

# AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL KENNEL COUNCIL LTD



## Extended Breed Standard of **THE COCKER SPANIEL**

Produced by  
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on behalf of  
The National Cocker Spaniel Council (Australia)  
and in collaboration with the  
Australian National Kennel Council Ltd

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## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COCKER SPANIEL**

### **C.C. JENKINS**

The origin of the Cocker Spaniel is lost in the mists of antiquity. All that can be said with certainty is that spaniel-type dogs existed in the Mediterranean region some 3000 years ago. Some writers believe that the long-eared dogs were observed in the Roman province of Spain and were taken to Europe, thence to Britain by the Romans. In the literature of the Middle Ages, mention is made of "Spaynels" which were used to seek game and to drive birds into the nets of hunters or to flush them for the hawks. There is evidence that these dogs were highly valued as working dogs and pets.

They were well known in the time of the Tudor Monarchs. Henry VIII, a keen sportsman, had a kennel of spaniels. During this period mention was made in sporting literature of colours. Orange and white or red and white appear to have been popular, and blacks and reds were observed.

The advent of the Stuart Kings led to greater popularity for the spaniel. Van Dyck's famous picture of the three eldest children of Charles I shows two orange and white spaniels. These do not appear to have been as small as the toy spaniels; yet not as sturdy as the modern Cocker. These dogs were greatly loved by Charles II, and were kept by Queen Anne and the first great Churchill, whose "Blenheim" dogs were widely known.

By the end of the 18th Century, three distinct types had emerged; the toy spaniels, the springer and the wood cocking spaniel (a medium sized dog used to hunt and flush woodcock for the shooters). By this time, there was a wide range of acceptable colours and there were variations in type from owner to owner, and from one district to another.

It was in the latter part of the 19th Century that Spaniels began to be shown as well as worked, and a Spaniel Club was formed to promote spaniel breeds. The beginning of this Century saw the formation of the Cocker Spaniel Club of England. This Club began the work of drawing up a breed Standard.

Those who drew up this early Standard had in mind the work the dog was expected to do, that is to hunt (in packs) for woodcock.

For this purpose the shooters needed a small, active, strong dog, sturdy enough to work cheerfully and tirelessly all day, and day after day, and sufficiently small and strong to go through thick undergrowth, following the scent of game. Anyone who has seen a spaniel working in thick cover will know that it must be a dog of stamina, high courage, intelligence and keen scenting power. In 1902 it was assumed that such a dog would weigh approximately 25 to 28 pounds. (In the early shows those over 25 pounds were classified as Field Spaniels and those under 25 pounds as Cockers.) At that time the range of guns available to game shooters was very limited. Therefore they preferred to use little dogs, which worked close up to the gun. They were unable to shoot far enough to keep up with bigger and more active dogs, ranging further ahead. However, with improvement in the quality of powder available, shooters suddenly found that they could shoot game at a greater distance. Dogs capable of moving out, and working well ahead of the hunters were needed.

The type of Cocker Spaniel favoured in the show ring at the turn of the Century no longer completely satisfied the needs of the sportsmen, and demand grew for a dog capable of retrieving as well as finding game - a good "all rounder" that would hunt as an individual rather than as a member of a pack. This was the type of dog that Mr Richard Lloyd, famous father of the famous H. S. Lloyd (of Ware) had in mind. When judging at Crufts, Mr Richard Lloyd, a keen shooting man, created a sensation by putting up a little black bitch, Ch. Jetsam Bowdler. This bitch was taller on leg than most of her contemporaries, closer to the beautifully balanced Cocker of today. She was a bitch with liberty of action - the type that the sportsmen wanted. Other judges followed Mr Lloyd's example and it became apparent that the day of the little, short-legged, "drainpipe" Cocker was over, and the era of the beautiful modern Cocker had dawned. The lack of exaggerations in the breed, its beauty, moderate size and gay temperament made it acceptable to sportsmen, to exhibitors and as a pet. A number of glorious specimens, some of the best of all time, appeared on the show bench.

The period between the two World Wars might be said to have been the "Golden Age" of the breed. Registrations soared, and the names of famous dogs and bitches became household words throughout Britain and, indeed, the world. Cockers topped the list of entries at all major shows, and became pets in homes in every civilised country. It is interesting to note that in this, their heyday, they remained close to their original purpose for existence. Many participated in field sports wherever they lived. Also, in order to lay claim to the title of "Champion" show winners in Britain were required to do more than win in the ring. They had to qualify in field work, passing simple tests to prove that they were not gun-shy and that they were willing and able to hunt game. Many people believe that it was a retrograde step when this qualification was removed, as it did, if nothing else, serve to remind breeders and judges of the work the dog was designed to do, of the temperament it would need to have, and that it was not only intended to "make a pretty picture". We have all seen and admired many Cockers that were very beautiful and very glamorous dogs; but it is well to remember that this is not their sole purpose in life; but merely the icing on the cake.

The very popularity of the Cocker proved detrimental to the breed. All through this period there were a number of very knowledgeable and conscientious people breeding these dogs - some of the greatest breeders of all time.

However, there were others who were only interested in making money out of the popular breed, the owners of the “puppy factories”. Many breeds have been destroyed by such people who have no real interest in providing good dogs, only dogs for sale. In the 1950’s a downward trend in the popularity of the breed began. Registrations fell as did show entries; other breeds going to the top of the list. It is interesting to note that this downward trend was world wide, and accompanied by a decrease in the number of Cockers used in field work.

The late Fifties and Sixties were years of crisis for the Cocker Spaniel. English breeders, many with a life time of study and dedication to the welfare of the breed, took a good, hard look at their dogs, and, being realists were able to perceive the problems which had arisen and which were, in the main, responsible for the decline in popularity. From these members of the Cocker Spaniel Club of England, came the demand that the standard of the breed be rewritten so that it could be understood more clearly by breeders, exhibitors and judges. They hoped this would lead to a concerted effort to eradicate undesirable traits, which had appeared, and to improvement of the breed.

In the late Sixties the Cocker Spaniel Club (UK) and the Breed Council (UK) undertook the great task of rewriting the Standard. The aims of this exercise were not to change the breed; but to clarify what had been written before – to word the Standard so that everyone would understand what was required; also to express in writing some facts about the breed which were well known and taken for granted by experts, but never actually put into words.

A revised Standard was produced in 1969 and also in 1986, when all English Breed Standards were changed in order to ‘standardise’ them.

## ● GENERAL APPEARANCE

***Merry, sturdy, sporting; well balanced; compact; measuring approximately same from withers to ground as from withers to root of tail.***

“*Merry*”: The word “*merry*” is used four times in the Standard; an important breed characteristic.

“*Sturdy, sporting*”: This implies an appearance of great strength, endurance and tireless activity; also alertness and interest in what is going on. A beautiful “statue” is not a Cocker Spaniel. You should ask yourself, “Would this dog be capable of doing a day’s work in the field?” If the answer is “No”, then the dog is not a good specimen, no matter how prettily marked and coated it may be.

“*Well-balanced*”: Balance is a very important feature of any dog and especially the Cocker Spaniel, which should be a dog with no exaggerations. To be well-balanced, a dog must have every part of his body in proportion to every other part, and to the dog as a whole. For example, we would not expect a 38 cms (15") bitch to have a head which would be the same as that on a 40.5 cms (16") dog. What is right for one would not be right for the other. Also, the dog’s weight must be in proportion to its height.

In his book on the Cocker Spaniel, published in 1927, (H.S. Lloyd - The Cocker Spaniel Foyle's Handbooks), the Late Mr H.S. Lloyd (of Ware) expressed the opinion that "if a Cocker is correctly balanced, the measurement from the bottom of the top lip, over the muzzle, the stop and the skull, over the occiput and down the neck to the withers, should be the same as that from the withers to the root of the tail and from the withers to the ground".

### Balance

Length of loin  
(3 to 4 fingers width)

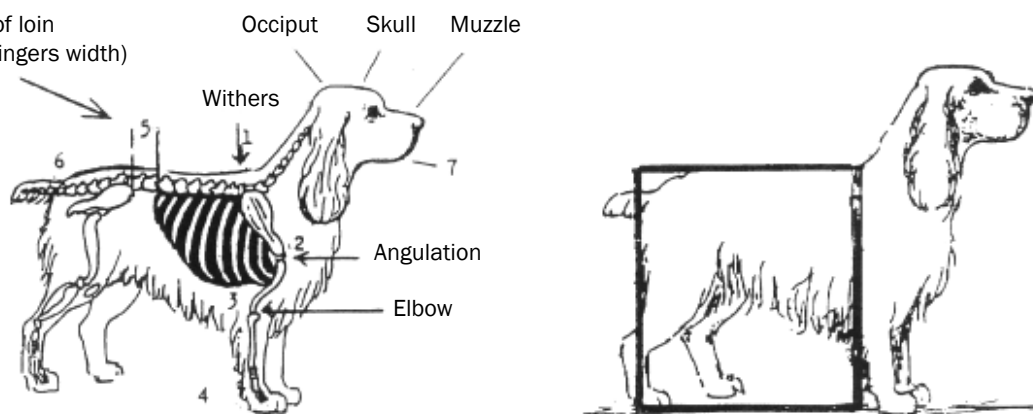
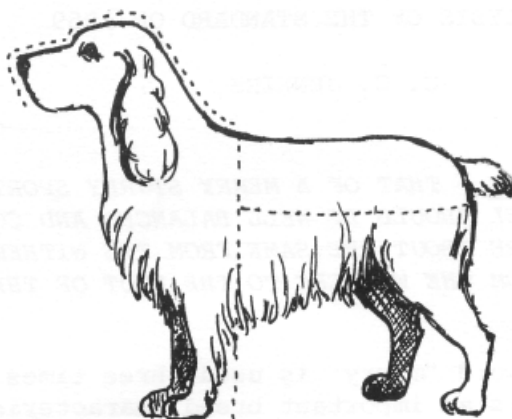


Illustration 1 - Balance

- 1 to 2 — Slope of Shoulder Blade
- 2 to 3 — Length of Upper Arm
- 5 — Loin
- 7 — Bottom of Top Lip
- 3 to 4 — Should measure approximately the same as 1 to 3
- 1 to 6 — Should measure approximately the same as 1 to 4
- 7 to 1 — A line drawn from 7 up over the nose, over the muzzle, stop and skull, over the occiput and down the neck to the withers (1) should measure approximately the same as 1 to 4 and 1 to 6 (see Illustration 2)

Illustration 2 - See above for balance requirements



*“Compact”*: The Oxford Dictionary defines “compact” as “closely or neatly packed together, “joined firmly together” or as “condensed”, “having a small surface in proportion to contents or bulk”, “firm, solid, dense”. In view of these definitions there is no place in the show ring for the long-backed, sloppy, weedy or slab-sided dogs. “Compact” suggests a short-backed, sturdy dog, well put together with a short, wide, strong loin; not a big dog, but a dog with plenty of weight for its height. (N.B. This word is used twice in the Standard.)

*“Measuring approximately same from withers to ground as from withers to root of tail”*: These proportions were not mentioned in the earlier Standard, but were known and taken for granted by experts in the breed more than 50 years ago. They were not inserted into the Standard until 1969. This was not a new idea, nor was it intended to change the proportions of the dog. It is important that the measurement be taken from the withers (i.e., the highest point of the shoulder blades) not from the base of the neck.

Illustration 3 – Clearly displays correct balance



Balanced

Off Balance

## ● CHARACTERISTICS

***Merry nature with ever-wagging tail, shows a typical bustling movement, particularly when following scent, fearless of heavy cover.***

*“Merry”*: See General Appearance.

*“Ever-wagging tail shows a typical bustling movement, particularly when following scent”*: The Cocker is not a lethargic or sulky dog - this is totally unacceptable. “Joie de Vivre” should be evident at all times and especially when the dog is at work. When a Cocker quarters a field the tail is wagging merrily, becoming ecstatic when the dog comes onto a warm scent, and slowing to tense action as he/she moves in cautiously to flush game. In the show ring the dog should move in the purposeful, positive manner, characteristic of the breed, tail wagging as it moves.

*“Fearless of heavy cover”*: This would be difficult to assess in the show ring, but fearless demeanour is required at all times.

## ● TEMPERAMENT

***Gentle and affectionate, yet full of life and exuberance.***

“*Gentle and affectionate*”: Very important characteristics of the breed. Sulkiness, aggression or nervousness undesirable - a sweet-natured dog.

“*Full of life and exuberance*”: The Cocker is not always an obedient dog, but its vitality and high spirits are more important than slavish obedience.

## ● HEAD AND SKULL

***Square muzzle, with distinct stop set midway between tip of nose and occiput. Skull well developed, cleanly chiselled, neither too fine nor too coarse. Cheek bones not prominent. Nose sufficiently wide for acute scenting power.***

The head is lengthy rather than thick but should not be Settery (i.e., long like that of a Setter). It must be in balance with the rest of the dog.

“*Square muzzle*”: The muzzle should be strong enough and deep enough to enable the dog to carry game, not weak in underjaw or too heavy in the lips. A muzzle which is too fine, is an indication of light bone; one which is too heavy shows coarseness. The Cocker is neither down-faced nor dish-faced. The planes of the head should be roughly parallel. The Standard calls for a combination of strength and quality.

### Planes of the head and position of stop

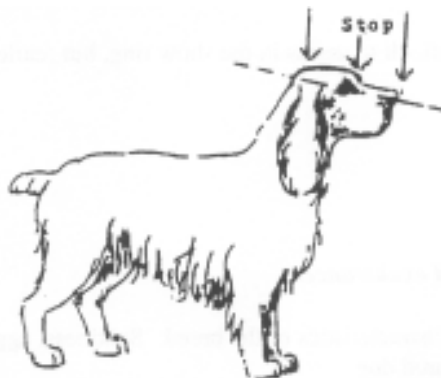


Correct parallel planes of the head



Incorrect – No ‘back’ to the head

Illustration 4 - Comparing head planes.



The stop should be halfway between the occiput and tip of nose. (When measured through the head.)

Illustration 5 - Demonstrates position of stop.

**Note:** Imagine three straight lines drawn through the head, one along the lower edge of the flews, the second along the top of the muzzle and through the head to intersect the occiput and the third along the top of the skull. These lines should be roughly parallel.

*“Distinct stop set midway between tip of nose and occiput”*: On page 24 of R.H. Smythe’s book “The Conformation of the Dog”, Dr Smythe points out that a distinct stop could be linked with good scenting power - an important requirement of the breed. Other writers have expressed the opinion that it gives protection to the eyes of a working dog. Good stop is accentuated by eyebrows. However, it should not be exaggerated. Too deep a stop gives a dog a heavy-headed appearance foreign to the breed. A dog lacking in stop appears to be plain in head. Colour is sometimes misleading and can “mask” a good stop. This is especially so in orange and white or black and white dogs, or in a roan with a wide blaze on the face. In balanced heads the stop is halfway between the tip of the nose and the occiput.

*“Skull well developed, cleanly chiselled, neither too fine nor too coarse”*: A well-developed skull is necessary for brain room. It should be an oval skull, neither round (apple headed) nor flat; neither is typical of the breed. The “apple” head detracts from the appearance of quality and gives a look of coarseness, and the over fine, flat skull indicates weakness. There is not a pronounced occiput like that of the Setters. The skull should be clean cut and should drop down steeply over the “crest” to blend into the neck.

*“Cheekbones not prominent”*: If they are prominent they give an impression of coarseness. There should be fine “chiselling” in this area, giving, the impression of quality.

*“Nose sufficiently wide for acute scenting power”*: A wide nose with open nostrils is an important breed characteristic, essential to a dog which works by scent. The colour of the nose is not specified. It is obvious that the important thing about the Cocker’s nose is its suitability for the task for which the dog was originally bred. As in other breeds, the colour of the nose is linked with that of the coat. Most Cocker Spaniels have black noses, but in the case of some coat colours, for example livers, liver roans, some orange roans, the nose is brown. In an earlier Standard the colour of the dog’s nose was mentioned only in the scale of points, where there was a penalty of 15 points, from the total of 100 for “light nose”. Those who observed their dogs closely will have noticed that nose colour tends to change and is sometimes noticeably lighter than usual in the winter months. Also there can be a marked loss of pigmentation when a bitch has recently been in season. This is most evident when the dog has a brown nose. It is a temporary condition and should not be penalised in the show ring.

Then there is the condition commonly referred to as “butterfly nose” (i.e., pigmentation does not extend over the whole nose, there are small or large areas permanently lacking in pigmentation). Coat colour, or pigmentation, has never been a big thing in this breed. Those who drew up the Standard of 1986 were obviously more concerned with utility than glamour. A small unpigmented spot should not be penalised in an otherwise good dog. However, a large area of nose lacking in pigmentation would carry its own penalty, as it would affect the dog’s expression and he/she would be penalised for lacking the expression required in the breed. All other things being equal, a dog with complete pigmentation would have to go over one badly lacking in this regard, but in my opinion such a fault would never justify putting a poor or mediocre dog over a good one.





Illustration 6 – Sweet head (male)

**Note:** Shaving, of the head is incorrect, also the removal of whiskers, eyebrows, eyelashes etc. This takes away the soft expression of the dog and gives a hard look. A shaved head appears to be out of balance with the rest of the dog.

## ● EYES

***Full, but not prominent. Dark brown or brown, never light, but in the case of liver, liver roan, and liver and white, dark hazel to harmonise with coat; with expression of intelligence and gentleness but wide awake, bright and merry; rims tight.***

*“Full but not prominent”*: The eye is approximately the shape of the human eye. It is a fairly large eye. A small, beady eye spoils expression. A “prominent” eye also gives incorrect expression. It would also be a handicap to a dog working in thick undergrowth as it could so easily be injured. If the eyes are set too close the dog will have a mean expression and, incidentally, a narrow range of vision, but they should not be set too wide apart.

*“Dark brown or brown”*: Eye colour should harmonise with coat colour. For example, one would expect a dark dog to have a dark brown eye. However, any shade of brown is acceptable. Those who drew up the early Standard of the breed were not merely concerned with beauty when they defined the desirable eye colour as “hazel or brown coloured”. (Nowhere in the Standard were they prepared to sacrifice working ability for cosmetic reasons). They had, no doubt, observed the brown eyes of good working strains. Many believed that the brown eye was linked with temperament, which was desirable. It is certain that a soft, brown eye does give the impression of gentleness, intelligence etc. Early breeders and judges knew what they wanted, but as time went by the word “hazel” was misinterpreted by some as meaning “yellowish or “greenish”. The Oxford Dictionary defines “hazel” as “light brown”, i.e., the Cocker’s eye was never meant to be any other colour but brown. The wording in the Standard of 1987 leaves no room for doubt as to what is required.

*“Never light”*: A light (i.e., a yellow or green) eye gives a hard expression foreign to a Cocker.

Note: A black, beady eye is also a fault. It gives the dog a hard mean look i.e., a black eyed dog would not have the expression required of a Cocker Spaniel.

*“In the case of a liver, liver roan and liver and white, dark hazel to harmonise with coat”*: A lighter brown permitted with these colours - still not a yellow or green eye.

*“With expression of intelligence and gentleness but wide awake, bright and merry”*: One of the most beautiful features of the dog, reflecting the kind of temperament it should have. *“Rims tight”*: Droopy rims, showing haw, spoil the dog’s expression giving it a sad look, foreign to the breed (certainly not a merry eye). Also, loose eye rims would be a handicap to a working dog, collecting grass seeds, dust, etc.

Note: There is no mention of the **colour** of the eye rims. Some Cockers have dark eye rims. These are an asset as they accentuate the soft expression. However, others have one or two light eye rims (sometimes mistaken for loose eye rims). There is nothing in the Standard to say that this is wrong but it can affect expression.



Illustration 7- A lovely (male) head, note the beautiful eye

## ● EARS

***Lobular, set low on a level with eyes. Fine leathers extending to nose tip. Well clothed with long straight silky hair.***

The ears are a very beautiful feature of the Cocker Spaniel.

*“Lobular”*: The Oxford Dictionary defines this as *“roundish and flattish pendulous part”*, *“a rounded projection”*. It is not a narrow straight ear. The ear falls in a fold over the entrance to the outer ear. Its purpose is to protect the dog’s eardrums from the detonation of the gun. This is important for a dog subjected to this noise at fairly close quarters for a considerable period of time.

*“Set low on a level with eyes”*: The fairly low set ear is a breed characteristic but exaggerations are not desirable. A very low set ear can be a health hazard. Dogs with ears set too low sometimes have deformed ear canals and are prone to canker. Not lower than a line drawn level with the eyes is ideal.

*“Fine leathers extending to nose tip”*: (Not beyond). The leathers are the fleshy part of the ears. They should be long enough to be in balance with the rest of the dog but not too long or too heavy. If they are overlong and heavy there will be a lack of ventilation for the ear canals and prone to canker or they would be a handicap to a working dog (i.e., the dog, would trip over its own ears). Once again exaggeration is undesirable.

*“Well clothed with long, straight, silky hair”*: The long, silky hair is a protection for the shoulders and neck when the dog is pushing through thick undergrowth. Also it helps to deaden the sound of the gun and so protects the dog when it is at work. Straight, silky hair is unlikely to catch and hold burrs and grass seeds like wiry, woolly or curly hair. The hair on the ears will hang below the leathers and so give the impression of greater length of ear.

Carriage of the ear is not mentioned in the Standard, which describes seton and appearance. The Cocker should carry its ears low - indeed their very weight ensures this. However, ears should be mobile. It is not a crime for a dog to raise its ears slightly when something takes its interest. It shows that the dog is alert and not just a “statue”. Incidentally, a Cocker working in the field will raise its ears when following an interesting scent. Movement of the ears indicates its excitement, as the scent grows stronger. Pups too, frequently raise their ears when excited. This should not be penalised, provided the seton is correct.



Note:

1. Oval skull
2. Balance
3. Seton and shape of ears
4. Wide nostrils
5. Square muzzle
6. Shape of eyes

Illustration 8 – Cocker Spaniel head characteristics

## ● MOUTH

***Jaws strong with a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite, i.e., upper teeth closely overlapping lower teeth and set square to the jaws.***

*“Jaws strong”*: The Cocker Spaniel is a retrieving dog and his jaws must be strong enough to carry game. Weakness in underjaw usually denotes light bone in a dog.

*“With a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite i.e., upper teeth closely overlapping lower teeth and set square to the jaws”*: The upper teeth should fit closely against and slightly over the lower teeth, like blades of scissors. Like other gundogs, the Cocker is expected to have a “soft” mouth i.e., a mouth that can carry game without damaging it. Experience has shown that a mouth with a scissor bite and regular teeth is best suited for this purpose. Nevertheless, I must confess that I have seen working dogs with mouths far from perfect, yet able to carry game without leaving tooth marks. A “soft” mouth is just as much a matter of a dog’s temperament as of the structure and placement of its teeth. A Cocker Spaniel with the correct gentle, merry nature will not “mouth” game, an aggressive dog will.

Teeth should be even, but in my opinion, it is the jaws that are important. A good dog should not be too heavily penalised for one or two teeth out of line or a tooth missing as this can be caused very easily by accident, in the kennels or in the field (A vet’s certificate can be carried to explain such an accident). “Distemper teeth” i.e., teeth which have been discoloured or the enamel “spotted” as a result of a high temperature such as that which occurs in distemper and some other acute infections should not be heavily penalised. A Cocker, which has been strong enough to survive such infection, is a worthy representative of the breed. His stamina is what we want in our dogs. A mouth that is not perfect is a fault NOT a disqualification.

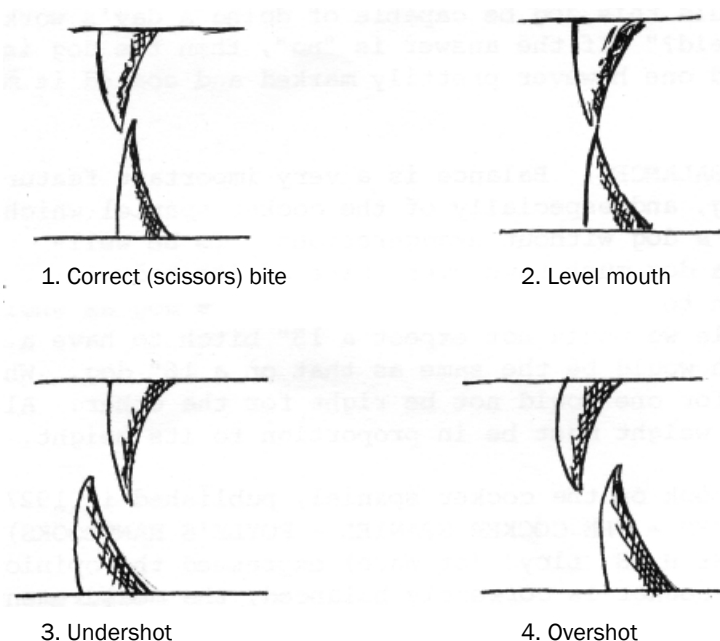


Illustration 9 - Demonstrates correct teeth placement

## ● NECK

***Moderate in length, muscular. Set neatly into fine sloping shoulders. Clean throat.***

*“Moderate in length”*: Once again, exaggeration is undesirable. A long-necked dog usually has a long back. This is a weakness. A dog with a short, thick, “stuffy” neck lacks liberty of action i.e., cannot work freely.

*“Muscular”*: The neck must be strong and well muscled (but not overdone and thick), otherwise the dog will be unable to lift and carry game. It should curve down from the crest in a slight arch. (The arch is a structure of great strength and strength is needed to carry game).

*“Set neatly into fine sloping shoulders”*: Should not be coarse or lumpy where the neck blends into the shoulders. Dogs can be over-muscled in this area - this restricts freedom of movement.

## ● FOREQUARTERS

***Shoulders sloping and fine. Legs well boned straight, sufficiently short for concentrated power, not too short to interfere with tremendous exertions expected from this grand sporting dog.***

*“Shoulders sloping and fine”*: Straight and heavy shoulders are linked with short “stuffy” necks, long backs and bad movement. (Short strides, not covering the ground well - see notes on Gait). Cockers should not be over-muscled on the shoulders as this causes interference with freedom of movement and rolling action.

Note: An important feature not mentioned in the Standard is the length of upper arm, which should (approximately) equal the length of shoulder blade. Too many Cockers are short in upper arm and consequently straight in front, lacking forechest (brisket) and moving with short steps, incapable of the long steps required if the dog is to have the driving gait characteristic of the breed.

### How Shoulders Affect Movement

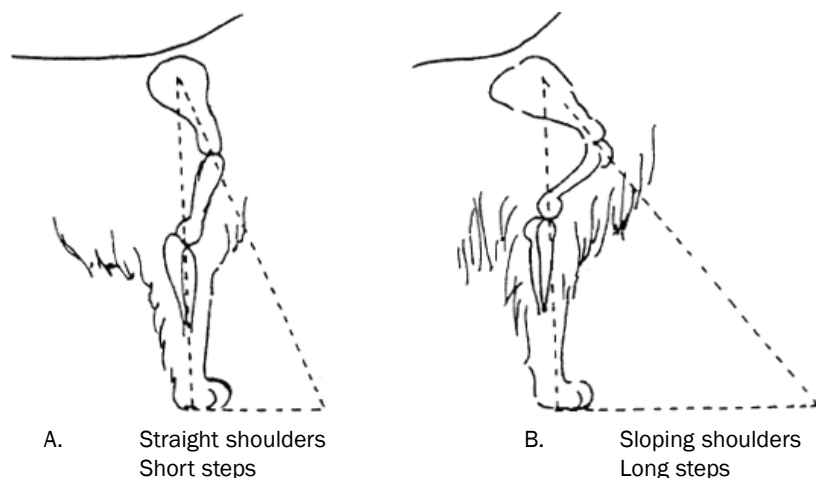


Illustration 10 – Shoulder angulation and affect on length of stride

*“Legs well boned, straight”*: The Cocker should have good round bone (not too coarse or too fine). It has been said by experts on the breed that he resembles neither the draught horse nor the racehorse. He is more like the hack. The bone should continue right down to the feet. Bone, which tapers off at the pasterns, is too light. Legs should be straight but not in the same way as those of a Fox Terrier. The Cocker Spaniel’s pasterns slope slightly. This gives him a smoother action. A Cocker Spaniel with straight pasterns will move in a stilted fashion. Its front action will be more like that of a Fox Terrier than that of a Cocker.

*“Sufficiently short for concentrated power. Not too short to interfere with tremendous exertions expected from this grand sporting dog”*: The Cocker should have freedom of action combined with power and endurance. It is not a “leggy” dog, neither is it a short-legged dog. The Cocker fanciers, who “made” the breed, gundog men like the Late Mr C.A. Phillips and the Late Mr Richard Lloyd, realised that little, low-to-the-ground dogs were not the answer to their need for a good “all-rounder” and as a result of their effort the beautifully balanced modern Cocker emerged. When measuring from withers to the ground, the elbows should come approximately halfway and we have a balanced dog, free from exaggerations. (The brisket comes a little lower between the legs). Of late we have seen in the show ring, many Cockers which appear to be too short in leg. Some are **really** short in leg. Others appear to be short-legged because they are over-coated (too much hair underneath). Neither is typical of the breed. The Cocker Spaniel was never meant to be a little, “boxy” dog. A short-legged dog cannot be a free mover, nor will it be in balance.

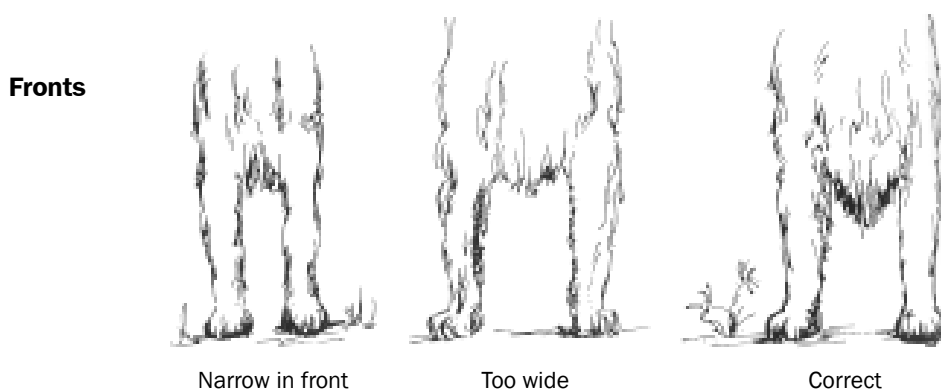


Illustration 11- Correct front

## ● **BODY**

***Strong, compact. Chest well developed and brisket deep; neither too wide not too narrow in front. Ribs well sprung. Loin short, wide with firm, level topline gently sloping downwards to tail from end of loin to set on of tail.***

*“Strong, compact”*: Body type is very important in this breed. The dog must give an impression of strength. There must be plenty of “weight for height” and the dog must be well put together. Once again, the word “compact” appears, i.e., “condensed”, “closely or neatly packed together”, or “joined firmly together”. A long backed dog would not be compact. The Cocker should have a moulded body, each part “flowing’ into the other parts. Underline, often hidden by excessive feather, is just as important as topline. This underline should consist of curves, not a straight line.

*“Chest well developed and brisket deep”*: The Cocker has a forechest, a deep brisket. Feel for the brisket. It is often disguised by hair. Lack of brisket is sometimes hidden in the same way. A great “sporrán” of hair is sometimes left to hide a narrow front and bad front action.

**When judging**

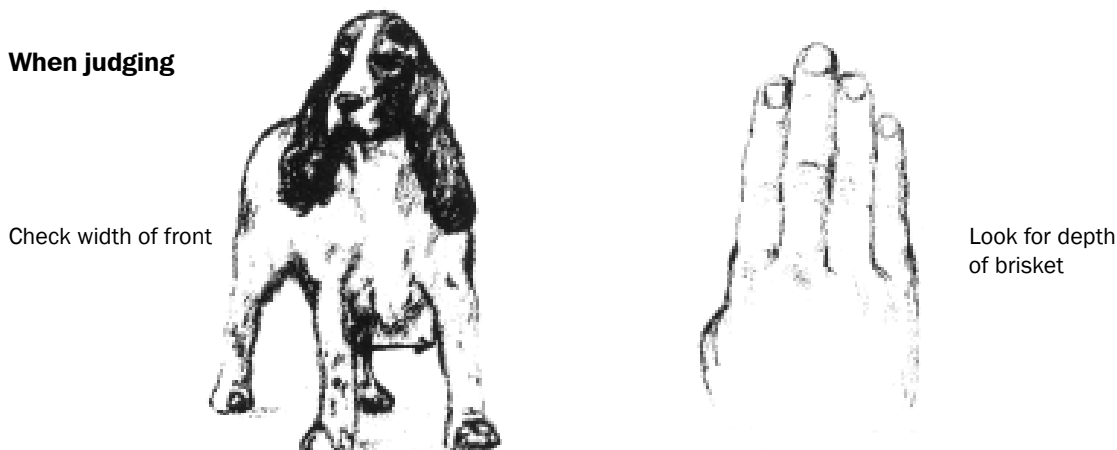


Illustration 12 - Depth of brisket

*“Neither too wide nor too narrow in front”*: A Cocker that is too wide in front does not have the freedom of action i.e., working ability. He “rolls”. If he is too narrow and straight (terrier- fronted) he will lack heart and lung room required of a dog for the “tremendous exertion” he is expected to make in the field. There should be room for the width of a man’s hand between the forelegs.

*“Ribs well sprung”*: Well-sprung ribs are essential to allow for heart and lung room on a working dog. There is sometimes confusion between a well-ribbed dog and a fat dog. To see spring of rib you must look down on the dog from above - it should be seen from behind fine shoulder blades, spreading out, then narrowing (not too much) to the “waist”. A Cocker lacking spring of rib and depth of body does not have the correct body type.

*“Loins short, wide”*: The loin should be short (not more than four fingers between the last rib and pelvis). It should be just long enough to allow for freedom of movement. The Cocker should not be “cut up” at the loin but should have depth, width and strength. Shortness and strength of loin are breed characteristics affecting typical Cocker movement. Undue length in this area would be weakness in a dog, where strength and endurance are called for. Long backed dogs are prone to spinal injury; the classical example of this being the Dachshund. Note: In an earlier Standard, the words “short in back” were used. I would suspect that they were omitted from the 1986 Standard because they are misleading. To be the compact dog, which the Standard requires, the Cocker must be short from withers to pelvis. Added to that is the length of quarters i.e., the dog is not short from the withers to the seton of tail. You will sometimes see a dog that is long in back, but short in quarters, “get by” in the show ring. Such a dog has two faults instead of one and should be heavily penalised. You must be sure that your Cocker Spaniel is short in the right place.

*“With firm, level topline gently sloping downwards from end of loin to seton of tail”:* The Cocker should have a level back, neither roached nor “swampy”. Both these faults indicate structural weakness. The gentle slope to the tail begins at the pelvis, not at the withers. When a Cocker’s topline slopes from the withers, he is off-type (i.e., this is not correct body type). There should be a slight drop from the withers, then comes the level back, followed by the gentle slope down from pelvis to tail.

## ● HINDQUARTERS

***Wide, well rounded, very muscular. Legs well boned, good bend of stifle, short below hock allowing for plenty of drive.***

*“Wide”:* This should be the widest part of the dog. To see this, place the dog on a table and stand directly behind it. You should only see the hindquarters.

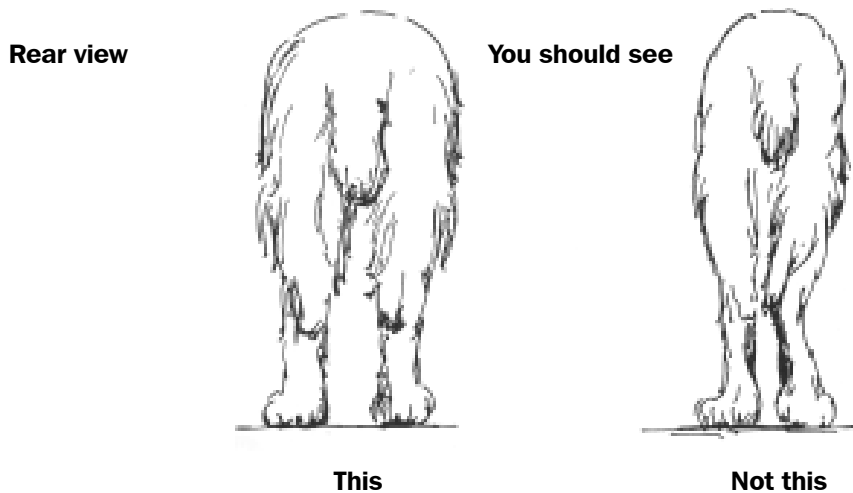


Illustration 13 - rear view see hindquarters only.

*“Well rounded, very muscular”:* The hindquarters should be rounded, the curves indicating the great muscles below the surface. There should be no straight lines in this area. This is a very important feature of a working breed. On page 87 of “The Conformation of the Dog”, Dr R.H. Smythe points out how important is muscle power in the hindquarters of a dog, which is required to have great drive. There must be no slackness here. Exercise is required to keep these muscles firm. To check the hardness of muscles you should place your hands on the thighs - thumbs inside, fingers outside; check the muscles inside the thigh. Incidentally, experts believe that the correct muscling of the hindquarters is important in the development of good sound hips. Once again, there should be no exaggerations. The quarters should be neither weak nor overdone, but in proportion to the rest of the dog.

*“Legs well boned”:* Bone must be strong, but not coarse i.e., in proportion to the rest of the dog.

*“Good bend of stifle”:* This is an absolute essential to drive. Without a good bend of stifle, action tends to be stilted and the dog cannot cover a great deal of ground. On pages 91 and 92 of “The Conformation of the Dog”, Dr R.H. Smythe expresses some



very interesting opinions concerning bend of stifle. He believes that this feature is especially important to the Cocker Spaniel, a dog that has to crouch as it goes through the undergrowth and push its body along with the hindlegs. He deplores the fact that today, some judges seem to overlook this important breed characteristic, and states that even though few Cockers actually work; we should try to keep intact the characteristics which make the dog fit to do so (see diagram showing relationship between drive and bend of stifle). An over-angulated dog is as incorrect, structurally, as the dog with insufficient angulation. Neither will be capable of correct movement. As stated previously, there should be no exaggeration in this breed. Note: If your dog has a good bend of stifle, do not cover it up with a “frill” of hair. Let it be seen. Excess hair in this region is often camouflage for dogs which lack bend of stifle.

### Angulation and Drive



A. Correct bend of stifle  
Long stepping

B. Straight stifle  
Short stepping

C. Incorrect  
Over-angulated stifle  
(sickle hock)

Illustration 14 – (A) Correct angulation (B) Too straight and (C) Sickle hocks.

“Short below hock allowing for plenty of drive”: (i.e., short below the hock joint). A long rear pastern usually accompanies a straight stifle and stilted action. When the rear pastern is short and there is good bend of stifle, there is capacity for great drive; but shortness should not be exaggerated. The length of the rear pastern must be in proportion to the size of the dog. When the dog stands naturally the rear pastern should be vertical.

### Check bend of stifle



Turn feather back to  
see correct turn of stifle

Illustration 15– Check for turn of stifle

## ● FEET

***Firm, thickly padded, catlike.***

**“Firm”:** The foot should appear to be one entity - the toes should not be clearly separated. Hair between the toes should not be cleaned out. It is there to protect the foot. Open feet are listed as a fault. This type of foot can be easily injured when the dog is at work and can collect burrs, grass seeds etc. A sound, firm foot is absolutely essential to a working dog.

**“Thickly padded”:** A dog that is expected to work all day over rough country must have a thickly padded foot, otherwise his feet would be damaged by stones etc. and he would, very soon, be lame. Also, thick, springy pads prevent stilted action.

**“Catlike”:** This implies a round tight foot with arched toes. It does not mean that a Cocker Spaniel has a small foot like a cat. To achieve this round tight foot and arched toes, the dog must be structurally correct in feet and must get a fair amount of exercise on hard ground. The nails should be worn down by exercise. Long toenails spoil the shape of a dog’s feet and can affect gait. Hair should be trimmed neatly around the foot to reveal the correct shape. Note: the size of a Cocker Spaniel’s foot is not defined in the Standard. We know from the list of faults in the 1969 Standard that LARGE feet are undesirable. However, the word SMALL does not appear in the Standard in reference to feet. Very small feet indicate light bone and would not be practical on a working dog that has to move over all types of ground. For example, a dog working swampy ground would need a fair sized foot. An extremely small-footed dog, one with feet like a Fox Terrier, would sink into the mud and progress would be slow. A Cocker’s feet should be of moderate size; in proportion to the size of the dog. Good feet are a very important characteristic of a working breed.

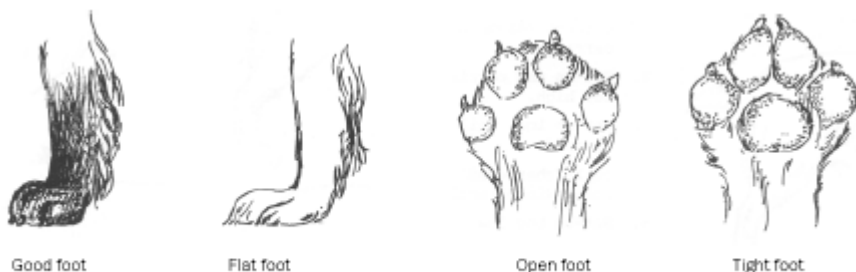


Illustration 16 - Correct feet.

## ● TAIL

***Docked: Set on slightly lower than line of back. Must be merry in action and carried level, never cocked up. Never too short to hide, nor too long to interfere with the incessant merry action when working.***

***Undocked: Set on slightly lower than line of back. Must be merry in action and carried level, never cocked up. Slightly curved, of moderate length, proportionate to size of body giving an overall balanced appearance; ideally not reaching below the hock. Strong at the root and tapering to a fine tip; well feathered in keeping with the coat. Lively in action, carried on a plane not higher than level of back and never so low as to indicate timidity.***

There are four factors involved here, the set-on of tail, tail carriage, action and how the tail balances with the rest of the dog.

*“Set on slightly lower than line of back”*: It should not be a high set tail, but not too low set. A high set tail “cocked up” because of seton is a bad fault, going as it usually does with poor hindquarters. A tail that is too low set is also a bad fault. It restricts the dog’s liberty of action. This fault can be clearly seen, as the dog moves with a “roll” that is foreign to the breed. These are structural faults impeding activity.

*“Merry in action”*: A breed characteristic indicative of true Cocker character. The tail should be held straight out and wagged as the dog moves. A Cocker cannot be merry if it is strung up on a tight lead or “stacked”. In order to show breed character the dog should be moved on a loose lead and should stand freely in the ring using its tail. A clamped tail is a serious fault as it usually indicates a lack of breed character.

*“Carried level, never cocked up”*: This refers to seton and carriage of tail. Sometimes puppies will cock up their tails with excitement, or a stud dog scenting bitches, although they have the correct seton. This should not be penalised heavily provided that only carriage and not seton of tail is involved. It is not as bad a fault as a clamped tail.

*“Preferably docked but never too short to hide, nor too long to interfere with the incessant merry action when working”*: If the tail is docked too long or too short the dog appears to be out of balance. This is a man-made fault rather than an hereditary disability and should not be penalised too heavily. Note: A thin tail or tail “sharpened” to a point like a pencil is incorrect. It indicates light bone and/or incorrect trimming and should be penalised. A Cocker’s tail gives a good indication of the quality of the dog’s bone, be it correct or too light. A thin tailed dog is usually light in bone.

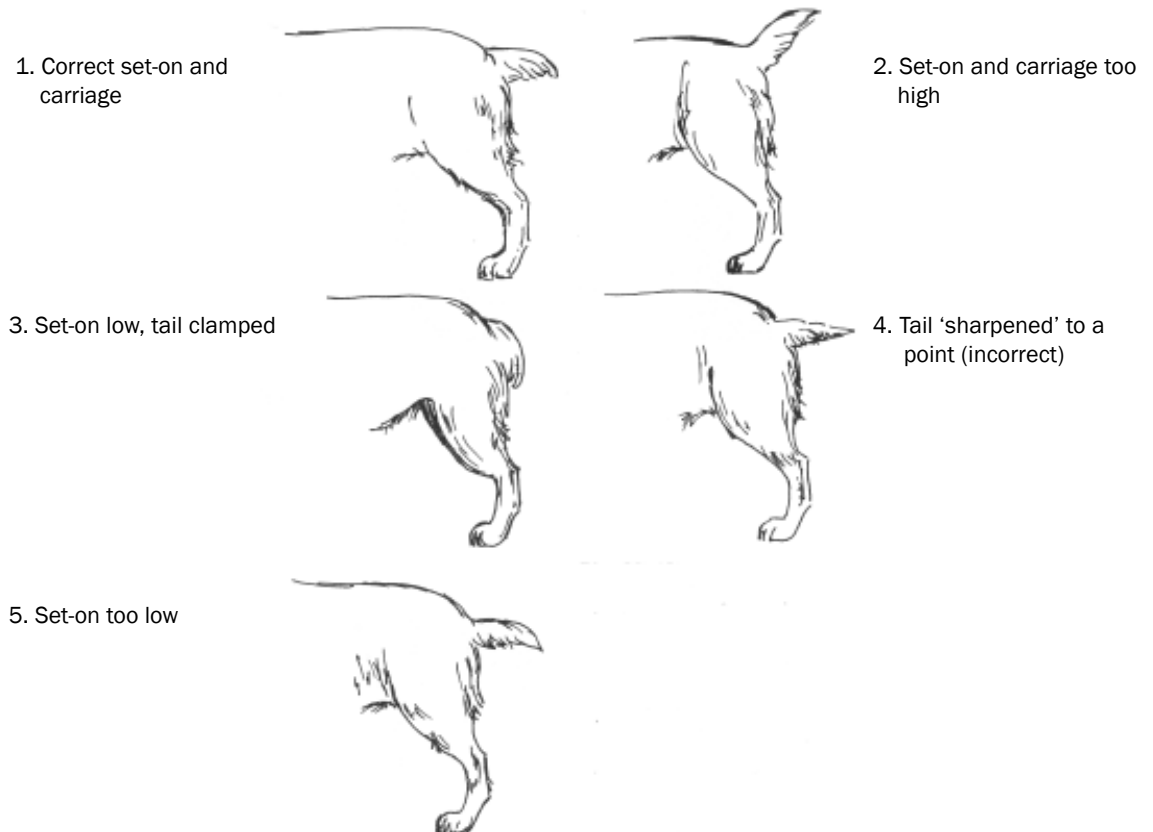


Illustration 17 – Set-on and carriage of tail

## ● GAIT/MOVEMENT

### ***True through action with great drive covering ground well.***

*“True through action”*: Front feet should be lifted cleanly and thrust forward without “toeing in”, crossing legs, throwing feet or elbows out, flapping feet etc. Feet should not be lifted too high. (The Cocker is not a high stepper). Hind action should be true, not cow hocked nor should hocks be turned out.

*“With great drive covering ground well”*: Drive is a very important breed characteristic, as without it the Cocker would be useless as a working dog. The Oxford Dictionary’s definition of “drive” includes the following, (*“push”, “impel vigorously”, “impel by thrust”*). A high stepping dog or a very fast stepping dog does not have drive. The high stepper does not cover much ground and would soon tire in the field. The one moving with little, fast steps, not covering much ground at each step but expending a lot of energy for little result, is flashy and eye catching, but lacks drive (i.e., it is not a good mover); neither is the dog that is unwilling to move because he lacks true breed character. The Cocker Spaniel is a long stepping dog. He should propel himself forward with long, powerful, effortless strides; the source of power being his great, well-muscled hindquarters. The dog should flex his hocks and use his rear pasterns so that the pads can be seen clearly from behind when he is moving away. It should be a free “fluid” action, never stilted or rolling, but giving the impression that the dog is moving, with purpose, ease and power.

If a dog is to move as a Cocker Spaniel should, it must be structurally correct; with fine, sloping shoulders, correct length of upper arm, good legs and feet, a good turn of stifle, powerful hindquarters and the correct length from withers to pelvis. Added to these ingredients for good action, there must be the will to move (i.e., Cocker character). A dog so constructed and motivated should move with the required drive. If these characteristics are missing you will see sloppy, stilted, rolling or hackney action.

In order to assess drive, you must see the dog moving sideways on a loose lead. No dog can move correctly if it is strung up on a tight lead with its front feet scarcely touching the ground. In the show ring the Cocker Spaniel should be gaited at the pace which best suits the movement of the individual dog. In “The Conformation of the Dog” (on page 50) Dr R.H. Smythe points out that a dog’s movement seldom approximates to that of a human walking pace, so the handler will need to adjust his pace to that of the dog. In the field the Cocker tends to move comparatively slowly with his nose to the ground. He is a trotting dog, built for endurance not a galloping dog. To demonstrate his ground-covering abilities he will need to move at moderate speed, neither too fast (it is not a race around the ring), nor too slowly (he cannot cover ground well at a crawl). He should move purposefully, as if he is really going somewhere, and happily, his tail straight out or better still wagging merrily.

While minor deviations in front and back action may be forgiven in an otherwise good dog, lack of the correct drive can only be viewed as a major fault in a working breed. The Cocker Spaniel needs drive to push through undergrowth and to keep going hour after hour in the field. Without drive the dog cannot work effectively.



Illustration 18 – This unique picture shows tremendous drive. Illustrates great length of stride desirable in the breed. This is what the judge should be looking for as the dog goes around the ring (the most important aspect of its movement). The dog moving with quick, short, flashy steps is useless in the field. The slower moving, long - stepping dog is the good mover. Note correct level topline with slight slope from end of loin to tail set.

## ● COAT

***Flat, silky in texture, never wiry or wavy, not too profuse and never curly. Well-feathered forelegs, body and hindlegs above hocks.***

*“Flat, silky in texture”*: A flat, silky coat is weatherproof; water runs off, just as it runs off a nylon raincoat. Most Cockers have a soft undercoat, which remains dry when the topcoat is wet. Anyone who has bathed a Cocker with this type of coat will know how hard it is to wet the dog to the skin (you have to part the coat and rub the water in). When a working dog with this type of coat comes out of water, he gives two or three good shakes and the coat dries out very quickly. This type of coat has an added advantage. It is very easy to keep in order.

*“Never wiry or wavy, and never curly”*: Wiry, wavy, woolly and curly coats soon become water logged in wet weather. Also they pick up and hold grass seeds, burrs, etc. This is a handicap to a dog expected to work in all kinds of weather and through water and thick undergrowth. Incidentally, this kind of coat is very difficult to keep in order.

*“Not too profuse”*: Not so long and profuse that it is a handicap to a working dog. Over long coat is an exaggeration which has crept into our preparation of show dogs during the past decade. This tendency has been deplored by the Cocker Club of England and by world famous experts in the breed. There is no doubt that it obscures the outline of the dog and makes it appear out of balance. One would tend to forget that some Cocker Spaniels have legs, so carefully are they hidden from view, and the dogs appear to be longer than desirable. Feather should not be so profuse as to obscure the body shape of the dog, nor should it wave around in front and behind hiding movement, width of front etc. In some cases, it is left there to hide faults. For example, dogs with poor bend of stifle often have a frill of hair around this area to hide a natural deficiency. Sufficient feather is an attractive feature of the breed but too much is inappropriate on a working dog and should be penalised.

Incidentally, dogs with the correct coat type do not grow this over profuse feather.

“Well-feathered forelegs, body and hindlegs above hocks”: There must be sufficient feather for protection against scratches etc. when a dog is working in thick undergrowth. Also feathering gives a nice “finish” to the dog’s appearance. However, there is a happy medium. No working dog should be over-coated. A great sproran of hair in front and flowing hair behind create the impression of unsoundness and undue length of body.

## ● COLOUR

### Solid colours

***Black; red; golden; liver (chocolate); black and tan; liver and tan. No white allowed except a small amount on chest.***

### Particolours

***Bicolours: Black and white; orange and white; lemon and white. All with or without ticking.***

***Tricolours: Black, white and tan; liver, white and tan.***

***Roans: Blue roan; orange roan; lemon roan; liver roan; blue roan and tan; liver roan and tan.***

***Any colour or marking other than the above is undesirable.***

In some states of Australia there seems to be prejudice against tricolours, yet a tricolour can be very beautiful indeed and some of the best Cockers of all time have been tricolours

A well made dog with plain colouring or odd markings should have no difficulty in winning over one which has attractive colouring and even markings, but is unsound or off type. Some of the all time “greats” in the breed have had unattractive markings; the classical example being, the great Fairholme Rally.

**Optical illusions:** The placement and shape of colour patches can give the wrong impression to the casual observer. Colour can make a dog look longer, shorter or dipped in back. It can make a straight shoulder look correct or a sloping shoulder look straight. It can make necks look longer or shorter than they really are. Stifles can be made to look straighter or better than they are. Colour can influence the appearance of quarters and movement. A blaze on the face can alter the appearance of the head and stop. In other words, colour can be most misleading and any unusual markings on a dog warrant a more than casual glance.

## ● SIZE

***Height: Dogs approx. 39-41 cms (15½-16 ins)***  
***Bitches approx. 38-39 cms (15-15½ ins)***

***Weight: Approx. 13 kilos - 14.5 kilos ( 28-32 lbs)***

## ● FAULTS

***Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog and on the dog’s ability to perform its traditional work.***

**NOTE:** Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

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The Conformation of the Dog by Dr R.H. Smythe.