

## Meet the Breed: A Very Merry Spaniel

**The stylish English Cocker Spaniel became a distinct breed in 1946 and hasn't stopped wagging its tail since.**

*By Stephanie Horan*

The English Cocker Spaniel is famous for its friendly personality; soft, melting expression; and incessantly wagging tail, which justly earned the breed the nickname "the merry Cocker."

"If they are not merry, they are atypical," says Patricia Jantzen of Somerset, Ky., who has owned and loved this breed for more than 25 years. Affectionate and trainable, English Cockers almost vibrate with happiness. Whether hunting in the field or snuggling with the family, their tails rarely stop wagging.

### Splitting up spaniels

Spain is believed to be the origin of the hunting spaniels (written reference in English texts to the "spanyell" can be found as far back as the 14th century). The English developed and refined the flushing spaniels, which work through thick brush, zigzagging from side to side, scenting both air and ground, until a bird is flushed from its cover and shot by the hunter. The dog marks the fall of the bird, then retrieves it.

All spaniels were considered a single group until the 17th century, when different types were recognized for their hunting ability, size and color. The English Cocker was one of the small land spaniels, so-called to distinguish them from water spaniels, which would readily retrieve waterfowl from lakes and rivers. The English Cocker was developed to hunt woodcock (the breed's name is derived from "woodcocking spaniel"), grouse and pheasant. Although the English Cocker will enter water to retrieve a downed bird, it was developed as an upland hunter and not primarily for water retrieval.

The first stud book of The Kennel Club (England) divided the spaniels only by size. Dogs that weighed more than 25 pounds were called Field Spaniels and dogs that weighed less than 25 pounds were designated Cocker Spaniels. In 1885, the Spaniel Club formed, and new breed descriptions were written to divide the spaniels by type. The previous system created problems, such as a dog being classified as a Cocker based on weight, despite the fact that it more closely resembled a Springer Spaniel.

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