

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

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Based on the CKC standard (July 1995)

THE WELSH SPRINGER SPANIEL

THE FIRST CLASS (DOGS A, B AND C)

Your first class is composed of three mediocre examples. They all have the preferred scissors bite. Their coats are straight, flat and soft to the touch, with moderate feathering in the desired places, and the colour is a rich red and white.

THE HEAD

All national WSS standards describe the skull as being slightly domes; the stop as being clearly defined and well chiseled below the eyes; the muzzle as straight and fairly square; the eyes as dark or hazel, medium size, not prominent, nor showing haw; and the ears as wet on moderately low; hanging close to the cheeks, comparatively small, gradually narrowing toward the tip and shaped somewhat like a vine leaf.

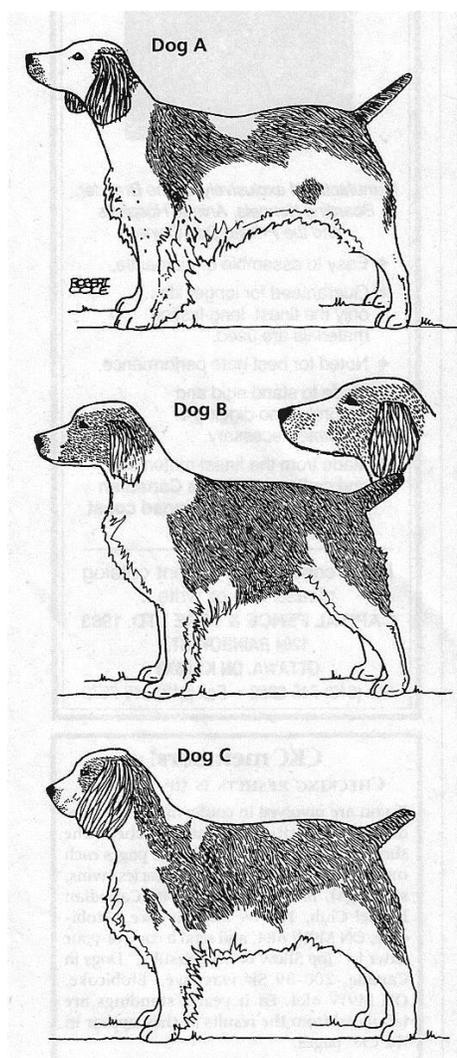
The revised 1989 American Kennel Club WSS standard expands on the CKC description of the head to include the following: The head is in proportion to the body; the eyes are oval shaped; the eye rims are tight and darkly pigmented; the length of muzzle is equal to, but never longer than, that of the skull; the top plane of the skull is slightly divergent from that of the muzzle; the ears are set on approximately at eye level; the nostrils are well developed and black or any shade of brown; and the straight, fairly square muzzle is free for excessive flews.

THE BODY PARTS

The rest of the Welsh Springer Spaniel fits into the normal endurance and slightly longer than tall category. The neck is long, muscular, slightly arched, clean in the throat, and neatly set into long and sloping shoulders. The chest is well developed with an obvious forechest. The WSS silhouette appears rectangle. The approximate height for dogs is 19 inches (48 centimeters) and 18 inches (46 centimeters) for bitches. (American judges and exhibitors please note that the disqualification for animals over these heights was decided in the 1992 Canadian WSS standard).

The topline is level, the loin is slightly arched, the body is close coupled, the croup is slightly rounded and the tail is an extension of the topline. The brisket reaches the elbow, half the distance between the withers and the ground.

The forelegs are of medium length, and the front pasterns are short and slightly sloping, complementing a long and sloping shoulder blade and upper arm. The hindquarters are strong, well boned but not coarse, the bend of the stifle is moderate and the hock joint is well angulated.



HEADS A, B AND C

Since the opportunity to study a good WSS head may not have presented itself and the worded description is still subject to interpretation, I have drawn a better head at a larger scale for comparison and placed it with Dog B.

FOREQUARTERS

None of these three specimens illustrated is particularly sound. Based on normal structure, Dog B has the best forequarters, followed by Dog C. Dog A does not appear to have any forechest, has a break at the junction of the neck and the withers, suggesting a steep shoulder, and the forward on the body position of the front leg suggests a steep upper arm. The same order could apply to their faulty toplines.

HINDQUARTERS

The tails on Dogs A, B and C all project above a non-existent shelf or buttock, and the back of the hind leg is practically straight from the base of the tail to the foot (lacking angulation at the stifle and the hock). This suggests a steep pelvis incorrectly set at nearly 55 degrees. (The norm is 30 degrees). Did you also notice that Dog B's rear pastern from the hock to the foot is too long? As for the longer tail on Dog A, the standard doesn't advise at what length the tail should be docked. However, if you are going to fault length, remember poor docking is a man-made fault.

COLOUR MARKINGS

If Dog A were a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel you would disqualify him for having white around one or both eyes. Not so for the Welsh Springer, where any pattern is acceptable. This is a good example of the sort of situation you never think about until confronted with it.

MY ORDER OF MERIT

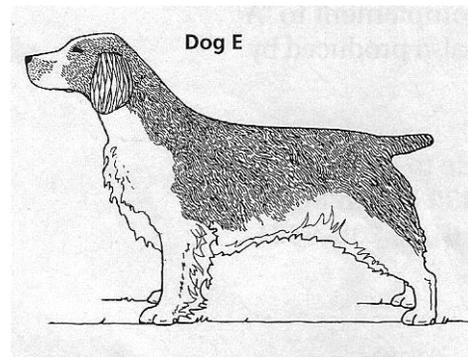
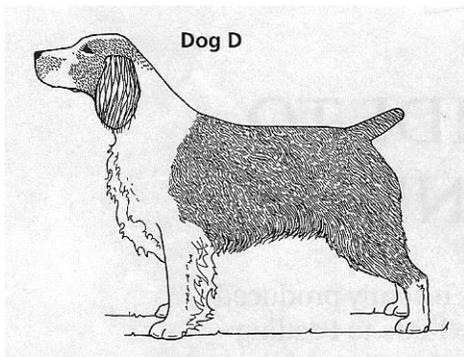
I would put Dog B with his unbalanced head at the front of the line, followed by Dog A and then Dog C. I could have placed Dog C in the middle; however, the standard emphatically states "a short chubby head is most objectionable." And Dog C has a short, chubby head.

THE SECOND CLASS (DOGS D AND E)

The focus is on type in this class of two sound dogs – both breed type and functional type. Having had the pleasure of working with WSS experts for three years, I eventually produced two illustrated representations of typical. The initial representation of typical is one of the two dogs in this second class. The other dog in this class depicts certain dangerous departures from correct type. Which is which?

WARNING

If you select the wrong dog as typical, you will confirm the suspicions of many WSS fanciers that there is an inherent danger that a North American-type Welsh Spring Spaniel will be promoted regardless of how well worded the standard, and how comprehensive the wording. But you would not do that.



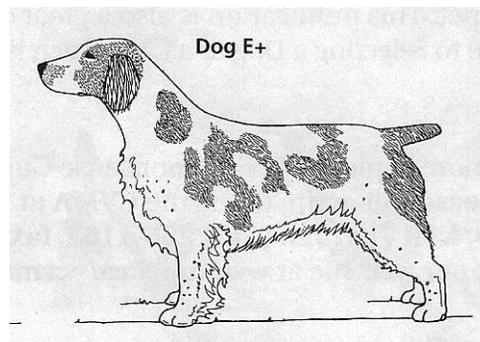
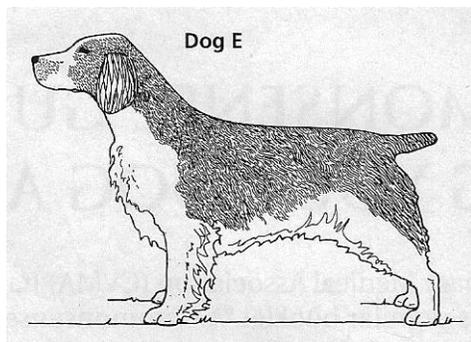
YOUR SELECTION

You, of course, selected Dog E as typical and now realize that Dog D is Dog E having undergone a number of graphic changes to the head and body parts, even though Dog E needs further improvement.

To depict the danger to WSS type that Dog D represents, I made his body two inches shorter in length, added one inch to the length of his legs and optically shortened his body even more by setting his tail on higher. I also made his ears long, low and large.

THE THIRD CLASS (DOGS E AND E+)

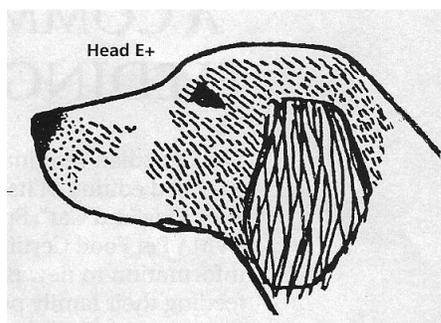
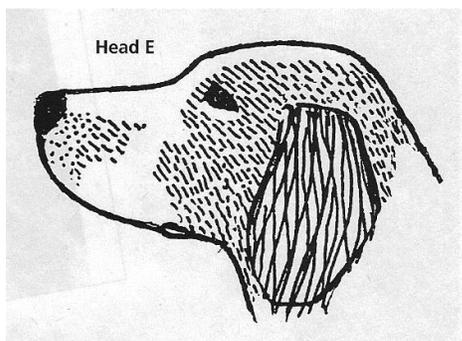
Both WSS in this class are worthy of championship status, one more than the other. The improvements possessed by Dog E+ draw attention to the standard's comprehensive wording.



To conform more directly and indirectly to the standard, I improved the slope to the croup by making it more slightly rounded (less gradual) on Dog E+. The nose has been made larger. The ears have been reduced in size and set level with the corner of the eye. The end of the muzzle has been made less square and trimmed the depth of flews. These changes have greatly improved the head; however, there is still one more that can be seen when you compare Dog E's head to that of superior Dog E+. Can you see the subtle improvement?

TWO HEADS

The WSS head is unique and should in no way approximate that of other spaniel breeds. John Phillips wrote, "The head is the most important single physical feature of the WSS." Cliff Payne is quoted as saying, "Cut off a Welshie's head and all you've got left is just another spaniel."



If the head is the single most important feature of the WSS, then the single most important feature that sets the WSS head apart from other spaniels is the relationship of the planes of the skull and muzzle. The skull and muzzle planes of most spaniels are parallel. The revised AKC wording reads, "The top plane of the skull is very slightly divergent from that of the muzzle, but with no tendency toward a downfaced appearance." The planes are divergent on one of these two enlarged heads and parallel on the other.