

A Royal Companion Enters the Ring

Judging the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.

The royal connections of the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel are well documented. Its likeness can be found woven into rich tapestries dating back to the 16th century. They appear in portraits of their eponymous master, Charles II of England, as well as in the paintings of many other notables of the English and European royal courts. Though used successfully for shooting small game, the Cavalier's true purpose has always been that of a companion. As such, beauty, elegance and sweet temperament have always been key points of this palace-bred dog, along with a neat, shapely spaniel body cloaked in a silky, feathered coat of distinct and vibrant colors.



By John A. Gammon

Head, Eyes, Expression

Perhaps it is a disservice to stereotype Cavaliers as a head breed. Yet without the flattish skull, high-set ears, dark, large round eyes and soft expression, that all-important attribute known as type is lost. Correct head type is necessary to distinguish Cavaliers from their cousins, English Toy Spaniels. English Toys, with their globular heads, short noses and deep stops, are the antithesis of the Cavalier standard and on no account should the two breeds approach similarity in head type.

Size of the head is proportionate to the body, the overall appearance being neither pinheaded nor overdone. The back skull is rather broad and, though slightly curved, appears flat across the top because of the ears' high placement.

The most important feature of the head and, arguably, of the breed, is the eye. Cavalier eyes should be large, round and dark brown, spaced well apart and looking directly forward. All of the trust and gentleness of the Cavalier's soul is communicated through its lustrous, limpid eyes.

Any of the following eye faults will detract from the correct expression: prominent, protruding or bulging eyes; small or almond-shaped eyes; eyes too light or with



The Cavalier King Charles is a perennially happy little dog.



a white ring showing around them; obliquely set eyes or those set too far apart. English breeders have recently flattered Americans by commenting on our success in keeping the large, round, expressive eyes. This is a critical characteristic and one that is easily lost if overlooked by breeders or judges.

A slight cushioning, or padding, under the eyes contributes to softness and correctness of expression. The muzzle is approximately 1½ inches long. It tapers gradually to give a clean finish to the face without lippiness or houndiness. The head is broken up by a moderate stop. Neither deep nor filled, it is midway between the shallow stop of the English Cocker and the deep stop of the English Toy. Any exaggeration of head properties, i.e., stop too deep, too much forehead or lip, or excess padding on the cheeks, will produce a hard or coarse expression, and the head will appear heavy and overdone. Too little in these same areas will create a snipey or foxy headpiece, as will a lack of cushioning beneath the eye.

The nose is black, without flesh marks. Nostrils are well developed. A scissors bite is preferred and greatly encouraged, though a level bite is acceptable if it does not mar the expression. Ears are set high, but not close. Leathers are long, wide and well feathered with long, silky hair. Cavaliers use their ears when alert, the cartilage stiffening to bring the base of the ear up and slightly forward. This forms a straight line with the top of the skull and brings the leathers forward so that the feathering frames the face. Once the large, expressive eyes, the balanced head and the silky ears are seen in one package, correct type becomes apparent and no amount of flash or showmanship should persuade you to look elsewhere.

Neck, Topline, Body

The perfect neck has a slight, muscular arch at the crest and is of sufficient length to allow the head to be carried proudly but never thrown back. The neck makes a graceful transition into well-laid-back shoulders and a straight, level topline. Cavaliers are short-coupled (though they don't measure square), the ribs well sprung, the chest moderately deep, reaching the elbows. Looking down at the dog, there is a slight "waist" between the last rib and the flank, but with no tucked-up appearance from the side.

Normal, sound front and rear assembly is called for and includes a good, broad pelvis, moderately muscled, well-turned stifles and well-let-down hocks. Action is free-moving and elegant, with reach and drive and a good length of stride. Cavaliers stand on compact feet with well-cushioned pads. The distinctive long hair on the feet creates a natural slipper. Dogs that spend time on hard surfaces will wear the slippers down, but it will still be obvious that they have not been trimmed.

Tails are well set on and carried happily but not too much above the level of the back. Males in particular will posture at one another, flagging their tails up. There is a slight rounding of the rump just before the tail-set, not to be confused with low tail-sets or sloping croups. Cavalier tails rarely stop wagging, especially when the dog is in

motion. This is a breed trait and an excellent barometer of the correct, gay temperament. Very few breeders dock tails anymore but it is still an option. Even then, only a tiny tip is removed, never more than a third. This is said to balance the outline of the dog, but this writer cannot bring to mind any Cavalier that ever appeared to have a tail that was too long. The tail is feathered with long, silky coat.

Coat and Color

Hair on the face and skull is naturally short, graduating to a medium length on the neck, back and body. Feathering on the ears, chest, legs and tail should be longer and all coat is single, soft, silky and free from curl, though a slight wave is permissible. The only trimming that is permitted is that of the hair growing between the pads on the underside of the foot. The breed should never grow so much coat as to obscure the natural lines of the body.

Cavaliers come in four distinct color variations: The broken colors, consisting of Blenheim and Tricolor, and the whole colors, which include Ruby and Black and Tan. The white in the broken colors is a pearly white, not an ice white or paper white, and it has a silvery cast when viewed



JIM WEAVER PHOTO



The watchword in heads is moderation.

in strong light. The white should be as clear and clean as possible, free from heavy ticking or freckling. Faces in particular should be free from heavy smudging or freckling.

Blenheims (named after Blenheim Palace, home to the Dukes of Marlborough, who developed this color strain) have evenly spaced, rich chestnut markings covering both ears and eyes, and well-broken-up body markings. The chestnut is a rich, reddish color; never liver, sandy-blond or orange. There is a white blaze extending between the eyes and ears, in the center of which may be the lozenge or Blenheim spot. This red thumbprint has its own unique

history and, though desirable, it is not essential and is not a judging consideration.

The Tricolor has jet-black ears and evenly spaced black markings covering both eyes, with a white blaze between the eyes. The rich tan markings appear over the eyes, on cheeks, inside ears and on underside of tail. Body markings are well broken up. Markings are an important feature on broken colors but a lightly or heavily marked dog shall be forgiven for that if quality so warrants.

The Ruby is a very rich red. It is acceptable if the longer feathering on rubies is paler in color than the body. Ruby puppies usually deepen in color as they develop.

Black and Tans are jet black with rich, bright tan markings over the eyes, on cheeks, inside ears, on chest, legs and underside of tail. The black is the blue-black of a raven, not brownish or rusty. Whole colors should have no white marks. However, a small white star on the chest, or one white toe is not uncommon. If not distracting, these markings are not of great concern.

Note that the Blenheim's chestnut, the Ruby's red, and the Black and Tan's and Tricolor's rich tan are three different colors. All colors should be rich and glossy with markings as neat and attractive as possible.

Ring Presentation

Since the first standard was approved, each generation of breeders has pledged to uphold the original intent of that first determined band of fanciers who wrote it: To produce a naturally presented breed totally free from trimming, sculpting or cosmetic alteration of any kind. This is part and parcel of breed type and the American Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club implores all judges to respect and enforce this section of the standard.

This means no trimming of whiskers or feet, no thinning out the neck or cleaning out the throat area, no sculpting of shoulders and hindquarters. Cavaliers should be impeccably turned out for the ring; clean, brushed and shining. Back coats can be coaxed flat with toweling and proper drying but not with thinning shears and stones. A few stray tendrils of lovely coat here and there are part of the natural, soft look of the breed.

The standard states that the trimmed dog is to be so severely penalized as to virtually eliminate it from competition and that is what it means; third, fourth or out of the ribbons with, hopefully, an explanation but no apologies!

Likewise, in the ring, the breed is handled naturally and with a minimum of fuss. Dogs are normally shown on loose or semi-loose leads and are allowed to self-stack while free-baiting on the floor with their handlers standing. Nothing equals the picture of a Cavalier standing on its own, slowly wagging its tail while looking up adoringly at a bit of bait or the sound of its handler's voice. This is also the best time for judges to check expression — they tend to lay their ears back and make unfortunate smiley-faces when picked up.

Tail-holding is not practiced in the Cavalier ring, not even for photographs. The outline is quickly spoiled if the tail is held out setter-style as it gives a rather alien look to the breed. Cavaliers are shown at a light trot.



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Size and Proportion

Newcomers to the breed are often thrown by size, either remarking "Oh, they're bigger than I thought" or "I didn't realize they were so small." The ideal is 13 to 18 pounds, a large span for a toy breed and so it would seem easy to stay within these limits. The reason, however, that the standard states, "These are ideals and slight variations are permissible" was to allow for larger dogs, not smaller ones. Seldom is there one of real quality, with correct bone and substance, that weighs under 16 pounds. American breeders have done well by staying in the 16 to 20 pound range, which is small compared to specimens in other countries where the standard weights are the same.

Height is 12 to 13 inches, proportionate to weight, with dogs possessing slightly more substance than bitches. Weedy and coarse specimens are to be equally penalized.

The breed is slightly off-square, and if measured from point of shoulder to point of buttock, the distance is slightly greater than from withers to ground. Heights from withers to elbow and elbow to ground are approximately equal. Never should they look long or low, nor should they be showing too much daylight under them. Though one of the largest members of the Toy Group, the

Cavalier remains a toy spaniel and it is the smaller, well-balanced dog that is preferred.

Temperament

The standard's descriptive words on temperament are: gay, friendly, non-aggressive, active, graceful, fearless, sporting, gentle and affectionate. The word fearless is not meant to suggest the fearlessness of a warrior, but that of an innocent that cannot imagine harm coming to it, and is thereby inspired to confidence and trustfulness.

Cavaliers are a joy to judge — they almost always seem to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. An approaching judge is likely to find little front feet dancing up their leg, or getting their hand licked or sniffed if offered. This should not be dismissed as amateur handling; it is a trait that breeders treasure and encourage.

Nervousness, meanness and shyness are not to be tolerated and should be met with the same weighty penalty as the trimmed dog, i.e., virtually eliminated from competition. Shyness does not refer to puppies or novice dogs that have yet to get their ring bearings, but rather to obvious mistrust and fearfulness. Sweet, gentle temperament is the hallmark of the breed; because of it Cavaliers are equally comfortable and biddable with children and the elderly, in the city or the country, at the finest estate or in the coziest kitchen. As long as their people are nearby with a pat and a kind word, Cavaliers are perennially happy little dogs.

And there it is; a lot of words to describe a very uncomplicated yet breathtakingly beautiful breed of dog. After a long run in the Miscellaneous Class, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel will take its place in the ring as a recognized breed on January 1, 1996. Cavalier fanciers ask only that judges be as gentle with the breed as the breed itself is, that they put forward naturally presented dogs that fit the standard and that are worthy of this phrase from it: "It is this typical gay temperament combined with true elegance and royal appearance which are of paramount importance in the breed." 🐾

John Gammon is a charter member of the American Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club, as well as its current president. He has been involved in the sport of purebred dogs for 30 years.



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