

JUDGING THE BRITTANY - DOROTHY MACDONALD

The single most important feature to look for in judging Brittans is Athleticism. Yesterday, today and tomorrow the Brittany's sole desire is to be your companion afield. Every structural feature, every cosmetic finishing touch, every temperament characteristic, all should be judged with this in mind.

Historically the Brittany can be found pictured in paintings and tapestries of the 16th and 17th centuries. Officially recognized in France in 1907, the breed came to America in the 1930s. Popular in the field almost at once, the Brittany was slower to gain recognition in the show ring. This was not necessarily a bad thing for the breed; the Dual dog (Field and Show) will always be of prime importance to the American Brittany Club and it's more than 3,500 members.

Happy and alert the Brittany is a friendly dog, but can be reserved. Most Brittans find showing a bore and would rather be somewhere else. They do not enjoy being posed, so by all means see your line of Brittans free standing if possible.

Athleticism - what is it? What structural features are needed to attain it? Well, as it pertains to the Brittany, it means an ability to be very agile, tireless, energetic and reasonably fast. These features become very important when judging the Brittany. (Please, this does not mean running them around the ring at the hysterical speed that is currently in vogue.)

- It does mean - good reach and drive and above all balance.
- It does mean - correct head carriage (a head held up or pulled, back over the shoulders would seriously inhibit a hunting dog's ability to cover rough ground.)
- It does mean - a strong neck, a slightly sloping topline and a tail that is a continuation of the same, (not upright like a brake).
- It does mean - strong powerful ends - a front end that shows good shoulder layback and good length of upper arm with elbows set under the point of the shoulders - and a rear end that has powerful thighs and

well bent stifles. Incidentally, the final assessment of the Brittany's angulation should always be made from the side with the dog in motion.

- It does also mean - these strong, powerful ends need to be connected by a short, straight back and a short loin. A weak mid-section with a short rib-cage or a long, weak loin or both creates a Brittany best described as "two ends in search of a middle".

With all of this angulation, the Brittany is still a square, leggy dog. His height equals his length (height at shoulder equal to length from point of forechest to the rear of the rump). His elbow is the halfway point between the shoulder and the ground. Note however, a Brittany that is square because he is straight in shoulder and/or stifle is not acceptable, within the square must be good angulation, good depth and length of rib-cage and a short loin. For his height, the Brittany weighs less than any other Sporting Breed. He should be lightly built with blade bone, never overboned or overbodied, he still needs enough substance to handle the largest of upland game.

Never forget the legs and feet of a bird dog. While lightly built the Brittany's bone is strong and his muscle development excellent. A slight slope of pastern is important for cushioning over rough ground. The foot is smaller than that of a spaniel, but close fitting, with thick pads. Ideally the foot is half cat foot for cushioning and half hare foot for gripping.

Well, now we have a great body so let's see about the head. While all features of a Brittany head are designed to aid and protect him in the field, they must also combine to create the look of a Brittany. An alert, eager expression that still keeps the soft look of a bird-dog. The Brittany head is moderate in size, medium length with a slightly wedge shaped skull and a gradual taper to the muzzle. No extremes, no exaggerations. The Brittany's ears are very breed specific. They are set high above the level of the eye, and are short, triangular and lie flat and close to

the head. The eyes are well set in the head and protected by heavy, expressive brows (prominent, full or popeyes should be heavily faulted). While darker, amber eyes are preferred, lighter ones should not be penalized and remember Brittany eyes darken with age even as late as three or four years old. The nostrils must be well open to permit deep breathing and adequate scenting. The lips are tight and dry so feathers will not stick.

Now that we have a whole dog put together let's see him in motion. Coming and going movement shows soundness; important but not particularly breed specific so far less important than side movement. Side movement shows the epitome of type - the sum of all the parts. In the case of the Brittany, correct side movement means a head .carried up and forward - a topline strong and steady with a balancing tail - front legs moving freely with good reach and no pounding - rear legs driving well under the dog and extending freely behind. Eager and energetic the Brittany should cover ground with lightness and power.

So having structure and temperament, let's now look at the finishing touches. A Brittany's coat is important for protection. It must be sufficient to protect him from scratches but never wooly of cottony in texture. The American Brittany Club was not kidding when they wrote in the standard regarding feathering "too little is definitely preferable to too much" and again "long or profuse feathering or furnishings shall be so severely penalized as to effectively eliminate from competition". Color (any allowed in the standard) is not of major importance, but is breed distinctive. Note: Roan while less dramatic than the clear white is equally acceptable. Black is a disqualification. Don't be fooled by a dark liver, if in doubt, check the nose; if the nose is liver the dog is liver. You cannot get a liver nose on a black Brittany. Remember when judging any dog with parti-colored or piebald patterns, great care must be taken that the eye is not deceived by markings. Hands may need to be used to check and if necessary see the dog from the other side standing or moving.

So judge the Brittany on type - that is the look and essence of the breed. Then remember that

the ideal Brittany needs to be sound in order to help him work in the field.

Everything that I have written is a supplement to the standard. By itself it does not cover the whole Brittany; but as an adjunct to your knowledge of the standard it may prove helpful in evaluating the whole Brittany.

Footnote: The Brittany is a measurable breed; so be prepared, when necessary to measure. Measuring a Brittany (or any dog) is serious and must be done with full concentration and knowledge. You should be wanting to measure a dog in, not trying to measure a dog out. Remember a dog's career and even a breeder's breeding program can be at stake. Not giving a dog a ribbon is one thing, disqualifying it is something else. Do it when justified, but be careful and do it right.

Set the wicket and check it with a tape measure, then show it to the exhibitor. The dog must be standing on a flat surface that is big enough so he does not feel perched or insecure. (A small collapsed grooming table is not acceptable.) Make sure that the handler understands that the dog should be in a natural position not a show pose. Head held above the back level but not pulled up and back over the shoulders. Find the top of the shoulder blades with the left hand and place the wicket with the right. If you come from a non-measurable take lessons and practice at home. Brittany people will thank you.

