



The Miniature Mediterranean Donkey Association of the UK

BREED STANDARD – OCTOBER 2025

A breeder's first task is to identify the specific purpose for breeding animals. This may seem obvious, but it is very often overlooked with the result that breeding is carried out with little progress towards any goal. Aimless breeding with no goals other than to produce a foal to sell on is doing any breed a disservice. Breeding combines the elements of genetics, selection, and husbandry to accomplish a goal. If a philosophy is in place, every animal and every mating can be evaluated relative to the goal, giving purpose and identity to the herd.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

The miniature donkey should be attractive, sound, strong and sturdy. The animal should be well balanced in a nicely coupled, compact picture. The animal should have an alert expression and 'presence'. Jennies should look feminine and slightly more refined, and jacks should be relatively stocky and masculine.

A maximum height of 36" at the withers measured at 3 years has already been established by the MMDA.

For entry into the stud book register, all foals born after 1st June 2026 MUST be a minimum of 29" when vet inspected at 3 years old. For both jacks and jennies, the minimum recommended height is 30". These minimum heights are strongly recommended by the MMDA to prevent loss of potential reproductive fitness, including foaling difficulties. Small size may also adversely affect conformation and balance. Overall bone should be strong and in proportion to the size of the donkey and muscle development. The miniature donkey should look like a standard donkey but in miniature.

HEAD

The head should be in proportion to the donkey. A shorter head is preferred to a longer one. The donkey should have a broad forehead and width between the eyes. The muzzle should taper with firm, even lips and large, open nostrils. The profile should be straight or slightly dished. Eyes are ideally large, prominent, dark, clear, with symmetry and a kind expression. Ears are preferred long, but in proportion to the head, parallel, set upright and carried alertly. The head should be well-balanced and carried in an upright position.

A large head that is not in proportion to the body may indicate dwarfism, which is to be avoided. In a desert environment large ears were adapted to help cool the body and to assist hearing over long distances.

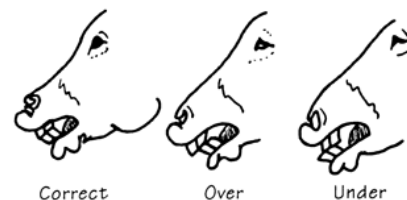
Eyes that are small, light coloured or dull may indicate poor vision or ill health. Wide-set, prominent eyes allow for wider field of vision. Large, open nostrils allow for optimum breathing with the ability to take an ample supply of oxygen.

Drooping lips can be a sign of ill health or age; protruding or receding jaw can interfere with eating and may indicate uneven bite.



TEETH

At maturity (after the third year teeth have erupted) the teeth of the upper jaw should meet evenly with the teeth of the lower jaw - not overshot ('parrot mouth') or undershot ('monkey mouth'). Up to a 4mm variation from an even bite (extreme limit) is accepted for registration into the MMDA stud register.



A good bite is important for grazing, chewing, digestion, nutrition and ultimately longevity.

NECK AND SHOULDERS

The neck should be strong, straight and in proportion to the head and body. It should not be too short and thick, or too long and thin or weak in appearance.

A short, wide neck does not allow for good control under the bit while driving. A strong, proportionate neck will also allow the animal to hold its head up alertly.

Donkeys' shoulders are more upright than that of a horse, but should not be excessively straight. An ideal shoulder angulation is approximately 45 - 50 degrees.

This gives the donkey power to pull and carry weight.



BODY

The body should have balance and symmetry. Each part should blend together in a well-proportioned, pleasing picture.

HEART / GIRTH / RIBS / BACK / LOINS

There should be a deep, generous girth. The ribs should be nicely rounded (well sprung).

The back should be strong, compact and level with a slight curve at the withers. The back should not dip or sway. The top-line should be gently sloped from the withers to a short, level back and loin and then to a moderately long and sloping croup and well-placed tail.

The loins, which are formed by the lumbar vertebrae, should be short-coupled, wide and well covered. Loins should lead into a moderately long and gently sloping rump.



A generous girth allows room for organs and expansion of the lungs during respiration. It also gives width of chest and space between the front legs.

A good top-line adds to balance and general appearance. Backs which are too long or too short look unbalanced, awkward and contribute to poorly coordinated movement.

Loins which are too long weaken the back and interfere with the transfer of power from the hind legs forward. Too much distance between the ribs and point of hip contributes to an awkward, unbalanced appearance and renders the animal's movement less efficient.

CROUP AND RUMP

As compared to a horse, the rump of a donkey has a sharper, more sloping croup. The pelvic bones are at a higher angle, therefore the donkey croup is higher and rump narrower. The rump should be strong and gently sloping. There should be good length from point of hip to point of buttock.

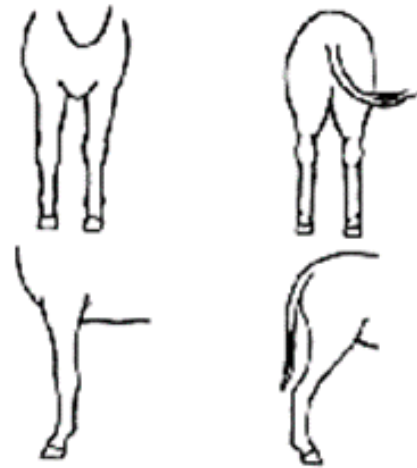
The hindquarters provide most of the donkey's impulsion and they act as pistons to thrust the animal forward. A thin, pointy rump can indicate an animal is in poor condition, may appear out of proportion and may reflect weak conformation.



LEGS

Legs should be squarely set and straight when viewed from all angles, with adequate bone in proportion to the animal to provide strength and balance. There should be space between the front legs for good width of chest providing ample room for lung expansion. The rear legs should have enough space to move forward following the front legs without rubbing at the hocks.

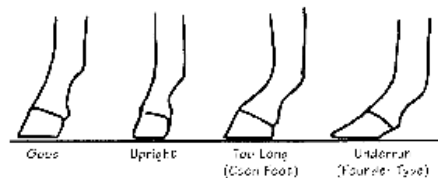
A working animal needs strong, straight, correct legs to be efficient and to prevent injuries, strain or lameness. Movement which is choppy, stiff or sluggish could be a sign of ill health or poor conformation. Animals that have significant "toeing out" or cow hocking" will break down more readily.



FEET

The hooves should be even and of a uniform shape. A donkey's hoof is narrower, more oval, and stands more upright than that of a horse. Hooves should be well trimmed.

Poorly shaped or uneven hooves can cause strain, lameness and clumsiness



MOVEMENT

Movement should be active, smooth, straight, free flowing and should cover the ground evenly with good length of stride. Each foot should be lifted clear off the ground and carried forward in a straight line.

CONDITION

A donkey should be in good weight with ribs just palpated under the coat without appearing "ribby". A well-muscled animal will show optimum conformation.

An animal in poor condition - either underweight or obese - is difficult to evaluate and can often appear dull and lethargic. Signs of poor condition may indicate or contribute to ill health. An animal in poor condition, even if structurally sound, will give a poor impression.

TEMPERAMENT

The donkey should be gentle, loving and responsive. He/she should be friendly, kind, trusting and willing to please. The donkey's temperament is much of their appeal. These qualities are well-documented in the earliest references in history.

COLOUR

There may be changes from a foal coat to a mature coat colour. A clearer idea of what the mature coat will be can be gained by looking at the colour of a foal's hair closer to the body or on the head around the eyes. The MMDA requests registrations to be updated after the donkey's third birthday (via the Association's Veterinary Inspection Forms) to include measured height and any change of colour. In the UK, most donkeys are issued passports via the Donkey Breed Society (DBS). The DBS recognise the following colours:

- Light brown - dun (all shades) usually light brown hair greying at base - will have paler muzzle and eye rings.
- Brown - a single colour mid brown coat hair, usually with a paler muzzle, eye rings and belly and a black cross marking.
- Dark Brown - single colour dark brown hair, may or may not have paler muzzle, eye rings and belly, and may or may not have a visible cross marking.
- Grey - true grey (as per grey squirrel) will have paler muzzle and eye rings, a cream belly, but no pale hairs within the body coat, usually has black cross marking.
- Grey roan - a coat of grey and white mixed hair on grey skin, may have white muzzle and belly paler legs and body colour will lighten with age.
- Black/brown - black, there is no such thing as true black in donkeys, may or may not have pale muzzle, eye rings and belly, no visible cross marking.
- Chestnut - (red) single colour coat of chestnut hairs, usually has a brown cross marking and may have a pale belly and legs, and will remain chestnut as age progresses.
- Chestnut Roan - coat of mixed chestnut and white hairs, but predominantly chestnut, cross marking if present will usually be brown.
- Strawberry Roan - (Sorrel) coat is made up of chestnut and white hairs, but a greater proportion of white, brown cross marking if present, paler belly and legs and will lighten significantly with age.
- Piebald - black and white, black may lighten with age and become grey/white
- Skewbald - any other colour and white.
- White - white hair on grey or pink skin, will not have a visible cross although occasionally the skin will be pigmented whilst the hair is not, and will often have pink eye rims and muzzle skin.
- Cream - cream hair, often on pink or grey skin but if the latter, may still have pink eye rims and muzzle, does not usually have a cross marking.

Whether an animal is being evaluated for the purpose of show ring or breeding, coat colour should always be the final consideration to characteristics of conformation.

AGE

This breed standard is written with the mature three-year-old in mind. Age may affect comparisons with the breed standard. It is desirable to choose breeding stock at maturity. A donkey's age at three years is calculated from the actual birth date. Before the age of three years old, a Mediterranean Miniature Donkey is immature and registered as a foal. Any foal conceived while either dam or sire are under 3 years of age will never be eligible for MMDA registration.

PEDIGREE

Pedigree is important when selecting the best possible stock for breeding. The original imported miniature donkey stock had a relatively small gene pool so some in-breeding was inevitable at that time. It is no longer necessary or acceptable. In-breeding can cause problems with confirmation, fertility, hardiness and genetic defects. In-breeding is defined as a foal that has ANY common ancestors on dam's or sire's side in the previous three generations – that includes parents, grand-parents and great-grandparents.

NB:

Imports into the UK must be DNA tested. The American National Miniature Donkey Association (NMDA) has been involved with DNA typing/testing since 2000. Information on this service is available by contacting the NMDA:

6450 Dewey Road, Rome, NY 13440, USA
Tel: 001-315-336-0154

Email: nmdaasset@aol.com

FAULTS NOT ACCEPTABLE IN BREEDING ANIMALS

Animals with any one of the following faults should not be used for breeding. These faults are highly undesirable:

- **Cryptorchid**
A mature jack with one or both testes undescended into the scrotum after 2 years is called a cryptorchid and all cryptorchid males should be gelded.
- **Dwarfism**
A dwarfed animal has an overall stunted, thick-set appearance. They can have numerous deformities in the legs with large, coarse and knobby joints or cannons short and stumpy. They have disproportionate heavy heads, usually carried low. Dwarfism traits are unacceptable for breeding.
- **Extreme 'cow hocks'**
Cow hocks that hinder the movement and, therefore, the function of an individual.
- **Extreme 'parrot mouth' / 'monkey mouth'**
Teeth that miss an even bite by more than 4mm affect the good condition, health, and eventually the longevity of the animal.

WEAKNESSES IN BREEDING ANIMALS

All donkeys have some weaknesses, but the degree and number of weaknesses is what needs to be kept in mind. Any animal with severe or numerous weaknesses should not be selected as breeding stock.

1. "Roman nose" - convex profile of the head. Coarseness of the head and neck.

2. Short, thick neck and low head carriage.

3. "Ewe neck" - thin, concave, weak neck.

4. "Roach back" - convex back. Long, weak back; sway back (sagging).

5. Short, high or flat croup, hip too short (no depth of hip).

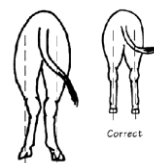
6. "Goose rump" - Steep, sloping croup, narrow rump.



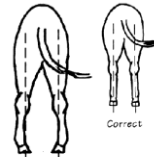
7. Insufficient bone in proportion to animal.

8. Too small to do the work that miniature donkeys were historically bred for.

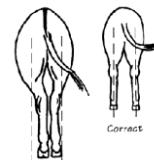
9. "Cow hocked" - the hocks of the back legs turn inward (toward) each other when viewed from behind.



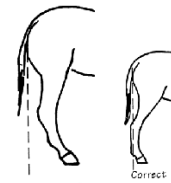
10. "Bow legs" - the hocks of the back legs turn outward (away) from each other when viewed from behind.



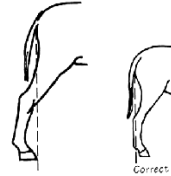
11. "Stands close behind" - the back legs are too close together. This is common in a narrow-bodied, flat-ribbed animal.



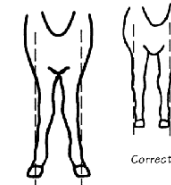
12. "Sickle hocked" - the back legs stand in and under the animal when viewed from the side.



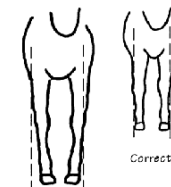
13. "Camped behind" - the back legs are set too far back behind the body when viewed from the side.



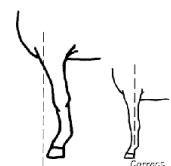
14. "Splay footed" - hooves of the front legs are turned outward and away from each other. This is common in narrow-chested animals.



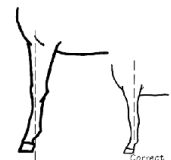
15. "Pigeon toed" - hooves of the front legs are turned inward and toward each other.



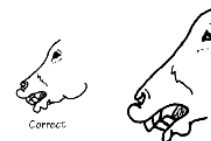
16. The front legs stand in and under the animal when viewed from the side.



17. The front legs are set too far in front of the body when viewed from the side.



18. "Parrot mouth" - upper teeth extend out beyond lower teeth - overshot bite.



19. "Monkey mouth" - Lower teeth extend out beyond upper teeth - undershot bite



Up to 4mm variation from an even bite (extreme limit) is accepted

Please note:

The MMDA (UK) and the NMDA (USA) are closely aligned when it comes to breed standard. There are very slight variations in what is deemed acceptable between the UK and the USA Associations:

Teeth – UK variance 4mm / USA variance ¼”

Height – From 2026, the lower limit for stud book registration in the UK will be 29” / USA lower recommended limit is 30”

Colours – There is a difference in colour terms between the UK and the USA. The MMDA aligns with the colour terms used by the Donkey Breed Society (DBS) as the DBS issue most donkey passports in the UK.

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