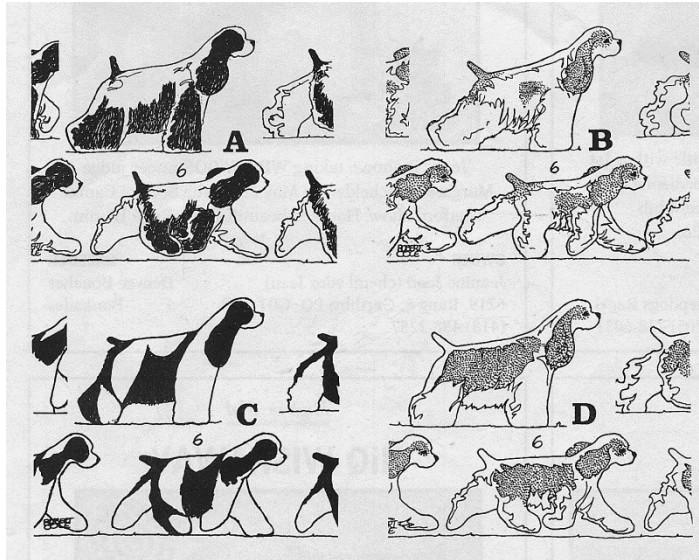


# YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, August 1996

## American Cocker Spaniel (Part One)



Based on the revised 1992 AKC country of origin breed standard.

Because of its length, this American Cocker Spaniel treatise is presented in two parts. The first is an illustrated stacked and moving judging scenario. The second will focus on this breed's unique head and on a particular colour that is a disqualification in the United States and should be in Canada.

### CONDENSED SCENARIO

It is not necessary to study all 40 of my drawings of four real-life cocker Spaniel bitches, stacked and moving, to determine an order of merit. There is sufficient information in the 'condensed' eight drawings above. There are two for each bitch – one of her stacked and one of her

trotting, the latter represented by phase 6 of an illustrated nine-phase sequence. Disregard their heads in both condensed and expanded scenarios; instead, concentrate on structure and movement. For all intents and purposes, their heads are identical.

### EXPANDED SCENARIO

The complete, illustrated nine-phase sequences are presented further on in this article for those who wish to study and compare, phase by phase, the different *manner* in which each of these four real-life bitches moves, and the reasons why.

### ANGULATION

While much of cocker angulation is hidden under the fine, double coat, an obvious ski-slope topline is an indication that the shoulders are steep. So are steep forequarters that appear to have pushed forward on the body, covering the breast bone and creating a hole between the front legs; necks without arch; and necks with an abrupt break at withers.

Hindquarter angulation is more difficult to see, and today's grooming isn't helping the situation. Bitches A, B and C appear sickle-hocked because of a current grooming fad, but only long-in-second (lower)-thigh Bitch B actually is.

### PROPORTIONS

Prior to the 1992 revised AKC Cocker standard, many readers interpreted the 1983 complicated description of body length-to-height ratio as equal and viewed the Cocker as square. The 1983 AKC standard read: "The distance from the highest point of the shoulder blades to the ground is fifteen (15%) percent or approximately two inches more than the length from this point to the set-on of the docked tail." (This is still used in Canada.)

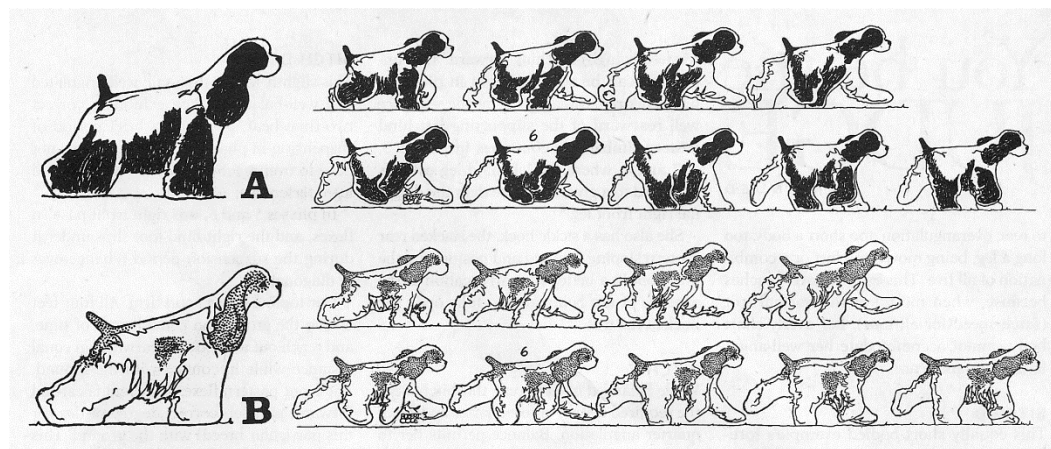
The 1992 AKC revised wording reads: "The measurement from the breast bone to back of thigh is slightly longer than the measurement from the highest point of withers to the ground." This revision is good, although the

work “slightly” is always subject to interpretation. All four of these bitches are slightly longer than tall, one slightly longer than the other two. All measure 14 inches (over 14 ½ inches disqualifies bitches, over 15 ½ inches disqualifies males in both the U.S.A. and Canada).

### THE TAIL

Once you’ve assessed angulation and body length-to-height proportions, one of these four parti-colors will probably have particular appeal. If it is Bitch A, you may be concerned about her high tail set, even though you have probably observed tails being physically pushed up higher than this by exhibitors to make the body appear shorter.

The docked tail should never be set on and carried straight up like that of a Fox Terrier, nor so low as to indicate timidity. If it is set on high, at about 11:30 o’clock as this bitch’s tail is, the cause could be a faulty flatter-than-desirable pelvis, in which case angulation would lessen at the shelf (behind the tail), stifle and hock; or, less faulty, the sacrum (three fused bones) that join to the tail may be level (e.g. Lakeland, Welsh Terriers). This is determined during examination on the table. Observed while the bitch is stacked, the nice-sloping shelf behind this girl’s tail (buttocks) indicates the cause is a less serious level sacrum.



### 1, 2, 3 and 4 STACKED

It is now possible, knowing that Bitch B with the long second thigh is the only one that is sickle-hocked and that Bitch A’s tail is caused by a level sacrum, not a flat pelvis, to decide on your order of merit stacked.

An order of merit among the moving bitches can be decided based on the single phase 6 taken from each illustrated sequence of nine-action phases. However, if, as an artist, I wanted to show each bitch in her best light, I would have chosen phase 2 for Bitch A; phase 5 for Bitch B; early phase 3 for Bitch C; and phase 6 for Bitch D.

My order of merit, stacked and moving, will be revealed at the end of the paragraphs describing each bitch’s angulation, proportions and movement.

### THE ILLUSTRATED SEQUENCE

These illustrated Cocker sequences at the trot were traced from motion-picture film (54 frames per second) using the rotoscope method employed by film animators. The unique sequence format I have selected enables you to compare, drawing by drawing, the action of each Cocker through a complete sequence – i.e., in the first phase, the sequence always begins with the dog’s right foreleg in vertical support regardless of the position of the other three legs. From this common beginning, locomotion differences can be compared phase by phase. As for cycle completeness, all possible phases are represented in just nine, not 18, drawings; the trot being a diagonal gait, one side of a dog is a mirror image of the other.

In the diagonal gait, opposite pairs of diagonals lift together in unison and strike the ground at the same time. During the change-over of diagonals, there is a brief period of suspension when all four feet are free of contact with the ground. Breeds slightly longer than tall should not over reach under their bodies at normal showing speed. Only one of these three bitches conforms to all four action requirements.

### BITCH A

The very well-angulated, very short-bodied parti-colour’s gait is that of the true sporting dog in that it exhibits the correct two-beat action – two-beat meaning “...in which the feet at diagonal opposite ends of the body strike the ground together..” (Official Glossary of the American Kennel Club) twice during each cycle.

The Glossary neglects to mention the brief period of airborne suspension in phases 5 and 6, and that in phase 4, diagonal ends lift at the same time (relinquish support). What this parti-colour does wrong is over-reach under her body to avoid leg interference during phase 3 through 7 (causing her to crab, seen coming and going away).

Over-reach can be due to imbalance front to rear; overangulation, too short a body, too long a leg, being moved too fast or a combination of all five. The example over-reaches because, when moved at the normal trot (same speed for all four), her overly short body cannot accommodate her well-angulated front and rear.

#### **BITCH B**

The equally short-bodied example's forequarters are steep, as evidenced by her ski-slope topline, and she has an overly long second thigh. Both of these departures contribute to her synthetic action. Her gait is a four-beat, not the correct two-beat, action. Each of her feet strikes the ground one at a time, not as diagonal pairs. The action is synthetic in that the hind foot has contact early, then takes over support, while the diagonal front leg (which should have also had contact) keeps on dramatically (and wastefully high) reaching forward. This imbalance can be seen to begin in phase 1, where her right hind leg begins the sequence well rearward of the supporting left hind pastern. Imbalance continues in phase 5, 6, 7 and 8, where the left hind leg extends rearward to a greater degree than the diagonal right front leg.

She also has a sickle hock, the stacked rear pastern sloping forward and positioning the hind foot in a better support location at the expense of not being able to fully open the hock at the trot.

#### **BITCH C**

While balanced front to rear, this bitch lacks the required degree of forequarter and hindquarter angulation. Balance permits her to exhibit the correct two-time beat, but without ground-covering ability. Suspension is reduced to a very brief period in phase 5. Note that although the body is quite short, because she lacks angulation there is no danger of interference under her body.

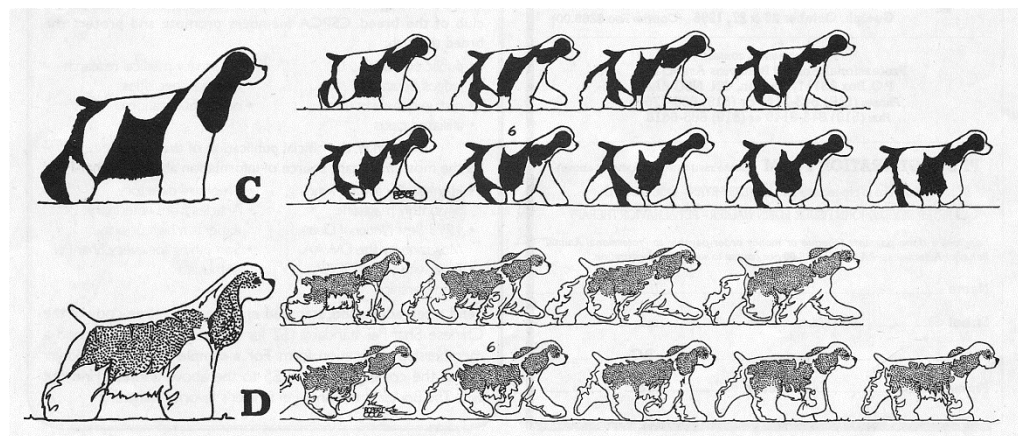
Being balanced but lacking reach and extension due to insufficient angulation is – with the exception of hackney action – the most obvious departure from correct, desirable movement.

#### **BITCH D**

The slightly longer-than-tall, well-angulated and well-balanced bitch exhibits a correct two-time beat, produces a brief period of suspension in phases 5 and 6, and does not have to over-reach under her body to avoid leg interference.

In phases 5 and 6, this right front pastern flexes, and the right hind foot slips under it during the suspension period (change-over of diagonals).

Her topline is level and firm. All four feet are on the ground an equal length of time, and reach out and extend rearward an equal distance while in contact with the ground. The front pastern flexes fully and is carried forward, parallel (correct degree of flex for this particular breed) with the ground. This bitch's action is smooth, coordinated and appears effortless.



#### **ORDER OF MERIT**

First place goes to Bitch D, second place to Bitch A, third place to Bitch C and fourth to Bitch B.

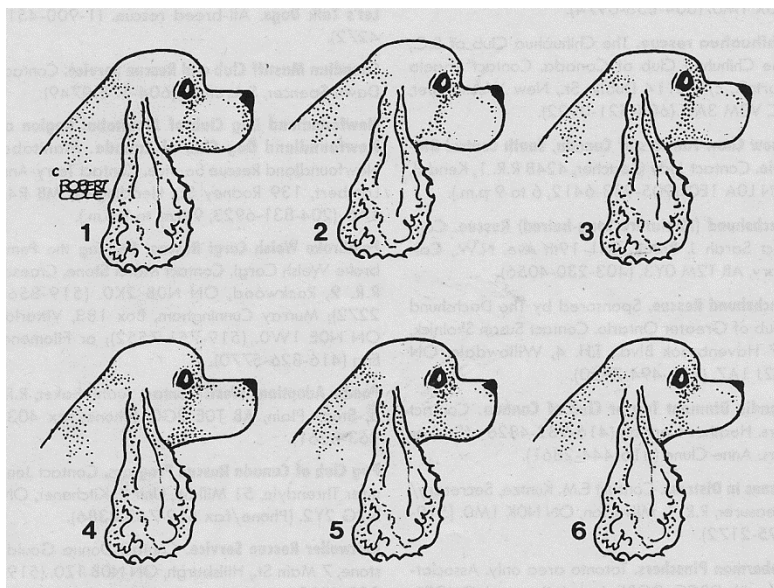
# YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs In Canada*, September 1996

## American Cocker Spaniel (Part Two)

Based on the revised 1992 AKC country-of-origin breed standard



This month we conclude our American Cocker Spaniel treatise by discussing this breed's unique head, as well as a colour that is a disqualification in the U.S., as, I believe, it should be in Canada.

Study the 18 heads: six in profile and 12 face-on. Find the one head in each group that is correct. In profile, the remaining five heads each has one fault except figure 3, which has two. Face-on, the remaining 11 heads each has one fault except figure 12, which has three.

### HEADS IN PROFILE

The skull on the one correct head is rounded, the eyebrows are clearly defined, the stop is pronounced, the nose is of sufficient size to balance the muzzle and

foreface, the upper lip is full and of sufficient depth to cover the lower jaw, and the long, lobular, well-feathered ears are placed no higher than parallel to the lower part of the eye.

The ratio of muzzle to skull is one to two, but without the traditional nose tip, stop and occiput reference points. Since the skull is rounded, the measurement is over the head (following the curve up over the rounded skull, not through it). This unusual form of measuring a one-to-two ratio of muzzle to skull is expressed in the standard as follows: "To be in correct balance, the distance from the stop to the tip of the nose is one half the distance from the stop up over the crown to the base of the skull."

My first two profile drawings, figures 1 and 2, conform to this direction. However, it is only figure 1 that is correct, based on a study published by the American Spaniel Club in 1987 which, in part, reads, "The muzzle should not have a scooped out appearance with the nose appearing high ..." If you were attracted to incorrect figure 2, whose nose appears high, you are not alone. It's the reason I placed these two side by side.

Figure 3 has two faults. The same 1987 American Spaniel Club study warned, "The muzzle should not drop off at the end, creating a Roman Nose." The AKC standard advises that "the skull should have no tendency towards flatness," as this bitch's does.

Figure 4 has a long muzzle, while 5 has a short, plushy muzzle; both are incorrect. Figure 6 has a weak muzzle that lacks depth.

### HEAD AND EXPRESSION

We are informed the correct expression is intelligent, alert, soft and appealing. The eyeballs are round and full, and look directly forward. The shape of the (tight) eye rims gives a slightly almond-shaped appearance; the eye is not weak or goggled. The colour of the iris is dark brown and, in general, the darker the better. Ears are placed no higher than parallel to the lower part of the eye. The skull is rounded. The boney structure beneath the eyes is well chiseled, with no prominence in the cheeks.

The muzzle is broad and deep with square, even jaws. The nose has well-developed nostrils typical of a Sporting Dog. It is black in the blacks, black-and-tans and black-and-whites. In other colours it may be brown, liver or black; the darker the better. The colour of the nose harmonizes with that of the eye rims. The upper lip is full and of sufficient depth to cover the lower jaw. The bite is scissors.

Face-on, figure 1 is my graphic interpretation of correct. I drew the eyes a little larger and rounder than some artists have previously done, and I drew the cheeks almost as wide as the rounded skull. Figure 2 has large, round goggly eyes; figure 3 has an irregular skull; 4 has eyes set too close together; 5 lacks a broad muzzle; 6 has too board a muzzle; 7 has ears set on too high; 8 has too small a nose and underdeveloped nostrils; 9 has prominent cheeks; 10 has a flat skull; and 11 has slightly slanted eyes with the white showing. Figure 12 has light eyes, insufficient lip to cover the lower jaw, and is throaty (which is actually part of the neck but I thought I would include it).

## COLOUR

Colour has no bearing on this judging scenario. However, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to elaborate on the colour sable, which created a dilemma for judges for over a decade prior to the revision of the Cocker standard in 1992. It is still a dilemma for those not familiar with this breeder concern.

At the moment, you can put a sable Cocker up in any English-speaking country except the United States – but I wouldn't advise it. That's because the U.S. is the country of origin and, based on the American Spaniel Club members' opinion, you would be doing the breed a disservice.

While the revised AKC wording does not mention sable, it does carry a disqualification for unacceptable colours. Sable is a red or brown coat colour overlaid and intermixed with black, and is not acceptable. The American breed club has urged the CKC to adopt this disqualification. I concur, and I urge fellow Canadian judges judging in the U.S. or elsewhere to conform to the wishes of this breed's country of origin.

