

What is a Field Bred English Cocker?

by

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As one is searching for a breeder or looking through hunting articles, the term “field bred” will appear. A “field bred” English Cocker is bred for the primary purpose of hunting. Health and Temperament should be held to the highest standard possible for English Cocker Spaniels but, because of a field bred dog’s specific purpose, its physical appearance and natural instincts will differ from that of the dog bred for conformation (the show ring).

A “field bred” English Cocker tends to be a bit larger than the current conformation bred dogs. A female tends to weigh between 24 and 30 pounds and the males tend to weigh between 30 and 35 pounds. Of course there are extremes on both ends of the weight scale but it isn’t common. From an appearance standpoint, the coat is quite a bit less profuse than dogs bred for conformation, and many field bred dogs never have any more than a bit taken off the feathering for grooming. The tail is docked but only 1/3 is taken off the tip. The purpose of this is to prevent the tail from splitting due to its busy action but yet to provide a clear indicator when the dog has made game as well as assist with a smooth gait as the dog covers the terrain it is hunting. The muzzle of the field bred dog tends to be shorter and the ear set a bit higher than conformation dogs. Field bred English Cockers come in all colors and patterns and generally are not “planned” for in the breeding due to the fact that the color has no connection to the dog’s primary function. Field bred English Cockers tend to be a bit heavier in bone and the muscle tone is more developed and evident.

From a temperament standpoint, the field bred English Cocker conforms to the breed standard, “The English Cocker is merry and affectionate, of equable disposition, neither sluggish nor hyperactive, a willing worker and a faithful and engaging companion”. Many who have hunted over them also will add that “they will make you laugh”.

Because the field bred English Cocker is bred for one purpose, hunting, the natural abilities are extremely high and the desire to hunt is only exceeded by the desire to eat. Field bred English Cockers are very natural retrievers and excellent at marking downed game. Their bird finding ability is second to none. Their size is compensated by their “heart”. They were originally bred in England to hunt woodcock and rabbits, and still do, so they need to be able to penetrate thick cover, but they have adapted equally well to the wide open plains of the Midwest. Field bred English Cockers are powerful swimmers and make excellent moderate weather, duck dogs.

Finally, the field bred English Cocker is extremely biddable, that is, willing to be trained. A “hyper” dog is not pleasant to hunt with or live with. A field bred English Cocker wants to learn and work for its handler. The dog should also be able to come inside after the day’s hunt or training session, and relax with the family.