

The Importance of Ear Size in the Swedish Vallhund

By Peter Erlandsson, translated from old Swedish By Marit Smedberg.



This specific article is about the Swedish Vallhund but it might as well describe any other Nordic spitz. If you own or have the benefit of borrowing a Vall I advise understanding the following

On top of the head of the Vall is two cones we call ears. We should really call these receivers 'external ears' but for this article I will continue to use the simplification of 'ears'!

The ears are conical, completely rigid and upright. The height of the ear is significantly taller than the base measures. The ears also are fairly high set on the pileum and the top of the ears are slightly separated when the dog listens forwards. This probably sounds like bla-bla-bla to the regular person but there is serious purpose for why ears are constructed so.

It might not be that often one watches closely the Vallhund on a leash, but there are specific moments you really can see a character trait in these mercuries! I would like to clarify this purpose by describing the following scenario.

When I walk my Vallhund we perhaps suddenly discover a herd of horses in the paddock ahead. The dog, instantly alert, directs his ears completely forwards to pick up every sound, because this is something to for him to pay attention to. Really fun! Then, all of a sudden, a blackbird begins to sing just behind us. Who wouldn't want to hear the song of a blackbird? My Vallhund apparently wants that too, so without taking his eyes and attention off the horses, he turns one ear 180 degrees backwards and listen simultaneously in two directions. Almost every Vallhund owner will have experienced such behaviour of our extremely curious breed!

If the Vallhund is out in the fields the cones are turning in every direction to find out what is happening. The dog is turning the ears to find which direction the sounds come from. This is a real and typical

character trait of all our Nordic spitz dogs. This is also clearly reflected in the breed standards of the Nordic spitz dogs. The 'ear movement' has always been noticed by cynologists as particularly typical for our domestic spitz breeds!

Now, as for myself, I can't move my ears. They are pretty solid! Therefore I must turn my head to hear where a sound comes from. With the show-fever the strange thing has been to shrink the ears of most of our spitz dogs. We should ask why and what the results have been?

Unfortunately dogs bred with shrunken ear size have a marked reduction in ear mobility. These dogs need to turn their heads to localize sounds and have lost the ability to simultaneously gather sounds from in front and behind. I rate this loss as a serious functional degeneration and this is a prime example of how derailed 'show norms' have harmed the spitz breeds!

Earlier I always tended to choose older and more famous dogs within the breed when I wanted to visualize both good and bad examples. It's kind of more neutral to point out faults in the past, isn't it?!

During at least two decades one certain male was the ideal norm for the Vallhund at SKK (Specialklubben för Västgötaspets). The active judges of today hardly remember a dog born in 1969 but he is depicted in a very great number of photographs. This dog had a un-typical head and incorrect ears. You can see this dog's head in a drawing from a photo that is used in an illustrated standard, this unfortunately is attempting to illustrate correct ear size! If one assumes from this male how large a Vallhund's ear should be?!?! well, dear judges.....!

Small ears in modern phraseology means reduced ear size. What today is middle sized ears are rather small ears to us older Vallhund people! There has been a clear change over time. Unfortunately we want to keep the ear proportions no matter what the phraseology is telling us! What you think is harmonious and balance proportions on Vallhund ears? Take this and add at least one and a half centimetres more to the ear size and you are closer to the breed ear size that is correct.

In summary, the ear size on the breed is very important. One can say fairly that our breed is a working breed and needs correct ears. This is not the time for pathological cosmetic heresies that distort the type. Ears as organs are important for this breed!

(abridged and edited)