

## English Springer Spaniels

**Discover how life with an ESS is just one adventure after another.**

*By Susan McCullough*

In 2004, English Springer Spaniels ranked 28th in registrations of all 154 breeds recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC) — clear evidence that thousands of other people are enchanted by this medium-sized dog.

Since 1924, the breed has been the winner of the Sporting Dog Group at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York City 12 times. Moreover, Springers have won Best in Show (BIS) at Westminster five times—only the Scottish Terrier and Wirehaired Fox Terrier have won more often. Clearly, the breed's attributes and charms aren't lost on the fancy.

English Springer Spaniels were developed to spring (flush) birds from bushes and undergrowth for hunters to shoot. Today, the breed is unofficially separated into two varieties: one that's bred to hunt (the field variety) and one that's bred to show (the show or bench variety). These two varieties differ somewhat in both looks and temperament, and any prospective owner of an English Springer Spaniel would be wise to understand those differences. In general, field dogs are leaner, more intense and more active than show ESSs.

Julie Hogan, former president of the English Springer Spaniel Field Trial Association (ESSFTA) and a breeder from Manassas, Virginia, suggests that less active families who aren't able to provide more than moderate exercise should opt for the show variety. However, "for the active family who can provide a lot of exercise and a bigger yard, and will spend a lot of active time with the dog," Hogan suggests a field-bred dog.

Despite the differences in activity level between the two varieties, all well-bred English Springer Spaniels do share some personality traits. Anyone who wants to live with this breed, from presidents on down, should keep these traits in mind.

### Springers are Sociable

Of course, few English Springer Spaniels have the opportunity to attend, much less be photographed at, White House state dinners or presidential briefings. Nevertheless, all of these dogs, if well bred, are extremely sociable. Even if they could speak human language, none would pull a Greta Garbo maneuver and declare that they "want to be alone."

Nancy Johnson, ESSFTA vice president for show and obedience, understands this characteristic well. "If you don't want a dog to accompany you to the bathroom, then don't get a Springer," Johnson says. "You just can't shut them away from you or they'll be miserable—and consequently, they'll make you miserable, too!"

Moreover, just hanging with the family may not be enough to keep this canine extrovert happy, particularly if that family does a lot of home entertaining. In her book, Millie describes her ongoing efforts to crash White House events, some of which succeeded. However, an English Springer need not live in the Executive Mansion or similar abode to be happy, and it won't be offended if its owners' dinner parties fail to make the local newspaper's society pages. "Almost any kind of household will be okay for a Springer as long as the dog is included as a member of the family and joins in the activities," says Johnson, who lives in Kaufman, Texas.

### Springers are Fun-Loving

English Springer Spaniels are well known for their fun-loving, enthusiastic nature. In fact, Millie, the former White House pooch to former president George W.H. Bush, appears to exhibit this characteristic in several photographs that appear in her book, *Millie's Book* (William Morrow & Co., 1990).

In one particularly striking photo, President Bush is seated at his desk in the Oval Office and is busily examining papers. Meanwhile, Millie is reclining in front of the desk on the floor of this seat of power, holding a tennis ball in her mouth and looking askance at the camera. One gets the feeling that she wishes that the Prez (her term) would stop fiddling with those papers and take a minute to throw that tennis ball for her to retrieve. Clearly, the dignity and gravity of the American presidency carries no weight with her.

Another English Springer Spaniel, Ch. Salilyn 'N Erin's Shameless (Samantha) showed similar irreverence when she won

BIS at Westminster in 2000. As reported in The New York Times, Samantha interrupted her photo shoot by hopping into the champion's trophy bowl—then promptly hopping back out when she decided that she was a little too big to fit into the bowl comfortably.

Both of these dogs are true to their breed in their desire to find fun and pleasure on any occasion. “This breed is joyful, exuberant and goofy,” says Alvin Eng, a breeder from Rocklin, California, who is also a member of the ESSFTA board of governors. “If you don't like active silliness in a dog, don't get this breed.”

Susan Mone, a breeder from Grass Valley, California, agrees with Eng. When asked what she loves best about the breed, she says that “they're just happy, happy dogs and so entertaining! It's such a fun and versatile breed.”