

American Cocker Spaniel



Origin: United States, England

Date of origin: 1700

Today's Function: spaniel field trials

Other Name: American cocker spaniel

Original Function: bird flushing and retrieving

Family: gundog, spaniel

Size: Medium size

Life expectancy: 12 to 15 years

Height: Female 13.5 to 14.5 inches / Male 14.5 to 15.5 inches

Weight: Female / Male 15-30 pounds

Group: AKC Sporting Group

Introduction



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American Cocker Spaniels, sometimes simply called "Cockers," are the smallest of the Spaniel breeds. Their name is derived from the "woodcock" bird, which they historically were (and still are) especially proficient at hunting. These are lively, cheerful, intelligent dogs that excel as family companions and weekend bird-hunting partners. They also excel in the conformation show ring. Well-bred and well-cared-for, Cockers have glorious coats, dreamy dark eyes and wonderful dispositions. American Cocker Spaniels have been among the most popular of all purebred dogs in the United States for many decades. Unfortunately, their immense popularity at times has caused the Cocker Spaniel to suffer from overbreeding by unscrupulous people who focused on making money rather than promoting healthy, sound, well-tempered dogs. Reputable fanciers of this lovely breed have taken conscientious steps to stabilize the disposition and health of their dogs, in addition to maintaining their glamorous coats and promoting their instinctive hunting talents. The American Cocker Spaniel was recognized as a member of the AKC's Sporting Group in 1878.

History



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Spaniels, earlier referred to as "Spanyells," have been around for centuries. This is a large and diverse group of dogs, dating back to the 14th century or perhaps even earlier. Spaniels of all types historically have been bred to hunt, either on land or on water, or sometimes on both. The American Cocker Spaniel is the smallest of the recognized Spaniel breeds and also is the smallest member of the American Kennel Club's Sporting Group.

American Cockers, and English Cockers, were bred specifically to flush and retrieve game birds. In fact, their name probably comes from the "woodcock," which is a bird that they apparently are especially proficient at hunting. During the 1800s, English Cocker Spaniels were imported to the United States and Canada in quite some numbers by bird-hunting enthusiasts, who valued their exceptional skills at flushing and retrieving woodcock, pheasant and grouse. English Cockers were

accepted for show competition in England in 1883, and were given breed status in England's Kennel Club Stud Books in 1892. In the early to mid-1900s, the American Cockers began to diverge from their English counterparts. American breeders interested in showing Cocker Spaniels competitively in the conformation ring began breeding them down in size, which also made them especially suitable as family pets. The Cocker Spaniel soon became the most popular purebred dog in America.

Hunting enthusiasts resisted the trend towards breeding petite Cockers. In 1935, they formed a separate breed club for the traditional English Cocker Spaniels, called the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America, which remains today as the parent club for that breed in the United States. The AKC formally recognized the English Cocker Spaniel as a breed distinct from the American Cocker Spaniel in 1946.

The enormous popularity of the American Cocker Spaniel had its benefits for the breed but also brought some unwelcome consequences. Commercial puppy mills and other unscrupulous "breeders" began breeding Cockers indiscriminately, without attention to the health, temperament or well-being of the parents or their puppies. Fortunately, responsible fanciers of the American Cocker Spaniel intervened and continued promoting high-quality examples of their beloved breed. Today's American Cockers by and large are the endearing, energetic, affectionate companions that made them among the most popular of all purebred dogs.

American Cocker Spaniel - Appearance & Grooming



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General Appearance

The American Cocker Spaniel is the smallest dog recognized by the American Kennel Club as a member of its Sporting Group. These are fairly small dogs that have glamorous, silky coats ranging from coal black to the lightest cream, and every color in between. The American Cocker Spaniel is closely related to the English Cocker Spaniel, but the two breeds diverged during the mid-1900s. Today, they are entirely separate breeds. The American Cocker Spaniel's head makes the breed immediately recognizable, with a rounded dome-like skull, a well-pronounced stop, an upturned

nose and squared-off lips. The American Cocker's drop ears are long and low set, with fantastic silky fringing. Its eyes are large, round and dark. The nose is black or brown, depending on the base coat color of the particular dog. This breed is known for its long silky fur and profuse feathering.

Size and Weight

Adult male American Cocker Spaniels should be 15 inches at the withers; adult females should be 14 inches measured at the same place. According to the AKC standard for this breed, height may vary one-half inch above or below these ideals. Male Cockers whose height exceeds 15½ inches, and females whose height exceeds 14½ inches, will be disqualified from show competition. Adult Cockers who are smaller than average will be penalized in the show ring, but will not be disqualified. American Cockers typically weigh between 15 and 30 pounds. As in most dog breeds, females tend to weigh slightly less than males.

Coat and Color

American Cocker Spaniels come in a number of colors and several different coat types. They uniformly have double coats, with a medium-length, silky outercoat and a moderate undercoat that provides protection when they are "out on the hunt." The outercoat can be either flat or slightly wavy. They have profuse feathering on their ears, chest, belly and legs. Excessively heavy coat, or coats that are too curly or cottony in texture, are severely penalized.

This breed comes in a range of colors, which are separated into three main groups: 1) black/black and tan; 2) any solid color other than black (known as ASCOB); and 3) parti-color. The black variety should be jet-black, or jet-black with tan points on the head, feet and tail, without any shading of liver or brown. American Cockers in the ASCOB group can be any solid color (other than black) from light cream to dark red or chocolate, although some lighter coloring is allowed on the feathering under the AKC breed standard. A small white marking on the chest is acceptable in these first two color groups. Parti-colored dogs have coats of two or more solid, well-broken

colors, one of which must be white. They can be black and white, brown and white, red and white or roan and white. There are also merle-colored American Cocker Spaniels, although they are not recognized in the show ring by the American Kennel Club. The merle color is considered to be a genetic mutation in this breed that may predispose Cockers of this color to increased health problems.

Grooming

The American Cocker Spaniel has an abundant coat that requires regular attention. Most owners of companion Cockers eventually elect to take their pets to a professional groomer, so that their lovely locks are kept neat, tidy and tangle-free. The large, soulful eyes of this breed need to be cleaned regularly, as do their long, hairy ears, to prevent debris from accumulating and to ward off infection. Cocker Spaniels can develop nasty hair mats if they are not kept well-brushed, bathed and combed. These mats can be rather tricky to remove, without injuring the dog's delicate skin. A thorough grooming and trim every few months usually is enough to keep an American Cocker's coat in tip-top shape.

American Cocker Spaniel - Behavioral Traits



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Behavioral Traits

Because the blood of generations of hunting dogs courses through the veins of American Cocker Spaniels, they are particularly alert to the presence of birds and other small animals. As a result, owners should not let their Cocker off-leash, unless the dog is thoroughly trained in obedience and has a rock-solid recall, because he might become distracted and try to chase any nearby moving creature. Some Cocker Spaniels have a tendency to be a bit aggressive, or a bit shy. Generally, this is due to inadequate socialization at a young age. The most important period for correctly socializing this breed is when the dog is 2-5 months old. During this key time, the owner should expose the dog to lots of new people and new situations in a positive, non-threatening manner. Children must be taught to treat the dog gently and

affectionately, so that he learns to trust them. When a young American Cocker Spaniel is carefully introduced to new people, places and things, he usually learns to accept them readily and becomes a happy, trusting, gentle family companion.

American Cocker Spaniel - Temperament & Personality



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Temperament

Outgoing, sociable and almost uniformly happy, the American Cocker Spaniel is an extremely popular family pet. These are charming, sturdy little dogs that originally were bred to flush and retrieve birds on land. Many of them are still used for that purpose. However, their best role is that of a beloved family member. This sweet, easygoing breed loves children and usually gets along quite well with other dogs and even cats, provided that proper socialization takes place. Because American Cocker Spaniels tend to welcome friends, family and foe in the same fashion, they do not typically make good watchdogs. However, they are loyal, endearing companions that crave - and thrive on - human attention. They also are quite portable, given their modest size, which makes them great travel partners.

American Cocker Spaniel - Breed Maintenance



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The coat care of the cocker spaniel can be time consuming. If the dog is not going to be shown, the coat can be clipped short for easy care. In cases where the coat is not clipped, the dog must be brushed or combed three times a week in order to maintain a nice coat. Professional clipping and scissoring every two to three months is also suggested. If the coat is left long, debris can become tangled. Bathe as necessary. Be sure to pay special attention to the cleanliness of the ears and eyes. This breed is considered to be an average shedder. While it loves to romp and play, the American cocker can meet its exercise needs with a long daily walk on leash. Be sure to provide enough exercise for this lively dog, because it may have a tendency to become overweight. Apartment dwelling is fine for this breed as long as it gets enough exercise. It is quite active indoors, and a small yard is suggested.

American Cocker Spaniel - Activity & Exercises



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Activity Requirements

The American Cocker Spaniel is the smallest of the Sporting Breeds recognized by the American Kennel Club. Although they are not large dogs, they are energetic, active and playful. They thoroughly enjoy going on hikes, swimming and participating in other activities with their human family-members. This is a highly adaptable breed that can live quite comfortably in apartments or condominiums, as long as their owners give them enough exercise. A long, brisk daily walk is often enough for an older Cocker Spaniel. However, younger animals will need more activity, either in the form of walks, romps at the dog park, playing in the yard with other companion animals or playing fetch with their owners. American Cocker Spaniels are natural retrievers and usually are more than willing to chase a ball and

bring it back for as long as their owner cares to toss it. It is important for owners of this breed to keep their dogs active and engage. A Cocker that is left to his own devices is likely to become bored and eventually destructive, as he tries to find ways to entertain himself.

American Cocker Spaniel - Health



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Health Predispositions

The American Cocker Spaniel has an average life expectancy of between 12 and 15 years. Breed health concerns may include allergies, autoimmune hemolytic anemia, cancer, cherry eye, cataracts, ectropion, entropion, glaucoma, progressive retinal atrophy, corneal ulceration, keratoconjunctivitis sicca, ear infections, hemophilia, hepatitis, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, patellar luxation, chondrodysplasia, hypothyroidism, patent ductus arteriosus, pulmonic stenosis, endocarditis, dilated

cardiomyopathy, intervertebral disc disease, epilepsy and an assortment of dermatological (skin) disorders.

American Cocker Spaniel - Trainability



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Trainability

American Cocker Spaniels are intelligent dogs that love to please their people and are easy to train. As with almost any breed, it is important that Cockers are socialized correctly starting at an early age. These are extremely sensitive, affectionate animals that are best trained using positive reinforcement and gentle, patient repetition of commands. Short training sessions several times a day are better than a single prolonged session. Owners should concentrate on getting their Cocker to master one basic command, before moving on to another one.

Housebreaking can be difficult for this breed. Crate training usually makes potty training much easier. Flushing and retrieving birds come naturally to most American Cocker Spaniels, without the need for any advanced or specialized training. They also excel in competitive dog sports such as agility, obedience, rally, flyball, hunting tests, field trials and many others. Well-behaved Cocker Spaniels also make exceptional therapy dogs.