

• A SHOWSIGHT BREED FEATURE • (2013)

Judging the Clumber Spaniel

BY DOUG JOHNSON



Often, I am asked to mentor new judges wanting to learn the nuances of the Clumber Spaniel. Sadly, many times this breed, like their rare lesser-known spaniel cousins, is one of the last few breeds applied for in the Sporting Group. At that point, your judging skills are already in place and sorting dogs is not as difficult as when you first entered the ring.

For newer Clumber judges that level of comfort can work against good decision making — meaning that you might start sorting with an untrained eye, making decisions on soundness instead of type, and rewarding a generic spaniel-type dog over an animal that excels in breed-specific qualities. The Clumber Spaniel presents judges with challenges not commonly found in other members of the spaniel family.

I have shared 40 years of my life with this unique breed and I can tell you they are not like the other smaller spaniels. While they differ in many ways, you should instantly notice as Clumbers enter your ring their larger body mass and longer proportions, a looseness of protective skin and distinctive broad head piece.

When I judge this breed, whether at a show or in my own breeding program, I look for a dog who is clearly long in proportion and deep in body with massive bone and substance; top that off with the hallmark head piece that contains the breed essential nuances I require (i.e. good eye set and the proper expression, deep lips and a softness of brow). You can keep a high bar for quality in what you look for in this breed; while low in overall numbers the quality is quite strong. When you have an entry, you will generally have plenty of decisions to make.



Looking at the breed in profile, the very first thing I notice is how low to the ground is this animal. Is he low and long? Does this dog occupy his space with substance and massive bone? Does he make an empowering impression with a big broad head with loose skin framing his face? As the judge, you should look at his elbow and notice that from the elbow to the ground is one half of his height at the top of the shoulder. If the length is greater than that, he is too tall. Additionally, the depth of his massive body should rest below this elbow line. We call for a deep set and low-slung animal. Long legs are without question the plague of the breed today. He should never be fine boned, tall or present lots of daylight under his body. More and more often, dogs are getting taller and as a result they appear shorter in back. With this extra leg length, their proportions are skewed. This long low silhouette is very important to the breed and defines his outline. As a breeder, these leggy taller dogs have no value; however, as an uneducated judge they can have a visual appeal. Beware: A taller dog will generally appear sounder and hold a firmer topline, giving a generic appeal or what we refer to as SPRINGEREY. I avoid these animals as breeding stock and winners in my ring.

Clumbers are a massive dog with barrel-shaped ribbing that is vital to this breed. The body has a wide girth and is two-thirds ribbing and one-third strong loin. There is no tuck-up. The underline is also long. Use your hands to feel how far back the bottom of the ribs go and check for any presence of tuck-up.

The front of the Clumber is well developed and wide but elbows are tight to the chest and well tucked in, supporting the dogs' full body mass. The pasterns are slightly sloping. On the move the front legs should reach forward

converging to the center line but never crossing over. Their feet are large and round, bone is strong. This breed has a level topline and a strong back but there will be a slight rise over the loin that is not always perceptible to the eye but evident upon physical exam. The croup is typical for most spaniel breeds. It is slightly rounded and never a continuation of the topline. Like the slight rise of the loin, you will need to feel this as the coat can be profuse. The tail should be slightly below the line of the back and never carried high.

This breed was developed to flush out game and beat birds out of nests for hunters. The ground cover where they worked was densely covered with native Rhododendron bushes and thorny thickets. To that end, the breed

must have loose-fitting skin with a great deal of play to move with the dog when he is pushing through this underbrush. This is a breed essential characteristic—without which he would never be able to perform his function as a flushing spaniel. This thick skin is an element of proper breed type most notably on the head; the skin creates the classic furling and loose eye. The brow acts as a protective element for the eyes as they push through the cover to locate game. Unlike other spaniel breeds, some haw will show around the eyes. A “V” shape lower rim is created with the skin. The Clumber has a medium length muzzle whose lip line should extend just below the lower jaw. Too much skin can lead to many health issues and should be avoided. The presence of dewlap is a must. A Clumber devoid of loose skin is a Clumber with no type. Unlike most of the other breeds with a typical lobe shape, the ears are triangular or leaf-shaped. The ear leather is a place to feel for the characteristic thick skin of the Clumber Spaniel. This breed has suffered with malocclusion for many of the four decades I have been involved with them. As a breeder, I do not keep dogs in my breeding program that do not have perfect bites, and as a result I never reward them in the show ring. There will be others of merit to reward.



(It is important to notes and an exceptional dog with an slight bite fault can and will be rewarded even if less than ideal) The Clumber is never shy or timid; instead he is reserved in temperament with a noble character. No Clumber should be hostile or aggressive, show with their tails tucked or afraid. Those examples should and must be removed from competition.

Most judges are comfortable with breeds that look the same moving as standing and frankly, often this breed is not. This is a direct result of the short legs and long body coupled with the loose skin. On the move, the dogs' skin can undulate back and forth, tending to rock and vibrate. This is referred to as the "Clumber roll." It is more apparent on the go round with a slight flap of coat that covers the shoulder blades moving. This is the spaniel shawl and is not to be trimmed or penalized. In other breeds the groomer will pull this out or trim it; however, it is left natural on the Clumber as it is part of his protective armor.

This breed has large round, dense bone; round muscle and thick powerful thighs. They have a wide, round rump typical of most spaniel breeds. They should have meaty or fleshy rears with good muscle tone, very short hocks with thick fleshy feet that work as shock absorbers. Going away from you, he should push back showing his pads.

This breed has made great strides in soundness in the past few decades. He has become a strong dynamic sporting dog, instead of the lumbering Clumber of yesteryear. They are more powerful and stronger today than ever. As breeders we are proud of these structural improvements.



His tail is thick at the root and can be either docked or natural. Neither is preferred. They are alwayswhite with either lemon or orange markings.

I often use a bulldozer or Milkmaids as a metaphor for the breed. The females are always slightly less dog throughout than their male counterparts and many times are overlooked. The mass of a male can outshine the superior qualities of a great Clumber bitch. Sadly, we struggle to have top winning bitches even when their qualities are superior. The girls will carry less bone, head and coat than males, but should never be fine in bone or lacking in substance.

Clumber Spaniels are unique to the Spaniel family. Their differences are what attracted me to them originally. It is my hope that when you have the opportunity to judge a major entry, you will come to appreciate the unique traits that define him as the country gentleman.

