

# A Tale of the Tail

The ACD tail and the breed standard



Marc Moore  
November 7, 2012

# It's a simple Tail right?



After having rescued Australian Cattle Dogs for nearly 30 years we never really focused on the tail of our dogs (other than if they had one!). I mean we had dogs that had bushy tails, thin tails, curly tails and bent tails.

That lack of focus on the tail ended this past year when we began to show our first ACD in confirmation. Looking at the standard it talks about the tail, giving the judges what appears on the surface a clear way to see the tail and how it relates on a confirmation correct ACD.

Let's look at this part of the AKC standard and see what it says and just as important what it doesn't say.

“The set of the tail is moderately low, following the contours of the sloping croup and of length to reach the hock. At rest it should hang in a very slight curve.

During movement or excitement the tail may be raised, but under no circumstances should any part of the tail be carried past a vertical line drawn through the root.

The tail should carry a good brush.” from AKC standard for the Australian Cattle Dog.

Well that seems simple enough...right.?

As I have found out this year it's not seemingly as simple to understand as one would think.

Let's look at the first part it deals with the attachment location of the tail. Basically the standard says the tail should be attached at a point where it appears that the body continues on down, that's what following the contours of the sloping croup means. The tail shouldn't look placed on the back or it shouldn't look as if the angle of the body stops and a new angle of the tail starts.

See the drawing below how the croup and tail flow together into one line.

The next item the standard addresses is the length of the tail, not too long or not too short is good right? Yes but it should end just about the hock. Clearly a little above is ok as a little below is ok that's what approximately means, although remember a tail that is too long is more likely a problem when working than the opposite since it could get stepped on or caught in between something.

The next section of the standard has to do with the movement section, this is the area of understanding that really needs clarification with many in the judging community.

I have a very confident male dog who doesn't care if he is in the show ring or in a livestock pen it's all work to him. With this "work" comes the typical ACD focus...as any of you who have cattle dogs know most have an "all in" philosophy, if it's play or work if you are a cattle dog you go all out, it's probably this that makes us love the breed so much, they do nothing half way.

So when it comes to a cattle dog in the show ring judges must understand this.

The standard says the tail can be raised during movement or excitement (or both). It is the understanding of how high that has created so much "fun" for us with new AKC judging friends this past year.

Let's look first at what the standard does not say..it does NOT say where it CAN be moved to during this movement or excitement. The only thing it says is where it can NOT go.

Basically the standard leaves it open for the tail to be anywhere during movement, anywhere but one place.

Anywhere means straight out, down low, or even higher than straight out, even between the legs (as much as i don't like to see that) is all allowed in the standard.

The standard says the one area that is a no zone is above a VERTICAL line drawn through the root of the tail.

This clearly states that if you draw a line from the ground up toward the sky going through the point where the tail attaches that no part of the tail is to cross that line, But also just as clearly the standard allows the tail to be ANYWHERE up to that point.



Carrying the tail anywhere up to the line during movement is fine according to the standard. Plus the standard says nothing about the shape of the tail during movement, at rest it should be down.

Fig1

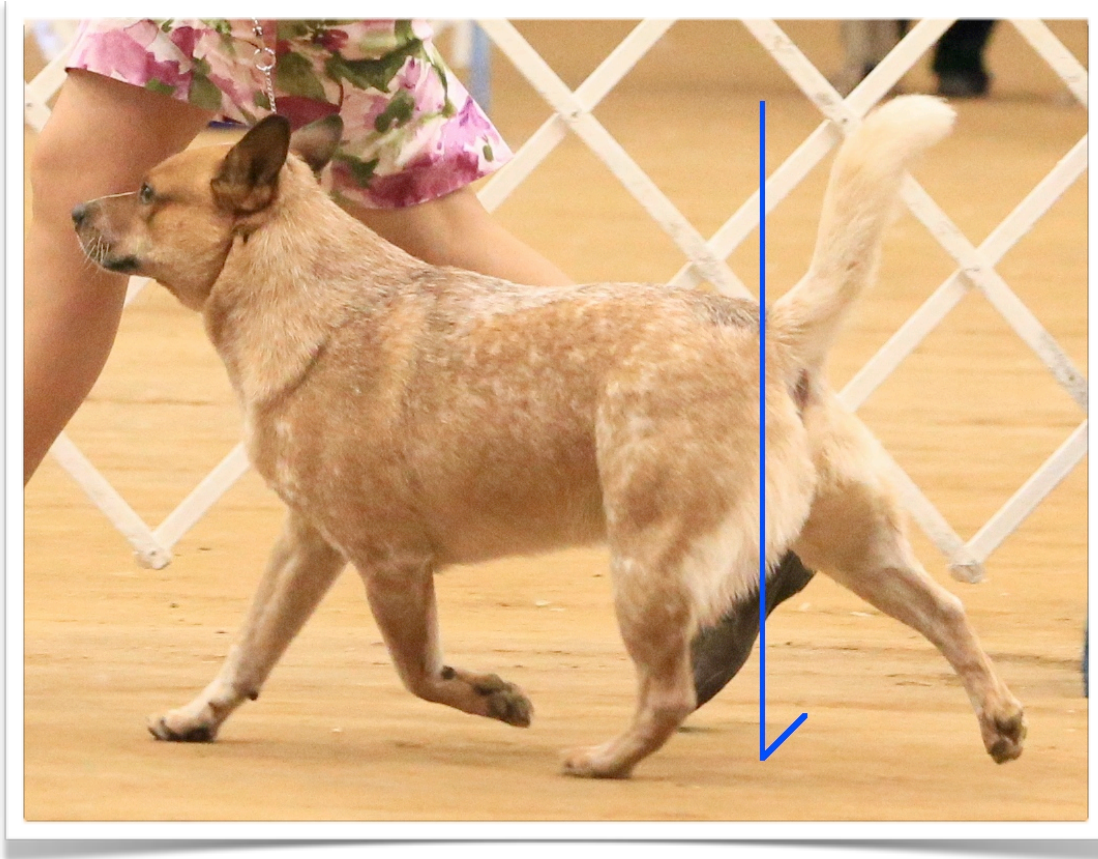


Fig1 shows the Vertical (up) line drawn through the root of the tail, note the tail up is nowhere close to crossing the line.

Fig 2



Fig 2 shows a HORIZONTAL line drawn across the topline of the body, note there is NO mention in the standard of the ACD moving with a horizontal tail position, it is fine but in no way according to the standard is it preferred or required.

Let's remember dogs, all dogs , use their tail as an instrument of expression, we all know what a wagging tail (or nub) means, well many ACDs show their expression during work with the tail. The mention in the standard was so that the tail fixed placement would be recognized as proper (following angle of the croup) and so



that a tail that comes up over the back could be seen as a problem mainly because this would show a likely structure problem of the attaching point of tail, keeping the “GAY” tail from becoming an issue in the breed.

Having judges who misinterpret horizontal from vertical is something that has frustrated me a few times this year as some have said to me they wished my dogs tail did not come up past his topline as its detracts from his movement? Well if they would reread the standard and realize the individual dog dictates the placement (during movement) of his tail and that yes an AKITA style tail is wrong on an ACD but anything up to that VERTICAL line is just fine, and that unlike many of the other breeds in the show ring that day, the ACD is going to work when his handler at the entrance of the ring says.....let's go!



The last part of the tail section of the standard addresses the coat finishing of the ACD tail, this section says it should carry a good brush, some have more “brush” than others, But again we should go back to the cattledog’s function for why this was even mentioned in the standard like it was. The cattledog was one of the original tools for the Australian rancher to gather up and drive his cattle long distances over sometimes many days and weeks which meant this dog didn’t come inside to a warm house every night , it slept on the ground of the outback in the cold and at times rain, the good brush of the tail is used to help keep the ACD warm has they can curl up and keep the face and head warm with a tail of good brush.

An ACD tail is much like the ACD itself varied and unique in it’s shape, color and movement, but with the guidelines allowed by the AKC standard it’s not to difficult to get the Tale of the Tail.

