THE SAMOYED

These materials have been approved by the Samoyed Club of America Board of Governors with the understanding that these articles reflect their individual author’s opinions. (9-10-2007)
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The Samoyed

by Kent and Donna Dannen

Though the Samoyed may look to some like an overgrown stuffed toy, this is a rugged working breed. It was developed over the centuries by the isolated, little-studied Samoyed tribes of north-central Siberia, one of the harshest lands on earth. This isolation preserved the gene pool from crossbreeding with other types of domestic dogs, resulting in one of the oldest of breeds; the Samoyed has remained virtually unchanged for several thousand years.

The Samoyed people lived a semi-nomadic life as reindeer herders, moving across the feeding grounds on the treeless arctic tundra in the summer and retreating into the taiga forests with their herds during the winter. Fishing and hunting added to their livelihood. These nomads lived, both summer and winter, in portable tents or chooms.

Second only to reindeer in importance to the wandering Samoyed people were their highly valued, multipurpose dogs. The dogs also gave the tribesman help in herding and hunting, companionship in the wilds, warmth at night in the chooms, and probably transportation across the frozen winter landscape by dogsled.

Unfortunately, we know relatively little about the Samoyed people and how they interacted with their beautiful, versatile dogs. Since before the 1930s no non-soviet anthropologist has been permitted to study the Siberian peoples. What we do know of the Samoyed people, their way of living and their dogs comes primarily from the journals of a handful of turn-of-the-century polar explorers who obtained Siberian dogs to help them chart unknown arctic and Antarctic regions. Some of these adventurers used Samoyed dogs and praised them highly for their usefulness and their wonderful temperaments. For instance, a Samoyed named Etah was lead dog for Norwegian Roald Amundsen, who, in 1911, was the first man to reach the South Pole.

Some members of the various expeditions that used Samoyeds retained these animals as pets after they returned home. Other Samoyeds ended their expedition days as zoo animals. And some were sold to English dog fanciers, who defined the breed standard.

The Samoyed has changed very little in appearance since the days of the explorers. Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, who attempted to reach the North Pole with a Samoyed sled team between 1893 and 1894, kept a record of the weights of his dogs, and their average size approximates today’s normal Samoyed. A 21- to 23½-inch male Sam normally weighs around 60 pounds, and the 19- to 21-inch female weights 45 to 50 pounds. This is the size and weight of an endurance dog. Many of the dogs originally imported from Siberia could have competed successfully in today’s show ring.

Expedition dogs from the western Samoyedic peoples often were spotted, brown or black. But Russian dog broker Alexander Trontheim, who procured sled dogs for foreign explorers, preferred to buy from the more eastern Siberian Samoyed tribes. These isolated people produced dogs that were always white, cream or biscuit, just like today’s purebred Sam.

It has been said that 12 individual dogs shaped the Samoyeds of today. This entire fabulous dozen ended up in England, where breeders began registering and showing the breed. Several were expedition dogs that returned from the 1894 Jackson-Harmsworth expedition to Franz Josef Land, north of the Arctic Circle. One came from an Australian zoo, where it had been deposited after completing the Borchgrevink Antarctic expedition. Another came from an expedition to the North Pole by the Italian adventurer, the Duc d’Abruzzi. English breeders who made personal trips to Siberia before World War I obtained others from Alexander Trontheim. No significant breeding stock has come from Siberia since World War I.

The first Sam to be registered in America was owned by Princess de Montyglyon, hereditary princess of the Holy Roman Empire, who immigrated to the United States in 1904. She was given the dog by the Grand Duke of Russia, the Czar’s brother.

Despite the breed’s aristocratic entry into America, many subsequent American breeders were everyday folks who began exhibiting and also sledding with the dogs they imported — primarily from English show stock. In America in particular there was an emphasis on producing...
Samoyeds that could work just like the expedition dogs and the original Samoyed tribal dogs.

The modern Samoyed most famous for working attitude and accomplishments was Rex of White Way, who was bred in the 1950s by Agnes Mason of White Way Kennels in California. Mason had lived in Alaska and raised sled dogs with her father. When she moved to California and began breeding Samoyeds, she continued her dog sledding activities.

Mason did much to publicize the working aspects of the Samoyed breed, giving exhibitions with her dogs at fairs, dog shows and parades. She employed dog driver Lloyd Van Sickle to use her dogs to carry mail by sled between Ashton, Idaho, and West Yellowstone, Montana, during the winter. Rex led the mail run team. He was also taught to parachute out of small aircraft to assist in winter mountain rescues.

Although a successful show dog, Rex evidently was kept too busy to finish his championship. There is a story that he was pulled out of a dog show one day to help with the rescue of people from a downed plane in the Sierras. Rex was also a successful weight-pull competitor. Rex’s name appears in the pedigrees of many of today’s best working Samoyeds, and his attitude and determination in the harness have put their stamp on many bloodlines.

Love must have motivated the tribal Samoyed breeders to create gentle animals that particularly love children and have calm, even temperaments. Sams often served as blankets for the Samoyed people in Siberia’s sub-zero winter nights. In modern, warm houses, despite their heavy double coats, many Samoyeds prefer to sleep next to (or in) their master’s beds.

All this devotion does not mean that a Samoyed necessarily will defend its owner or owner’s property. Sams seem to trust nearly everyone, and would prefer to go home with the burglar if his life seemed more entertaining. The only warning sounds a Sam may make as strangers approach its master’s property are yips of joy at the sight of new people to love. This loud barking, however, makes the Samoyed an acceptable watchdog, even though it is useless as a guard dog.

The Sam’s typical mischievousness can make puppy raising or obedience training an interesting experience. Boredom may spawn episodes of creative destruction, which can cause great consternation among Samoyed owners who have little time to devote to their pet. Even if a Sam receives much attention through training, it often seems that the dog lies awake at night thinking up ways to evade the owner’s goals. If training is made a game, however, and the owner is undeniably the master of the pack, training a Samoyed can be a real joy. Many Sams have placed admirably in obedience trials.

Two or more dogs can pull a dog sled, an activity that can help exercise owners and dogs and make winter a very enjoyable time. The founding dogs of the Samoyed breed worked as sled dogs and were obtained from Siberia for that task. That alone should resolve the never-ending controversy among present-day fanciers over whether or not the Samoyed’s original purpose was to pull sleds as well as herd reindeer.

Samoyed dogs probably did both, for nomadic people cannot afford single-purpose possessions.

Samoyeds have competed admirably in weight-pull events. In weight pull competitions, each dog within a weight category tries to pull successively heavier loads until all dogs but one have failed to pull the heaviest. Some Samoyed owners derive practical benefit from their dog’s willingness to pull heavy loads by using them to drag logs in from the woodpiles.

Another of this versatile breed’s innate talents is herding. While very few Sams have been trained for stock dog herding trials, many have taken and passed herding aptitude tests. Perhaps the use of reindeer instead of sheep would cause more Samoyed owners to try this activity.

For the owner who desires to work this breed in less organized ways Samoyeds can hike with burdens such as food, water, clothing, and other gear in dog packs. Some owners who enjoy cross-country skiing may wish to acquire a towline and use one or two Sams for skijoring.

Most Samoyed owners would agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson that “beauty is its own excuse for being,” but the dogs need to work also. Capable of performing many different tasks, Samoyeds need the mental and physical stimulation of labor to achieve the dignity implied by their erect ears and plumed tails and the joy implied by their ready smiles.
On the Yamal Peninsula in the Russian north, voting in the presidential election has already begun. Because of the remoteness of the peninsula—it is on the short of the Arctic Ocean about 1,430 miles northeast of Moscow—residents were to vote between Monday and Saturday.
Welcome to the Samoyed

by Jill Smoot

Judging Sams can be a challenge in itself as this is not a breed that wants to stand still for extended periods of time. Being highly intelligent, boredom sets in quickly. They will be looking for something else to do, some way to liven up the place. The Sam is the dog you will see grabbing at the handler’s skirt or pants on the down and back. They get great glee out of executing a flying leap and sometimes a full flip on the way around the ring. They will be found batting at the handler with a front foot to say, “Yo - I’m here - feed me or let’s go!”

Sams are puppies forever in their mind; their body reaches maturity at about 3 years of age. Some think this dog show game is great fun because they get fed. Some think they are brought to this great place to play with all the other dogs. Others are totally bored. When you look in the eyes of the bored ones you see visions of miles of snow, reindeer and small children.

There are not words adequate enough to describe the Samoyed expression: the twinkle of mischief, the look of intelligence and dignity, an undying devotion to humans and a smile that lights up the entire face. Once you’ve seen it you’ll know.

But first, all the pieces have to be in the right place. A structurally sound Samoyed is beauty in motion. There is no bounding or pounding, no flopping of too long a coat. Its stride is clean and effortless; head down and ears back they are ready to take on the elements. A sound dog will not tire easily. Feel free to move them as much as time allows. You may poop out the handler but you should not be able to poop out the dog.

The greatest injustice you, as a judge, can do our breed is diminish the importance of their working ability. If you are having a hard time making up your mind as to your placements, ask yourself, ‘Which one of these dogs would I want with me if I was in the tundra in Siberia, 20 miles from the nearest town?”

The Samoyed (Sammy-Ed) has the distinction of being the breed with the most often mispronounced name and one of the most beautiful. Being one of the most beautiful may perhaps be a curse as people tend to forget the Samoyed is a multipurpose working dog - not just a pretty face.

To fully understand the Samoyed you must go back to the breed’s origin and appreciate their role in the lives of the Samoyed people. From The Samoyed by Kent & Donna Dannen:

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As you initially view the Samoyed in your ring, he should present the picture of an animal just off square, being 5% longer in back than in height, and with length of leg 55% of the distance from the ground to the withers. This is a requirement of any good working and herding dog.

While we stress good length of leg, we do not want to see Sams the size of malamutes. The bitches may be longer in back than the males but not so long as to be unsound. The Standard states:

An over sized or undersized Samoyed is to be penalized according to the extent of the deviation. Size is not a disqualification. Short legs are to be severely penalized.

Go back to environment and function - the Samoyed is not a single purpose dog. It was designed to be a utility dog, capable of performing both herding and sledge functions. It is by necessity a compromise in construction and performance.

That its functions included herding large animals over considerable territory meant the dog must be smaller, quicker and more agile than its Malamute relative, placing it closer to the Siberian Husky in this respect. The requirement that it also haul moderate loads over very long distances made it desirable to have a substantial dog. The Standard addresses substance as:

... the sufficiency of bone and muscle which rounds out a balance with the frame. The bone is heavier than would be expected in a dog of this size, but not so massive as to prevent the speed and agility most desirable in a Samoyed. In all builds, bone should be in proportion to body size. The Samoyed should never be so heavy as to appear clumsy nor so light as to appear racy. The weight should be in proportion to the height.

The Samoyed is a double coated dog. The body should be well covered with an undercoat of soft, short, thick, close wool with longer and harsher hair growing out through it to form the outer coat, which stands straight out from the body and should be free from curl. The coat should form a ruff around the neck, more on males than females. The female coat will be softer than the male coat and usually shorter. Quality of coat should be weather resistant and considered more than quantity. A dog in the process of blowing, who exhibits proper coat quality is more desirable than a full coated dog with improper coat quality. Stand off coat is another very important point. An outer coat comprised of longer hair will lie down, hold the ice and snow and weigh the dog down. There is a point of too much coat, as you can have too much head, too much bone, etc. Once again, think of function.
Other points on coat:

- Most puppies will have very soft coats, known as puppy fuzz.
- Some puppies will not lose all of their puppy coat until around 1 year of age.
- Some puppies will have a profusion of curly coat on their backs under the tail. This will often make them look very high in the rear. It is also a temporary puppy coat condition. Puppies who have waves in the coat on their back generally turn out to have a ton of coat as an adult. Frequent baths will change the coat texture and durability.
- You should be able to see the silver tips in the coat in natural light. An absence of silver tips may be the result of scissoring.
- The only parts of the Samoyed that should be scissored are: feet (bottom and sides) and hocks.
- A Samoyed can carry a plush, sculptured looking coat and not be scissored.

The color of the coat should be pure white, white and biscuit, cream, or all biscuit. Any other colors are a disqualification. A dog exhibiting biscuit is just as desirable as a dog who is pure white. We derive some of our best pigmentation from dogs with biscuit in the coat. The breed has removed the colored dogs from the gene pool. You may find a puppy with a streak of what appears to be gray in the coat. The gray will disappear as the dog gets older and that particular dog will generally have very black pigment.

As you run your hand through the coat you should find only hair on your hand — no chalk, hair spray or other foreign substances. A blue or green tinge to the coat is the sign of a bleach job gone sour. Do not reward this activity.

You cannot truly judge a Samoyed standing still. Once again, we get back to the beautiful syndrome. Some dogs may be a beautiful picture standing still but without proper conformation they could not pull their weight in the cold climates.

The Samoyed should move with a single tracking effortless stride, exhibiting reach and drive, dignity and grace. A Samoyed should never have a straight shoulder or upper arm or a short upper arm. This would result in no reach, a choppy stilted gait, and far too many steps required to reach a designated point. The Sam is not an overgrown Pomeranian. We want the shoulder blade and upper arm to be at least the same length — ideally the upper arm is a slight bit longer than the shoulder blade. The shoulders should be long and sloping with a lay-back of 45 degrees and be firmly set. Out at the shoulders or elbows should be penalized. The withers separation should be approximately 1½ inches. To facilitate proper movement of the shoulders and front legs, the chest should be deep, the deepest point being at the point of the elbow, and ribs well sprung. Heart and lung room are secured more by body depth than width.

In the rear assembly the upper thigh should be well developed, stifles well bent – approximately 45 degrees to the ground. It is very important that the front and rear angulation be the same. You will see all too many over-angulated rears with straight fronts. This does not make a balanced Samoyed. The hock should be approximately 30% of the hip height. Straight stifles are objectionable. Double jointedness or cow hocks are a fault. Cow hocks should only be determined if the dog has had an opportunity to move.

The Samoyed should have a hare foot — not a cat food—slightly spread but not splayed; toes arched, pads thick and tough, with a protective growth of hair between the toes. Generally when you find small cat feet on a Sam they also have very straight pasterns and very straight shoulders. Once again, think of the environment. The Sam’s feet are their snowshoes.

Another part of the Samoyed which is misinterpreted as often as the name of the breed, is the Samoyed head. You will hear the breed has two types of heads — bear heads and wolf heads. There is one proper head as per our Standard and it is neither a bear head or a wolf head. It is important at this time to remember the Samoyed is described...
as a moderate dog: moderate in length of back, moderate length of leg, etc. When you look at a Samoyed head think of moderation. We do not want to see a head so broad and muzzle so short as to resemble a Chow head; nor do we want a head so narrow and muzzle so snippy as to resemble a wolf.

The skull should be a wedge, broad (in balance to the body), slightly crowned and should form an equilateral triangle on lines between the inner base of the ears and the center point of the stop. If the distance from the occiput to the eyebrows is the same as the distance from the bottom of the stop to the tip of the nose, you have a balanced head.

The muzzle should be of medium length and medium width, neither coarse nor snippy; should taper toward the nose and be in proportion to the size of the dog and the width of skull. The muzzle must have depth and the presence of an under-jaw to fill out the picture. The whiskers should not be removed. The stop should not be too abrupt, nevertheless, well defined.

The lips should be black for preference and not have the appearance of being coarse nor should the flews drop predominately at the corners of the mouth. The Sam should have a smallish mouth with the lips curving up slightly at the corners to create the Samoyed smile. A pigment break in the lip line is acceptable.

The ears on the Samoyed may be one of the hardest things to judge as the dog will not always hold them where they belong. The ears should be strong and thick, erect, triangular and slightly rounded at the tips. They should not be large and pointed, nor should they be small and bear eared. The ear should be well furred to protect it from freezing. The correct size ear for the head can be measured by folding the ear down; the tip of the ear should come to the outer corner of the eye. The ears should be placed well apart but be within the border of the outer edge of the head. They should not be on top of the head or have the tips point at each other. When a Sam is very excited, to the point of doing a triple flip, they can draw their ears too close together. When a Sam is bored with the entire scene, he can drop his ears and then greatly resemble an Ewok. If there are children ringside or heaven forbid a baby crying, the Sam's ears will probably be turned completely around. It may take some noise making on your part to see the true ear set.

The eye shape and placement are a big part of the Samoyed expression. The eyes should be almond in shape so the dog can squint out the blinding reflection of the snow. Round or protruding eyes are penalized. They should be placed well apart and deep-set with the lower lid slanting toward an imaginary point approximating the base of the ears.

Eyes should be dark for preference - blue eyes are a disqualification. Eye rims should be black. In bright light, a Sam will squint his eyes and you cannot tell the correct eye shape. Turn the dog away from the light or block the light with your body to view the true eye shape.

The nose should be in proportion to the size of the head - black in color for preference but a brown, liver or Dudley nose should not be penalized. A Sam's nose can change color (becomes lighter) during the winter and may lighten as the dog gets older. The nose should not be colored.

With all the parts of the head in their proper place, the Samoyed expression is one of alertness and intelligence. The slight curve of the lips forming the Samoyed smile is a trademark of the breed.

The neck should be strong and carried proudly erect, set on sloping shoulders to carry the head with dignity when at attention. The chin should be above the topline when the neck is erect. The neck should blend into the shoulders with a graceful arch. A Sam will drop his head when trotting.

The tail should be profusely covered with long hair and carried forward over the back and down the side of the body when alert. The tail will sometimes drop. When judging the Sam, you should see the tail over the back at least once. The tail should be moderately long with the tip of the tail extending to the top of the hock. The tail is carried loosely (you
should be able to run your hand (under it), over the back with the set not too high or too low. A double hook is a fault. One of the main purposes of the tail is to protect the face when the dog is curled up in the snow. Without proper length, the tail could not reach the dog's face.

Temperament is another very important part of our breed. Theses are people dogs; they should like most people. The only thing you should expect from a Sam while you are examining it is a lick on the face. If a Sam has the proper temperament, you should never be in fear of being bitten. Unprovoked aggression should be severely penalized.

What a typey Samoyed does not have²

- short legs
- straight shoulders
- extra heavy bone
- fine or spindly bone
- small thin feet
- cat feet
- thin long ears
- large round eyes
- extremely wide, large mouth
- a "loner" solitary disposition
- round body
- aggressive disposition toward humans
- long droopy soft coat
- clumsy movement
- excessive massive size
- small, spitz-like size
- cobby body
- long body
- weak rears with cow hocks

A proper typey Samoyed does have²

- good length of leg, 55% of height
- sparkling, well-set almond eyes
- eyes that can squint out the sun
- head carried higher than the tail with a set of the neck whose curve matches the line of the curve of the stifle, when viewed from the side
- heart-shaped rib cage, with spring of ribs and depth to approximately the elbow
- slight arch in the loin for strength and speed
- loosely set tail, drooping down either side of the body with enough room to pass your hand between body and tail at the croup
- sufficient coat and ruff to frame the body with pleasant curves, with texture that is on the harsh side, erect to hold out snow and moisture, and double-coated at appropriate time of the year
- expression — created by set of ears, shape of eyes, Samoyed smile and a total lighting up of the face

² Interpretation of the Standard, Part I - The Essence of Type, Bob Ward
The Samoyed as a Working Dog

by Donna Dannen

I've been asked to write about what I have experienced as one who extensively works my Samoyeds, in light of the Samoyed Standard. First of all, I believe that if the Standard were strictly adhered to, all Samoyeds would be capable of any of their ancestral work: that of endurance hauling, herding and hunting. The standard, as written, is a good one, describing the attributes needed in endurance work.

Unfortunately, sometimes the incredible beauty of the Samoyed breed gets in the way of what lies underneath the heavy coat, and the cosmetic aspect of the Sam becomes more important (though it, too, is composed of important elements of survival in the Arctic environment) than basic structure and movement. The Samoyed is also captivatingly mischievous and often is rewarded for showmanship (again a part of the character as mention in the Standard) as much as for the physical aspect of the written Standard.

When a breed of dog is so beautiful and captivating, it is easy to see why the breed's background can be ignored or forgotten. Underlying the lovely coat and winsome face is a history of harsh reality in a brutal environment. The Samoyed being developed as a breed in part by fairly primitive Arctic people, was not a dog that could get by on its mere beauty. It was the helpermate, babysitter, and sometimes the parka ruff for its first people. These dogs had to survive little food and extreme temperatures. They had to be helpful or they became clothing or put in the stew pot.

With this background in mind it is easier to understand why some of the basic elements of the standard are so important ... and so often overlooked today when not needed.

The basic structure of the Samoyed and the Siberian Husky are similar. Both are Arctic dogs used for working purposes in similar environments. The Siberian Husky was built for speed; the Samoyed did not need the get-away qualities of the Siberian. One thing that is often missed however, is the two standards' repeated mention of MEDIUM size and bone. Both dogs are medium dogs.

The tail carriages of the Siberian and Samoyed are different, and the Siberian "appears" to be longer back. Remember that Samoyed bitches, however, are allowed to be longer than the males, and even should be, for the purpose of successfully carrying litters of pups. Of course, other cosmetics are different for the two breeds, but the size and substance should be similar.

Because the Siberian Husky has an extensive modern history of being worked as a sled dog, more of the basic important elements of working structure has remained with that breed. With the Samoyed, however, the English law forbade dogs hauling. Because the Samoyed was developed as a show breed in England, the working characteristics of the Sam took a back seat. In America, however, the Samoyeds has always been worked, to a degree, as a sled dog. Still the work has been casual and mainly recreational and some important elements of the Standard have been overlooked.

1. Eye shape. The typical Arctic eye is almond-shaped and slanting. In the Samoyed the eye should be dark in color. The shape of the head and eye of the Samoyed points to its primitive ancestry.

2. Eye shape, and a tight lip line forming the characteristic Samoyed smile are important to survival in the Arctic.

3. Neck length and set are of paramount importance to a dog that must work all day. The short neck, often a result of improper shoulder placement is not conducive to endurance.

4. The chest of a Samoyed should be deep and heart shaped, allowing for proper room for heart and lungs to work effectively. The sternum of the Samoyed should be fairly prominent. The chest should not be so wide as to cause interference with the elbows while moving. A more narrow chest shape would be preferable to one that is too broad in an endurance dog.

5. Proper angulation of shoulders and rear quarters are a must for a dog that needs to move over many, many miles. Proper angulation and medium build should produce a dog that moves freely and effortlessly for hours.
6. Balance of angulation is a must for well-timed, light-on-the-feet agility and grace. These things are of greater importance than the bulk needed to pull heavy loads. The Samoyed never hauled the weight that malamutes hauled. Most of the time they followed the reindeer herds which can travel miles in a day. Good timing and balance to travel over the swells and uneven ground of the tundra was most important.

7. The feet of the Samoyed are often overlooked in judging. Poor feet cannot go the distance, and are of utmost importance. Pads should be thick and sturdy. Toes should not splay, but be tight and arched. Pasterns should have spring and be flexible without being too let down. Poor, over-extended pasterns are a great liability in distance travel and should not be tolerated in a working dog.

8. One thing to remember about endurance, distance animals, is that they must have excellent front assemblies. It is preferable that the rear be equally as good and strong, but the front is the most important aspect to a working dog, with no extraneous movement and good reach.

9. The Samoyed should have excellent muscle tone. Flabbiness or lack of muscle tone may indicate a lack of conditioning of an exhibit but Samoyeds should have good tone and musculature for maximum endurance. Muscling should not be overdone, and bulky, but conducive to the medium build of the endurance dog.

10. The Samoyed should have a harsh working coat. Drooping, soft coats, with excessively long guard hairs would not hold up well in the Arctic environment. The musk ox is the only Arctic animal with a long, drooping coat. Thick, double coats with guard hairs that stand out from the body are more important than the amount of coat.

The Samoyed is fun-loving and light-hearted, much like the Samoyede people that developed this breed. However, they should move with drive by covering ground and looking effortless. Their temperaments should exhibit a willingness to do a job as required. The essence of that working character should be evident in the show ring.
The Samoyed as a Herding Dog

by Louis Thompson, MS, RPh, AKC, AHBA Licensed Herding Judge

Samoyeds are, to say the least, a multi-purpose dog. The harsh climate in which they lived precluded having domesticated animals that had only one function. Limited food supplies required that they be proficient in more than one attribute. Thus it was that the breed took up the role of an Arctic shepherd.

Like many nomadic peoples, the Samoyede’s main source of sustenance and symbol of wealth and power were their herds of livestock, in this case the tundra caribou, or reindeer. With the adult males weighing in excess of 1,000 pounds, these wandering herds provided food, shelter, and most of the necessities of life on the tundra, must like the bison herds of the American plains did for the American Indians. The difference was that in the cold, barren Arctic, the Samoyede people had to keep in close contact with the herds to insure that they could make use of them.

The type of herding that this lifestyle required was a combination of tending and driving, with some fetching thrown in when members of the herd would stray from the main group. The people would set up a camp in the center of a likely grazing area and then place a ring of dogs around the camps to keep the herd from trampling through their respective living rooms. A second, large ring of dogs were placed on the outer edges of the grazing herd to keep the main body of reindeer together and prevent stragglers from wandering off onto the tundra.

When the grazing was depleted, everything was packed up and the herd was driven to a new site where the process was repeated as before.

Since it has been over 100 years since any Samoyeds were used for this purpose, finding a Sammie that exhibits more than a passing interest in herding is a bit serendipitous at best. While those Arctic tribesmen may have bred for the herding instinct, today’s breed maintains that legacy in a very hit and miss fashion. Today’s Sammies work because they want to please their owners, or because they still retain some of the primitive pack-hunting urge. The intensity of their desire can vary greatly from one exposure to the next, and is not anywhere near the force that motivates such breeds as the Border collie. Samoyeds work WITH their owners, and easily become bored with repetitions. They resent being forced to work a particular way, and will often find their own style of herding, especially if it is more active or more fun.

In general, Samoyeds are upright, loose-eyed working dogs. This means that they use their whole body to influence the movement of the livestock. This requires that they usually work closer to the stock than a breed that controls through the use of “eye.” In this respect, they are very similar to such other herds as Australian Shepherds or Shetland Sheepdogs. Samoyeds also tend to shoulder or chest livestock to push them in the direction that they want them to go, a trait that I have only seen in one or two other herding breeds. If working cattle, they should be taught to keep their distance, as their upright nature makes them prime targets for a kick. They are not afraid to work in confined areas with stock, and I have seen even puppies jump on top of milling groups of sheep to break them up.

Because of the requirements needed to perform these tasks, mobility, agility and stamina are the hallmarks of a herding Samoyed. Heavy, bulky dogs would be a liability rather than an asset. Their power is restrained, but available if needed for recalcitrant or uncooperative livestock. The other great asset is their native intelligence, to solve problems on the fly, to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, and still work as a team with their human partners.

I wholeheartedly encourage any Samoyed owners to have their dogs tested for herding instinct. The training must be with you and your dog as a team; the harder you push them, the more they will resist the training. But the results can be more rewarding than anything I have ever attempted with this breed. Remember, Samoyeds are the symbol of versatility.
Samoyed Size in Relation to Function

by Don and Dot Hodges

The Samoyed, being essentially a working dog, should present a picture of beauty, alertness and strength, with agility, dignity and grace.

... Substance is that sufficiency of bone and muscle which rounds out a balance with the frame. The bone is heavier than would be expected in a dog of this size, but not so massive as to prevent the speed and agility most desirable in a Samoyed. In all builds, bone should be in proportion to body size. The Samoyed should never be so heavy as to appear clumsy nor so light as to appear racy.

The weight should be in proportion to the height. Height - males 21 to 23½-inches; females - 19 to 21 inches at the withers. An oversized or undersized Samoyed is to be penalized according to the extent of the deviation.

(Excerpts from the Samoyed Standard)

Quoting the breed history presented in the official AKC publication, The Complete Dog Book:

... eventually the Samoyed peoples ... found themselves safely entrenched behind bulwarks of snow and ice in the vast stretches of tundra reaching from the White Sea to the Yenisei River. Here for generations they have lived a nomadic life, dependent upon their reindeer herds and upon their dogs as reindeer shepherds, sledge dogs and household companions.

Considering these excerpts together, one quickly recognizes the important role of height and substance in the ability of the breed to function as it was originally intended. If selecting a breed designed exclusively to perform draft work for a nomadic tribe, one might immediately think of a breed such as the Alaskan Malamute, which is very well designed to perform heavy draft work with great endurance, or a Siberian Husky, designed to perform lighter draft work with greater speed. The Samoyed, however, is not a single purpose dog. Designed to be a “utility dog” capable of performing both herding and sledge functions. It is by necessity a compromise in construction and performance. That its functions included herding large animals over considerable territory meant the dog must be smaller, quicker and more agile than its Malamute relative (placing it closer to the Siberian Husky in this respect). The requirement that it also haul moderate loads over very long distances made it desirable to have a substantial dog.

The result is that the A.K.C. Samoyed Standard calls for a breed whose height for males is identical to that of Siberian Husky males (the range for females is one inch smaller for Samoyeds—19-21 inches—than for Siberian Husky females who range from 20-22 inches) to preserve the quickness and agility needed for its functions, but the Standard also specifies bone heavier than expected in a dog of this size, neither “so massive as to prevent the speed and agility most desirable ... nor so light as to appear racy.”

Recognizing the importance of size and substance in relation to the functions performed by this breed, deviations from the standard with respect to height or substance should be penalized according to the amount of deviation. A 25-inch male or a 23-inch female Samoyed (the desirable freighting sizes specified in the Malamute standard) is not designed to function in a manner appropriate to that of a Samoyed. Neither would a 19½-inch male or 17½-inch female (the sizes of Finnish Spitz, for example) be expected to perform the sledge work the Samoyed performed.
Length of Leg vs. Height in the Samoyed

by Kathy Wiley and Larry Mackai

The following is written to clarify a few points on size and length of leg in the Samoyed. In the past ten years of handling and breeding Samoyeds, we have bred, handled and won with both large and small Samoyeds. The one thing that bothers us the most is when others, and this includes judges, will put a dog down for being too small or too short on leg. Their statements point out their lack of understanding for the Samoyed Standard.

Proper length of leg in the Samoyed does not mean you have to be a 23$\frac{1}{2}$-inch male. It also does not mean that 22-inch male is short on leg. The standard for the Samoyed says

*Height: Males 21 to 23$\frac{1}{2}$ inches; Females 19 to 21 inches at the withers. Length of leg from the ground to the elbow should be approximately 55% of the total height at the withers.*

Just because a dog is 23$\frac{1}{2}$ inches does not give that dog proper length of leg. It does put him at the top of the Samoyed height standard. A dog that is 22 or 22$\frac{1}{2}$ inches does not automatically make that dog short on leg. It puts him in the middle of the Samoyed standard.

All of us—breeders, exhibitors and judges—must remember we do have a height standard for the Samoyed breed. A smaller dog should not be faulted for being within the standard. A smaller male in full coat may give the illusion of being short on leg, but do not judge him so until you have felt the location of his elbow and the top of his withers. Do not call the smaller dog short on leg just because he is smaller. But most of all, do not penalize him for being within the standard.

Remember, all else being equal, a smaller in-standard dog should win over an equal quality over-standard dog.

Bigger is not better.
Interpretation of the Standard
Part I - The Essence of Type by Robert Ward

First, to over-simplify!!!

When it looks like the breed it is supposed to be – then it has breed type.

- Major B. Godsol, All Breed Judge

Type is Soundness
Soundness is Type
and the two cannot be divorced.
Each animal’s soundness is HIS TYPE.

- Louis Murr, All Breed Judge

Evolution through environment, and survival and usage by way of function have dictated type to the majority of the “Natural Breeds” of dogs and other animals upon our planet. In the cold northern climates:

- Too large an ear dissipates too much body heat. Even the Arctic rabbit has shorter ears, likewise the fox and bear.

- Bright, brilliant, blinding light, where the days are long and danger of snow-blindness exists, has created eyes that are squinty, protective, with almond-shaped such as the polar bear, ermine, white fox, Samoyed and Siberian Husky.

- A curled or plumed tail that does not drag in the snow, or freeze, yet mobile enough for protection while sleeping, is common to all of the above mentioned animals.

- Feet, large, hare-shaped, expandable for snow and mud.

- A shoulder and fore-quarter with excellent extension and a rear quarter set for speed and drive; giving the ability to hunt or herd.

- Ribs well-sprung with a heart-shaped rib cage for lung capacity and endurance; not a round body with short legs waddling after prey. Length of legs 55% of total height to catch a quarry or herd all day, and not become lost in snow, dirt or hummocks.

- A coat that naturally resists cold, snow, mud and dirt with one good shake. Not so long, flat and soft that snow will pack into it in layers.

Type is our soundness and soundness is our type!

Once we agree that we are a "NATURAL" breed and that the details and appearance of our breed came directly from the biological and environmental background, we may easily recognize the original basis of our breed standard. The description of the head, “Samoyed-Smile” and disposition are certainly man-made descriptions, but only the descriptions, and the basics as they are.

Let us proceed to our “man-made” descriptions of type in the Samoyed (even the name is European, created and named after a tribe rather than what the owners called their dogs).

How small a portion of a good Samoyed needs to be observed to quickly recognize the breed? Will an eye do it? Or perhaps an eye and an ear? Myself, if I cannot see it in merely the lipline or Sammy Smile, I am disappointed. A smallish mouth with a correct smile, with proper pigmentation should denote the type to anyone.
Is there a correct personality to live and exist as a pack or family group? Are they outstanding in their friendly, loving character toward humans? This part of type is our breed.

When function dictates type, it in turn dictates gait. A true HERDING CANINE has an extremely long humerus, examples: German Shepherd Dog, Siberian Husky, Border Collie, Belgians, Shetland Sheepdogs, Collies, Samoyeds and even a proper Pembroke Corgi. All of their standards originated with a 45 degree shoulder lay-back, and reference to upper arm and shoulder length being the same length.

John Tanner, Professor at Mt. Palomar University, is a life-long Siberian enthusiast. He has measured photographs and dogs by the 100s, of original Northern dogs from the 1890s through present day photographs. His statement is, “the hallmark of the Siberian Husky is an upper arm longer than his shoulder length.” THAT IS THE HALLMARK OF THE TROTTING HERDING DOG.

What does all of this have to do with SAMOYED BREED TYPE?

### What a typey Samoyed does not have

- short legs
- straight shoulders
- extra heavy bone
- fine or spindly bone
- small thin feet
- cat feet
- thin long ears
- large round eyes
- extremely wide, large mouth
- a "loner" solitary disposition
- round body
- aggressive disposition toward humans
- long droopy soft coat
- clumsy movement
- excessive massive size
- small, spitz-like size
- cobby body
- long body
- weak rears with cow hocks

### What a typey Samoyed does have

- good length of leg, 55% of height
- sparkling, well-set almond eyes
- eyes that can squint out the sun
- head carried higher than the tail with a set of the neck whose curve matches the line of the curve of the stifle, when viewed from the side
- heart-shaped rib cage, with spring of ribs and depth to approximately the elbow
- slight arch in the loin for strength and speed
- Loosely set tail, drooping down either side of the body with enough room to pass your hand between body and tail at the croup
- sufficient coat and ruff to frame the body with pleasant curves, with texture that is on the harsh side, erect to hold out snow and moisture, and double-coated at appropriate time of the year
- expression — created by set of ears, shape of eyes, Samoyed smile and a total lighting up of the face

A good show dog ... the king ... the queen ... has ring presence that I can not describe nor put into the standard or type.
The dog is an antigravity machine. Moving around is a sophisticated system to keep from falling down. The system also has to be efficient as to energy costs. Gravity can win two ways.

Any gait—walking, trotting or galloping—is an engineering problem. A dynamics problem, the action of a force (here, gravity) on a body in motion. The problem is how to lift, throw, catch and balance. Dogs don’t move forward in a straight line. Looking at the side, they really describe an arc, or a series of arcs.

The rear assembly first lifts and then throws the dog’s body forward. When the momentum is expended and the dog’s body starts to fall or pitch forward, the catching is done by the front assembly.

The most efficient motion is the most forward motion with the least energy expended. Or, in other words, the fewest strides over any given distance—or—the most ground covered with the fewest steps.

The most forward motion is achieved when the hock is short and the lower thigh is long as compared to the upper thigh, i.e. a stifle at a 45 degree angle.

Balanced side gait depends on the bottom of the arc. Best balanced gait: 45 degree stifle and 45 degree shoulder blade. A dog with straight stifles and a straight front is also balanced. However, he takes more strides to cover the ground, which is not efficient. A dog with a 45 degree shoulder and straight stifle is in this category.

Out of balance: 45 degree stifle and straight shoulder, or over angulated rear and 45 degree shoulder. They will do “funny things with their feet,” and tire out early and want to go take a nap.

A long neck aids efficiency. It puts some body weight forward and up in the air, aiding in forward momentum.

Viewing the dog coming and going, you can see a side-to-side swing because of a four-legged support system, and because the upper part of the body is heavier than the lower part of the body. As the speed of locomotion picks up, the wobble gets worse, and the dog wastes energy trying to keep from falling over sideways. Viewing from above, the dog describes a zigzag.

The most efficient dynamic for a fast gait forward is to narrow the support system to a “bicycle effect,” i.e. single tracking fore and aft. This produces less side-to-side wobble at faster speeds.

Innards, heart and lung room—depth of body is needed for the most heart and lung room. Width of body does not give extra room for innards, and width contributes to more sideways wobble and elbow and front width problems. Tuck up really means a deep thorax.
Part II: The Samoyed and his Standard – A dog in the middle

The Samoyed is a working dog. He is not a white chow or a very hairy German Shepherd.

He is an Arctic dog and is in that group with the Siberian and the Malamute. He fits right in between those two.

The Siberian is the thoroughbred—light, rangy, and built for speed. The Samoyed is not that lean and light. He has more size and substance.

The Malamute is a true draft dog—comparable to a Clydesdale—heavy of body and rather straightish in rear angulation, built for strength and stamina. The Samoyed has more rear angulation, and is not broad and heavy.

The Samoyed is most like a Morgan horse—a sort of all-purpose representative of his species.

The Samoyed is most like a white, very hairy German Shorthaired Retriever. A damn good, rough—country field dog.

The Samoyed is a hairy dog with considerable length of leg, plenty of bone, with a 45 degree shoulder and a 45 degree stifle, narrowish but deep thorax. He has a body slightly off square about 5% longer than tall to handle that fore and aft angulation with a long neck.

His working gait is a trot. Light and easy on his feet, single tracking fore and aft, and covering ground very well.

He is a medium dog—a nice compromise kind of dog, built for stamina and speed in balance, but not exaggerated.

Part III: The Real World – The Judging Ring

The trot exposes all a dog’s structural faults, weaknesses, and also his correct structure.

The Samoyed standard has no long list of bad points in a descending order of badness as some standards, but they are there in the standard if you analyze.

1. Rear end – must be ABSOLUTELY FLAWLESS.
2. Length of leg and depth of body. Bad = short legs, long body.
4. Weak back and/or over-long back.
5. Feet – Hare foot. Working dog’s feet must be tough and without flaw!
6. Fronts – bad = choppy, stilted gait. Must have good reach.

Hair is trouble. You absolutely CANNOT stand and stare at Sams when you judge them. You MUST put your hands on them, and feel and measure. You MUST move them so you can see the results of each dog’s structure.
Samoyed Color

Excerpted from an article in *Dog World*, April 1972

When the Samoyed dogs emerged into the spotlight of modern history (circa 1900) from aeons of isolation in the Arctic Circle, they were a colored breed. Colors ranged all the way from an icy white to cream, through beige, to the color of an overcooked biscuit. Shades of cream and biscuit predominated.

Because there were few excellent individual dogs of this stand-out, shimmering white, and because it was such a spectacular and unusual color, compared to the many brown breeds then current, individual preference most frequently dictated a breeding scheme to attain the lightest and whitest tones possible. However, a startling fact became evident after several generations of pure white/white breedings: Pigment degenerated; nose, lips and eye-rims became tan, then pink. Eyes lightened, and if this type of breeding was continued, albinism emerged.

It was found that the cream and biscuit-shaded dogs were necessary for the preservation, not only of pigment, but of other breed characteristics. The biscuit-shaded dogs invariably carried the hardest textured outer coat with the proper silver tips. The pure white/white dogs quickly suffered a softening of coat texture, as biscuit color receded farther and farther back in the pedigree.

Another interesting characteristic of biscuit-colored dogs was that they not only had biscuit-colored pups, but sometimes had pups of purest white with the vivid black points, eyes, and harsh coat proper for the breed! As you may know, the darker eyes and the hard outer coats were necessary for survival in the harsh northern Arctic environment, where the glare is painful to the eyes, and a soft coat would absorb moisture, and ice up fatally fast. So these breed features are not merely aesthetic.

What was the result of these findings on the desirability of biscuit color? It was to specify a white, cream, biscuit or biscuit and white Samoyed in the breed standard. Today the Standard still calls for the same colors, but in the breed ring few colored dogs are seen ... Either consciously or unconsciously, either knowingly or through ignorance, judges exhibit a prejudice against a color other than solid white. Today, a solid cream dog is not unusual, but the rare darker colors are disappearing. These dogs with the true burnt-biscuit color most often have the color restricted to the ear rims, the head, or the tips of the body coat.
Heart of America
Samoyed Bibliography
Compiled by Jim Osborn, February 1995

Samoyed Breed Books

Many of these are out of print, but in some cases some distributors may have stock, and new editions and reprints may sometimes become available. Check with both distributors and publishers for current availability.


1945 – 1st Edition
1951 – 2nd Edition
1961 – 3rd Edition
1971 – 4th Edition


Wilson, Peal & Auckram, Valerie (1961). The Samoyed (New Zealand) (368 pp). Hastings, New Zealand: Published by the authors. Also contains pedigree data for early New Zealand and Australian dogs.

Periodicals


The Samoyed Club of America Bulletin (published five times per year). Samoyed Club of America, c/o American Kennel Club, New York, NY. Available to members only.

The Samoyed Quarterly (published quarterly since 1976). Hoflin Publishing Ltd., Wheatridge, CO.

Samoyed Pedigree Data


Lloyd, William E., Editor (undated). *Samoyed Pedigrees*, 4 volumes. London, England: Published by The Samoyed Association, c/o The Kennel Club. Covers English champions from 1901 through 1990. Note that Volume 1 exists in 1st and 2nd Editions, while Volumes 2, 3 and 4 exist in only the 1st Edition. However, Volume 4 contains extensive corrigenda for Volumes 1, 2 and 3; all volumes undated.

Weir, Lila, Roberta Hoemig & Marj Van Omum, Editors (1977). *Samoyed Champion Pedigrees, USA 1907-1971*. Olympia, WA: Published by the authors.


There is also a book of Australian Champion Samoyed pedigrees which has not been reviewed by this author. It is also noted that there is no convenient source of reliable pedigree data on Canadian dogs, whose pedigrees are intertwined with those in the U.S. The Canadian Kennel Club published stud book data, but in earlier years this was in a format that does not stand alone, requiring other information or references.