

IRISH WATER SPANIEL

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance including the correct colour of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure. However, if a dog possesses a feature, characteristic or colour described as unacceptable, it must not be rewarded in the show ring.

Most recent changes to this Standard has an effective date of 01/02/2021

ORIGIN

Ireland.

UTILISATION

The Irish Water Spaniel can be easily adapted to suit most forms of shooting. He will hunt, often point and retrieve, readily from heavy cover. The construction and nature of the breed has traditionally made it the choice of the wild-fowler.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The exact origins of the breed remain obscure. Generally it is thought that Water Spaniels evolved from dogs that originated in Persia and came to Ireland via Spain. The first Irish reference to “water dogs that pursue water fowl” dates from 1600, so we know that dogs with waterproof coats were used in Ireland even before the advent of the fowling piece. There is no real evidence of the ancestry of the Irish Water Spaniel except in its most peculiar feature – the rat tail. This feature appears in no similar dog and makes it very likely that the modern breed had an indigenous Irish ancestor. The tail has given rise to the names, “whip tail” and “rat tail”. In any event, the descendants of these dogs were accepted and achieved great success on show benches in the second half of the 19th century. In 1890 the Irish Water Spaniel Club was formed to promote the interests of the breed.



Illustration courtesy of NKU Picture Library

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Smart, upstanding, strongly built, compact, or cobby.

BEHAVIOUR / TEMPERAMENT

Proud, combining great intelligence and endurance with a bold and dashing eagerness of temperament, immense stamina and loyalty. A good family dog with a sense of humour, but discerning with strangers.

HEAD

Skull and head should be of good size.

Cranial Region:

Skull: Skull high in dome, good length and width allowing for large brain capacity. Top-knot should consist of long, loose curls growing down into a well-defined peak between the eyes and should not be in the form of a wig, i.e. growing straight across.

Stop: Gradual.

Facial Region:

Face: Perfectly smooth. Hair grows in a narrow line forming a beard at the back of the lower jaw.

Nose: Large and well-developed, and of dark liver colour.

Muzzle: Long, strong, and somewhat square in appearance.

Teeth: Strong and regular with scissors bite.

Eyes:

Comparatively small, almond-shaped, dark amber or dark hazel, and very intelligent looking.

Ears:

Very long and lobe-shaped in the leather, set low, hanging quite close to the cheeks and covered with long, twisted curls of hair.

NECK

Fairly long, strong, and arching (enabling the head to be carried well above the level of the back), and strongly set into the shoulders.

BODY

Should be of good size, being, as a whole, so proportionate as to give a barrel-shaped appearance accentuated by the springing of the ribs; overall strong and well-muscled.

Back: Short, broad, and level, strongly coupled to the hindquarters.

Loin: Deep and wide.

Chest: Deep, but not too wide or round between the forelegs, though large girth with ribs well-sprung behind the shoulders.

Ribs: Carried well back.

TAIL

Smooth, strong, and thick at root, where it is covered for 7.5cm – 10cm (approx. 3" – 4") with short curls, and gradually tapering, ending in a fine point. It should not be long enough to reach the hock joint, and should be carried nearly level with the back in a straight line.

LIMBS

Forequarters:

Shoulders: Very powerful and sloping.

Forelegs: Well-boned and straight, the forearm at point of elbow in a straight line with the highest point of the shoulder blade.

Hindquarters:

Very powerful.

Stifles: Well-bent stifles.

Hock: Hocks set low.

FEET

Large, somewhat round and spreading, well-covered with hair, both over and between the toes, but free from any superfluous feather.

GAIT / MOVEMENT

The gait has a characteristic style peculiar to the breed, that of a rolling motion produced by the barrel-shaped ribcage.

COAT

Dense, tight, crisp ringlets, entirely free from woolliness but with a natural oiliness. The back and sides of the neck should be covered with curls similar to those on the body; the throat should be smooth, the smooth hair forming a V-shaped patch from the back of the lower jaw to the breastbone. The forelegs are covered with feather, which should be abundant all round, though shorter in front. Below the hocks, the hind legs must be smooth in front, but feathered behind down to the feet.

COLOUR

- A very rich puce liver

* White on chest objectionable.

SIZE

Height at withers:

Males: 53cm – 59cm (approx. 21" – 23")

Females: 51cm – 56cm (approx. 20" – 22")

***N.B.** Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum. Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.*

FAULTS

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog, and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.

- White on chest.
- Paleness of coat.
- Light eye.
- Woolliness of coat.
- Feather on front of hocks.
- Want of feather on front of forelegs.
- Splayed feet.
- Feather on stern.
- Feather on face.
- White on feet.

Disqualifying faults:

- Aggressive or overly shy dogs.
- Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities shall be disqualified.

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FCI Standard No 124: IRISH WATER SPANIEL

FCI Classification: Group 8 – Retrievers, Flushing Dogs, Water Dogs
Section 3 – Water Dogs
With Working Trial