

Dare To Be Rare

# THE SHIKOKU KEN

by Dawne Deeley

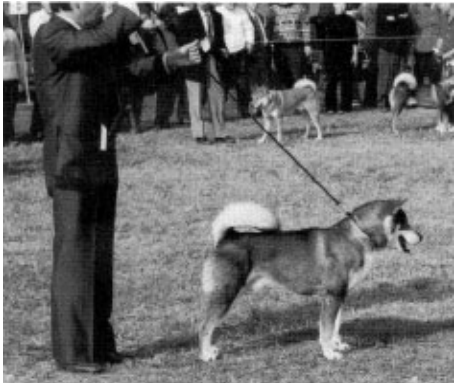
Dear readers of CDD,

A few of you have been kind enough to approach me with comments and suggestions regarding “Dare to Be Rare”. Every question is appreciated, and I have some new ideas thanks to those individuals who took the time to give them! One thing I would like to explain is the structure of the column. The majority of all breed standards are written based on relatively simple explanations and general descriptions, and as such I have decided to omit comparisons or definitions of such things unless they are unique to that variety. The material presented is, for the most part, breed specific and is offered in the spirit of enhancing the readers’ appreciation of the chosen topic. The reference notations provided at the end of each article are to give readers a push in the direction of further study, and it is my fervent wish judges and fanciers will take their own initiative in order to advance their knowledge of these fine and honourable breeds.

## The Shikoku Ken—A Venerable Japanese Dog

A native of Kochi Prefecture on the Japanese island of Shikoku—and even today sometimes referred to as the “Kochi—ken”, or ‘dog of Kochi’ - the Shikoku has long proved to be an able hunter of wild deer, boar and other game. Individuals of this Spitz type have been documented in art and literature for well over a thousand years, proving an important component of the family who owned one. The breed proved both his mettle and value by putting food on the table, and the most able specimens were held

In the highest respect. Dogs were trained by one of two methods: in ‘Hoe—dome’ the dog barked the prey to ‘stand’ in the manner of the Karelian Bear Dog or Norwegian Elkhound, while ‘Kame—dome’ referred to the dog worrying and biting at the cornered animal until the hunter arrived. These methods required an animal to have endless stamina, high intelligence, and a sixth sense regarding the actions of the quarry. A lever head was also essential, as was a limitless tolerance to pain and discomfort, and a fierce devotion to the master.



Two top quality specimens of Shikokus

The Shikoku owes its pedigree to three distinct lines: Hata, Honkawa and Awa.

Founding the Hata line was 'Gomago', who was born in 1934. He obtained a Best in Show title in 1940. The principle elements of the Hata animals included a generally heavier, stockier build and thick, more profuse coats. Skulls tended to be broad and ears were tidy and small, but counterbalancing these virtues were the faults of longer coat, inferior eye colour and shape, and ponderous movement. The flip side of the coin was evidenced by the Honkawa strain, whose foundation dog 'Chousungo' was also born in the same year. These dogs were characterized by light, flawless movement, long, strong limbs with excellent angulation, good ear set and correct eye colour. Their outer coats were harsh and weatherproofing, but they lacked the protective undercoat of the Hata animals. Honkawa Shikoku also tended to a slender, more elegant build, which corrupted the impression of 'Sobuku', but ultimately it was this strain that was to influence the direction of the breed as we know it today. In 1937, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese government declared the Shikoku a Living National Monument. It was also during this decade that the breed was characterized as Shiba Inu, or 'medium dog', joining the brindle Kai, Ainu and snow—white Kishu varieties. All of these breeds were and still are, hunting spitzes, differentiated mainly but their colour. The desired height for the Shikoku is 17– 21 inches, or if you prefer, 52 cms/dogs and 46 cms/bitches, with a rand of +/- 3 cms.

To what would prove its great fortune, the relative isolation in which the Shikoku lived enabled it to escape much of the war's ravages. With pockets of purebred examples to work with there was no need to introduce the blood of other breeds, as was the case in many other nations.

Unfortunately, however, the Awa line of dogs was to virtually disappear during this time.

Today, the Shikoku is still much valued in his homeland as a versatile and determined hunter with approximately ninety per cent of all dogs being used for this purpose. A minority find their way into the show ring. In Canada his appeal is broader, the majority have found new occupations as house pets, while more and more are entering conformation events. Breeders in this country hope to expand that repertoire, and to eventually use this intelligent and cunning animal in such sports as tracking and obedience.

## The Shikoku in Canada

It is possible the Shikoku might never have entered Canadian show rings were it not for the interest of Katja Weber. Born in Germany, Weber expressed her love of northern breeds by breeding, racing and exhibiting Siberian Huskies. In 1989 she found it necessary to move into a more urban environment, and subsequently downscaled to the Shiba Inu. By 1995 Weber had married and moved to Canada, bringing her dogs with her.

Two years later, on a visit to the United States, she was shown a video of the Nikonken Hozonkai (NIPPO) specialty show for native Japanese breeds, and was instantly smitten with the Shikoku. Undeterred by the difficulties presented in getting specimens out of Japan, Weber persevered and was eventually rewarded by the discovery of a kennel in the Netherlands. Establishing contact was the next step, and by February 2000 she had brought the first Shikokus to North America, Imiko-Seium v.c. Egmato ("Mike") and Nanashihime v.d. Egmato ("Nellie") were not bred as they were littermates, but they were shortly joined by half sister Yananako v.d. Egmato ("Yana"). Excited by her progress, Weber initiated talks in 2001 with both Agriculture Canada and the Canadian Kennel Club, shortly thereafter the breed was granted Miscellaneous status.



Weber's first Shikoku Imiko-Seium v.c. Egmato "Mike"

Tragically, Katja was to lose Nellie in 2002, when visiting Amsterdam for that year's World Winner show. Not easily defeated, she turned to veteran breed expert Chieko Sugiyama, who enabled Weber to obtain the five year old bitch Retsu Go Sanuki Nagatosow from Japan. A solid friendship was forged between the two women, with Sugiyama-san assisting with the import of several more dogs.



Another import from Japan, Tenshou Go Awahakuga "Kuma"

Over the next handful of years, Weber was to establish her breeding programme with the integration of Murasaki Go Ayumisou ("Mura") and Shunkou Go None Ishiyanasou ("Ishe"). On October 23, 2005 these two presented Katja with the first Canadian –born Shikoku litter. A year and a half later, Weber's greatest dream was realized: on July 1, 2007, the Shikoku was admitted to the Canadian Kennel Club's Hound Group.

## Character

In her written observations taken from her booklet "The Shikoku", Weber defines three essential components of breed character and mental 'type'; Kan-I, Ryosei and Sobuko. Japanese breed authorities consider these elements as part of a synergistic whole, and the following definitions were drafted with the North American judge in mind.

Kan-I holds the greatest importance, and those familiar with Japanese tradition and the samurai code of conduct will recognize this straight off. Bravery, steadiness, boldness and alertness blend with the deference and obedience to produce true Kan-I. In his home country the Shikoku may be faced off with another competitor in the manner of terrier sparring, all the better for the judge to observe and note this trait. I daresay few North Americans have either the experience or nerve to try this, but at the very least one should be aware of the procedure and understand the importance of evaluating an individual dogs' mental strength.

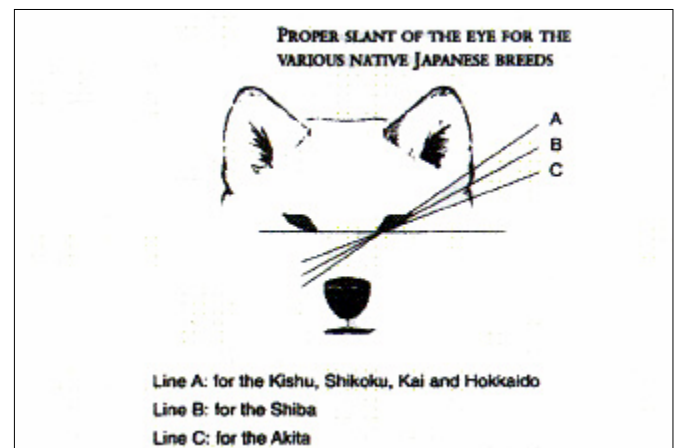
Ryosei is best translated as "good natured", albeit on a more complex level than might first be thought. This trait is manifested by a gentle disposition, obedience and faithfulness.

Sobuko eludes concrete definition—at least by Western standards. 'Artlessness' is the term most often used to describe this nebulous characteristic, which is something not necessarily seen with the eye; a more simple explanation would be sincerity, modesty or gracefulness.

This unique and ageless mysticism grants a special charm not only to the Shikoku, but to other Japanese breeds as well. To quote Weber, "Japanese judges often refer to a winning dog as the one that has superior Sobuko. It is not mere physical beauty but the combination of Kan-I, Ryosei and Sobuko in a harmonious whole that produces the essence of the Japanese dog."



By comparison to breeds long removed from their original purpose the Shikoku is still resourceful, reserved and more than a little feral. His highly developed survival instincts help him to be aware of his own physical position and that of his quarry or enemy, at all times. Judges would be wise not to crowd or force the upper hand in their examinations: give each entry a reasonable length of time to assess your approach, and remember apprehension or hesitation will be noted!



## Carriage

The Shikoku moves in a way that befits a big-game hunter. The breed is lithe, quick and capable of great endurance. As with so many of his ilk, the Shikoku does not produce the tremendous extension and extreme drive often found in the New World show ring.

Instead his stride is clean and true, and his gait displays resilience and elasticity. There should be a definite impression of athleticism, and the ability to dodge and dart on a moment's notice. Head carriage may be up or held level to the topline. Forgive the dog who air or ground scents—he is a hunter, after all.



A typical Shikoku female

## Coat

The Shikoku is a double-coated breed, with the amount and quality being affected by age and season. In an ideal specimen, the outer coat is quite harsh and straight, with a 'hand' that is distinctive from most Nordic varieties. It is shorter on the face and legs, and forms a ruff around the neck of mature individuals. Undercoats should be thick, soft and dense, and help provide the weatherproof jacket that warms and protects the dog on extended hunts. Hair on the tail is described as being 'rather long', but this should not give one the impression of being either a plume, or excessively brushy. A tail that hangs with no natural curl whatsoever, or is bobbed, is a disqualifying fault. Grooming of the Shikoku is minimal, with the removal of excessive undercoat the only major issue. At the risk of sounding redundant, my entreaties to judges regarding artificial enhancements are being repeated here; these 'aids' are not applied by breed purists, and therefore should not be encouraged by all-rounders. Whiskers are also left on.

## Colour

Once you have seen a Shikoku 'in the flesh', it can be difficult to reconcile the vibrant Desired colours in the Shikoku are black sesame, red sesame or black and tan, though it appears quality specimens of the latter are very much few and far between. Cream dilutes and white coats may be seen, but are much frowned upon by Japanese purists for reasons of colour degradation. Each guard hair should present all of the individual pigments. As an example, in the black sesame the hair would have a white root, red 'centre' and black tip. Shades can and do vary between specimens, especially during seasonal coat 'blows', with the final shadings being quite dramatic and visually striking.

As with nearly all spitz breeds, puppies will go through quite a production of dropping 'baby' hair, and any evaluations during this time should bear this in mind. One crucial element is that of urajiro, namely the white hair markings appearing on the underside of the body and tail, inside the legs, on the cheeks and the apron of the chest. Urajiro is not clearly defined in the FCI, JKC or CKC standards, but as with breeds such as the Shiba and Japanese Akita Inu, is considered an essential type component. Absence of urajiro can be compared in the broadest sense to lack of markings in such breeds as Rottweilers and Dobermans—I trust judges will get the idea.



Much of the material provided for this article was obtained from the booklet "The Shikoku—A National Monument of Japan", authored by Mr. Kadota/Chief Judge Nihon Ken Hozokai; Chieko Sugiyama, Katja and George Weber.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION GO TO

[www.nihonken-hozokai.or.jp](http://www.nihonken-hozokai.or.jp)

[www.shikokucanada.org](http://www.shikokucanada.org)

[www.akashima.ca](http://www.akashima.ca)

BREED STANDARDS MAY BE FOUND AT THE FOLLOWING

[www.ckc.ca](http://www.ckc.ca) (Group 2/Hounds)

[www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be) (Group 2/Spitz and Primitive Breeds)

The Japan KC website is, unfortunately not available in English.