

ONE WORLD

A Universal Discussion of the English Springer Spaniel

By Kathy Lorentzen

Throughout my more than thirty years involvement with the English Springer Spaniel breed, there has been much talk among both judges and breeders that the breed in North America has strayed so far from its roots that it has actually become the “American Springer Spaniel”, having little in common with the breed in its country of origin. Quite a lot of people believe this to be so; in fact, there was a time when I believed it myself.



Figure 1. BIS (left, a bitch) and RU BIS (right, a dog) at the ESSA of NSW Specialty in Sydney. The bitch is 1/4 American. The dog is pure Australian.

My attitude has changed completely during the past ten years. The change is due in part to my having exported an Am. Ch. bitch to Australia, who handily won her Australian title and produced winners in that country when bred to sires of pure Australian/English bloodlines and to an American import sire. Her offspring have continued to produce further generations of top winners in Australia when bred in combination with dogs of English, Australian and North American descent. Watching these bloodlines merge to produce excellent quality English Springer Spaniels has been a valuable learning experience, which culminated with my recent trip to Australia to judge the ESSA of NSW Specialty Show on Easter Sunday in Sydney.

The entry that day, which consisted of a number of second, third and fourth generation descendants of the bitch I sent there ten years ago, as well as many dogs that were of pure or part modern English, Australian or Scandinavian bloodlines with no American blood, reinforced my conviction that this breed is indeed “one” the world over.

During the past few years I have researched the breed in England, Scandinavia and Australia in a search to find qualities that could be brought in to improve some areas of the breed in America where many people (breeders and judges alike) feel the breed is weak. During this search I discovered that



Figure 2. A Scandinavian head that all seminar attendees felt defines breed type-regardless of which version of the standard you follow.



Figure 3. Modern English Show Champion.

there is a large contingent of people around the world who feel as I do-that by combining the best qualities of the breed from different bloodlines around the world, we can in fact strengthen the breed worldwide.

On May 31st of this year, in Toledo, Ohio, the first structured “**International Breeders Seminar**” for English Springer Spaniels was held. David Swank and I conceived the idea, David did all of the organizational

work, and the weekend of events was held in conjunction with the Toledo, Ohio KC back-to-back shows. It was an

independently produced and financed event, with no sponsorship from the Parent Club. Many people and organizations helped with funding, raffle items, food, plane tickets, etc. All monetary proceeds from the weekend were donated to the AKC/CHF Grant #2304-continued investigation into the Genetic Molecular Causes of Canine Epilepsies.

On Saturday Springers were judged by Dr. Tarja Hovila of Adamant Kennel fame in Finland. Exhibitors and fanciers came from as far away as Texas, California, and Nova Scotia to exhibit and participate. Five point majors were awarded to the WD, who was of mostly American bloodlines with one import grandparent, and the WB, who was half and half American/English breeding. She was awarded BB as well. BOS was an English import that has done very well in the American show ring. Best Puppy was a bitch of pure American breeding.



Figure 4. Scandinavian bitch "Au Natural".



Figure 5. The same bitch as in figure 4, with her tail docked and her markings changed.

That evening more than fifty

breeders, fanciers and judges gathered to discuss the breed from a global viewpoint. Using a Power Point presentation that contained photos of dogs from around the world, I moderated an interactive discussion with panelists Dr. Hovila from Finland, Jennifer Lawrence from Australia, Julia Merriman from Rhode

Island, and Karen Foster from Georgia. Though we were unable to have an



Figure 6. European bitch unretouched.



Figure 7. The same bitch as in figure 6, with her markings and her trim "Americanized".

English breeder on the panel, we did have audience participation from breeders who have imported a number of dogs from England and another breeder who has been to Crufts on numerous occasions, so the modern English dogs were well represented.

On virtually every continent except North America the English breed standard is used. The English standard is much briefer than the American one, and it contains differences in the descriptions of size (approximately 20 inches, no sex differentiation or weight parameters), head shape (skull "slightly rounded", no mention of parallel planes), tail set and carriage ("set low, never carried above level of back") and movement ("strictly his own") from the American standard.

It also contains many similarities, though not as wordy in description. During our long discussion about the similarities and differences in the breed around the world, some very commonly held opinions and ideas emerged. It became obvious that the participants overwhelmingly agreed that the strengths and weakness of the breed in different countries are very complimentary to one another. Some examples:

1. Light eyes plague modern English dogs, yet most have excellent coat and skin color, while American dogs have generally good eye color, but very pale eye rims and noses in many cases. Scandinavian and Australian dogs also excel in pigment color but suffer from light eye color. The combination of correct eye color along with proper dark eye rim color serves to produce the soft, soulful Spaniel expression so often lacking in the breed today. It was widely felt that the trend to breed out ticking and roaning in the North American dogs is what has removed the proper skin color from the breed here.

2. English, Scandinavian and Australian dogs have consistently better front assemblies than the American dogs, and the American dogs have stronger hindquarters.
3. American dogs tend to be more compact, while the Scandinavian dogs especially can be quite rangy and some of the English and Australian dogs exhibit that characteristic as well, along with a lack of correct ribbing.
4. American dogs have lost a lot of length and finish of foreface, while the dogs in other countries have retained the lovely long, deep muzzles that both standards require. And, though the English standard does not require parallel head planes, in the opinion of the foreign experts, the best of their heads do indeed possess those parallel planes.
5. Because of the looser interpretation of size in the English standard, it varies more in other countries than it does in America, with too large being more common than too small everywhere but in North America, where we have seen a trend to smallness and a lack of the bone and substance required in the standard.
6. Croups and tail sets do differ from country to country, but the majority of attendees agreed that by combining bloodlines we could correct many of the too flat croups and high tail sets seen in North America today and also modify the exaggerated steep croups (which cause rear movement problems) of some of the English dogs. Australian and Scandinavian dogs tend to be more moderate in croup and tail set than pure American or English ones.



Figure 8. Mature American dog, in full Specials coat and groomed for the ring.



Figure 9. Mature Australian dog, who was a Best In Show Winner at Sydney Royal over 10,000 entries, in full coat and groomed for the ring.

Virtually everyone gathered at the seminar felt that the MAJOR differences between the North American dogs and those in all other countries are COSMETIC. Markings, presence or absence of ticking, docked or undocked tails, amount of coat, and grooming and handling techniques serve to make the dogs look much more different from each other than they really are. The photographs that accompany this article clearly illustrate that point.

Our hope in beginning to bring the world of the English Springer Spaniel together is that everyone, breeders and judges alike, will learn to see beyond the cosmetics to the real dogs underneath, and recognize that outstanding specimens of the breed exist in many different areas of the world. The combination of these dogs, with the goal of retaining their real Spaniel type characteristics uppermost in mind, should benefit the breed everywhere. Plans are already underway to stage a second International seminar in 2005.