

Brittany, The Dual Dog!

By: Diana Kubitz, American Brittany Club JEC

When you look at a Brittany, what do you see? Different people see different things. Some notice how athletic they look going around the show ring. Others might see a bird dog who avidly seeks game and points it. One person might see a family dog that is wonderful with children and other pets. To some they see a versatile breed that is eager and willing to do all of the above and whatever their owner can imagine for them: Dock diving, agility, rally, barn hunts, therapy dogs... the list endless!

What do the Judges Education Committee see when they see a Brittany? All of the above and so much more! We see a breed whose parent club's mission statement says it will be "**forever a dual dog.**" What does that mean exactly? It means that we are a dedicated group of like-minded individuals that breed, compete and love the Brittany, and yet there is more...

A **dual champion** is an individual that has completed the required elements to earn a show title and the required elements in field trials to earn a field title, hence the AKC designation of DC. Now it starts getting harder. In the show, you don't compete against champions until you are a champion. In the field, you compete against everyone, all the titles of the alphabet: FC, AFC, NFC, NAC, NGDFC and NAGDC. So, Susie who is a two-year-old bitch running in an Open Gun Dog Stake can be competing with national champions. Competition gets really tough! You finally get those last 3 points and you have a field champion, who was already a show champion! Now you do your happy dance because your dog is a **DUAL CHAMPION!**

The number of Brittany Dual Champions has increased steadily throughout the years and we now have 647 at last count taken from the ABC webpage on Duals. 647 and as I type this the number is probably increasing. We have more Dual Champions than all the other sporting breeds combined. WHY? What makes them so special?

The first thing that comes to mind is the way our standard is written and how it was written. It was written with the sole purpose of having dual dogs. Every item in our standard has been written so that the dog can run athletically in the field, have tight eyelids so as not to catch weed seeds, a scissors bite so that they might better pick up a bird for a retrieve. Every word, every sentence about this breed is written so that it can run in the field for 30 minutes or 60 minutes in a trial, all day as a hunting companion and remember hunt tests are a fairly modern event compared to field trials and shows.

Those like-minded individuals that I spoke of earlier have devoted their careers to breeding a Brittany that is more athletic, while staying true to the standard. While basic conformation has changed slightly with informed breeding practices, those changes only made the different colors of the Brittany begin to look like one breed. When I started in the breed some 50+ years ago, the orange and white, the liver and white and the roan, looked like 3 distinctly different breeds. Over the years, we have skillfully blended the three and now they have the same structure. What didn't change was their drive and desire for birds, nor their intensity on point.

Judges, when you see a Brittany running around your ring, please note that it's topline should not have changed much from when you looked at it at first glance when standing. This helps you to know the dog is sound and could run and hunt game. Movement is not the only thing that shows you an individual is a good Brittany, but it is the most important thing. This is not a breed to be judged standing, it's a breed to be judged moving. It is a *dual dog*. It can be lovely, but pretty is only important if that dog can point a bird and run all day. That means that the structure as the standard calls for will insure that it can do just that and anything less than that is not acceptable. Muscle is a part of conformation, as important, perhaps more so in this breed, as a good bite or length of loin. While I've mentioned bite, a Brittany is to have a scissors bite, a true scissors bite. You don't need to check for missing teeth. NO WHERE in our standard does it say anything about the bite, other than being scissors. I get calls after show weekends all the time, "the judge counted my dog's teeth!" The judge said my dog's "teeth were too small!" When in doubt check the AKC "cheat sheet" (AKC Oral Exam) about examining the bite.

The Brittany should be the same height from the withers to the ground as they are from the forechest to the rear. The question we get asked most is “how can it be leggy if it’s equal?” That is a good question, but it can because the length of the body is in the ribcage with only 3 – 4 fingers width in the loin. It is the same distance from the withers to the elbow as it is from the elbow to the ground. The standard says: “Proportion--So leggy is he that his height at the shoulders is the same as the length of his body.” I tell judges it’s the “appearance of being leggy.”

What I really want to know is the dog in standard? DQ’s in size are under 17 ½ and over 20 ½ inches at the withers, same standard for dogs and bitches. A six-month-old puppy **must** meet the criteria of being at least 17 ½ “tall. A finished champion should be no taller than 20 ½”. Our only other DQ is black in the nose or coat, if the nose is black, the dog is black. If the nose is brown, the dog is liver. Simple, but we’ve had some problems with that over the years so I thought it worth mentioning.

How does temperament figure into a dual dog? Our Brittany should be even tempered dogs; “A happy, alert dog, neither mean nor shy.” In the field if one dog jumps another and a fight ensues, one or both of the dogs are thrown out of that day’s competition (or are supposed to be). if you see a Brittany in the ring demonstrating aggressive behavior or shyness, please do not reward it as it doesn’t possess the temperament we as Brittany devotees are looking for.

I didn’t talk about the ease of judging a Brittany if you use the 3M’s: MOVEMENT, MEDIUM and MODERATE. **Movement** being the most important as I’ve already discussed. While side gate is most important, you can’t entirely negate the down and back. If you’ve got a dog side winding, crabbing or “knitting and pearling” as we used to call it, it’s not moving correctly. I have given you some excerpts from our standard to demonstrate the medium and moderate. “A compact, closely knit dog of **medium size**”; **Moderate**: “Not too light in bone, yet never heavy-boned and cumbersome”; “Skull: **Medium** length, rounded, very slightly wedge-shaped, but evenly made.”; “Muzzle: **Medium** length”. Seems simple, but it works! MOVEMENT, MEDIUM, MODERATE!

So how do I know so much about Brittany and the Dual? Well, I owned #273 NAC/DC/AFC Renegade’s Kansas Kid – ABC Hall of Fame! He contributed to my being the JEC for the American Brittany Club because I won the 1992 National Amateur All Age with him myself! I finished his show title and his AFC! Once you’ve had a dual, you are always looking for that next! I learned a lot from that dog and the people I encountered on the journey. Jodi Engel chose me for the JEC position when she knew her health was failing because she said I “got it!” I had the experience of competing on all levels in the field and in the ring and the importance of the DUAL Brittany has always been clear to me.

If you haven’t taken a Brittany seminar lately or breeders seminar, please join us to see the changes in our presentation. We’d love your opinion as we constantly strive for new ways to explain the breed we love! I have a committee of devoted individuals who are long time breeder/exhibitors and each has an individual talent to add to our skill set. I take full advantage of this carefully picked team that is devoted as I am to keeping the Brittany “**forever a dual dog!**”