

2003 National Specialty Judges Critique

By Kathy Lorentzen

It was my distinct privilege to judge the 2003 ESSFTA National Specialty Show. I would like to thank the members of the club for inviting me and giving me the thrill of a lifetime in dogs. I would also like to thank my excellent stewards; Melanie King and Susan Still-they did a great job of getting the dogs in and out of the ring and keeping everything organized.

I approached this assignment with a firm conviction to put aside all my personal preferences and prejudices in the breed and judge the dogs based solely upon the priorities set forth in the breed standard. I figure I must have succeeded; just look at how many liver and white Springers won major awards! (You all know my feeling that black is a superior color...)

Speaking first in generalities, I want to commend modern breeders on two areas where I feel you have made tremendous steps forward: first, temperaments were simply outstanding. I had one dog that grumbled under his breath at me when I went behind him, and one other who was uncomfortable with having me go over him behind his line of vision. Otherwise, the dogs were awesome in attitude, behavior, sensibility and showmanship. I was mightily impressed. The other area where improvements are remarkable was bites. I saw only three that I felt were seriously faulty in the entire entry. The vast majority were textbook perfect. Congratulations to you all.

Now to two areas of concern: first and foremost is the too commonly seen lack of balance, which causes many different serious movement problems. I am not speaking just of balanced angulation fore and aft, but also of balanced bone length in the front and rear assemblies. I saw problems with all of this in many different configurations. Some dogs had long shoulder blades but short upper arms. Quite a few had the reverse, short, vertical shoulder blades but long upper arms that set the front legs well back under the body. Moving to rears, many had second thighs that were much longer than the upper thigh. Any and all of these unbalanced combinations seriously compromise soundness. I saw a great deal of short front reach (due to short, vertical shoulder blades), lack of convergence in front, high-stepping "wristy" action (this comes when the upper arm is short and vertical and the second thigh is long-the front has to "lift" excessively to try to get out of the way), and crabbing and side winding.

This is an area where I think breeders really need to concentrate effort. (Of course this is not exclusive to Springers, many Sporting breeds are suffering the same troubles). Fronts with long, sloping shoulder blades, an upper arm that matches in length and angle, and rears that balance with the front in both angulation and matching bone length, provide a Sporting dog with the capacity for an effortless, smooth, coordinated endurance gait and the ability to "go and keep going" the way a hunting dog should.

A second area of concern is heads. I saw some very correct ones but I also saw a lot that stray further than my parameters can go. Divergent head planes, prominently set eyes, lack of correct eyebrow, excessive stop and high, domed foreheads are far too

common in our breed right now. The Springer head is unique to the Spaniel breeds and, while they don't "walk on their heads", I don't believe that any Sporting dog can really be of outstanding type without a head that is descriptive of its individual breed.



On to some discussion of the individual winners. My Winners Dog, **Alpine's Times Square**, came from the 6-9 puppy class. He was an upstanding liver and white puppy dog with beautiful bone, legs and feet, excellent height to length proportion, and outstanding balance in every way. He had long bones of the forequarter and his hindquarter matched perfectly with no exaggeration of length of thigh. He had broad, well-muscled thighs and a perfect gently rounded croup and his tail set and carriage were very good. On the go this puppy proved why balance is so important—he maintained his upstanding profile and used his legs effortlessly. He took long, easy steps, held his top, carried his neck correctly up and slightly forward, and his down and back was excellent as well.

Reserve in dogs to the 9-12 puppy, **Tiffany's Suncoast Sharpshooter**. This black and white puppy has a lovely outline and an absolutely beautiful head and eye. While I preferred his head to that of the WD, I felt that the baby puppy defeated him slightly in ease and way of going and in quality of bone and substance. This is a wonderful young dog and I hope that he makes up into just a little more dog that he was on this day.

I had a lot of wonderful bitches but when the Bred-by-Exhibitor class walked into the ring I knew I had my work cut out for me. There were about six in the class that I would have been happy to take home. When the dust settled, both WB and RWB came from this class. Winners to **Pawmark's Twilight Dazzle**. She has just about everything that I think a young Springer bitch should. Her head is gorgeous, with a flat skull

and perfect parallel planes and a beautiful set and shape and color of eye. Her long, sloping shoulder blades allow her a beautiful reach of neck and that neck joins her shoulder gradually and smoothly like the standard requires. She has a beautiful shape of rib, long and properly sprung, and a strong loin and correct croup and tail set. On the move she is balanced and coordinated and carries her profile perfectly. She is sound, balanced, coordinated and every inch a Springer.



Figure 1 Best of Winners

Reserve to **Especial Moonlite Rendezvous**. I have to tell you that I loved this bitch two years ago at the National when she went BOS in Sweeps, but I had not seen her since that day. She has more than fulfilled her early promise. She and the WB were so much alike—wonderful upstanding profiles with excellent length of leg and height to length proportion, beautiful front assemblies that create that lovely length and set of neck, wonderful head shape with length of foreface, set of eye, prominent eyebrows

and parallel planes. While I preferred the amount of bone and the quality of foot on the RWB, I felt that the WB excelled in motion, and that was the deciding factor.

I want to give special mention to the Veteran classes, as they were outstanding. I think I had looked forward to judging these classes more than any other, and I wasn't disappointed. These dogs and bitches have stood the test of time and their quality, balance and soundness have allowed them to age with grace and beauty. Thank you all so much for bringing them.

I spent a lot of time working in my head on how I was going to manage the Specials class and I hope that everyone enjoyed the way I did it. I really wanted it to be a "dog show", I wanted every dog to get his or her moment in the sun, and I wanted it to be suspenseful to the end. And, as it turned out, it really was, since even I didn't know until the very end who was winning! What a thrill it was for me to sort through all those lovely dogs and watch the cream of the crop rise to the top. When I got the second cut organized in the ring I decided to work the class in "pairs" so I could sort out the eventual winners and Awards Of Merit. This method worked extremely well in helping me organize in my mind just what traits I felt were most important and in allowing the audience to see dogs of very high quality that all had wonderful type but were of somewhat different "styles".

It came down in my head to two pairs that were outstanding, but had clear-cut differences. At that point I made a decision to use one pair over the other and my reasons were this-the eventual BB bitch defeated the 2nd Award of Merit bitch on length of stride, quality of bone and angle of croup and tail carriage. The eventual BOS dog defeated the 1st Award of Merit dog on carriage of topline, angle of croup and tail set and carriage, and naturalness of trim. I felt that the 1st Award of Merit dog was too sculpted.



Figure 2 Best of Breed

So now I had it down to the pair I knew I was using, but then I had to make a decision as to which one was BB and which BOS. I sent them around the ring again together and then got down and looked at their heads, and at that moment I decided that the bitch was winning. Best of Breed went to **Ch. Eldamar's Wil-Orion Daystar**. If you turned this bitch over, she would have the words "I am an English Springer Spaniel" written on her tummy. From the tip of her beautiful head, to the perfect set and carriage of her tail, she is first a **SPANIEL** and second a **SPRINGER SPANIEL**. She has balance

and proportion, she moves with ease and power, she carries her top, is a perfect size, has a very correct coat-there is nothing to dislike about her. (Well, I guess in a perfect world I would make her BLACK). Just kidding, no mail please! She is "free from exaggeration" and she beautifully combines the look of "beauty and utility" required in the breed standard.



Figure 3 Best of Opposite Sex

Best of Opposite Sex to **Ch. Amilyn's Flying High**. He perfectly matched the BB bitch and is a dog that I think could have a brilliant specials career. He possesses all the same virtues that the bitch has, but she defeated him in quality of head. I felt that the bitch's head was more correct, with a flatter skull, better breakup of brow and better planes. This dog had a wonderful outline, outstanding

quality of ribcage and loin, a perfect croup and tail set, beautiful bone, legs and feet, broad thighs and was sound from every direction. On top of it he was

trimmed to perfection and beautifully presented by his young owner, who apparently has nerves of steel, as I have never seen anyone in the thick of competition at a National with that much poise!

Best of Winners to the bitch on the basis of head quality, but it wasn't an easy decision. I thought the WD and WB were so similar in make and shape and way of going, I was thrilled to see them standing and moving together.

1st Award of Merit to **Ch. Ridgewyn-N-Belvoir Uprising**. I love this dog and everybody knows it. His wonderful head, beautiful bone, legs and feet, the "stallion" look of him when he stands free-he is a terrific dog. He has had a fabulous career and is so deserving of it.

2nd Award of Merit to **Ch. Especial Stormy Weather**. I did a lot for this bitch when she was being actively campaigned. There are so many things to love about her. She has the most beautiful eye and skull, she carries her profile so well and her back is so strong, and her down and back is the best in the world. A litter of puppies has done nothing but improve her.

3rd Award of Merit to **Ch. Crownroyal's Black Tea Leaves**. I have always loved this one as well. She has held her quality so well into her Veteran years. She is substantial yet still a girl, has the blackest eyes ever, and goes around the ring with such freedom and grace.

4th Award of Merit to **Ch. Dartek's Expedition**. How interesting, he is sire of the BOS dog. And they are so very similar, but the son is a smidge better. And isn't that the mark of a great dog, that he can produce better than himself? If he keeps this up he will make a

Figure 4 Final lineup-BB, BW, BOS and six AOM



wonderful name for himself in this breed.

5th Award of Merit to **Ch. Wil-Orion's Eldamar Nightmoves**. He turned out to be a littermate to the BB bitch. This dog was good sized and very substantial, yet so balanced and sound. I loved the way he went around the ring, upstanding yet with so much length of stride and great balance and power.

6th. Award of Merit to **Ch. Polesitter's Roller Derby**. I finished this bitch last year at a Specialty. I loved her then and I still loved her at the National. She was completely out of coat but hair is just window-dressing. She has such a great outline and carries that outline with so much style. Her leg action is outstanding and she has a lovely head.

Unfortunately the sky opened for the progeny classes, which is really too bad as I think they are the most important classes at any National Specialty show. I was really happy that so many of you went to the time and effort to enter these classes this year. The quality was wonderful and I hope everyone will continue to support these classes in the future.

It was an honor and a privilege and the most fun I have ever had in my "dog life". I really didn't want the three days to end. Thank you all, again, for bringing your lovely dogs and for accepting my decisions with such graciousness.