

2011 NATIONAL SPECIALTY JUDGE'S CRITIQUE

Thank you to the ECSCA for the incredible honor of judging the National Specialty on the occasion of the club's 75th anniversary. Many thanks to the specialty co-chairs and the committee members for their interest and, I am sure seemingly endless efforts to host a National. Thank you also to my ring stewards who helped the ring run smoothly. Many thanks to those club members who unselfishly volunteer their time and effort for our breed.

Before getting to the individual dogs, I would like to make a few observations. Although interpreting the nuances of the breed standard is subjective as we all know, like most judges I evaluate the dog in a positive way. I am looking for the good in the dog and reward the dog with the most good to offer the future of the breed, as the purpose of dog shows is to evaluate breeding stock (and not to run madly around the group ring).

With one exception, I hadn't judged the breed in about a year or so before this show and it was interesting to see a few changes in the breed. The most noticeable to me was the quality in the males at the National. The great depth of quality has always, since the '70s at least, been in the bitch classes. At this specialty, I felt there were any number of outstanding males. This bodes well for breeders who often look beyond their own dogs or those of nearby friends, for a stud dog to accomplish a purposeful and well thought out breeding. Other general positives were that there were fewer long-backed English Cockers in the ring as we've seen in the past and fewer over-angulated rears. "Cocker" type was numerous, with very few of "setter" type.

While the judge part of me was thinking positively, the breeder part made note of some negatives to be aware of. Correct shoulder construction continues to plague the breed. Short, upright upper arms are common, placing the front legs in front of the body instead of underneath it where they belong. Shoulder construction is the most difficult aspect of structure to understand and even more difficult to breed. Correct fronts are absolutely necessary to functionality and proper breed type. There were any number of flat feet, something I used to see only once in a while. The breed can't do what they were bred to do if their feet won't support their weight. Alarming, there were numerous exhibits with totally flat back skulls. The skull is to be **ARCHED** and **SLIGHTLY** flattened. The arch, or height, to the sides of the back skull is necessary for anchoring

jaw muscles. The jaw has to be capable of picking up and carrying sizeable birds for a distance. When looking at a dog with a totally flat back skull head-on, the classic, soft English Cocker expression is gone and is replaced by a hard stare, foreign to the breed and absolutely wrong.



DOG CLASSES

Bred by Exhibitor Dogs

1. **Gwynllyn On Point Sporting Fields**, black and white. Lovely to go over with plenty of bone, good front, a well-knit, deep, short-coupled body, all cocker. He is made to move, but fights his handler. The longer he was in the ring, the more he gave in and used himself.

Reserve Winners Dog

**from the
ECSCA Review
Summer 2011
National Specialty
Edition
Judge:
Bonnie Threlfall**