

English Cockers Afield

Those persons who now judge or plan to judge English Cockers should seek out an opportunity to see them in the field. Both the Working Tests sponsored by the ECSCA and the Hunting Test or Field Trial programs sponsored by the AKC will provide you with that experience. The ECSCA lists the date for Working Tests, and the Hunting Tests and Field Trials are listed with the American Kennel Club.

The English Cockers who are bench-bred are the majority of ECS in working and hunting tests; at the newly emerged cocker (CS & ECS) field trials, field-bred abound. Keep in mind that the primary purpose of a field dog is to efficiently get the game from the field to the table. This is accomplished through instinct, training, persistence and stamina. Stamina is maintained with the interaction of good structure, effortless soundness of motion, and conditioning.

Make mental note of the various hunting styles, comparing breed to breed and dog to dog. The standard supports the dog's function. The fine points of type: color of eye, parallel planes, length of neck, fineness of shoulder points, length of tail, color and markings tend to lose their significance in the overall picture of the spaniel at work. But the essentials of type become more obvious.

The length and balance of head, strong jaws, and the arch and strength of neck are essential for retrieving. Well rounded ribs (lung/heart capacity), overall substance and thick, tight feet are essential for stamina. Moderate angulation, front and rear, balance of height at shoulders to length of body, breadth of ribs, and strength of loin and hindquarters are essential for efficient, effortless ground-covering ability. The broader dog with a level topline and low center of gravity can turn faster. The taller animal with the sloping topline will hunt with its head up like a setter, and not go under the cover like a spaniel. That wagging tail is the barometer of the nose, communicating to the hunter the location, nearness of the game, and the impending flush. The long ears are an aid in scenting ability as they grab the scent and concentrate it. But a dog with ears so long that he steps on them is at a disadvantage. A short loin is desirable for protection of the vulnerable parts of the body, but the loin should not be so short as to allow the back feet to interfere with the front legs. Soft, thick, curly or overly abundant coat will tend to interfere with the dog's ability to go through heavy cover. A bit of looseness to the skin will prevent many field injuries. But lack of coat will leave the skin and body with no protection making a dog unsuitable to face the elements.

Judges and breeders alike should take advantage of any opportunity to observe dogs working in the occupation for which they were selectively created. Individual standards are an aid in maintaining each breed's uniqueness. Our English Cocker Spaniel have been bred to hunt upland game such as Dove, Woodcock, Partridge, Grouse, and Rabbit. Here, we also use them for our beautiful Pheasants and Chukars. Our dogs work close, in a natural quartering pattern, flushing the game out, and retrieving with zeal. A "merry cocker" - moderate and compact.

by Sue Sellers Rose