

ENGLISH COCKER SPANIEL – HUNTING STYLE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In England, the (English) Cocker Spaniel was selected for its small stature, sturdy, compact build and excellent scenting abilities to accommodate the hunting of woodcock in the dense cover where these birds are found. The breed excels in locating scent trapped at ground level in thick brush. The English Cocker is often described as “a big dog in a small package” due to the power, stamina, and sheer heart that drives it to do the work of a considerably larger dog.

The official 1988 Breed Standard states; *“The English Cocker... is alive with energy; his gait is powerful and frictionless, capable both of covering ground effortlessly and penetrating dense cover. Its enthusiasm in the field and the incessant action of its tail indicate how much he enjoys the hunting for which he was bred.”*

HUNTING MANNER

The English Cocker Spaniel exhibits a merry temperament and hunts with enthusiasm. The breed is characterized by an animated “bustling” manner accompanied by a “busy” tail as the dog works through cover. The dog should cover ground thoroughly, changing pattern and speed when appropriate. The English Cocker uses air and ground scenting with equal skill.

The speed of the English Cocker is generally moderate, with changes of pace as required for conditions. His gait is characterized more by drive and the appearance of power than by great speed. His range will vary depending on the cover, but in general, the English Cocker should hunt relatively close to its handler. When it is apparent the dog is getting closer to the bird, the dog's tail wags more vigorously and the level of animation increases.

FLUSH

The English Cocker Spaniel should make a smooth, determined flush; however, certain game or cover situations may allow for a slight hesitation. Both hard and softer flushes are equally acceptable for this breed.

MARK & RETRIEVE

The English Cocker Spaniel is an excellent marker, though its smaller size may be a disadvantage in tall cover. Some steady dogs will “hup” where they have a clearer view, or stand on their hind legs in order to follow the mark, though they should not move forward from their location until sent by the handler.

On the retrieve pick-up the English Cocker Spaniel, being a smaller dog, may require a moment to position the game in its mouth – particularly live birds – for optimum grip and ground clearance before returning with it. They should have a firm, but gentle mouth with all game.

WATER WORK

Developed as an upland hunter and not as a duck dog, the English Cocker Spaniel is capable of handling water retrieves as might be necessary on an upland hunt. While some dogs will leap into water with great enthusiasm, the breed generally is inclined to enter the water in a more deliberate manner. The dog should demonstrate focus and determination in the performance of the task.