

A STUDY OF THE EPAGNEUL BRETON STANDARD

by Kathleen Dillon

A Brittany is a Brittany, right? Well, not exactly. Though the Epagneul Breton (French Brittany) and the Brittany Spaniel (American Brittany) are cousins, they are different breeds with different standards and despite some similarities there are more conformation differences between the two types to take into consideration than just the different colorings.

It has been an on-going effort of this parent club to educate the public, judges and owners of the Epagneul Breton. As with any new breed it takes time and a number of dogs being seen in person in order to come to a better understanding. The written word cannot replace actual hands on, but a more in depth explanation on various points of the standard can be of assistance.

There is of course a reason for each item in a standard – for example this is a sporting breed and good feet are vital to the gait and endurance of a working gun dog in the field. Conformation standards are written not for what makes the breed look pretty, but for what is required for that particular breed to perform as it should in the field. This breed is first and foremost intended to be athletes and their conformation must reflect that of an athlete. A fine boned or whippet (too tucked up) specimen is not the athletic specimen that a Breton should be, nor is a heavy boned, ponderous specimen. The French Brittany (Epagneul Breton) is the smallest of the pointing dogs, and is an elegant, vigorous dog having substance without heaviness. They are lively, full of energy, with an intelligent expression and a gentleness of character. In addition to points in the standard that affect their performance, there are some points of the standard that are key to the “look” of an Epagneul Breton as well as to their function.



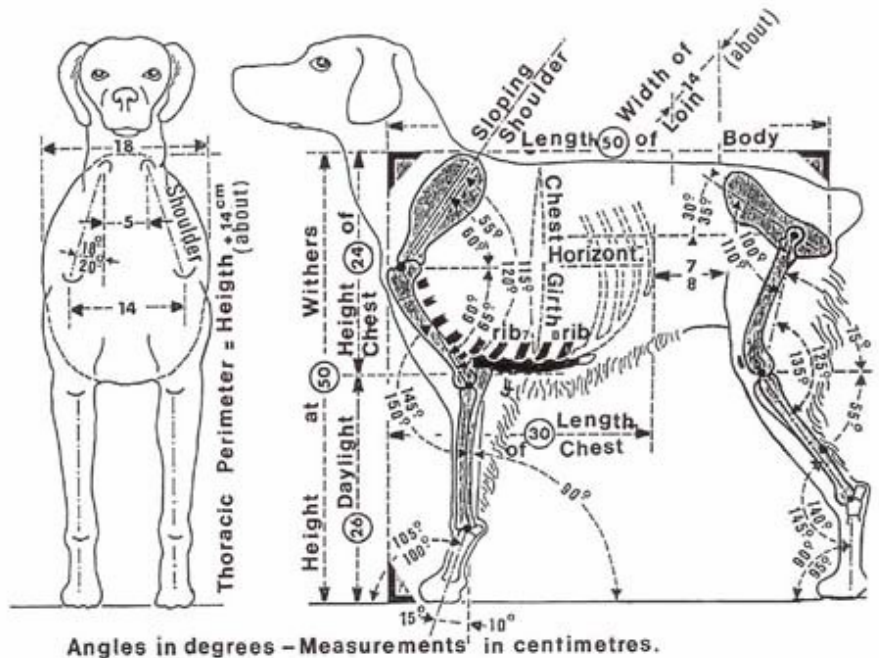
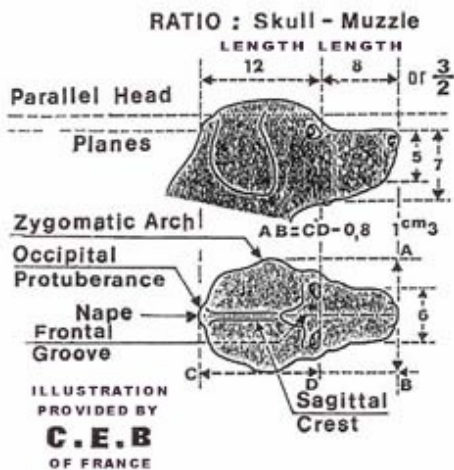
A properly built Epagneul Breton should present what is called a “cobby” look – compact, square and muscular. Perhaps some have heard the term “cobby” and not quite understood what it meant. The term refers to the length in conjunction with the height of the dog. The standard states that the length of the body should equal the height of the dog at the withers. Ideally the dog should fit into a square. The dog’s ribs should be well-sprung and let down to the elbow. This provides ample room for lung expansion during long and arduous searches in the field without tiring.

Hindquarters should be broad and well muscled. The upper thigh is broad and well let down and close to 31% of the height at the withers, with an angle to the horizontal between 70 and 75 degrees. The lower thigh is just slightly longer than the upper thigh with clean, defined muscling. Broad in the upper part, the lower thigh diminishes gradually in size towards its junction with the hock and at an angle to the horizontal between 65 and 70 degrees. When the dog is standing, the strong rear pasterns are nearly perpendicular to the ground and, viewed from the rear, parallel to one another. All of this is important because the rear is what propels the dogs across terrain with strength and stamina. Correct leg and hock length and angulations all affect the run.

The shoulder blade is long (30% of the height at the withers), close to the body and thickly muscled. It slopes backward at between 55 and 60 degrees from the horizontal. Tips of the shoulder blades are separated by two inches. Upper arm is very muscular and slightly longer than the shoulder blade. The angle between the shoulder blade and upper arm is between 115 and 120 degrees. The forearm is muscular and clean, slightly longer than the upper arm, and should be practically perpendicular to the ground when the dog is standing normally. Elbow is close to the body, neither in nor out. Pastern is strong, flexible and slightly sloping (about 15-20 degrees from the vertical). Feet are moderately oval, toes tight, pads firms, toenails short. The nose is large with wide and well-open nostrils for scenting, the coat must be functional for the field.

EPAGNEUL BRETON

WHOLE BODY AND PARTS



The Breton should be presented with its natural coat and with a minimum of grooming because the dog's coat must be functional in the field. The coat is fine but not silky, lying flat on the body or very slightly wavy, never curly. It's short on the head and the front of the limbs. The forelegs should be slightly fringed, with hindquarters well fringed to mid-thigh. Coat colors may be orange and white, liver and white, black and white, tri-color, or roan of any of these.

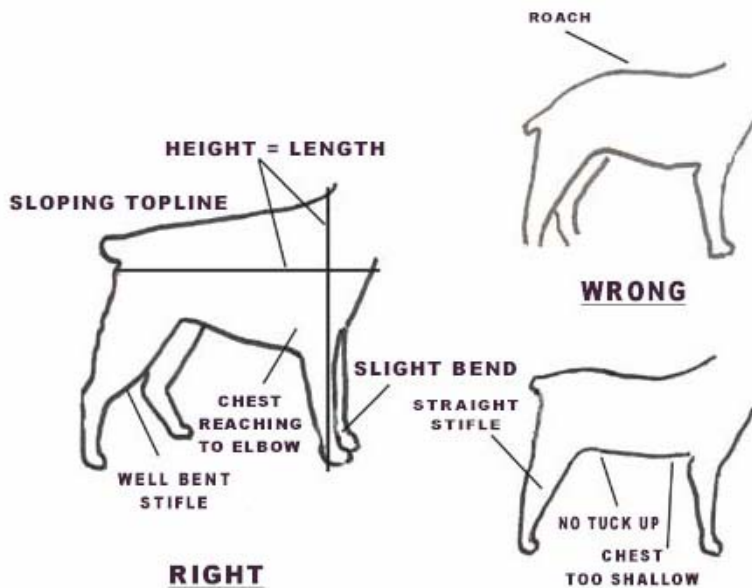
Their movement should be easy and lively, denoting the little cob full of energy. The preferred gait when hunting is the gallop: quick strides with relatively short extension. The Epagneul Breton does not have the extended reach such as that of the setter's movement.

The above all describe the build of an athlete. A Breton should not be slight in build and light of bone giving them a frail look, but neither should they be heavy boned and thick. A Breton too thick and heavy boned would not have the proper gait nor the endurance required for upland hunting, and dogs too slight or too small would not have the ability to retrieve the larger species of birds such as pheasants. Often these attributes go hand in hand with the height of the dog because those that measure under the standard are also quite often slight in bone and build and the opposite is often true with those that measure over.

Please note that the height of the Epagneul Breton is another important aspect when it comes to conformation. The standard for the Epagneul Breton states that size outside the limits of the standard is an Eliminating Fault and thus attention should be paid to this aspect. Height for males must be 18.5 inches minimum, 20.5 inches maximum with the ideal being 19 – 19.5 inches. Height for females must be 18 – 20 inches, with the ideal being 18.5 – 19 inches. Measurements should be taken from the ground to the withers (which is the ridge between the shoulder blades).

Example A (below) shows drawings explaining the dog's topline, measurements, etc. You will notice that the horizontal and vertical lines on the full body drawing indicate where measurements should be taken to measure the height (at the withers) and length of the dog. It also shows how the chest should appear: well let down to the elbow level. The topline is mostly level, never exaggerated or overly sloped, with only a slight rise from the croup to the withers presenting a firm, straight top line. Withers are not pronounced. The rump should slightly slope with hips just slightly lower than the withers. The chest should be broad with ribs well-sprung, let down to the elbows and be well developed toward the rear.

The top line SHOULD be only slightly sloped as shown in the example. An exaggerated slope is not what you want, but you also don't want what is referred to as "roach" backed or "saddle" backed. The top right drawing in Example A shows what is meant by "roach back". The lower right drawing in Example A shows an example of "saddle or sway back". The drawing on the right in Example A also shows other undesirable traits: notice the difference in the two examples of the chest. The one on the right is not let down far enough and is not tucked up at the back. (Note: there are times when dogs are too 'tucked up' which is also not desirable.) It also shows an example of a straight stifle versus the desired well-bent stifle. The tail should be held level or down and, unless bob-tailed be no longer than four inches often ending in a tuft or twist of hair. Many pups are born bob-tailed, meaning they were born with a naturally short tail or even no tail at all.



Example A

The correct head is an important aspect to the overall look of the Epagneul Breton, which includes ear set, stop, muzzle and cranial length and widths. The skull is longer than the muzzle at a ratio of 3:2 and from the front the width of the head at the zygomatic arches is slightly less than its length. The top of the muzzle is straight, the top line of the head and the top of the muzzle are parallel, which is important for scenting purposes. The stop is obvious but not too pronounced and not too sloped. The cranial region is slightly rounded seen either from the front or profile. The cheeks are not heavy and the skin fits tightly.

Ears are set high on the head, not too short nor too long, triangular in shape, slightly rounded at the tip, covered with wavy hair, longer on the upper part of the ear and gradually becoming shorter toward the tip. The nose should be black or to tone of the darkest color of the coat. The eyes are slightly oblique (not too round and not too almond-shaped) with an “intelligent, soft and frank expression”. The eyes are dark, from black or dark amber or to a tone in harmony with the nose and coat (notice that the lip leather is also dark and in harmony with nose and eyes). Superciliary arches form a slightly rounded curve without being too prominent. Eye expression coupled with an upward movement of the base of the ears gives rise to the true “Brittany expression”.



The neck, which is medium length and well-muscled sets smoothly into the shoulders in the form of a slightly curved, truncated cone. The neck should never be arched. The necks on Epagneul Bretons should not be shaved for presentation in the ring.

When being judged on conformation there are faults, eliminating faults and there are disqualifying faults. In general, a fault is any departure from the points of the standard and the seriousness with which the fault is regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree. The eliminating fault for this breed is size outside of the limits of the standard. An eliminating fault simply eliminates the dog from awards without affecting the dog's UKC registration. A disqualifying

fault is a genetically inheritable fault that could be passed along to offspring and therefore such a dog should not be bred. A disqualifying fault does affect the dog's UKC registration. Some of the disqualifying faults include: Overbite, underbite, distinct unpigmented areas on the nose or eyelids, eyes very light or of different colors, white patch on the ear(s) or eyes situated in a white patch, marked convergence of head planes, a solid coat color, entropion or ectropion, timid character, aggressiveness.

The standard of a breed denotes the ideal or perfect specimen. A dog does not have to be *totally* perfect to be a good specimen of the breed. Though it is the rare dog that is the absolute perfect specimen of the breed they do exist, and breeders who have a true devotion to the breed strive continuously to produce just such specimens. In order to do so, attention must be paid to conformation, natural ability, temperament and health – it's all part of the total package.

France, this breed's country of origin, has embraced the "total dog" concept for the breed since its inception and that is what has kept the breed what it is today both in working style and ability and in its looks. If fieldwork plus conformation are not both a part of the total package here in the United States, the breed will be at danger of diverging as so many other breeds have. No one wants to see any part of the breed becoming what is commonly referred to as "show" dogs only or "field" dogs only and the dangers are inherent when breeders start breeding simply for one venue or the other as has happened to some breeds. But conformation events when utilized as a part of the "total dog" concept DO assist in seeing to it that breeders strive to produce pups that will remain within the standard for the breed as well as being the natural upland hunting dogs they are intended to be. We as the parent club strive towards maintaining the breed in the U.S. by utilizing the methods that have worked so well in France and we therefore happily embraced the UKC's total dog concept as a means to accomplish this goal for the breed's future. Knowledgeable judges in the show ring and in field events will be a necessary key to meeting this goal as will informed and knowledgeable owners and breeders. Today's owners actively and regularly upland bird hunt with their Epagneul Bretons and correct breeding and judging of the breed will continue the tradition of this breed being the total dog.