

SPANIEL (COCKER)

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance including the correct colour of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure. However, if a dog possesses a feature, characteristic or colour described as unacceptable, it must not be rewarded in the show ring.

Most recent changes to this Standard has an effective date of 01/01/2026

ORIGIN

Great Britain.

UTILISATION

Flushing dog.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

[ed. from FCI Breed Standard No. 5:]

Cocker Spaniels were recognised as a separate breed from Field and Springer Spaniels soon after the formation of the Kennel Club in 1873. He originated as the 'Cocking Spaniel' and derived this name from flushing woodcock. As with a number of Gundog breeds, there is, nowadays, a difference between those used for work and those used for show: the show Cocker is a sturdier, heavier version of his working counterpart.



Illustration courtesy of NKU Picture Library

GENERAL APPEARANCE

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

CHARACTERISTICS

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

TEMPERAMENT

Gentle and affectionate, yet full of life and exuberance.

HEAD & 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.

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.

Ears:

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

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.

NECK

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

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.

BODY

Strong, compact. Chest well-developed and brisket deep; neither too wide nor 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.

HINDQUARTERS

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

FEET

Firm, thickly padded, cat-like.

TAIL

Set on slightly lower than line of back. Must be merry in action and carried level, never cocked up. Previously customarily docked.

Docked: Never too short to hide, nor too long to interfere with, the incessant merry action when working.

Undocked: 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.

[*refer note below]

GAIT / MOVEMENT

True through action with great drive covering ground well.

COAT

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

COLOUR

- **Solid colours:** Black; red; golden; liver (chocolate); black and tan; liver and tan. In all above solid colours, a small amount of white on chest tolerated, but white in any other location highly undesirable.
- **Particolours:**
Bicolours: Black and white; orange and white; liver 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 other colour or combination of colours unacceptable.

SIZE

Height at withers approximately:

Males: 39cm – 41cm (15½" – 16")

Females: 38cm – 39cm (15" – 15½")

Weight:

Approximately: 13kg – 14.5kg.

N.B. Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum. Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.

*Regardless of the provisions of the current KUSA-adopted standard, docked or formerly docked breeds may be shown at all FCI- and KUSA-licensed shows in South Africa, whether their tails are docked or natural. Under no circumstances are Judges permitted to discriminate against exhibits on the grounds of docked or natural tails, and equal consideration for awards must be given to either.

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.

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When judging this breed at FCI International Shows, use:

FCI Standard No. 5: ENGLISH COCKER SPANIEL

FCI Classification: Group 8 – Retrievers, Flushing Dogs, Water Dogs

Section 2 – Flushing Dogs

With working trial.