Capable Cats
An Introduction to Cow Hocks and Structure
1. What is a hock?
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Cats walk on their toes.
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2. What do cow hocks look like?
Cow hocks are a mis-alignment of the back leg joints.

The hocks come together.

The knees and toes point outward.

The underlying cause sometimes is hip dysplasia, but sometimes not.
Cats cannot jump correctly with weak back legs.
They have weak **thrust**, poor **stability**, and diminished **lateral** strength.
They cannot run powerfully, or change direction quickly, or land securely from a jump.
Cow-hocking is a physical disability. It is a functional handicap to any animal.
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June 2017
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A few words about… X-Rays

Can x-rays determine cow hocking? **NO**, because of the positioning of the cats’ legs during x-rays. (Unless the cow hocking is caused by hip dysplasia.) Looking at the cat standing is the best way to see cow hocks!

Right lateral (side) view

Ventrodorsal (like frog-leg) view
Structure is easy to see when the cat is standing
3. What is toeing-out in front?
Toeing-out in front
“Toeing-out,” feet face out, elbows turn inward
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4. Why is good structure necessary?
Correct Structure

• Power
• Accuracy
• Stability
“Build the barn before you paint it.”
Conformation can be assessed in young kittens as soon as they stand up and start moving around. It does not change as they mature.

A young Bengal kitten with excellent legs

The same Bengal kitten, older, same good legs
Devon Rex kittens, 8 weeks old

Sphynx kitten
Observe, observe, observe.
Did you know all of the TICA Breed Standards of Perfection require correct structure? (Correct structure is not required for the Household Pet cats, of course.)
Where it is located in every breed’s Standard

See Show Rules, ARTICLE SIXTEEN for more comprehensive rules governing penalties and disqualifications.
See Show Rules, ARTICLE SIXTEEN for more comprehensive rules governing penalties and disqualifications.

Where I recommend it should be located because of the importance of functional health.
“See Show Rules, ARTICLE SIXTEEN for more comprehensive rules governing penalties and disqualifications.”
Many abnormalities which are detected in judging are not breed specific, but, rather occur in all cats. Responsible breeding aims to conserve our breeds while maintaining their health which means focusing on reducing or eliminating these abnormalities.

Household Pets are excepted from this rule because they are not the result of planned breeding programs.
Except as otherwise stated in this rule, judges shall penalize or disqualify, depending upon severity, championship cats, non-championship kittens, Advanced New Breeds (ANB), and New Traits Class (NT) [see TICA Standing Rules 701.4.3], and shall penalize championship alters for the following:

...
256.12.7

**Inability** to bear or support weight or to **walk normally**.

256.12.8

**Abnormal positioning of the legs and feet while standing**.

Examples include, but are not limited to, **bowed or cow hocked legs**, splaying of the feet, or obvious **toeing in or out of the feet**.
“judges shall penalize or disqualify depending upon severity”

TICA Show Rules say penalizing tail faults is discretionary, whereas penalizing or disqualifying structural problems is mandatory.
Health

Temperament

Breed Type

Color

TICA Show Rules

TICA Breed Standards

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According to TICA’s By-Laws, “The Registration Rules, Show Rules, take precedence over any individual Breed Standard…

Therefore, the Article 16 of Show Rules, should be applied FIRST, and faults at the Show Rule level are more important than faults under the individual Breed Standards
All associations judge structure:

**Cat Fanciers Association (CFA), U.S.A.**

"The following descriptions and drawings of "normal" and "abnormal" are offered as an educational tool to help develop and refine the ability of cat fanciers to recognize and select against undesirable and potentially harmful physical characteristics."

"Judges help to promote the elimination of defects by recognizing and rewarding cats with structural soundness on the show bench."

★ **Bowed legs** occur when the hocks are further apart than the feet
★ **Cow-hocked legs** - The hind hocks turn inward and cause the feet to point outwards rather than straight forward.
### Programme - Programm - Programme

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tr>
<td>09.00 - 09.30</td>
<td>Roll Call and introduction / Anwesenheitsliste und Einführung / Liste de présence et introduction</td>
<td>Diana Di Natale (Roll Call) / Donatella Mastrangelo (introduction)</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.30 - 10.00</td>
<td>FIFe structure / Struktur der FIFe / Structure de la FIFé</td>
<td>Dorte Kaas</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 - 10.30</td>
<td>Standards &amp; Judges reports/ Standards &amp; Richterberichte / Standards &amp; rapports de juges</td>
<td>Steven L. Jones</td>
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<td>10.30 - 11.00</td>
<td>Open discussion / Offene Diskussion / Discussion ouverte</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00 - 11.15</td>
<td>Coffee break - Kaffepause - pause café</td>
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<td>11.15 - 12.15</td>
<td>Anatomy of the cats and faults / Anatomie der Katze und Fehler / L’anatomie du chat et ses fautes</td>
<td>Pia Nyman</td>
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<td>12.15 - 12.45</td>
<td>Open discussion / Offene Diskussion / Discussion ouverte</td>
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<td>12.45 - 14.15</td>
<td>Lunch break - Mittagspause - déjeuner</td>
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<td>15.15 - 16.00</td>
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<td>Coffee break - Kaffepause - pause café</td>
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<td>16.15 - 17.15</td>
<td>Show arena and ethics of judging / Dia Showaruna und Ethik des Richtons / L’arène de l’exposition et l’éthique du jugement</td>
<td>Donatella Mastrangelo</td>
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<td>17.15 - 18.00</td>
<td>Open discussion / Offene Diskussion / Discussion ouverte</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>End of seminar / Ende des Seminars / Fin du séminaire</td>
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"As the desire of any concerned breeder must be to try to eliminate any defects which can affect the health or comfort of cats, it is obviously undesirable to breed from any cats with defects, and especially from those displaying severe examples of any defects."

"Judges too should help to eliminate defects by penalizing them on the show bench wherever they are encountered."
6. A few words about…

- Balance
- Breeding
- Tail Set
- Hip Dysplasia
- Giving Birth
A few words about… **Balance**

Look at this cat and think about movement, power, and weight distribution:
• Both back feet are *behind* the hips. He is cow hocked in his back legs (in real life).

• His front legs are compensating to hold rear weight, by reaching back behind shoulders. The cat pulls with front legs.

• Neck *straining* forward, to carry body weight on the stronger front legs.

• This cat is lacks normal stability and thrust

• Excellent. The back legs are supporting hip weight.

• The front legs evenly supporting the shoulders.

• Imagine rear legs as the engine, and front legs as the landing gear.

• This cat is stable, flexible, with agile movement, and balanced.
Not balanced:

- *Both* back feet are *behind* the hips. He is cow hocked in his back legs (in real life).
- His front legs are compensating to hold rear weight, by reaching back behind shoulders. The cat pulls with front legs.
- Neck *straining* forward, to carry body weight on the stronger front legs.
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Balanced:

- Excellent. The back legs are supporting hip weight.
- The front legs evenly supporting the shoulders.
- Imagine rear legs as the engine, and front legs as the landing gear.
- This cat is stable, flexible, with agile movement, and balanced.
A few words about… **Breeding**

What happens when you breed a very cow hocked cat to one with good structure?

You can get a **range** from bad to fairly good. It also depends on the cause of the cow hocks. Hip dysplasia? Misaligned joints?

But …. bad structure **can** be bred out eventually.

It is better to start with a cat with correct structure.
A few words about… **Tail Set**

The TICA **Bengal** Standard says, “A thick, **low-set**, medium-length tail adds balance to the cat.”

This croup is gently sloping, with the tail set on just below the level of the back.
Great Pyrenees tail is “set low and carried low in repose”
Tail set is high off a flat croup

Low tail set, displaying the soft flowing curve over the croup

Tail is set very high on a short, flat croup
Japanese Bobtail, short, flat croup:

The pom-pom “appears to commence at the base of the spine.”
A few words about…

**Hip Dysplasia**

Yes, it exists in cats.

Hip Dysplasia is a hereditary defect in the socket joint that it is not as deep as it normally should be. (“Dysplasia” means “poorly developed.”)

Because of this the head of the femur does not fit exactly in the socket joint and the surfaces begin to rub against each other, causing the cartilage to degenerate, leaving a bone-against-bone joint surface which is painful.

(In the show ring, judges only need to observe structural irregularities, not guess the cause.)

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This cat has hip dysplasia, diagnosed by a veterinarian by x-ray.

When judging, only the “abnormal positioning of the feet and legs while standing,” must be penalized, not the cause.
Dogs with cow hocks require more surgical intervention (Cesarean-sections) to give birth than dogs with good structure do.

Perhaps this is true with cats, too?
7. Examples of good structure
Excellent Cat
Excellent
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Excellent
Munchkin

Excellent
Excellent

House cat in Tokyo, Japan
Street cat in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Exeellent
Excellent
Excellent
Here are some examples of wild cats

Notice their functional, strong, excellent structure

Asian Leopard Cats, used in the development of the Bengal and Toyger breeds
Jungle Cat, used in the development of the Chausie breed
Serval, used in the development of the Savannah breed
8. Judging
Judges and Breeders collaborate in a partnership to **improve** the breeds.

Cats, like people, are not perfect. But they should be the best they can be and **that is OUR responsibility.**
Judges have an important responsibility – they help select the future breeding cats, because the highly-awarded cats are often used more for breeding
Judges are the “custodians of the breeds.”

🔍

Judges are the Quality Control Department, experts who give informed, honest evaluations.

Excellent
It is the balance and interaction of length, size, substance, proportions and angles of conformation that give us our various breeds.
The uneducated eye might see only the **superficial** appearance.

The more knowledgeable eye of judges can evaluate more deeply.
The owner of this Bengal asked me to include him in this Structure seminar, as an example of a cat which should NOT be awarded.

The owner said to ask the judges to please check structure, because it is important to the breeders and the breed.

This cat was very successful in the show ring the year he was shown.
How can legs be checked when judging the cats at cat shows?
It may be **easier** to be a good dog show judge than it is to be a good cat show judge, because when the dogs are moving around the ring, their conformation is clearly visible.
When judging dogs (and cats), it is important to look at them when they are standing naturally.

Structural problems or discomfort are evident if they shift weight from one foot to another, or move one back foot forward to adjust stability, or shift their body weight to the front or the back.

"Treat a work of art like a prince: let it speak to you first." – Arthur Schopenhauer

"Treat cats like royalty: let them speak to you first." – Vickie Shields
This is also a way to look at the legs.
9. Test
Question 1

Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B
Question 1
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 2

Which cat is cow hocked?

A                                    B
Question 2
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 3
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B
Question 3
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

Correct!

B
Question 4
Which cat is cow hocked?
A                                      B
Question 4
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 5
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

B
Question 5
Which cat is cow hocked?

A

Correct!

B

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Question 6

Which cat has better back legs?

A                                    B
Question 6

Which cat has better back legs?

A

B

Correct!
Question 7

Which horse is cow hocked?

A

B
Question 7
Which horse is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 8
Which dog is cow hocked?

A                                    B

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Question 8
Which dog is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 9
Which dog is cow hocked?
A                                    B
Question 9
Which dog is cow hocked?

A

B

Correct!
Question 10
Which dog has the best rear structure?

A                      B                      C
Question 10
Which dog has the **best** rear structure?

A  
[Image of dog with cow hocked rear structure]

B  
[Image of dog with correct rear structure]

C  
[Image of dog with too narrow rear structure]

Cow hocked  Correct!  Too narrow
Question 11
Which cat has the **best** front structure?

A  B  C  D
Question 11
Which cat has the *best* front structure?

A                 B                  C

D

Correct!

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Question 12
Which dog has the best front structure?

A                                B
Question 12
Which dog has the best front structure?

A

B

Correct!
Question 13

What do you observe about these two cats?

A  B
Question 13

What do you observe about these two cats?

A

B

A is excellent

B has cow hocks, front ankles together, and elbows out
Question 14

Which cat has better balance and structure?

A                                     B
Question 14

Which cat has better balance and structure?

A

B

Correct!
Question 15

Which cat has better balance and structure?

A                                    B

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Question 15
Which cat has better balance and structure?

A

B

Correct!
Question 16
Which cat has excellent balance and structure?

A  

B
Question 16
Which cat has excellent balance and structure?

A  
B

Correct!
Question 17

Referring to the Bengal breed standard, which Bengal has the best tail?

A                                       B

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Question 17

Referring to the Bengal breed standard, which Bengal has the best tail?

A

B
Question 18
Which cat has better leg structure?

A                         B

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Question 18

Which cat has better leg structure?

A

B
Congratulations! You have completed "Capable Cats - An Introduction to Cow Hocks and Structure"

For comments, questions, or to contribute photos, please email Vickie Shields, vshields@ix.netcom.com
Questions?
The End

(Notice the excellent structure of the back legs!)