

## **FROM HEAD TO TAIL PART 2 : Does it Span**

We are an odd lot in this breed. The standard of the country of origin barely covers a page with the hindquarter of the dog described (perfectly!) with only one word. Here in Canada the powers that be gave us more words, but did not change anything else (thankfully) so we still have this small tenacious workmanlike chap who lives with us and for those of us that do so, works with us.

None of the breed standards worldwide give us a height for the breed. This is with good reason. When the border originated it was as a working terrier, and "work" for this breed means to go to ground and bay (give voice) or bolt (make his prey move out of the earth or den) He was also expected to get to his place of work on his own four feet (in some instances he would be on horseback in saddlebags but mostly he got to work honestly) and some of the terrain was moorland, tussocky, stony, high. Or lowland, level, ploughed, etc. So, borders with longer legs would be needed for some terrain and a bit shorter for other.

What has never changed is what is needed to go to ground! A narrow flexible (compressible) rib. The men that originated this breed knew well what they were doing and they had a canny way of making sure the dog was of the correct size to do the job whether he was taller or not. They spanned him. They placed their hands with thumbs together behind the dog's shoulders and their hands came around and under the dog behind the elbow. If they could do this easily and their fingers touched or hopefully overlapped a bit then they knew the dog could creep and wriggle into the earths of its then quarry. (The legal quarry of the Border Terrier at that time was Fox, Badger and Otter) – nowadays of those three in the country of origin it is just the fox that is legal quarry)

As breeders we do not want to breed dogs that are too big, so we have learned to span our dogs as the tool of choice to let us know whether or not our breeding showing stock is correctly built through the rib to go to ground. This spanning is vitally important. Not only does it give us information as breeders and judges. Far more important is the ability it gives to the dog itself to do its job without getting stuck or overwhelmed by its quarry.

A fox's earth may only be four or five inches in places, it may even have clay pipes integral to the tunnel system. The dog has to slide and wriggle through these (pitch black) places and confront his quarry whilst laying flat out sometimes on his sides and bay at him to scare him out, or get to work on him physically with teeth and claw. Try to imagine this, all in a tight space that is dark, the only way out is usually the way you got in and to do this your chest MUST be narrow and able to compress. Your skin MUST be thick and loose so you can wriggle backwards as well as forwards. You must be courageous!

For those of you who do not work their dogs, or who enjoy the sport of "Earthdog", please do not equate the 9" and square tunnels leading to a caged rat, as work. What it does do is test the willingness of the dog to creep into a darker place and close up to quarry in a safe environment. I like Earthdog and I think it is great that we have it, and I would defend to the last breath the good folk who put these trials on. However for those who may have thought these were similar to a real earth and that a dog who can get down there is narrow, sadly this is not so!

When giving judges education, we always try to educate them as to why they are spanning as well as showing them how. If a judge is prepared to stand in the show ring of any breed, s/he should have at least the knowledge of why that breed is on the planet.

## Does it Span (cont'd)



So when you have that next show prospect in the whelping box, and you are evaluating his good and bad points, remember what he was bred for and WHY those points are important and when you get to his rib, make sure it is long, compressible and not round.

The photos are Courtesy of Dawn Bladon (Emblehope) and show a border being spanned correctly.

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