

FIELD WORKING QUALITIES OF THE AMERICAN WATER SPANIEL

The American Water Spaniel Club, Inc. has developed and approved the following description of the breed's hunting characteristics. This description is provided to AKC judges and clubs to identify and assist in preserving the breed's most common and desirable field characteristics. Because training and field experience can affect the degree to which an individual dog exhibits these characteristics the description is only an overview of the average American Water Spaniel.

The AWS is a methodical hunter equipped with an excellent nose and strong drive. It does not work the field with the speed and flash of a field bred English Springer Spaniel (ESS) but neither does it work slowly and casually like the Clumber or Sussex. Typically the AWS will work a field at a steady and deliberate pace moving side to side in a sweeping fashion. Windshield wiper patterns are not the norm for the AWS even when trained to develop such. Rather than waste its time in unproductive areas of the field, the AWS, especially if they are truly hunted, may tend to seek out cover that will hold birds. If properly trained to respond to whistle, they may be guided to hunt the unproductive areas.

It is not too unusual to find AWS that are hard flushing dogs but they are not the norm. Just before putting a bird to flight the dog will often hesitate and try to locate the bird through the use of its nose or by sight. The AKC Spaniel Hunt Test Regulations state, "Section 5. The Flushing Spaniel should be rated highest for a bold flush. However, a soft flush or momentary stopping is acceptable if the dog, within a very brief period, forces the bird into flight." This description of a soft flush found in these regulations is precisely how many of the AWS put a bird up before the gun.

The AWS, especially one that is trained well, will generally work within gun range. Being a spaniel that is probably more often used as a truly versatile dog (i.e. used for waterfowl and for upland) by its owners, it may occasionally work closer to its handler than will other spaniels seen at AKC hunt tests. The average AWS is not likely to have the broad sweeping pattern of an ESS but neither should it be too close underfoot like a Sussex.

The AWS is truly an all-purpose dog and most that are trained are probably cross trained (flushing and non-slip retrieving) to one extent or the other. Therefore, it should not be unusual to see an AWS that handles the hunt dead more like a true blind. Some, if not most, AWS running in tests will likely be handled more on the hunt dead than other spaniel breeds. This is likely due to the fact that the haphazard way in which many of the spaniels run the hunt dead does not really fit the nature and historic perspective of the AWS.

To summarize: The American Water Spaniel is a methodical hunting dog that covers the field at a steady and deliberate pace utilizing a sweeping pattern. The breed normally employs a soft flush and often hesitates just prior to putting the bird to flight. The American Water Spaniel should demonstrate excellent use of its nose and persistence to work a scent trail. When it comes to retrieving from water, the breed should show willingness to enter the water with entries varying from cautious and deliberate to powerful and bold.