

The English Cocker Spaniel Study Guide

Introduction

When judging the English Cocker Spaniel, it is important to always keep in mind the original purpose of the breed, which is to hunt in dense, deep cover, most often taller than the dog. The English Cocker must be made correctly to function properly. It must be understood that the English cocker pushes through the cover and does not leap over it like the larger Springer or Setter. To work efficiently in this type of terrain and in this manner, the English Cocker MUST have well sprung ribs, a deep chest, a well-developed forechest, generous bone, a short broad loin, and broad, muscular hindquarters.



Essential Points to Consider When Judging The English Cocker Spaniel

- The English Cocker is a dog of balance with no one feature overpowering another. He has a round, softly contoured appearance with no sharp angles or lines.



- As part of the judging process, this breed MUST be viewed from above to confirm that the well-sprung ribcage is the widest part of the dog. The rear must also be broad, as well as the loin short. Although developed primarily as a land Spaniel, the make and shape, and particularly the

breadth of the dog, which enable him to push through thick cover, also help him be more buoyant in the water. Observe the individual from above on the table and look at the class as a whole from above, on the ground.

- He has a functional head with correct planes enabling him to see forward over a carried bird. He is a dog of moderation with no exaggerations. He is balanced at both ends and is supported by generous bone and well made feet. He is a dog of power rather than speed and is a very substantial dog for his size.
- This is a short-coupled, substantial dog with the height at the withers slightly greater than the withers to set on of tail. He has a slightly sloping topline with well-sprung, deep ribbing that is carried well back to a short, broad loin. His neck is just long enough to allow him to comfortably pick up a bird and carry it high enough so as to not interfere with his front legs. He has to have the make and shape, the forechest for protection, the ribspring, bone, coupling, and “hammy” rear with well let down hocks, to enable him to push through dense cover.
- In any size English Cocker entry, you must first choose your dogs based on their breed specific make and shape and pull those to the head of the line. Then reward the soundest of them. For example, a dog who is a lovely cocker on the line, and in motion carries himself with decorum, but has a “slightly” round eye, or a “slightly” low tailset should NEVER be placed below a dog which does not possess the breed’s essential characteristics, just because he has a dramatic silhouette, races around the ring and is showmanship personified.

General Appearance:

The English Cocker Spaniel is an active, merry sporting dog, standing well up at the withers and compactly built. He is alive with energy; his gait is powerful and frictionless, capable both of covering ground effortlessly and penetrating dense cover to flush and retrieve game. He has a distinctive head and eye. His head and expression are the appeal of the breed. He is

a very powerful, broad, and compact dog for his size.



Size, Proportion, Substance:

Height for males is 16 to 17 inches, and 15 to 16 inches for females. We have had very good big dogs and very good small dogs – reward a good Cocker at either extreme. Historically size has always balanced out and we have not had to be wary of getting too big or too small.

The height from withers to ground is slightly greater than the length from withers to set on of tail. The elbow is midpoint between the withers and the ground. He is neither “leggy” nor low on leg. This is a dog of moderation rather than extremes. Exaggeration of any characteristic will throw off the balance of a compact, well-knit dog. The English Cocker IS a compact, short coupled dog. To the uninitiated, he is surprisingly heavy for his size. An English Cocker lacking in substance that is long, narrow, refined, shelly, racy and fine-boned is “settery” in appearance; is atypical of the breed and should not be rewarded.



“Settery”

“Cockery”

Please note when judging, that the bone, forechest, ribspring, and “hammy” rear should be very evident in even a six month old puppy. A well-made puppy of any color should not be considered “dumpy”. A racy, narrow, fine-boned puppy will never mature into a correctly made adult.

Head:

The head and expression are the appeal of the breed. The expression is soft, melting, and dignified. When viewed from the front, the skull is arched on the sides and SLIGHTLY flattened



on top, but not flat throughout. It is very important to note that the arch to the sides of the backskull is essential for good attachment of the jaw muscles,

making bird carrying easier.

The head appears strong, yet free from coarseness, and is softly contoured without sharp angles. The eye color is dark brown except in livers & liver particolors where hazel is permitted. The nose is black except in livers & liver particolors when it will be brown. A brown nose on a red or red particolor is permissible, but black is preferred. The skull and muzzle are equal in length, the brow being not appreciably higher than the backskull. Our standard does NOT call for parallel planes

WHEN VIEWED FROM THE SIDE, however, for the English Cocker to perform the function for which he was bred, his head planes (when viewed from the side)



APPROACH parallel, enabling the eye to look forward, just over the muzzle. The stop is definite but moderate and slightly grooved. The muzzle is cleanly chiseled under the eyes. When examining puppies, the grooved stop is indicative of future chiseling once the molars have completely dropped. The eye shape is medium size, full and slightly oval with a slight lift to the top. This lift is what gives the English cocker an alert look. He should not look “hound-like” or mournful. Haws can be pigmented or unpigmented, or be one of each. All are correct as long as the lids are tight.

Neck, Body and Topline:

The neck is moderate in length. It is in balance with the length and height of the dog, and is just long enough for the dog to easily reach down, pick up a bird, and to carry the bird without it interfering with his front legs.

His forechest is well-developed for protection, projecting moderately beyond the point of the shoulder. The brisket reaches to the elbow and the well-sprung ribs are of good depth and extend well back. The laid back shoulders blend smoothly into the well-knit, compact body. The back is short and strong, the loin is broad and, to the touch, slightly arched, and the croup is gently rounded. He has a SLIGHTLY sloping back, with a tail that is carried level off of a gently rounded croup. The tail may be carried somewhat higher when the dog is excited, but never cocked up. (Please refer to the following Parent Club clarification when judging an undocked dog: <http://www.ecsca.org/naturaltail.html>.)

Forequarters and Hindquarters:

The English Cocker stands well up at the withers, but not as a result of straight shoulders. He has moderate, but balanced angulation front and rear. Realistically, ideal shoulders are about 100 degrees rather than 90. The elbow is directly under the withers. The upper arm and the shoulder blade are equal in length, the point of the shoulder being midway between. The rear is balanced to the front, with the same angle forming from the top of the hipbone, to the point of the buttock, to the stifle joint. When standing naturally or properly set up, a perpendicular line dropped from the point of the buttock to the ground should land directly in front of the rear foot. He does not have an over-angulated rear that extends way behind his body.

Equally important for form and function as the well-sprung ribs, generous bone, short loin, and well-developed forechest is a broad, "hammy" rear. There is significant muscling on both the outside AND the inside of the rear legs, continuing down through the second thigh. The second thigh and upper thigh are of equal length. Hocks are by necessity short, for

powerful pushing through cover. Please note that even from this angle, the correct, round, broad, "cockery" body is evident.



The correctly made, functional English Cocker has a generous amount of bone to support his substantial body. The bone is nearly uniform in

size from elbow to heel, and the feet are proportionate in size to the legs. Feet are firm, round and catlike, the toes arched and tight with thick pads. The pasterns are nearly straight with some flexibility.

Gait:

The English Cocker must maintain the same outline moving as standing. Topline, croup, tail carriage, and neck and head carriage remain constant. The English Cocker's gait is characterized more by purposeful drive and determination and the appearance of power, than by great speed and flashy showmanship. He covers ground effortlessly with extension both in front and rear appropriate to his angulation. The dog that moves quickly, taking lots of steps but going nowhere, is incorrect. Coming and going the dog will move with width between the legs appropriate to his build. Naturally, with increased speed, there is a tendency towards convergence, but a correctly made English Cocker cannot single track.

If the English Cocker is properly angulated in



front, he will reach to just underneath the tip of his muzzle. The

straight-shouldered dog with the dramatic

topline is only able to reach to below his ear set. The correct set of croup, equal length and development of upper and lower thigh, combined with a well let down hock, will enable him to follow through behind with appropriate drive.

Coat and Color:

The coat is silky and well feathered, but not so profusely as to interfere with fieldwork. The correct, silky coat will either pull out of the dog or slide through the cover, with little debris attached. A cottony coat will collect debris and sometimes hang up a dog in the field. The jacket lies flat to the body with natural length and enough depth to give protection. The feathering follows the contours of the body with no trimmed in exaggerations.

Colors various. There are no color restrictions in our breed except for a short sentence indicating that in particolors, solid colored patches should be broken and more or less evenly distributed, and that white feet on a solid colored dog are undesirable. There is no one color that is more preferred than any other.



Liver roan, solid liver, blue roan, solid black, black and white, orange roan, solid red, all the colors with tan points. slipped masks, lots of spots, no spots at all, white spots on blue dogs, etc., all are acceptable. (Please refer to the following Parent Club clarification when judging questionable color patterns: <http://www.ecsca.org/ECS Colors.pdf>.)

If you come to judging English Cocker Spaniels as a breeder of self-colored dogs, you will need to educate your eye to see around and through different markings. A black leg, front or rear, can elongate a dog. Spots on the topline can cause the eye to see dips and rises not really there. Tan markings on legs coming or going can throw your eye off as well and make a sound dog look like he is moving incorrectly.

There is a reason they are called “optical illusions”. What you think that you are seeing may not really be there, or it is there and you are just not seeing it? Be aware and don’t assume. Take a minute to look at the off side of any dog whose markings bother you. You may find yourself seeing a totally re-proportioned dog.

Temperament:

The English Cocker is merry and affectionate, of equable disposition, neither sluggish nor hyperactive, a willing worker and a faithful and engaging companion. The very important word “merry” appears in the first and in the last sentence of the standard.



“An untypical Cocker that is sound is useless.”

A typical Cocker that is sound is priceless.”

Anne Rodgers Clark
Past President ECSCA



*Compiled by the English Cocker
Spaniel Club of America Education
Committee.*