How to make a Labrador without breaking eggs

I actually spent several hours trying to draw a graphic for what I want to pass along, but I am not an artist and the figure has to be 3-D. So, here are the objects you may use to illustrate what I am about to write:
an egg (I recommend hard boiled in case you drop it)
a few toothpicks or pipe cleaners
some crazy glue if you want to make a model

If you will think of the dog's chest and body as an egg, the structure problems will become easier to picture. If you asked them to hold the egg up to represent how the chest looks on a dog, most people would place the egg with the blunt end forward and the pointed end toward the rear. If you visualize the dog shaped this way, it would explain some of the structure you see in the ring - flat forechest, wide front, narrower rear, etc. Now, if you take some toothpicks and make a right triangle from them (the hypotenuse not quite the diameter of the egg) that represents the shoulder, you can easily see that a proper shoulder can not fit easily onto the large end of this egg. Since the front point of the joint can not extend beyond the egg, the only way to make the bones fit reasonably is to make both the scapula and the humerus shorter and more upright. This still leaves them sort of "tacked on" to the broad side of the egg, with the top of the scapulae a long distance apart and the same wide distance between the elbows at the bottom of the chest.

This is what I see in the ring with some consistency. Often the scapula is buried into the muscles at the side of the neck in order to accommodate the wide, flat chest. The elbows stand free of the dog's body. On these dogs, the front usually drops straight, true and wide.... just what lots of people think looks great standing still. These dogs are not likely to move as well because they lack layback of shoulder and proper return of upper arm for reach. They will also tend to toe-in when moving because their legs are not under them, but beside them. Often they will also roll a lot in the body, since the suspension points of the shoulders are not near each other. Instead of the shoulder blades "standing close together at the withers", they don't even have a speaking acquaintance with each other and often don't come to the top of the back.

Now, turn the egg the other way - with the pointed end to the front. Place the toothpicks on this end of the egg and notice how much longer and laid back they can extend. The tip of the scapulae can be above the beginning spring of rib and the elbows can be under it. This dog has a forechest! The keel extends below the elbows, but does not interfere with the elbows nor require that they be at the widest part of the chest. This dog will tend to look a little narrower in front (well, face it... they ARE), with the spring of rib making the middle of the dog wider than the front. This spring is carried through into a wide loin and croup – as the standard describes. They are built more like a good rowboat (a prow, keel, and wide stern). Many people don't like this look, since they equate the space between the front legs with the girth of chest. A properly-built dog can have a lot of chest and lung room and STILL have legs standing parallel UNDER it.

From the side, this dog will have more layback of scapulae, more return of upper arm, some forechest showing in front of the neck, and the neck will appear longer. From the front, this dog will stand with legs parallel under the chest, rather than beside it. OFTEN it will toe out slightly (more when puppies) because the elbows are not forced out by the humerus being on the side of the chest. The elbows are actually under the chest (not tied, just normally supportive) and free to rotate properly. In motion, this dog will move with a fairly parallel gait and feet straight forward. This makes the dog more balanced off the center toes, gives the dog better stamina in the field, and allows for the most forward momentum without shifting the suspension points at the top of the scapulae constantly. This dog is smooth on the go-around and relatively parallel on the straight-away. The rear legs are directly in line with the front legs (you should see only two legs going or coming because the ones on the other end of the dog are directly lined up). The front is not wider than the rear, the rear doesn't have to do strange things to dissipate excess drive that the front can not absorb. The dog doesn't have to sidewind due to unbalanced angulation.

Now, having said this, I can tell you that the puppies and adults I generally like the best have the body shape I prefer (pointed end forward) and consequently are closer together at both the tips of the scapulae and at the elbows. They will often toe out a bit when standing, but move with feet forward, balanced on the center of the foot. The real secret is to assess the BODY shape and how the shoulder assembly is attached. If the elbows are "tied" and do not have normal flexibility, the dog will also move wrong and the feet will actually reach wider than the elbows. This is a rare fault, but I have seen it. It is often because the body shape is still wrong (blunt end forward) and the shoulder bones have been accommodated differently. Many breeders speak of a "narrow front" when they are referring to the distance between the front legs. If the body shape is correct, this has no bearing on the width of chest ABOVE the elbows and the spring of rib behind them.

I hope you find this of use and enjoy playing around with the egg and toothpicks. It is one of the best ways to really get a good view of how the shoulder assembly and body work together to support balance and function. As a demonstration of the differences in how structure looks on the actual dog, I invite you to visit a web page I made a few years ago to compare the legacy of one dog's impact on structure.
http://www.nimloth.com/kismet.html
All of the dogs on the page are long dead, as the photos are from a very old Julie Brown Directory. The first dog demonstrates the blunt-end forward body with elbows clearly beside the dog, not under him. The second photo is of a bitch with the other type of body-shoulder assembly, with elbows under her (I think she is standing slightly toe out). The third photo is of their son. It is a warning of how quickly and easily we can lose shoulder angulation, placement and overall structure. It is clear that this dog has his father's body type and function. These graphic representatives of the differences in structure I demonstrated with the egg are why I prefer to take my eggs "the other way 'round", thank you!