

Structural Correctness

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Though the smoke may still be pretty thick over the prospect pen, by now you should have found a set of goat kids that have the “look” and it is time to narrow the selection down a little further. Quite obviously, one of the most important traits that we have to pay great attention to is structural correctness. The reason that structure is of such great importance is because it is a trait that will now greatly change due to nutrition, environment or management. In other words, a crooked legged, weak topped kid will mature into a crooked legged, weak topped finished goat regardless of who is controlling the feed bucket. My experience in evaluating structure is that when you initially select only those kids that have the “look,” you generally select against animals that have structure problems. It is a unique animal that is stylish enough to catch a buyer’s eye that has a major structural problem.

When I evaluate structure, I generally divide the animal into four areas: **Topline**, **Rump**, **Front-ends** and **Feet and Legs**. The easiest of these four to evaluate is the **topline**. Most people think that all goats are weak topped and generally most goats have some “sway” to their topline. However, there are goats out there that are extremely straight and correct in their tops. Topline straightness is function of both bone structure and muscularity. Not only do animals have to be straight topped from a skeletal standpoint, but they must also have sufficient muscling in their tops to maintain the straightness of lines and correctness that you are seeking. This is not to say that a light muscled kid can not be straight topped or that a heavy muscled kid can not be weak topped, but this is the exception rather than the rule. You should realize that if a kid is weak or broken topped at 30 pounds, you can guarantee that he will be the same or probably worse at 100 pounds. This trait almost never improves with age or weight!

The second area of evaluation is the **rump**. The area between the hook bones and the tail is one of the most important areas to select for in prospects. Not only does this area affect general appearance of the goat due to his tail set and placement, but more importantly, it affects how the kid moves off of his/her rear legs. Once again, it is common for many kids to have some slope from hooks to pins, but there are goats that are nearly perfectly level through their rumps. A level rump results in a higher tail placement. The appearance of a longer hip and likewise the placement of the rear legs our further behind the body. All these traits result in a nicer balanced, more pleasing appearance to your prospect. Quite simply –if your prospect is steep rumped and low set in his tail, he should probably be culled from your keeper list!

The third piece of structural evaluation involves the **front-ends** of the prospects. The **shoulders** of a possible prospect should be smooth and well-blended into the body. They should tie neatly at the neck-shoulder junction and lay tightly onto the rib cage. Common problems include open topped shoulders and those that are too prominent at their points. Although these conditions are NOT terrible, they generally worsen with age. The kids should also be very trim through their **chest**. A deep chested, heavy breasted young kid ALWAYS results in a poorly balanced, unattractive finished goat. The neck should be trim and stylish setting directly on top of the shoulders. This will cause the kid to be more correctly balanced and will give the kid the look of being taller fronted. U-necked, low fronted kids NEVER have the “look” as a baby or as a finished goat.

The final area that you should evaluate for structure is the **feet and legs**. A young kid should move around smoothly and with style. If they do not – there is most likely a problem. We talk about how important it is for a kid to walk wide on the ground as this is a true indicator of muscling, it is also an important indicator of correctness as a truly correct animal will always place his legs at the corners of his body to maintain perfect balance. Therefore, when you evaluate structure, start from the ground up. The feet should always be large, short and square to the body. Yes, it is true that you can slightly change the way an animal moves and stands on its feet through “creative foot trimming.” However, if a young kid has bad feet, it will be a struggle to keep him sound as he matures. The next joint, the pasterns – both front and rear, should be short and straight with flexibility. Long, weak pasterns result in spongy-footed, poor moving kids. Short, stiff pasterns result in stiff, stilty moving kids. Neither of these results in BLUE RIBBON kids. The hock joint should, again, have some set with flexibility. Post-legged and sickle-hocked kids will wind up as poor moving, ill-structured finished goats. From the rear, the hocks should be smooth and straight with the body. A “bow-legged” or “cow-hocked” kid will only get much worse with age. The knees on the front legs should be smooth and in direct line with the front legs. Again, a “buck-kneed” or “calf-kneed” prospect only gets worse with time!

It is also worth mentioning that any structure problem related to feet and legs on a prospect will generally result in a kid that is much slower growing. The reasoning behind this is very simple. If it is painful for him to get up and go to the feed trough to eat. Then he will most likely make fewer trips to eat –resulting in lower performance and the loss of that competitive edge in the show ring.

I find evaluating structure on young kids to very simple—either they have it or they do not. It is true that occasionally a leopard can change its spots and that a kid with a structure problem may improve with age, BUT IT DOES NOT HAPPEN VERY OFTEN!!! When you get in the “pickin’ pen” –find the kids that have the “look” and then make sure they are structurally correct. At this point your list of potential prospects should be getting smaller and the smoke should be clearing a bit.