

Interpreting The English Springer Spaniel Breed Standard Copyright 2004 by Kathy Lorentzen

Perhaps the most important words in the General Appearance section of the standard are “well-proportioned, free from exaggeration and nicely balanced in every part”. These few very descriptive words set the tone for a standard that demands a sturdy, functional and workmanlike spaniel. His style and beauty are the icing on the cake, and in combination with his sporting dog characteristics produce a dog unsurpassed in both function and form.



The Springer was developed as an endurance dog, one that could work all day in the field at a reasonable pace. Endurance dogs are efficient trotting dogs, and they must have proper structure to provide the stamina necessary for that work. Correct proportion, leg length and balance are essential. **Legs must be long enough to carry the dog easily over rough terrain and heavy cover.**

Body length (from point of shoulder to point of buttocks) should be just enough greater than height at the withers to allow for free, easy and coordinated movement. The Springer should always appear to be upstanding and short backed-his length is carried in his well-made forequarter, his ribcage and his broad, well-muscled thigh. **A correctly proportioned Springer never looks long, low or squatty.** The Springer is the tallest of the land spaniels and was developed to go over the cover, not through the cover like the shorter legged Clumber or Sussex. Extremes in size in either direction are to be avoided. A particular concern today is that correct overall size and substance are being lost in a quest for elegance and refinement. The Springer can (and should) be strikingly beautiful without sacrificing proper substance and strength and quality of bone.

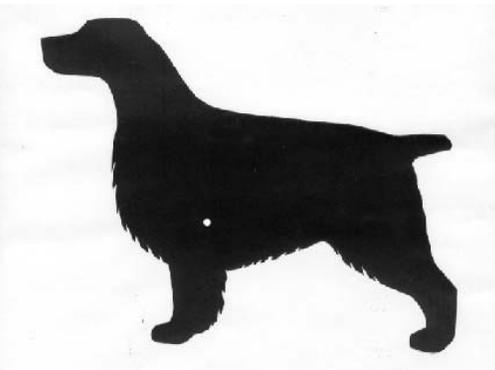
Although perhaps not considered a “head” breed, correct head type is important in defining overall breed type and character. Good head type can be difficult to find in the modern Springer. Current breeders should put heads high on their priority lists, and judges can help to restore correct heads by rewarding those with real quality whenever possible. **Look for parallel**





planes of the topskull and muzzle; a large nose with well-opened nostrils; a straight nasal bone; a muzzle long, wide and deep enough to allow the dog to easily pick up and carry a large game bird; moderate stop with a groove that carries well up into the skull; well-developed eyebrows (and a flat, level topskull behind them) and definition in the chiseling of the bone structure under the eye sockets. The standard says that, "the eyes are the essence of the Springer's appeal". Eye color should be dark, harmonizing with the color of the coat. Eyes should be oval in shape (really beautiful oval eyes will appear to be openly

triangular). Eye rim color should blend with the color of the coat. These things, in combination with moderate stop, well-defined eyebrows and beautiful chiseling under the eyes, produce an expression that is kindly, trusting and soft. A Springer should look at you "out from under" his eyebrows. All too often today we see eyes that are round or protruding, surrounded by very pale eye rims, which produces an expression that is harsh and "startled". That expression is highly undesirable in the English Springer Spaniel. **A good Springer head is more than just a "pretty face"**. Many of the glamorous heads seen today in the ring share a number of faults so commonly seen that they have been accepted as normal. They are often downfaced; snipey and short muzzled; have too much stop; and have round topskulls with very prominent frontal bones. The breed standard clearly describes the correct, functional (and beautiful!) Springer head. Breeders and judges should work together to restore this wonderful, unique feature to the breed.



Correct neck and body development are crucial to a sporting spaniel. The neck should be long and strong enough to allow the dog to reach to the ground to pick up game. It should never be thin or swan-like; while that might make a pretty picture, necks of that sort lack the correct muscular support needed to pick up and carry heavy game. Ribs that are fairly long, properly sprung, and slope rearward provide room

for organ expansion when the dog is working. A compact body with a fairly short, broad loin helps to keep a correctly balanced dog from tiring and provides

a strong backline through which impulsion is carried from the rear to the forequarters. Slightly sloping pasterns and well-made feet with tight, arched toes and deep pads absorb footfall shock. Remember that a skeleton is just a bag of bones without the musculature that supports it. **Any dog built for endurance should have strong, supple, well- developed muscles that you can feel when you are examining it, especially in the loin and hindquarter.**



As in many contemporary sporting breeds, correct angulation is frequently lacking in the Springer. **The standard calls for the external "appearance" of front angulation that is nearly ninety degrees when measured from the top of the shoulder blades to the point of the shoulder to the elbow.** Unfortunately many modern Springers have extremely poor forequarter angulation (and it is seen in many different

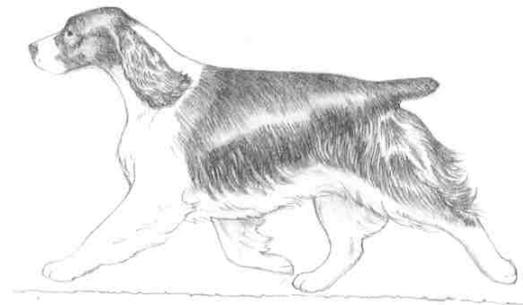
configurations). In a desire to have necks that appear to blend smoothly into backlines, some breeders are producing dogs with shoulder blades so short and upright that they literally disappear into the base of the neck. While it may look pretty and feel smooth to the hand, structural abnormalities of this sort create all kinds of problems for the dog when he tries to move. **Shoulder blades should be long, slope well back behind the neck to the withers, and be fairly close together at the tips.** Upper arms should follow a similar angle from the point of shoulder to the elbow. **A Springer should never stand with his elbows under his ears.** When the front is correctly built, a vertical line drawn from the top of the shoulder blades will fall through the elbow; the point of shoulder will be found well forward of this line; the sternum will be properly placed and prominent; and the fill of forechest will carry well down between the front legs.

Keep in mind that there is a "point of correctness" and anything beyond it is exaggeration, which creates angulation the dog is unable to utilize. This is particularly a problem in Springer hindquarters. A properly angulated rear, posed with the rear pasterns vertical, will stand with the front of the toes approximately under the rearmost point of the buttocks. Dogs that stand with their feet considerably behind this point have either too much angulation or excessive length of the second thigh (or both). Musculature cannot support that exaggerated bone length and therefore strength and endurance are seriously compromised. **Because of this lack of support, coupled with improper forequarter construction, we often see**



dogs that have "fused" joints that cannot open in movement. This is not limited to the hock joint (sickle hocks) but includes the stifle joint as well.

When assessing movement it is always best to see the dog go on a loose lead. A Springer should maintain his upstanding outline when moving, but will naturally put his head somewhat forward for balance. The Springer's gait should be smooth, well coordinated and effortless, showing good length of stride. A dog with a correctly built forequarter will move forward with total ease, using a minimum amount of energy. Feet should remain close to the ground through all phases of the trot, and should converge toward a center line of travel. Tails should be carried merrily, but never approaching "straight up". Any sort of fancy, high stepping, kicking up or exaggerated side gait is a device used by the dog to adjust foot timing and avoid interference. Since this action uses tremendous effort, it cannot be sustained for any length of time and is therefore inappropriate for an endurance trotting dog.



A correct Springer coat is a weather protective jacket. Topcoat should lie firmly against the body, feel alive and resilient, and be of sufficient length to provide the dog with protection from the elements. The soft, dense undercoat will vary with climate and season, but some should be apparent. Springer grooming has become an art form, and it is up to the judge to look beyond an artful trim to the dog underneath. Trimming is fine, but if the dog is sculpted into a shape by excessive barbering (especially of the topcoat or underline), then it is over trimmed and should be penalized. Springer judging should never be reduced to a trimming and presentation contest. Of course they should always be spotlessly clean, in proper weight and muscle and glowing with good health-but the mediocre dog with the glamorous trim should never defeat the good dog with a more casual haircut. A good Springer, with his quality and virtues enhanced by a knowing trim, is a beautiful sight. A poor Springer with an ultra-fancy trim is still a poor Springer, and it is important that judges are able to discern the difference.



It is also up to the judge to look beyond the coat pattern to the structure underneath. Dark patterns, open markings, tricolors and roans are all perfectly

acceptable under the standard and just because “picture painted” markings have become the norm in America a good dog wearing a different, but equally acceptable, marking must not be overlooked. Variety is the spice of life.

Springer Temperament has been much in the news in the past few years. Breeders have worked very hard to stabilize temperament and judges around the country are commenting favorably on the improvement of temperament in the ring. Springers should be friendly and agreeable in the ring, with some allowance for unsureness in puppies and novices. They should display poise, intelligence and confidence. Aggression, towards either people or other dogs, is unacceptable.

The standard clearly defines type as the most important consideration when judging the Springer. The typical Springer combines beauty with utility, which means that the Springer should be lovely to look at without sacrificing the qualities of head, substance, bone, balance and movement defined as being necessary for function in the breed standard. The flashy, extreme, exaggerated dog, lacking in the basic spaniel characteristics so important to maintaining the integrity of the breed, should not be valued over the correctly balanced and proportioned one who looks the part of a stylish, capable, useful hunting partner and endearing family companion. This is the purpose for which the English Springer Spaniel was created, and this is how he should be maintained for the future.

