

Clumber Spaniel

Judging the Clumber Spaniel

By Dennis Fitzpatrick

Drawings by Eileen Weston, courtesy of Connie Holt-Grenier

I want to thank Showsite Magazine for inviting me to participate in their feature on the Clumber Spaniel. I began my interest in dog shows back when I was 13 and showing my mother's West Highland White Terriers but really got hooked when high school classmates Pam, Toni Woods and I went to San Gabriel Kennel Club show in hopes of finding a Samoyed breeder I could purchase a puppy from and begin showing my own purebred dog. Over the years, I've enjoyed the sport of purebred dogs a great deal and have bred and/or owned over 100 champions in four breeds. In 1996 I was approved to judge by AKC and was honored by the membership of the Clumber Spaniel Club of America to be the first American breeder-judge to ever judge at a Clumber Spaniel National Specialty in 2002.

A few points of interest that I keep in mind before I start into the approach I take in evaluating my entries of Clumber Spaniels, as there has been a lot of debate and/or discussion into type and what makes it up. I have attended a number of seminars by some fabulous and knowledgeable judges over the past 15 years and I have learned a great deal. However, one thing that has always bothered me and I see it a lot today in the ring is the notion of selecting all the "typey exhibits" and then selecting the "best" movers from that group. This notion that movement is excluded from type is incorrect in my opinion. Movement where form follows function is an essential to type and should be weighted accordingly when moving the 'typey' exhibits to the front to of the line! Otherwise one is judging the statue of a breed and not the live animal and whether it conforms to its function and where function is an essential part of the type.

Secondly, the notion that correct bites and why they are important. I have heard a lot of judges talk about bites and suggest that a Clumber Spaniel with a bad mouth would not be able to carry a bird. That

seems odd to me as an appropriate and/or a viable response to an exhibitor when commenting on their animals' lack of correct bite. Let's think about it a bit, a Boxer, Bulldog and Bullmastiff and probably most dogs can 'carry' a bird in their mouths and having correct dentition is not a factor. Why bites are important is the manner in which the game item is retrieved and delivered to the hunter. Birds are especially fragile animals and bruising the meat on the retrieve with an animal with a hard mouth (generally an issue with poor dentition) further damages the meat and causes it to foul more quickly making it unsuitable for consumption. So correct dentition is very important and should always be one of the primary considerations in judging any flushing spaniel when their primary function is to retrieve game that is suitable for eating.



For me I like to bring in my Clumbers into the ring and have them stand naturally so I can get a natural first impression of their overall appearance. Do I see the basic characteristics that one should expect? Are they rectangular in shape, are they primarily white, are they substantial in conformation? (For me this means; do they have significantly more bone, size, depth of body and girth than the rest of

the land spaniel family? There should not be an attempt, in my opinion, to make them into white St Bernards and/or where more is better). After all these are hunting dogs who should be able to hunt for a full day without getting tired. The last general characteristic is 'low' and I often think that this is interpreted as meaning 'smaller' is better and I think that is a horrible mistake. Low to me means that their bodies are lower to the ground than the other land spaniels and not a measure of 'size'. I am seeing far too many Clumber spaniels that are clearly smaller and slighter in weight than the current breed standard calls for.

When judging I like to see my Clumbers moved on a loose lead and at the correct speed, the first thing I do is examine each class on an individual go around so they can relax and get ready for the hands on examination.

When I first go over my exhibits I want to see that they fit into the standard for both 'size and weight' and carry sufficient bone to clearly distinguish them as the heaviest boned of the spaniel family. One thing I see too often is a smaller less quality exhibit winning simply because it's smaller. Judge's need to remember that a 20" and 85 pound Clumber dog is as ideal as an 18" and 70 pound Clumber dog and the same applies to the bitch classes as well.

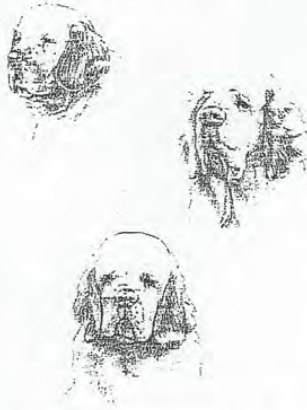
Next I examine the head and there is a lot of variety here and most of them are acceptable. I want to see a clear eye with proper shape and size. The head should have a marked stop and broad back skull with square moderately wide muzzle and large nose. As a proud member of the spaniel family ears are attached at eye level and carried low (set) and of sufficient length to reach the nose as this facilitates concentrating scent around the large nose.

I like to see my Clumbers with sufficient length of neck to reach to the ground easily so they can retrieve game with ease. The body is important to me as its depth

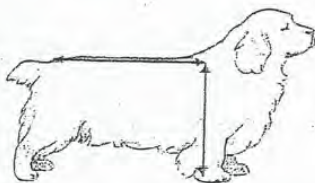
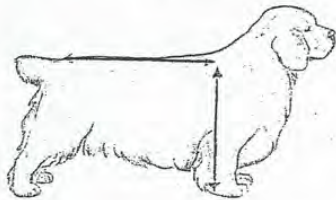
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and spring of rib are essential in giving the Clumber Spaniel the 'low' to the ground and robust appearance that distinguishes it from the rest of the land spaniels with the exception of the Sussex Spaniel. I see far too many leggy Clumbers that lack sufficient forechest and depth of body. These are not Clumbers that are too tall just they are lacking the mass and substantive qualities that are characteristic of the Clumber Spaniel. The back (from withers to start of loin) is sufficiently long to give the characteristic rectangular body shape and it is



firm and level. The topline over the loin is slightly arched which is not as pronounced as to give the Clumber Spaniel the 'running downhill appearance'. In most cases, one feels this rise with the hands but it also can be seen on the go around with the back holding firm and level and the rise

over the loin to set of tail.

The front and rear assemblies should be well balanced with sufficient matching angles. Like most purebred dogs a zero and/or insufficiently angled animal is faulty and undesirable. It is my opinion balanced angles front to rear is more important than having the correct angle measurement in the front assembly and an unbalanced incorrect one in the rear. There should be little or no space between the elbows and the body and the depth of body should reach clearly below the elbows. Additionally, I like to see good, round and well arched toes on the front feet and the same for the rear feet but they can be a little less round and slightly smaller than the front feet.

The Clumber coat is dense with a good weather resistant quality. It is straight, flat and soft to the touch. Feathering is moderate and over-grooming or sculpting the coat is highly undesirable and there should be no evidence of shaving about the neck or throat. Feet both front and rear can be tidied a bit to show a clear outline of the feet and some tidying of the tail is also acceptable. One thing I'm seeing a lot of is Clumbers who are being over-groomed and have a sculpted appearance like one sees in English Cockers and English Springers which I find highly undesirable as it takes away from the natural outline of the dog.

The Clumber Spaniel is a white breed with as few body markings as possible. It is common to see color both lemon and orange about the head and ears. One also will see a tail spot and some freckles on the feet and legs which are acceptable. However, for me excessive body ticking or body patching is undesirable and should not be rewarded. But color issues really do not often come into play unless I am confronted with two equivalent Clumbers one being more colored than the other. In that situation, I would place the least colored first.

The proper gait is essential for the Clumber to work freely and comfortably for a whole day of hunting. I like to see good stride length from the side without any crossing over underneath or high step-



ping in the front. From the rear the hocks come straight back at you without any appearance of cowhocks or a loose twisting action. The front legs should be straight without any evidence of twisting or weakness in the pasterns. The motion is clean and with good reach and as speed increases the feet tend to converge 'toward' the centerline. Clumbers should never single track or crossover in the front when coming at you. In my opinion the characteristic 'Clumber Roll' is the result of the excess skin and the proper slower gait which facilitates the excess skin to roll from side to side. One thing I see too much of when judging Clumbers are handlers who think that Clumbers should be moved at high speeds that are not characteristic for the breed. The Clumber is a gentleman's hunting dog and should be moved accordingly. It isn't a horse race where the first one across the line is the winner.

So in closing then the four key aspects to keep in mind when judging a Clumber Spaniel are, it should be long and clearly have a rectangular silhouette, it should be significantly more substantial than other members of the land spaniel family, it should be primarily white with as few as possible markings on the body and low to the ground as its depth of body would indicate.

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