

YOU BE THE JUDGE

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THE FIELD SPANIEL

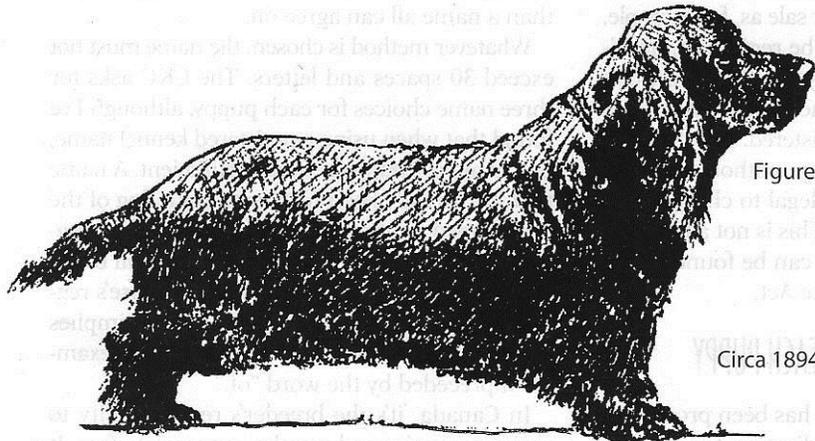


Figure 1

Circa 1894

HISTORY

A comment on the internet that I had having difficulty finding technical information on the Field Spaniel brought immediate response from Ms Becki Jo Hirschy of Calico Field Spaniels. Her response was in the form of a document she had authored, entitled, *A Field Spaniel Primer for Breeders, Fanciers and Judges*. In addition, she provided a Field Spaniel slide presentation, which she hopes at some point to refine and produce as an on-line self-study. Much of what I impart in this article is coloured by her informative Field Spaniel contribution.

Until 1901, the Field Spaniel and the English Cocker Spaniel developed as one breed, separated solely by weight. In 1901, the two were separated into two distinct breeds. The Cocker benefitted from this separation, but the breeders of the Field Spaniel bred for a longer, lower dog, through many outcrosses to Sussex Spaniels, eventually producing a breed (Figure 1) that became the butt of jokes. The breed lost many supporters and it remained for a group of dedicated Field Spaniel devotees to rescue this worthy breed from certain oblivion.

It is believed by some that the Irish Water Spaniel was used as one outcross to depart from long and low. The not-infrequent predilection of Field Spaniels to grow curly topknots is offered as proof. Next, fanciers with good sense chose the English Springer Spaniel as an outcross to restore a more upstanding type of dog. The last such outcross was recorded in the mid-1950s. To distinguish between the Field Spaniel and the English Springer Spaniel, the former's breed standard was revised to preclude black-and-white and liver-and-white exhibits. Eventually the Field Spaniel became larger and longer in leg while still retaining its substance and characteristic head. It is important to remember the field Spaniel's precarious and colorful history when judging this breed because the necessary out-crosses in the past account for the variation of type seen today. For example, it is not unknown to see Field Spaniels with a hint of Sussex or English Spring Spaniel appearance to head and body.

Correct proportions, an essential feature

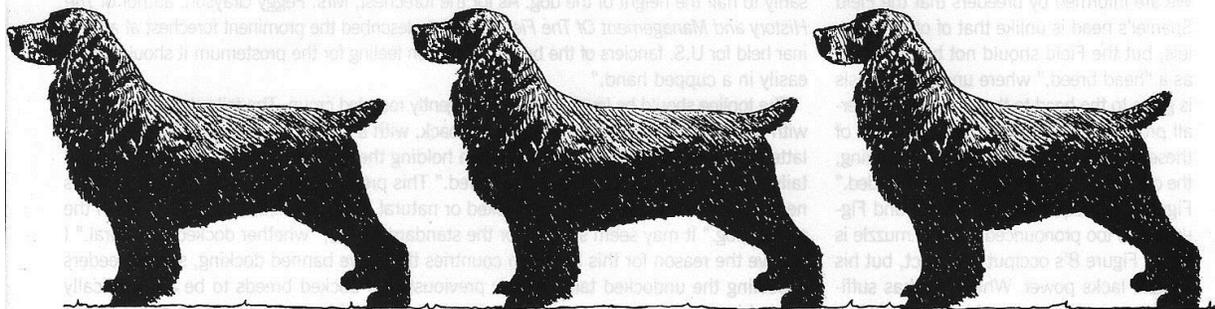


Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

CORRECT PROPORTIONS?

The balance of Field Spaniel size, proportion and substance is essential. Height is 18 inches for dogs, 17 inches for bitches. A one-inch deviation either way is acceptable. All three of these Field Spaniels are 18 inches tall. All three are solidly built, with moderate bone and firm smooth muscles. All three are not the same length. Which 18 inch Field Spaniel has the correct body length? The standard advises, "A well balanced dog, somewhat longer than tall." All three of these Field Spaniels are "somewhat" longer than tall. Knowing correct proportions is essential in judging this breed; fortunately, the revised AKC Field Spaniel standard goes one step further and determines that "somewhat" is approximately 7:6.

Which example do you believe best represents correct Field Spaniel proportions?

The Field Spaniel is not a long dog. The length should come from a long rib cage, short loin and short, gently rounded croup. Length is measured from the foremost point of the shoulder (not forgetting there is also a forechest) to the rearmost point of the buttocks.

Standing by itself, any one of these three body lengths might appear correct; however, we are aware that this is not a long breed, so Figure 3 can be eliminated. Measured from the top of the withers to the ground and divided into six increments, if we add a seventh and turn the seven increments horizontally, their length is equal to the distance from Figure 2's point of shoulder to point of buttock. Figure 4 is approximately square. Awareness of correct proportions in this breed is especially important because of the many outcrosses that were used in its creation. Departure from correct proportions are a continuing breeder concern.

HEAD

"Conveys the impression of high breeding, character and nobility.

Expression – Grave, gentle and intelligent. **Eyes** – Almond in shape, open and of medium size; set moderately wide and deep. Color: dark hazel to dark brown. The lids are tight and show no haw; rims comparable to nose in color. **Ears** – Moderately long (reaching the end of the muzzle). Set on slightly below eye level; pendulous, hanging close to the head; rolled and well feathered. Leather is moderately heavy, supple and rounded at the tip. **Skull** – The crown is slightly wider at the back than at the brow and lightly arched laterally; sides and cheeks are straight and clean. The occiput is distinct and rounded. Brows are slightly raised. The stop is moderate, but well defined by the brows. The face is chiseled beneath the eyes. **Muzzle** – Strong, long and lean, neither snipey nor squarely cut. **Nose** – Large, fleshy and well developed with open nostrils. Set on as an extension of the muzzle. Color: solid: light to dark brown or black as befits the color of the coat. **Lips** – Close fitting, clean and sufficiently deep to cover the lower jaw without being pendulous. **Bite** – Scissors or level, with complete dentition. Scissors preferred."



Figure 5

CLASS ONE

We are informed by breeders that the Field Spaniel's head is unlike that of other spaniels, but the Field should not be described as a "head breed", where undue emphasis is given to the head to the detriment of overall proportions, balance and type. None of these three heads is correct. For one thing, the occiput should be "distinct and rounded". Figure 6's occiput is non-existent and Figure 7's is too pronounced and the muzzle is short. Figure 8's occiput is correct, but his muzzle lacks power. Whether it has sufficient power to pick up a bird is debatable.

The various breeds that contributed to the creation of the Field Spaniel also add to the difficulty in judging this breed. Type is represented by Figure 2 is not always present in a class. Type is not represented to its fullest in this next class. One example harks back to the Sussex Spaniel, one evidences a hint of English Springer Spaniel, and the third has an overly refined head and insufficient substance (light bone). Difficult though it may be, you are invited now or after reading the following, to place these three Field Spaniels in order of preference.

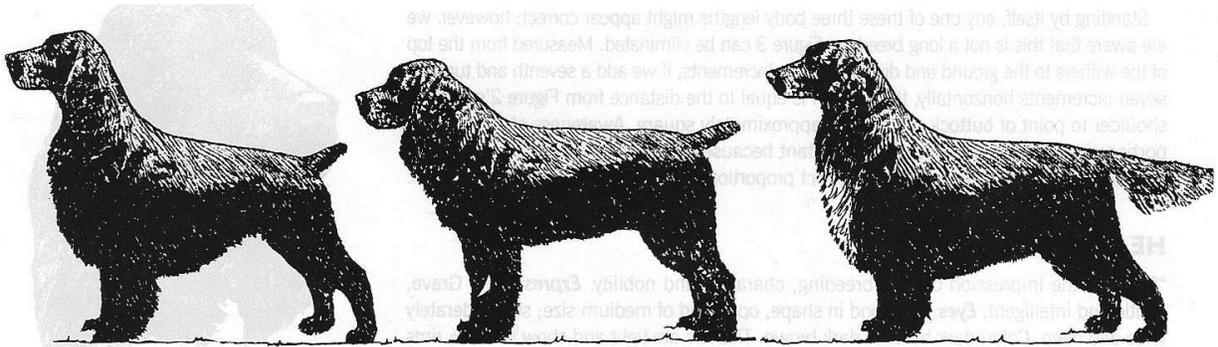


Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

THE REST OF THE DOG

The Field Spaniel's neck should be "long". How long? Figure 11's neck is the same length as Figure 2's, which Ms Hirschy and I believe to be Field Spaniel long. Two have correct "little or no tuck-up". All have chests that descend to the elbow but not necessarily to half the height of the dog. As for the forechest, Mrs. Peggy Grayson, author of *The History and Management Of The Field Spaniel*, described the prominent forechest at a seminar held for U.S. fanciers of the breed as, "When feeling for the prosternum it should cradle easily in a cupped hand."

The topline should be level, with a short, gently rounded croup. The tail sets on low, in line with the croup, just below the level of the back, with a natural downward inclination. (The latter advice doesn't deter exhibitors from holding the tail as high as 1 o'clock.) "Docked tails are preferred, natural tails are allowed." This preference for docked continues in this next sentence, "The tail whether docked or natural length should be in balance with the overall dog." It may seem strange for the standard to add "whether docked or natural". I believe the reason for this is that in countries that have banned docking, some breeders expecting the undocked tails of their previously tail-docked breeds to be automatically carried horizontally, were shocked to find that many of the tails curled up and over the dog's backs. Hence, "should be in balance with the overall dog."

Figure 8's tail is undocked. Does this make him unbalanced? If you consider the long tail makes this particular dog unbalanced, then you must fault it. Docked is preferred and undocked takes a little getting used to, which could colour your opinion as to balance.

According to Ms Hirschy, Field Spaniels with short rib cages will often have an immediately noticeable sharp upward "tuck-up", that rises to create a distinct waist. In these cases, the loin is almost always too long. Figure 6 has a short rib cage and the tuck-up tends to produce imbalance.

Figure 7's head is large, adding to front end heaviness. The muzzle is short, the flews are loose and heavy instead of "long and lean" and "lips close fitting". The short neck adds to the front heavy appearance

and harks back to the early Sussex Spaniel outcross. His tail is set on correctly – just below the line of the back – but lower down, the rear pasterns are long (hock too high).

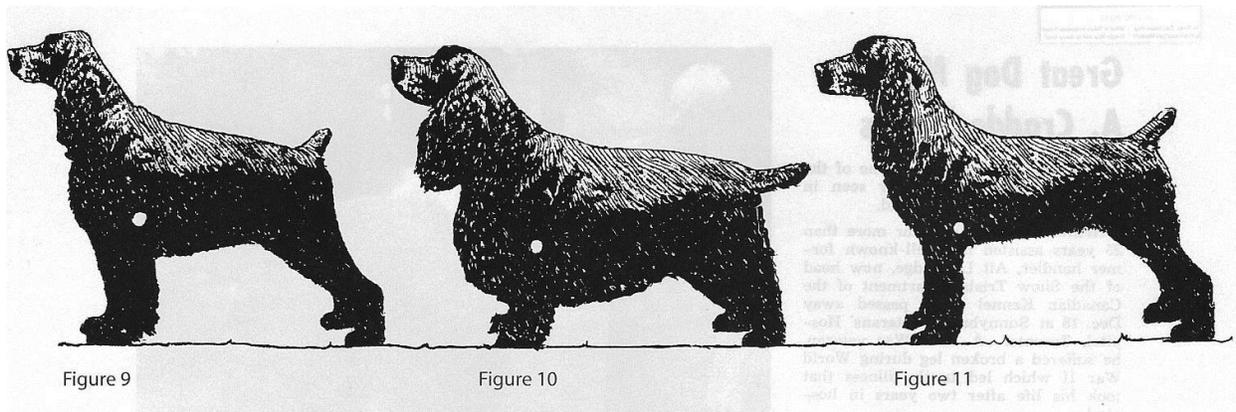
COLOUR AND MARKINGS

How much white is allowed? Figure 8's white area extends from the point of one shoulder across to the other. Is this too much white? I am informed that a patch on the chest that extends from point of shoulder to point of shoulder (a shirtfront) is definitely too much. Many fanciers actually prefer just a stripe or line dusting down the chest.

Tan points are acceptable and appear on all colours, including roan. They extend from eyebrows to the sides of the muzzle, the cheeks, the chest, front and rear pasterns and under the tail. Dark pencil marks on the toes in this breed are considered an enhancement. No one colour is preferred over another.

PLACEMENTS

Figure 7 holds little appeal and I placed him third. Figure 6 is an impressive dog but not an impressive Field Spaniel. Figure 8's light muzzle could do the job. Although the standard does not advise how much white is allowable, I agree with breeders who see a white "shirtfront" as being definitely too much and therefore faulty. As for the undocked tail, if I had never seen a Field Spaniel I would consider this dog balanced. Having seen docked examples, I must still admit he appears balanced. I gave Figure 8 first place.



CLASS TWO

There are a few more important features to take into consideration and they are best presented in the form of a graphic judging scenario. Again, you can put up only the quality that is present in your ring and unfortunately, Figures 9, 10 and 11 do not have quality in abundance; however, each contributes to our awareness of a few more important features.

To assist you in part since you cannot use your hands, the position of the elbows hidden under the moderately long, slightly wavy coats have been marked with a white dot. The position of the elbow is a good indicator of how long and at what angle the upper arm lies, and the length of the foreleg in comparison to the depth of body. For example, Figure 9's dot is too high, indicating too long a foreleg. In the case of Figure 10, the low position of the white circle indicates that the foreleg is short. The white marked elbow on Figure 9 suggests that the upper arm is sufficiently long and slopes rearward, but the awkward break at the junction of neck and withers and the shape it takes indicate that the shoulder blade is more vertical (steep) than it should be.

The Sussex Spaniel type Figure 10 serves to remind that in this breed when the legs shorten they usually show a slight bow – okay for the Sussex Spaniel but not for the Field Spaniel. In the rear this example lacks angulation at the hock and probably the stifle. As for this correct low set-on-of-tail I am advised that a concave dimple where the tail leaves the body indicates a tail that sets too low.

The tail on Figure 9 is not only set on high, it is short. In general, one third of the overall tail length is retained. We are advised that it is better to err on the side of too much length rather than too little.

In some breeds, Figure 11's lack of full coat would not be tolerated; in fact, in many breeds there would be little chance of winning. Not so in the case of the Field Spaniel. The standard advises "amount of coat or absence of coat should not be faulted as much as structural faults." The Field Spaniel coat is single, moderately long; flat or slightly wavy; silky and glossy; dense and water repellent. If the Field is worked, the amount of coat left after the tearing of briars and brambles ends up as a working coat. A Field Spaniel that is in a working coat and condition should never be penalized for lack of feathering.

PLACEMENTS

Figure 11's muzzle, high set tail and less than full coat disturb, but not to the degree that the faults possessed by Figures 9 and 10 disturb. First place Figure 11 is very much a Field Spaniel, even without setter-like feathering on the chest, underbody, backs of legs, buttocks and second thigh. Second place went to long legged Figure 9 and third place went to short, bow-legged Figure 10.