The coat is short on the face, ears, front of the forelegs and on the hocks; it is medium length on the body, and longer in the ruff, cape, jabot and culottes. The ruff begins in back of the ears and extends completely around the neck; the cape forms an additional distinct layer extending beyond the ruff; the jabot extends across the chest and down between the front legs. The hair down the middle of the back, starting just behind the cape and continuing over the rump, lies flat. It is slightly shorter than the cape but longer than the hair on the sides of the body and sides of the legs. The coat on the rear of the thighs forms culottes, which should be as long as the ruff. Lack of differentiation in coat lengths should be heavily penalized, as it is an essential breed characteristic.*”



Correct coat pattern

As mentioned above, the hair down the middle of the back lies flat. It is said by some to resemble a shiny satin “stripe” as it is very distinct from the rest of the body coat, which is often said to resemble

velvet. As the Standard states, this “stripe” should lie flat and continue over the rump. The “stripe” is typically the first area of body coat that exhibits the adult pattern as puppies gain their adult guard coat.

Texture – *“The coat is abundant, straight and slightly harsh to the touch. The softer undercoat is dense and short on the body and is very dense around the neck, making the ruff stand out. Silky coats, body coats over three inches in length or very short harsh coats are equally incorrect.”*

*Note: Puppies up to around 18 months may have a slightly softer coat, as they are shedding out puppy coat and growing into their adult coat. Likewise, a veteran may have a softer “spay” type coat, and may have more tinges of red as they age. Neither are to be penalized.

Trimming – *“As the Schipperke is a natural breed, only trimming of the whiskers and the hair between the pads of the feet is optional. Any other trimming must not be done.”*

The Standard **IS** specific about what trimming is acceptable (whiskers and hair between foot pads). It may be difficult to determine whether or not a dog has been trimmed when they are in your ring. For this we ask that you reflect back on the importance of the COAT PATTERN and where each distinct section lies. It is not uncommon to see Schipperkes with almost no length of coat on their underside as this should appear not shaped or trimmed, but should have a tapered appearance as this is the natural growth of the coat. It is also observed as a trend that the coat is not extending over or even to the croup. Each of these areas that are trimmed are done so to give the appearance that the dog is either not short on leg (i.e. trimming the underline, including the jabot) or is short enough in back to exhibit a square look in their silhouette (trimming of the croup and or culottes). It has also been seen where the body coat and ruff are trimmed in a way to accentuate the pattern. The jabot has seemingly gone “missing” from many dogs as well.



While brushing the coat is completely expected, it is important to note that it should be done to **accentuate** the pattern that is expected in the breed. A common trend seen is the brushing up of **all** of the coat on the body including the stripe and even trimming hairs on the stripe to make it more even and give the appearance of a solid topline.

The Schipperke pattern is **NATURALLY** very distinct and may be mistaken as having been trimmed, but as a seasoned handler or judge, you should be able to determine how a coat looks when trimmed versus when it grows naturally. There are tapered ends to the coat, not blunt cut ends.

We are often asked if a Schipperke that is out of coat will still exhibit the pattern. Even in young puppies, the pattern is evident, and is even present in a dog that is out of coat, but will not be as accentuated because of the lack of undercoat. The distinctive lengths **should be present**. The question then is whether the dog **would** carry the proper undercoat when in coat or not. As the judge, you will need to judge each dog for that day, but you must remember the importance of the full pattern to the breed.

If the pattern is correct, it will be **distinct and obvious**; you should not have to look for it. A coat lacking pattern should not be awarded.

“The outercoat must be black. Any color other than a natural black is a disqualification. The undercoat, however, may be slightly lighter. During the shedding period, the coat might take on a transitory reddish cast, which is to be penalized to the degree that it detracts from the overall black appearance of the dog. Graying due to age (seven years or older) or occasional white hairs should not be penalized.”

Determining “Squareness”

While the dog is still on the table, you may find it useful to determine if the dog is square or not. The abundant coat can be deceiving and may make you think that a dog is actually longer than they really are. It is suggested that you take one hand and place it on the forechest while taking the other hand at the hind end where the croup falls, and gently push the hair into the dog to determine if you are viewing a truly square dog. It is of note, that because we are looking for a dog with a proper, thick coat, it is important to determine that the dog exhibits the **thickset body** as described in the Standard, and not just coat making them appear to be thickset.

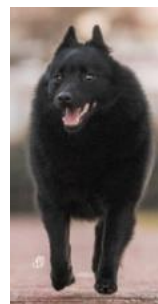


Schipperke Movement

Let’s now discuss movement in the Schipperke. The Schipperke should be able to exhibit the described movement on a **loose leash** at a **moderate speed**.

Although this section of our Standard appears short, it is **concise** about what is expected:

“Proper Schipperke movement is a smooth, well-coordinated and graceful trot (basically double tracking at a moderate speed), with a tendency to gradually converge toward the center of balance beneath the dog as speed increases. Front and rear must be in perfect balance with good reach in front and drive in the rear. The topline remains level or slightly sloping downward from the shoulders to the rump. Viewed from the front, the elbows remain close to the body. The legs form a straight line from the shoulders through the elbows to the toes, with the feet pointing straight ahead. From the rear, the legs form a straight line from the hip through the hocks to the pads, with the feet pointing straight ahead.”

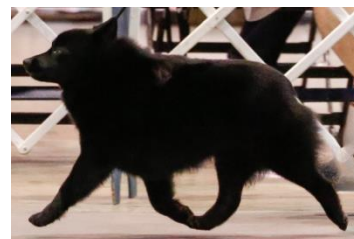


Correct double tracking movement

It describes the legs forming a **straight line** from the shoulders through the elbows to the toes; therefore, it does not allow any toeing in or out, flipping at the pasterns or paddling, or being out at the elbows. Additionally, it describes that when viewed from the rear, the legs form a **straight line** from the hip through the hocks to the pads with the feet pointing straight ahead. Again, this does not allow for hockiness, bow-legged movement or toeing in or out. When viewed either from the front or rear, the legs should be synchronous and in line with each other; ideally, you would not see the set of legs that is furthest from you as the dog moves. Any deviation from what is written within the Standard would be considered a fault.

When considering the double-track movement of the Schipperke, it is helpful to reflect on their original purpose and the importance of structure in that role. As vermin hunter on a moving barge, it is important to have the low center of gravity of a thickset, square dog. Correct movement is also important to help maintain balance on a barge in motion. A tall dog with single tracking movement, could not properly balance. A dog with a barrel chest would have much wider movement in the front than the rear which may also cause them to fall off balance while doing their job.

Although not much is mentioned in our Standard in regard to side-gait, please refer back to the *“smooth, well-coordinated and graceful trot”*. We are not looking for wide-open, flying side gait at high speeds. This should not be rewarded. Be aware of sickle-hocks, not only on the stacked dog, but on the go around as well. Many times, speed is used to hide faults such as this.



Ideal, balanced side-gait

“Front and rear must be in perfect balance with good reach in front and drive in the rear.”

This again is where we need to reflect on the structure as described in the Standard. A thickset, square dog would not exhibit extreme side-gait, nor are we looking for shortened or stilted side-gait. The balanced angulation we are looking for would not allow either. We are looking for a dog that maintains a level, or slightly sloping topline while moving, as any variation from this could be a breakdown in structure.

“The Schipperke is an agile, active watchdog and hunter of vermin. In appearance he is a small, thickset, cobby, black, tailless dog, with a fox like face. The dog is square in profile and possesses a distinctive coat, which includes a stand-out ruff, cape and culottes. All of these create a unique silhouette, appearing to slope from shoulders to croup. Males are decidedly masculine without coarseness. Bitches are decidedly feminine without over refinement.”

The Standard describes the height at the highest point of the withers as 11-13 for males and 10-12 inches for bitches. The key point, however, is that *“Quality should always take precedence over size”*. If the dog is square, has an ideal coat pattern and silhouette and moves well, he should be rewarded over a dog that is smaller or larger but does not exhibit the same qualities. We are not looking to reward coarseness. The male should be masculine, while the female Schipperke should be feminine compared to males, but should not be over refined.

“Any deviation from the ideal described in the Standard should be penalized to the extent of the deviation. Faults common to all breeds are as undesirable in the Schipperke as in any other breed, even though such faults may not be specifically mentioned in the Standard.”

We would like to encourage you to put your hands on the dogs again even after you have examined them initially and have seen them move. There may be times where you thought you felt one thing, but after seeing them move, you feel you are not seeing that, or that you want to determine if the dog is square. Most exhibitors should welcome this, but please note as with any dog that is initially examined on the table, the exhibit **MUST** be placed back on the table if you wish to put your hands on them again.

Schipperkes tend to be a late maturing breed, typically getting better as they age. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see them being campaigned over the age of 7-8 years.

There are currently 2 disqualifications within the breed:

- *A drop ear or ears.*
- *Any color other than a natural black*

In conclusion, we hope that you have gained a better understanding of the breed and the importance of our breed's characteristics and attributes. We are looking for a thickset, square Schipperke that exhibits proper coat and texture while being **BALANCED** in structure and movement. The head should form a wedge with a fox like face exhibiting small, triangular, high set ears and dark brown oval eyes. The head must be in balance with the neck which flows in balance with the body. It is a combination of the distinct coat pattern and structural attributes that contribute the important silhouette of the Schipperke.



Balanced Male Schipperkes

Balanced Female Schipperkes