

**Sporting Group
Brittanys
By Dorothy Macdonald
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A NATURAL DOG

As he was in the past, as he is in the present, and as we will keep him into the future, the Brittany is above all a natural dog. He is a basic hunting dog. He is a basic house dog and companion. He therefore should also be a basic show dog.

In the past. The Brittany was developed by the peasants of Bretagne as an all-purpose hunting dog to help put food on the table. All sorts of crosses were made, but always his sole purpose for existence was that he was “good at his job.” Finally the Brittany’s looks became more standardized, and he achieved recognition as a definite breed. Writing in 1906, French Major Gran-Chavin states that he can understand the locals’ infatuation with the breed, as “their endurance and rusticity were often revealed to me during the course of the long hunting days in a country very much intercepted with rivers and canals and often very woody.”

In the present. Today the Brittany is still the same hunting dog in the same wash-and-wear attire. He can and does compete with any and all pointing breeds. He ranges well ahead of the horses, has style on his points, and is unbeatable for nose. Above and beyond all else, he is still the companion hunting dog of old — finding, pointing, and retrieving game for his owner.

So, too, in the show ring, the Brittany can compete and win groups and Bests in Show against all comers, which he does best not by aping the looks of other breeds, but just by being himself in his everyday attire.

The Brittany standard was very carefully crafted to prohibit over-coating, over-trimming, over-anything. Moderation is the all important aspect of the breed. Sad today, I find I am seeing too many dogs with a sculptured outline and even, on occasion, a coat that has been fluffed by blow-drying. A Brittany must have a bath, must have his feet and nails trimmed, and may even require thinning on the underside of his neck, but not shaving. I have even seen a topcoat that had been shaved!

One of the biggest causes of a split in a breed — that is, a show dog and a field dog, and never the twain shall meet — is excessive and incorrect coat. An excessive amount of feathering, artificially maintained, has been the death knell for many dogs’ natural desire to run and hunt, for they are restrained for fear of pulling out that all important coat. Go back in history (not so very far, either), and none of the sporting breeds carried the feathering of today — and, of course, did not have access to the iniquitous blow-dryer. Coats lay flatter and were of better texture, and there was far less quantity of coat.

In the future. How about we all make a promise to breed, raise, and compete with our Brittanys — in show and field — as the rugged individuals that the have always been: basic hunting dog, basic show dog, and the real test of companions? Remember, the Brittany has always existed because he is “good at his job.”