

Judging The Welsh Springer Spaniel

By Adrienne Bancker

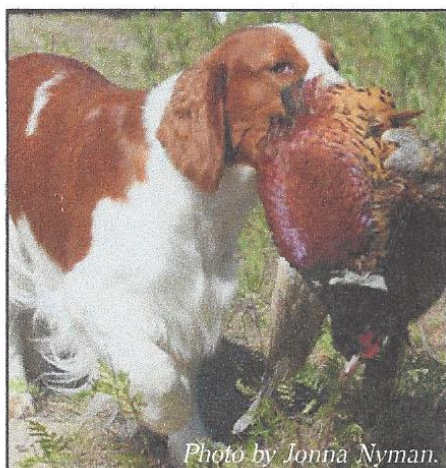


Photo by Jonna Nyman.

Illustrating an International Champion, multiple group winner doing what is natural for the breed.

Walking into the ring to judge the Welsh Springer Spaniel should be a simple pleasure. Here is a breed that has managed to maintain its form and function for hundreds of years. A Welsh is a simple dog; there is nothing exaggerated about it. There is no separation of type between working and showing as there is no separation of type from country to country. Temperament reflects a dog comfortable with people and amiable with other dogs. And, to make things



Photo by Sanna Kopola

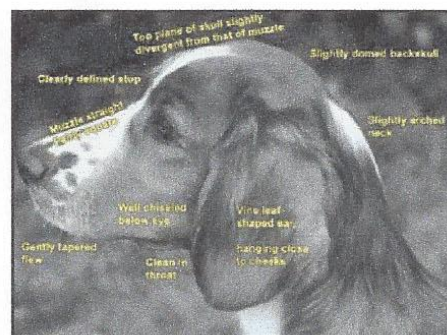
This is the same bitch as above, 'Mimmi' INT FIN S(u) N DK CH FINJW-09 NORDW-10 HeW-10 FINW-10 Benton Walk of Fame winning GROUP-1 at Helsinki Winner under Mr Ron Menaker, USA.

even more pleasurable, the Welsh Springer, as a whole, has continued to improve in quality over the past 36+ years that I have personally known the breed. This is how I recommend judging the breed so that it will be a simple pleasure for the reader, as well.

When the dog enters the ring what is the first thing I want to see? A working spaniel. I want a medium sized, functional, unexaggerated dog. If that picture isn't there, I consider it a serious deviation from the general appearance desired for the Welsh Springer Spaniel.

I then move on to outline and proportion. Do I have a rectangular silhouette of a dog with a balanced head that blends into a slightly arched neck which flows into a level back with a slightly arched loin and continues to a slightly rounded croup finished off by a tail (regardless of length) set as a continuation of the topline? The length of the dog comes from the properly angled fore and rear quarters and in the length of ribbing. I use the square within the rectangle as a high-level guide. The square comes from drawing an imaginary line up the back of the front feet, through the elbows to the withers (height) and from the withers to the set of the tail (length). The rectangle comes from drawing a line from the point of shoulder to the point of buttock (length). When that length is compared to the height, the Welsh is longer than tall, hence rectangular. If any aspect of my desired picture for outline and proportion isn't there I need to find out why when I do my examination.

Next I want a glimpse into movement. A simple trot around the ring will tell me if I have a dog that moves efficiently and effortlessly with drive from the rear. This is not a test of speed, but of endurance. Do I have a dog that will be able to last in the field one day, enjoy the outing and be physically fit and able to do it again the following day and the day after that and the day after that? If I don't see



A young female illustrating correct profile and highlighted areas.

this on the first go around, but I like the overall impression of the dog, I wait until the individual movement to determine if it was the dog or the handler causing the off-picture.

I now move to the front of the dog and take my first glance at, what I consider, breed essence – the head and expression. Our standard states: "...head is unique and should in no way approximate that of other spaniel breeds. Its overall balance is of primary importance" This is an aspect that makes a Welsh a Welsh and not a red & white English Cocker, Beagle, or Setter. Primarily, there is no exaggeration anywhere. The head should never be broad and massive nor opposite long and lean; there is no pronounced stop, no deep, pendulous flews, no round eyes, nor pronounced eyebrows, no long, low set heavily leathered/feathered ears. There is no excessive skin. Even though there is a bit of loose skin on the body of the Welsh to prevent tearing and pulling while working in and amongst heavy brush, the skin of the head is relatively clean fitting. The ears, in repose, are set on a line with the corner of the eye and gently taper to the tip, they do not hang straight down, but at an angle and hanging close to the cheek. The flews/lips also gently taper as they move towards the well developed nostrils; the throat is clean. And, the eyes. Those eyes must be set in tight, darkly pigmented, oval rims and must have an expression that is

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kindly, friendly. No sclera or haw showing. There must be chiseling under the eye, lovely definition of bone that underlines the beauty of the Welsh head and expression.

As to balance and its importance; the foreface is equal in length or only slightly shorter than the back skull. This is very easily measured by taking your hand and placing it, palm down, on the back skull, determining the length by opening/closing your fingers and then placing that same hand on the foreface. Does the nose extend beyond your hand or fit within the same measurements?



The top winning and top producing bitch British Show Champion Ferndel Cecilia. Even as a veteran bitch, 'C' still illustrates so many desirable qualities of an outstanding Welsh Springer and is one of my all-time favorites.

On the contrary – do you have a short, chubby head? Is the foreface noticeably shorter than the back skull? No matter how cute a “cockery” head may be, it is definitely an objectionable feature for a Welsh. Teeth should be large and useful for gripping game.

The slightly divergent planes of the Welsh Springer head are easily determined by looking at the head in profile and using your hand. The top of the muzzle is straight, e.g. no roman nose, and leads in to a clearly defined stop which goes up to a slightly domed back skull. When measuring for length of back skull to length of foreface, you can also use the palm of your hand to feel for the slight dome (front to back) of the skull cap.

As I move from the head to the body I want a head to neck in proportion of about 1:1 and I want the neck to blend

smoothly into the shoulders. I don't expect Welsh shoulders to be as close at the tips as some of the other spaniels, but they should be long, sloping shoulders and I want a well set back upper arm with a prominent forechest. These are problem areas in the breed – upright shoulders, short upper arms and/or lack of forechest and these areas will alter the desired silhouette.

Moving along the dog I want a long ribcage with well-sprung ribs. A young dog may not yet have the spring of rib that comes with maturity, ask the steward the age. If less than three years and you like the dog, you may forgive the fault depending on what you feel under your hands; is it immaturity or is it slab-sided? Any older than three years and I would probably leave the dog out of contention. The loin is slightly arched, muscular and close-coupled. I like a rib:loin to be about 2 1/2 to 1. The body of the Welsh is compact, but length of ribbing should never be compromised. I can forgive a slightly longer dog with a longer loin with a long rib cage and will always consider it above the Welsh that appears to be more compact but is in fact 50/50 rib to loin. The proportion of the rib to loin is one of the major contributors to the correct Welsh outline and its length of body. Depth of body should reach to the elbows or very slightly beyond; I do not want a shallow body.

The topline is level in that it does not slope as stated in several other spaniel standards. Stating that the topline is level does not mean it is flat; one can't describe a topline as having a slightly arched loin and slightly rounded croup without having some flow to the picture.

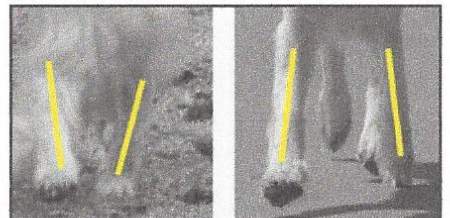
The hind quarters should be well-developed with good wide thighs and second thighs. Hocks should be well let down. Remember: This is a breed where nothing is exaggerated. I shouldn't see long sweeping rear ends with hind toes standing far behind where the point of buttocks end. Feet are round, tight, with good arches and thick pads. These are feet that need to work on all sorts of terrain as well as swim. Flat feet, paper

thin pads, loose feet all contribute to injury for a working spaniel.

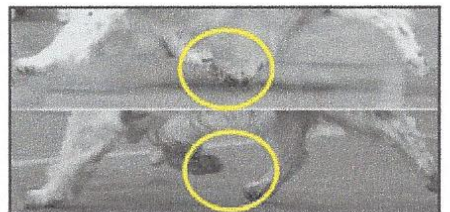
As I am going over the dog I am also evaluating coat and texture. Markings are easy – they don't matter as long as I have a dog that is a rich chestnut red and pearly white. The coat is straight, flat and soft. Silky not wooly. No obvious barbering and not dripping in feathering either.

I end the exam with movement. I want to see a dog moved at an easy trot. Think of it this way... how much effort does it take to trot around a show ring on level ground usually on matting and in a climate-controlled building? Even if outside on a hot day on poorly mowed grass with gopher holes, there shouldn't be much effort made to trot. I want to see a dog light on his feet, covering ground smoothly and with purpose. I definitely do not want to see a dog raced around the ring. When a Welsh is in the field he is an endurance trotter with frequent bursts of running. He doesn't trot in the field at break neck speeds; if he is going to trot that fast he will break into a run.

Currently there are two movement problems I see occurring more frequently. The first is lack of convergence of the front legs as the dog is moving towards you. Although the Welsh does not single



Left picture illustrates CORRECT convergence in front. Right picture illustrates INCORRECT.



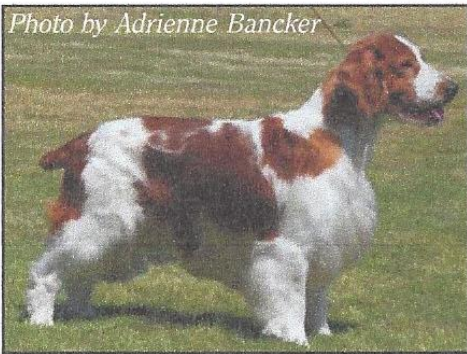
Top picture illustrates CORRECT convergence underneath. Bottom picture illustrates INCORRECT.

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BIS/2xBISS Rolyart's Still the One CD RN WD VC. Among his many, many accomplishments, "Gator" was, also, the first breeder/owner/handled Best in Show winner for the breed. 'Gator' is the son of a Swedish sire and American dam.

track, the legs definitely do converge as speed increases. Too many Welsh are moving in a side-to-side, wide, plodding movement.

The other problem is lack of convergence of the front leg with the hind leg underneath the body. This can be attributed to several things, but primarily it follows the course of the incorrect front end as I stated earlier.

As for temperament, I expect the dog to accept my hands for examination. The tail may be wagging furiously or maybe just a gentle waft, but except for obvious

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Br. Ch. Julita Ryvanda, 'Vanda' is a British WSSC club show winner as well as full British Champion (field and bench). Although 'Vanda' is full British breeding and is pictured here as a veteran bitch, notice the similarity of type to the young American Champion 'Gator'.

novices or very young puppies that may be a bit overwhelmed by their surroundings, I want my Welsh to exhibit a friendly and confident character. To do otherwise is anathema to the breed.

I would like to end this article with a statement from A.T. Williams, as quoted from *The Twentieth Century Dog*, ed. Herbert Compton, London, 1904:

"The ideal Welsh Spaniel must be exceedingly active and strong, able to negotiate the most difficult as well as the thickest places, and to last out the longest day. His color must always be

red and white, the red deepening with age. His head is fairly long and strong, but not setter type. Ears should be small, offering a minimum of resistance to gorse and briars; eyes dark and full of spaniel expression; body very muscular, not long on any account, with thick coat, not curly, stern down, never above the line of his back, with plenty of movement; legs medium length with plenty of bone and good round feet. And for disposition he must possess utter devotion to his master, high courage and not afraid of a fight if imposed upon him, but not quarrelsome."

That quote holds true over 100 years later. It is our responsibility as breeders, owners and judges to ensure that it holds true 100 years from now. In the meantime, I hope you too enjoy the simple pleasures of judging this delightful breed, the Welsh Springer Spaniel. ■

Adrienne Bancker
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For more information on
the Welsh Springer
Spaniel, go to

<http://www.wssca.com/html/wsscaEducation.html>

