



Judging The Brittany

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In an early article in *The American Brittany*, Vol 6, No. 11, June 1955, Dr. Allen Truex, M.D. stated:

“Whenever Brittany people gather, the discussion invariably includes “dual purpose dogs.” The dictionary states that dual is, an adjective meaning, “composed or consisting of two parts; twofold.” Then the dual purpose dog is one that is proficient at two different things. We are now the proud owners of the greatest “dual champion” of all times—she can eat more and sleep more than anything on four legs! However, this is not the twofold purpose we usually desire. Rather it is that the dog has the ability to perform well and also looks good. The dog’s general appearance should appeal to the owner’s eye for canine beauty. Not many of us would desire a sway back, bowlegged dog. Neither would the hunter knowingly purchase a blinking, trailing or gun shy dog. So the dual dog we desire is one that looks good, or has the proper conformation, and can also do a creditable job in any type of field work for which we wish to train him.”

Today the discussion has not changed and when Brittany folks gather the question is still asked; “How do we keep our breed dual?” We have more dual champions than any other breed and we would like it to stay that way.

In September of 2007 I submitted my yearly report to the American Brittany Club’s Board of Directors. In it I recommended that we tell AKC that we want judges to take our Brittany seminar at least every five years. It passed unanimously.

You might ask the reason for the recommendation and it is quite simple. Today, tomorrow and forever, The American Brittany Club wants the Brittany to be a “Dual Dog.” Part of that is in the hands of the breeders who must adhere to the standard when breeding. After that it’s in the hands of the judges, show and field.

In the field the dogs are asked to find birds, point them with style and as adult dogs to be “steady to wing and shot.” So part of that process is in the handler’s hands and is dependent on the quality of his training. The other portion is up to the dog. If they point the bird and all is in order, the judges must then decide which of the dogs run that day should place.

Similarly in the show ring, the handler trains the dog and it’s up to the dog to perform on a given day. In this article I will be discussing the standard and the show judge’s responsibility in helping us keep our breed dual.

Our judge's education committee has come up with many new and innovative ways to explain what the Brittany is asked to do in the field and we would like to share this information with judges. Some of you may have received a CD in the mail asking you to watch it and give us your opinion. Hopefully many of you will be taking a seminar in the near future and will be able to see the field portions we have added to our presentation. Understanding what our dogs are asked to do in the field should make understanding the function of the dog as it applies in the ring easier.

When judging a Brittany you must never forget the "function" of the dog. It must move quickly over all types of terrain, through all types of cover in an efficient "ground covering" manner, seeking game. Every part of the Brittany standard is written with this in mind. The open nostrils to smell the game, the eyes well set to prevent eye injury in heavy cover, etc.

Too often, we see judges choosing a dog with a pretty coat over a dog with better structure and sound movement. Judges need to look past the coat color and coat condition, and look at the structure and soundness of the dog underneath. A coat can be trimmed to enhance the outline of a dog; therefore, you need to feel the dog to ensure that there is sufficient substance under the coat. Some judges see coat color, coat condition and head as "type and completely miss the dog's overall soundness and utility as opposed to simply considering how attractive the dog looks standing.

Our mantra about coat is "too little is preferable to too much." We repeat it often because we mean it. Profuse coat will never be seen in a dog that is worked in the field, because it would require hours of grooming to pick out burrs and other debris. On the flip side, a Brittany should not be over groomed with a scissored outline, back-brushed legs, or a coat full of product.

Brittanys may not always show enthusiasm at a show, finding birds and playing with the family is more fun, but they should NEVER be timid or mean. A bird dog, while it can be gentle, must be bold and sound in mind and body.

Shoulders should be sloping and set correctly. Today we see straight shoulders set too far forward. It makes for a pretty Topline, but it is not correct. Similarly we are seeing feet too flat. We've come up with new ways to make comparisons with good and bad examples in our newest presentation for judges.

Our standard emphasizes side movement and the ability of the dog to cover ground efficiently; it does not mean that the down and back movement can be discarded. We are concerned because we see far too many hackney gaits or "flipping fronts" (caused by too short an upper arm), being put up over sounds dogs with proper movement. Our standard calls for "reach and drive." Reach is when the front foot moves well forward, not up. The upward motion is not efficient in the field and will even cause injury to the dog in some cases. At the very least the dog will not show the stamina a dog with correct movement will exhibit. We are looking for a well balanced dog that moves well. When you find that, you will find the "type" we look for in the Brittany world.

A friend and mentor of mine was a Standard Poodle breeder. Every time I visited her she would be "roading" her Poodles from her bicycle. One day I asked her why. She explained that conditioning was part of conformation and that no dog in the ring should be overweight or move with a rolling gait. She went further to say that since I owned a sporting dog, conditioning was even more important. Every time I see an over-weight Brittany whose sides roll as they move, I cringe. I know the handler didn't do their homework and their dog is not in proper condition to

show and could not perform the breed's function as it was meant to do. Judges please don't reward this lack of condition.

I would be remiss if I didn't make some mention of size. If you find a sound dog with good movement in your ring and you think it might be too small or too tall, please measure it. Our standard for males and females is the same - 17 ½" to 20 ½". Far too many judges decide a dog is too big and do not use it. Again, please measure.

Brittanys come in a variety of colors, orange and white, liver and white, orange roan, liver roan and tri-color. No black is acceptable in nose or coat. Tri colors are acceptable, but not preferable. A Tri must be a liver and white, which exhibit classic orange markings specifically described in the standard; no less and no more. If you find a mis-marked Tri, you need to make a reference in your judges book that it is mis-marked and please do not use it.

Again Dr. Truex says: "So the dual dog we desire is one that looks good, or has the proper conformation, and can also do a creditable job in any type of field work for which we wish to train him." They may be asked to do that for six hours, 30 minutes, or anything in between.

I have only touched on a few examples of things we have tried to clarify in our new judge's education presentation. We look forward to meeting you and getting your opinions on what we have done. A judge's education program is always a work in progress for any breed, but technology has enabled us to do things not possible before. We look forward to many more improvements in the future, hence the "every five years" request. We'll try to make that as easy as possible for judges. Whenever we are asked to present at a judge's institute or do a presentation anywhere, we answer a resounding YES!

If you need information on finding a Brittany seminar, workshop or mentor, or would like a Brittany presentation done for your group, please contact me at (269) 962-2363 or renegade@voyager.net. Thank you for doing your part in keeping the Brittany "forever a dual dog."

