

# Striking A Balance



## Understanding Correct English Cocker Spaniel Gait

Presented by the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America's Breed Education Committee



# What is Correct Gait?

Movement, in any aspect is about inertia, force and balance. In dogs it is the synchronization of their structural framework that allows them to move with ease and power.

Each breed was developed for a specific purpose and therefore they should move as their standard describes, allowing them to perform their function soundly and with ease to prevent exhaustion.

English Cockers were developed to hunt in and push through dense cover, darting in and out, over and under bramble. They are a workman-like breed, packing a lot of power and strength for their size. Their structure must allow for the muscle and bone needed to carry out this function.

**They were bred for drive and power rather than speed.**



*As English Cocker breeders, we must always keep the original function at the forefront of our breeding decisions.*



**An energetic and alert small sized gundog**

*Hunt test or young  
English Cocker.*

**What comes to mind when you imagine**



**a beautiful and correctly moving English Cocker?**

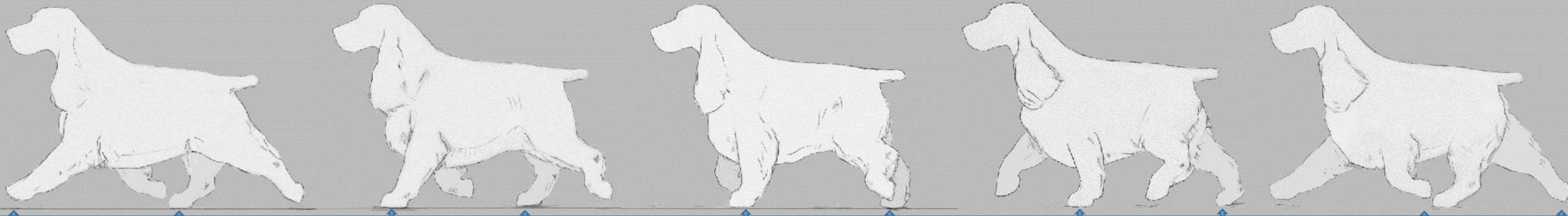
*“The English Cocker is capable of hunting in dense cover and upland terrain. His gait is accordingly characterized more by drive and the appearance of power than by great speed.”*



*“He covers ground effortlessly and with extension both in front and in rear, appropriate to his angulation. In the ring, he carries his head proudly and is able to keep much the same topline while in action as when standing for examination.”*



# The Five Phases of a Trot



1. reach

2. pull

3. transition

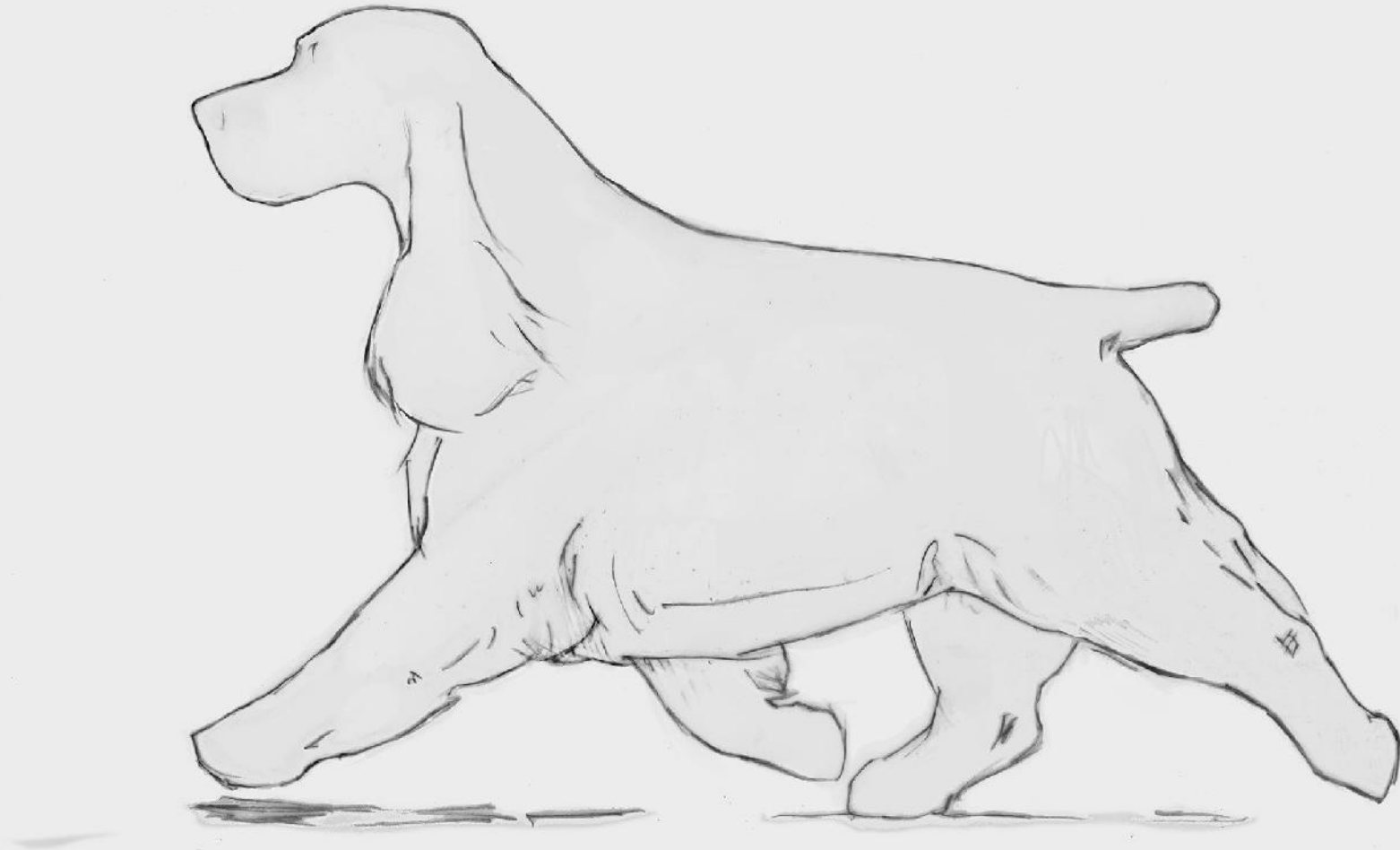
4. push

5. drive / extension

Because we evaluate dogs in the show ring at a trot, understanding the mechanics of this action is essential. Trotting is a symmetrical gait produced when diagonal pairs of legs move almost simultaneously. In a Cocker's trot there is always some support to the ground, except for a brief moment when just one foot will be down. If the dog is moved too fast, there will be an instance of complete suspension, (a flying trot) which is incorrect for this breed.

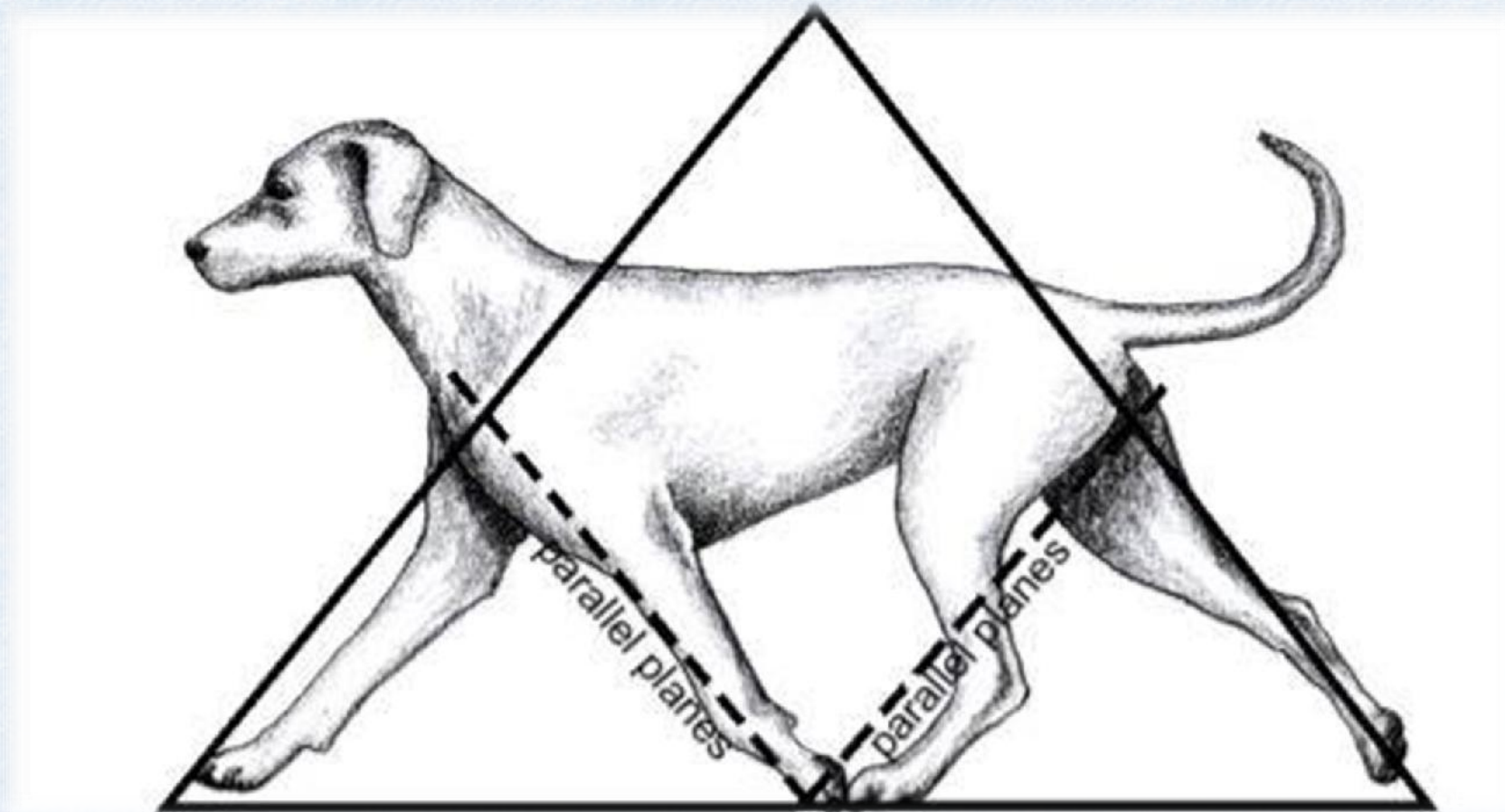
1. **Reach** - The diagonal pair of legs reach forward as far as the angulation permits.
2. **Pull** - The shoulder and rear pull, transferring the weight forward.
3. **Transition** - The middle of the stride.
4. **Push** - The center of gravity shifts as the weight is propelled forward.
5. **Drive** - The legs drive through, extending back as far as the angulation permits.

**This image beautifully shows the five steps of the trot, but you can also clearly see the correct, two beat foot timing.**



**Feet are kept low to the ground, with no wasted motion.**



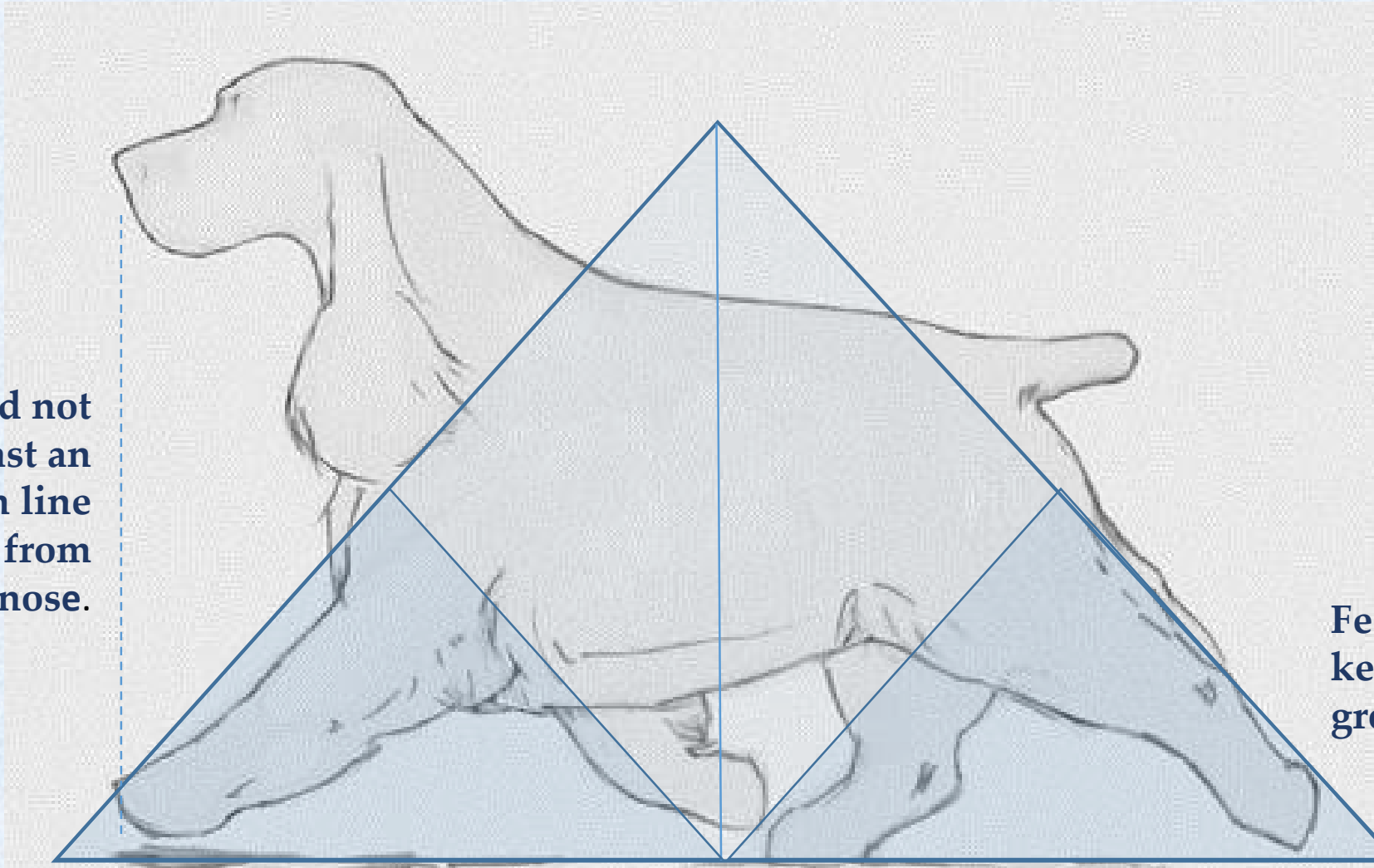


**Balanced gait is typified by a synchronization of front reach and rear drive.**

**Balanced movement calls for a triangular action, both front and rear.**

**This indicates that the dog is correctly constructed and capable of performing its function efficiently, without wasted motion and energy.**

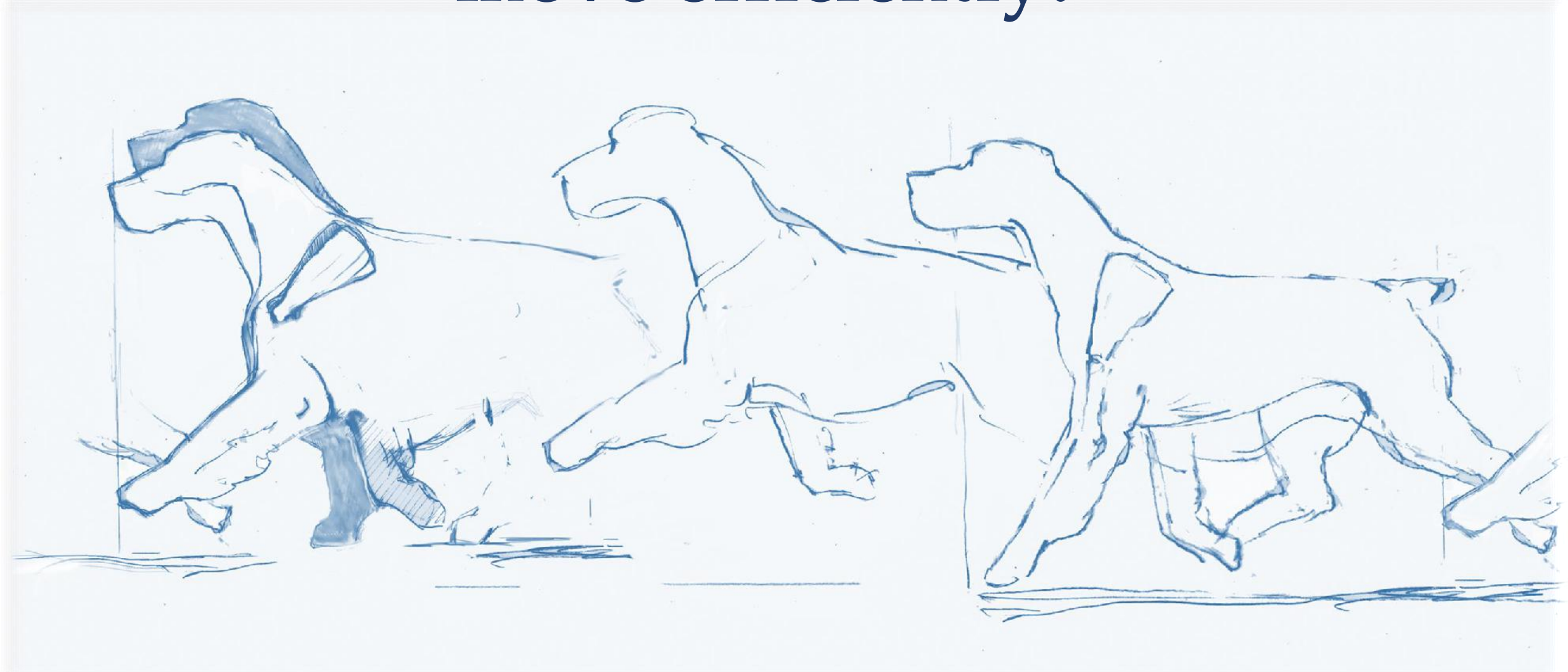
**Reach should not extend past an imaginary plum line stretched down from the nose.**



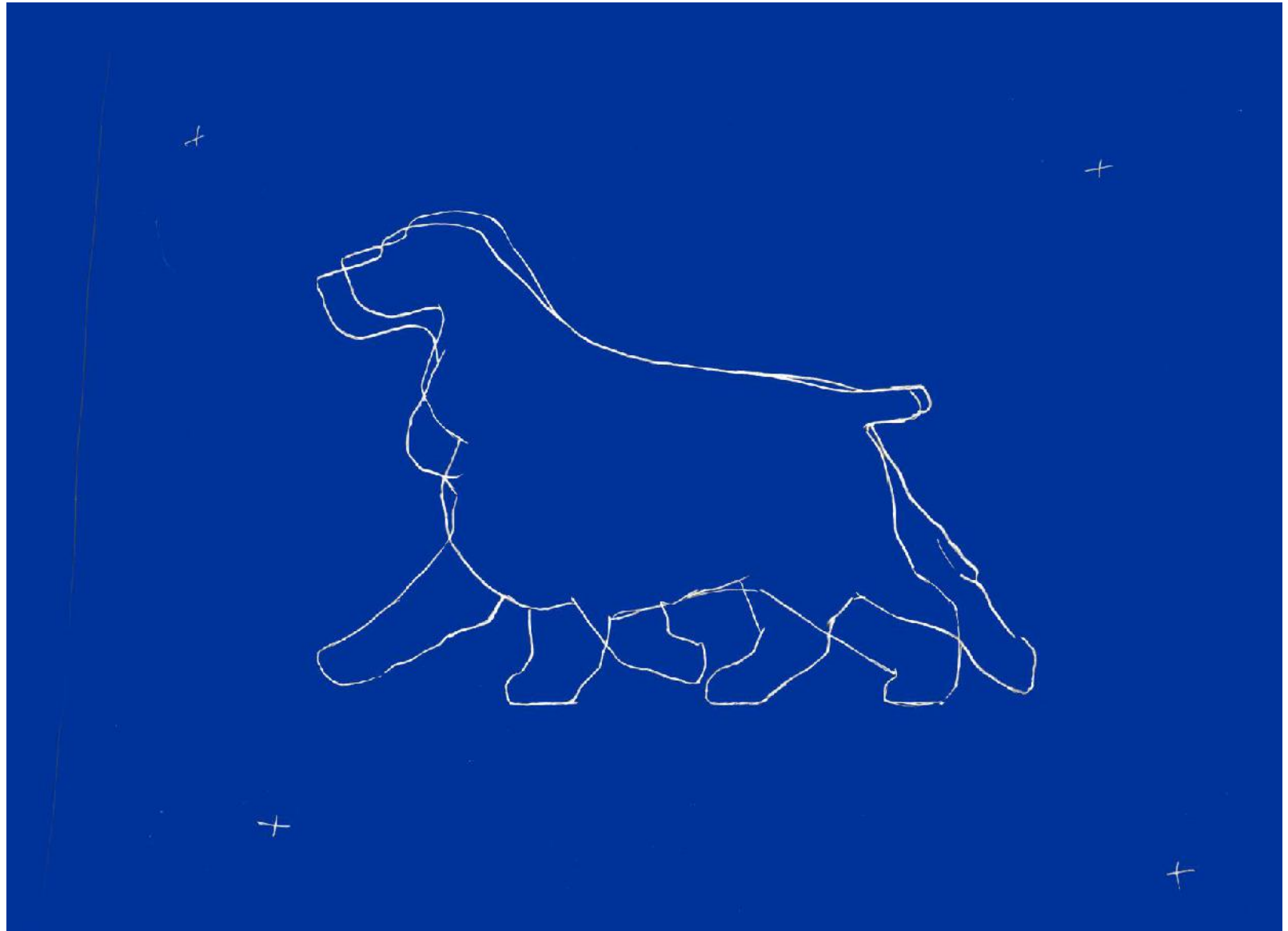
**Feet should be kept low to the ground.**



# How does structure affect a dog's ability to move efficiently?



**A balanced and moderate English Cocker keeps roughly the same outline moving as standing.**

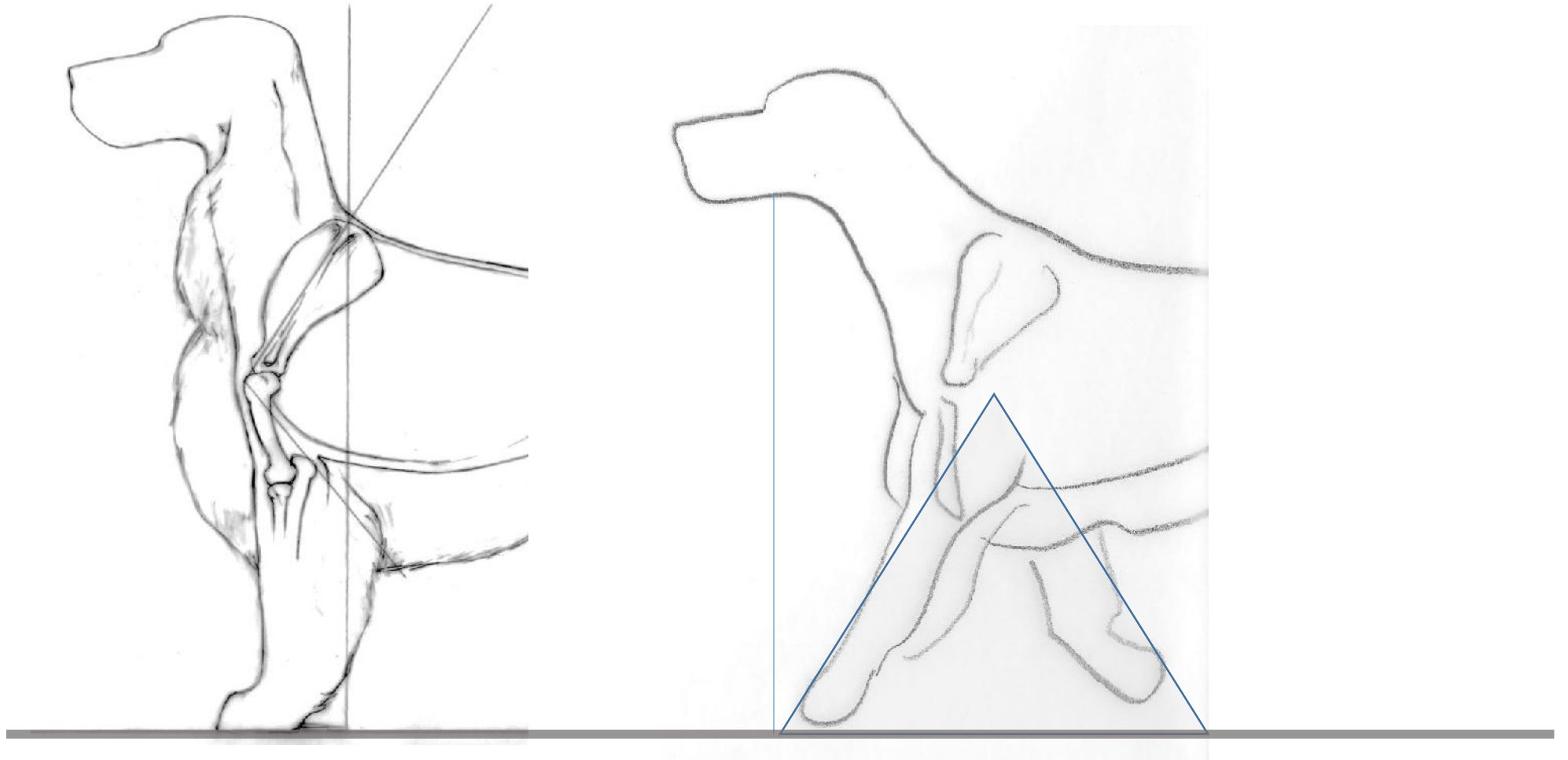


The neck will naturally drop a bit during movement, which aids in reach.

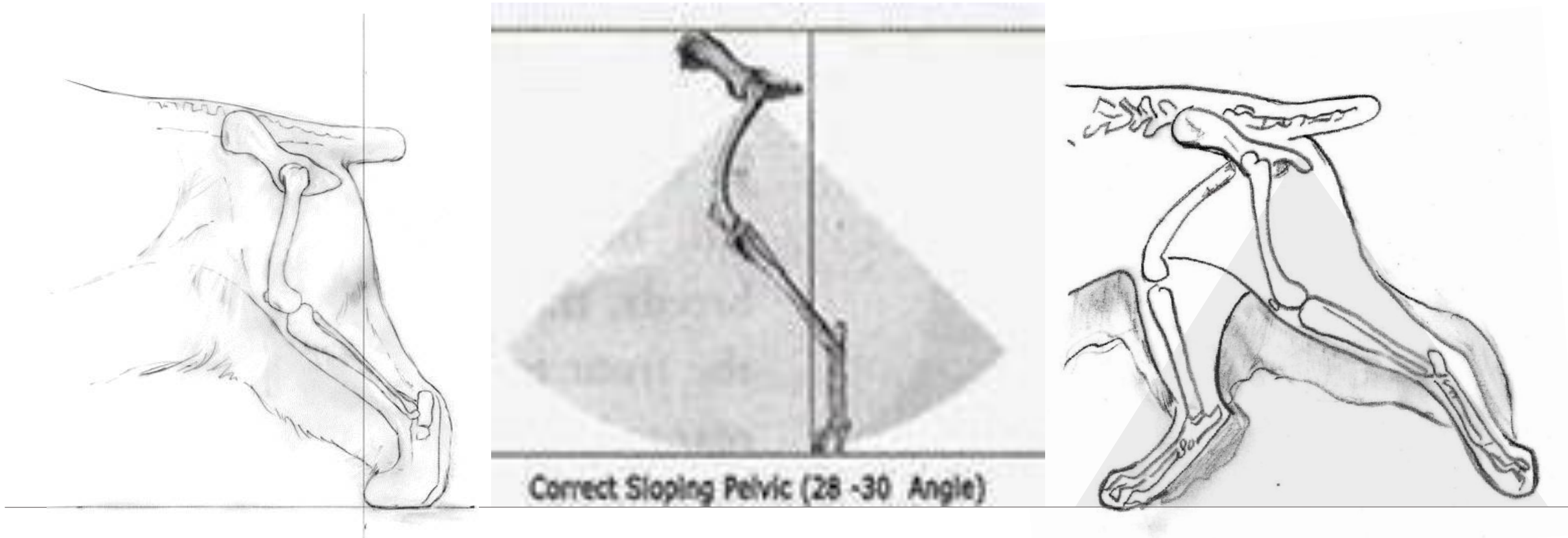
**The shoulder angle correlates with the amount of reach a dog will have in front, as well as the amount of follow through underneath the body.  
This image shows a correctly made front assembly.**



**This shoulder assembly has a more open angle. When in motion, this dog does not have the ability to reach to the end of his nose, and consequently his stride is shorter and less efficient.**



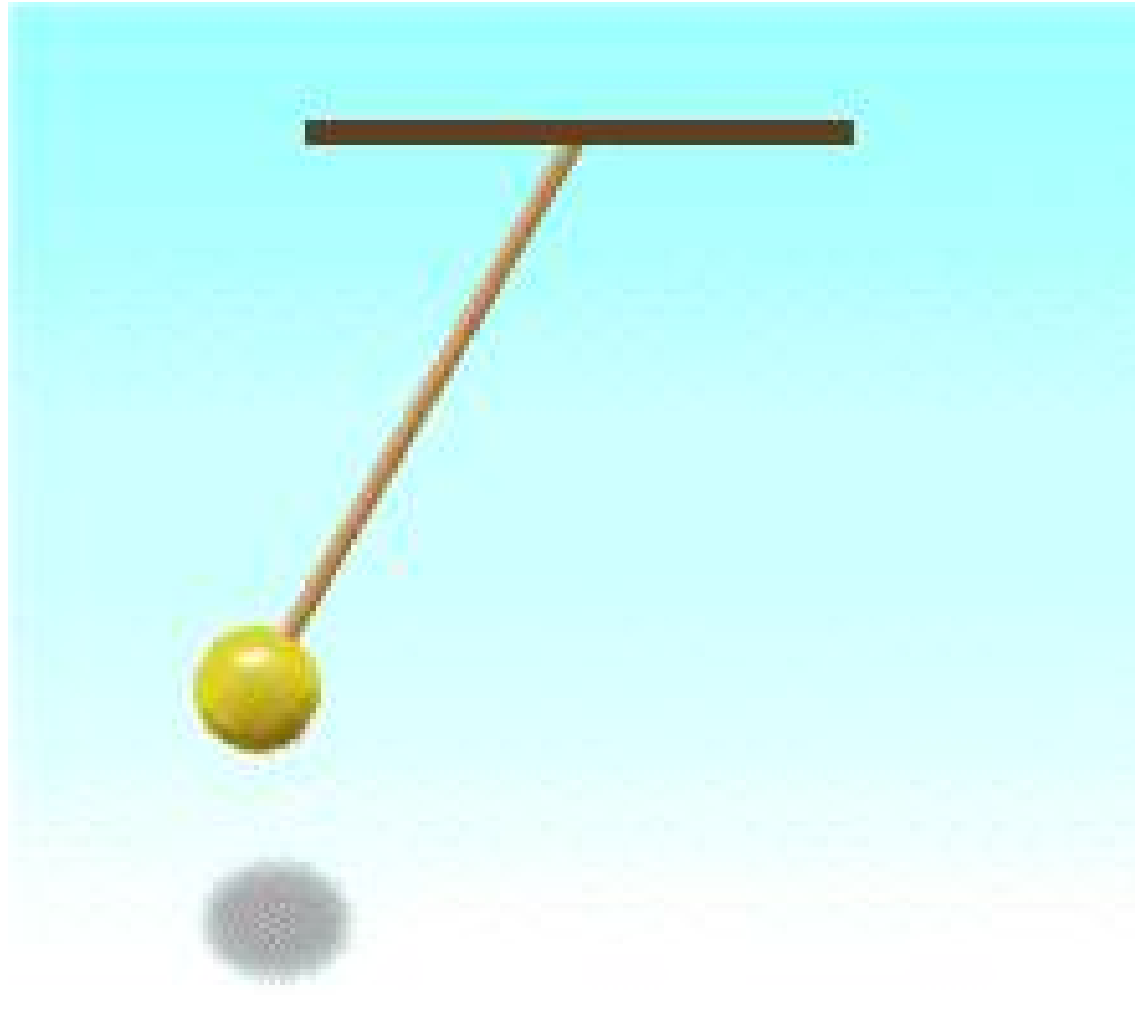
The correct length and tilt of the pelvis affects the angulation and working arc of the rear. Thus allowing a balanced swing of the leg and a good strong driving action behind to match the front.



A perpendicular line dropped from the furthest projection of the buttock to the ground, should land directly in front of the rear foot. The femur and the tibia are equal in length. The distance from the hock joint to the pad (rear pastern) is short. Thick, shorter muscles attach to this frame.

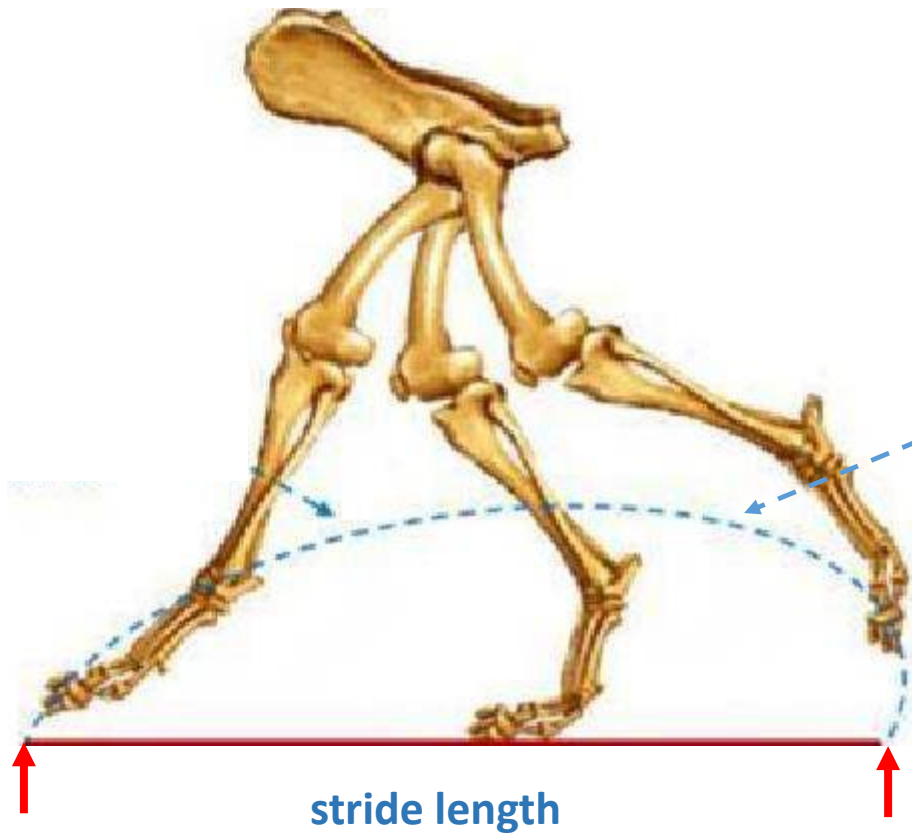


**Think about a pendulum. If the balance is off in either direction it will disrupt the even swing.**

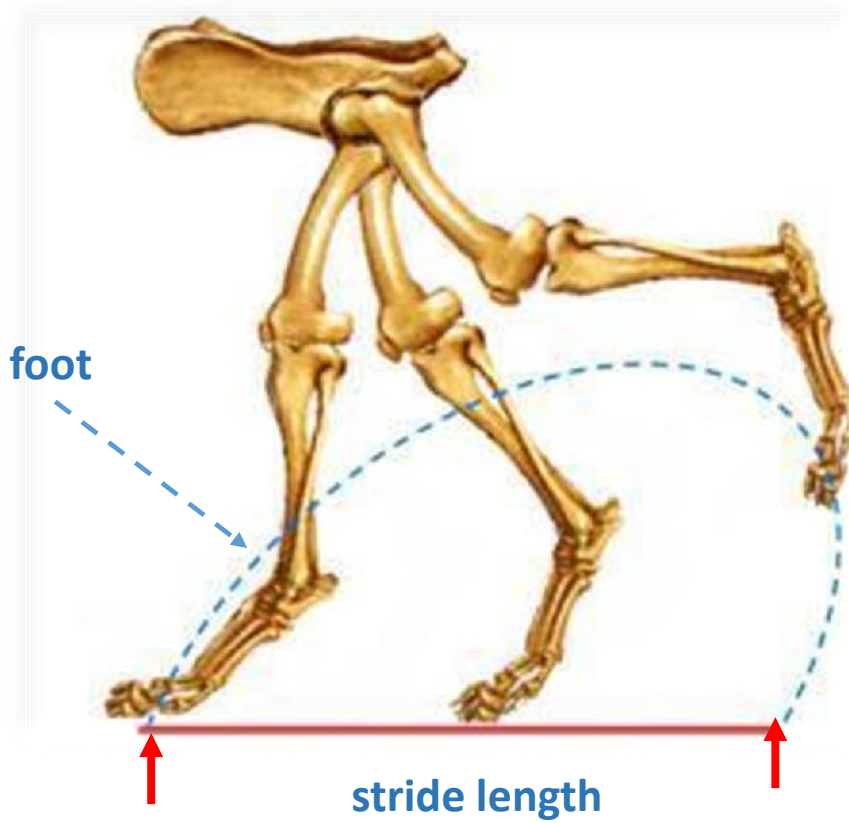


# The Effect of Pelvic Tilt on Stride

Normal Pelvic Angle



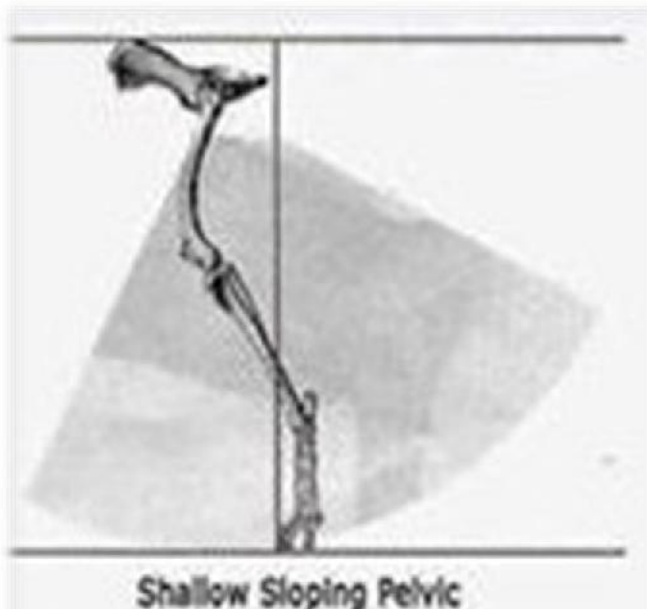
Flat Pelvis



path of foot

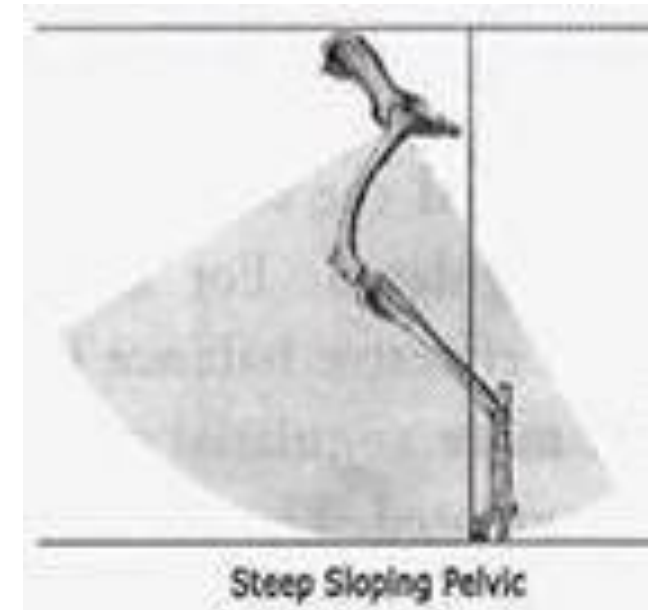
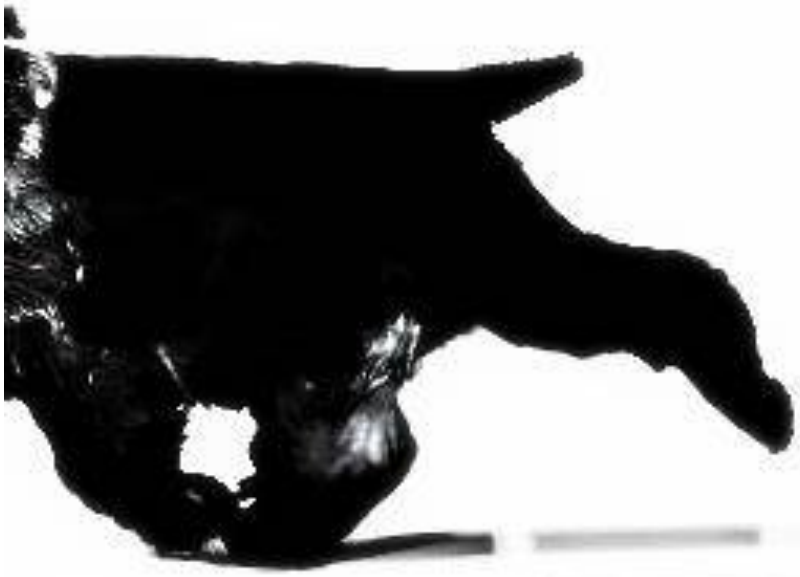
stride length

stride length



With these illustrations we can see how an incorrectly sloped pelvis or croup can affect the even swing of the rear legs.

The dog on the left has a shallow slope (flat croup), which results in a high kick behind.

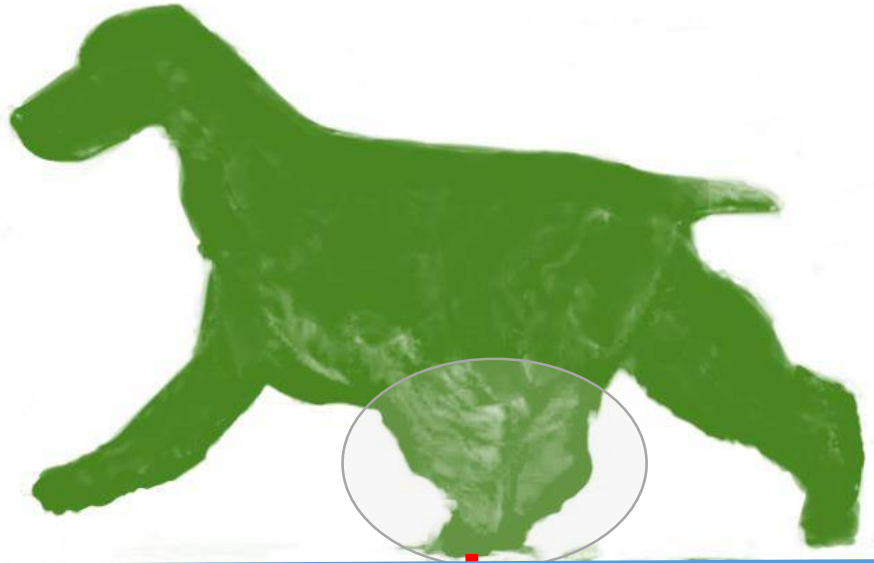


The dog on the right has a steep sloping pelvis, (overly rounded croup), and therefore has a limited ability to drive behind. Notice how the rear leg underneath is overreaching the front leg.

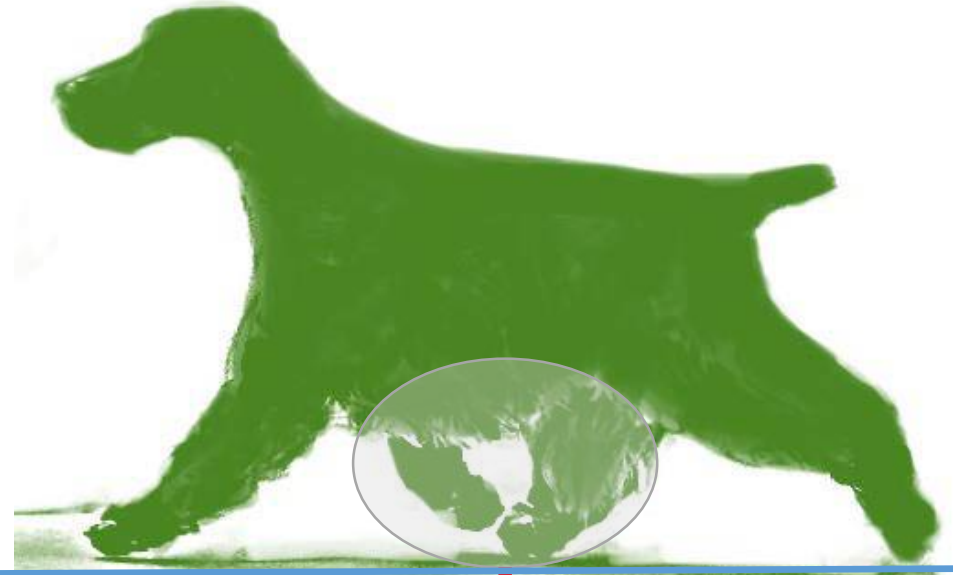
The balanced swing of the rear is altered by the structural tilt of the pelvis.



# Overreaching



overreaching

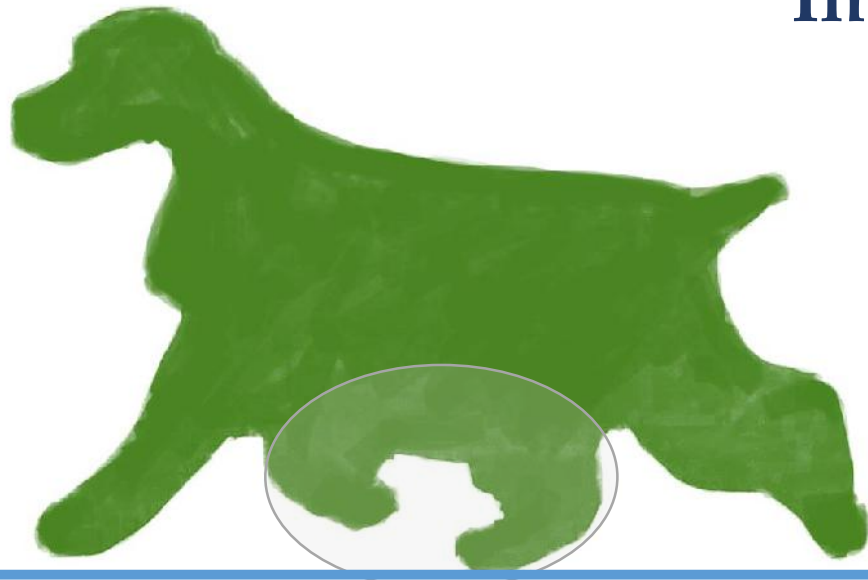


correct foot placement

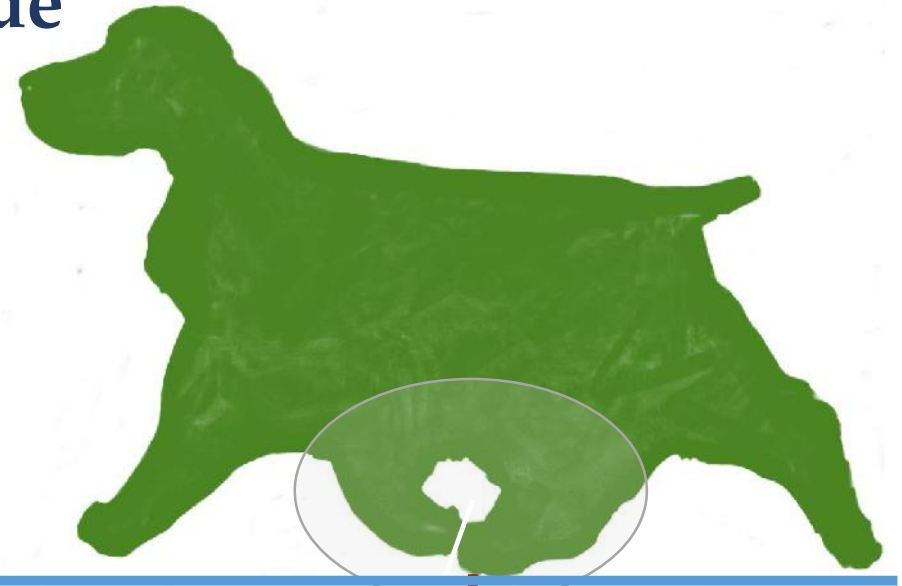
For the most efficient movement, the hind foot will step into the track made by the front foot as soon as the front foot lifts. When the hind foot steps beyond the track of the front foot, the dog is overreaching. This is most often caused by an over angulated rear and/or a steep croup.

# Under Reaching

Insufficient stride



under reaching

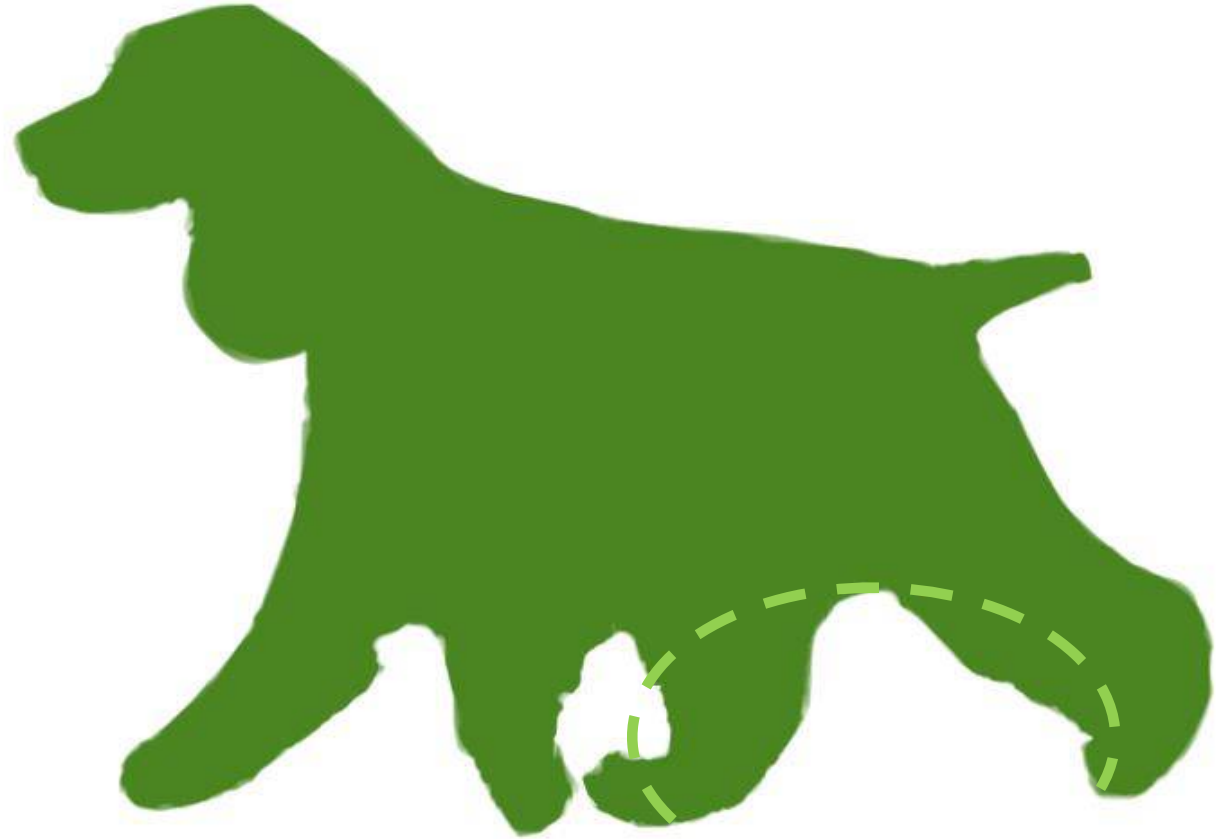


correct foot placement



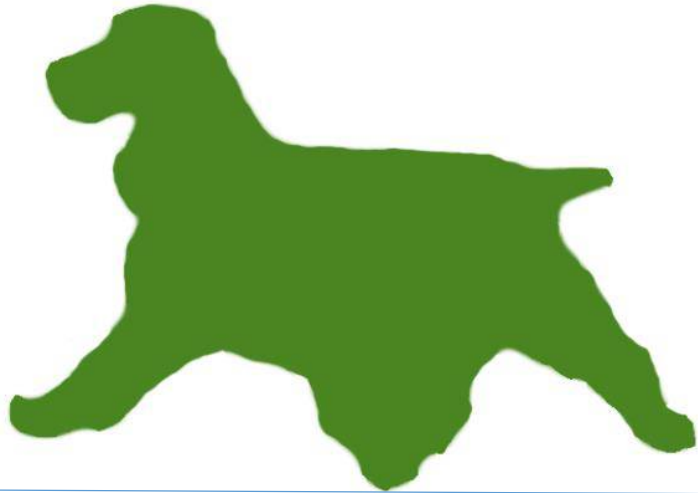
When the hind foot is unable to reach far enough under the body to step directly into the track left by the front foot, the dog is under reaching and this is usually caused by a lack of angulation in the rear, a flat pelvic angle, and/or excessive length of body.

# Sickle Hocks

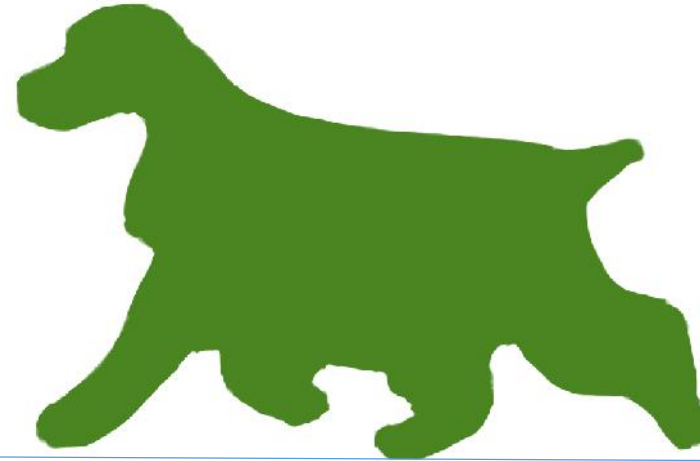


Sickle hocks cause a dog to be unable to straighten his hock joint, so the rear foot cannot flex and push backwards. Therefore, the dog will be unable to follow through, push and drive behind which creates a circular, rotary motion in the rear.

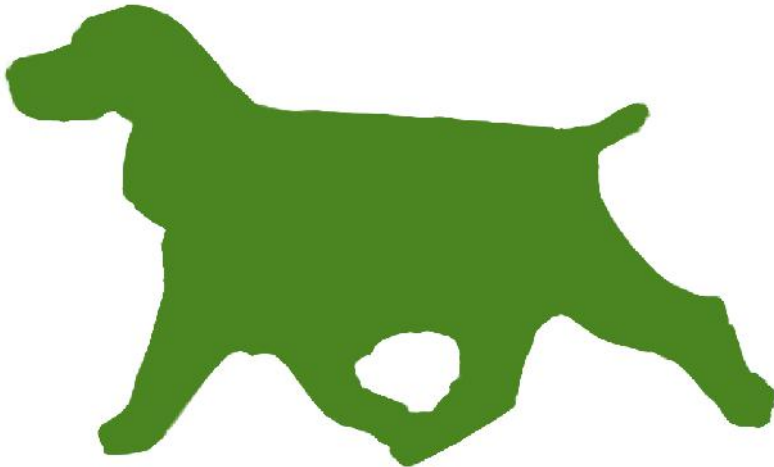
# More Faults and types of wasted motion visible from side gait



**paddling in front, curled hind toes**



**poor foot timing, four-beat gait**

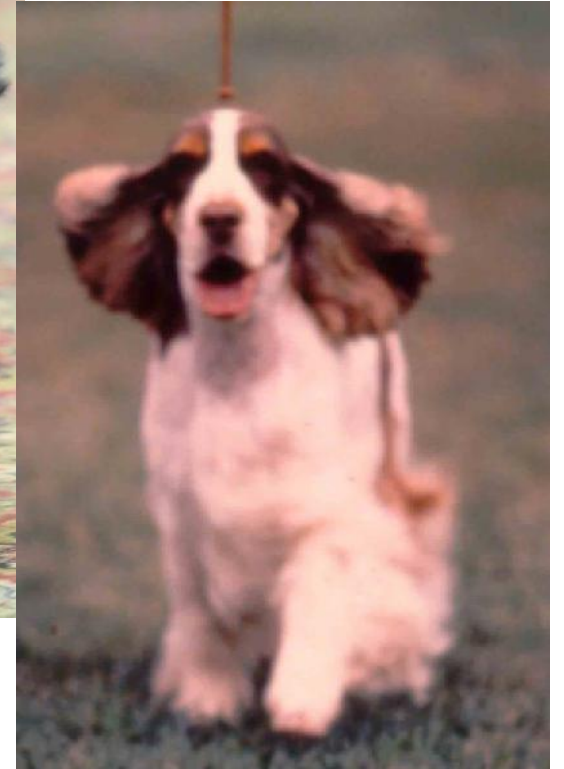


**pounding in front with high kick behind**



**excessive lift in front**

**Because of his roundness and considerable width, a correctly made English Cocker cannot single track.**

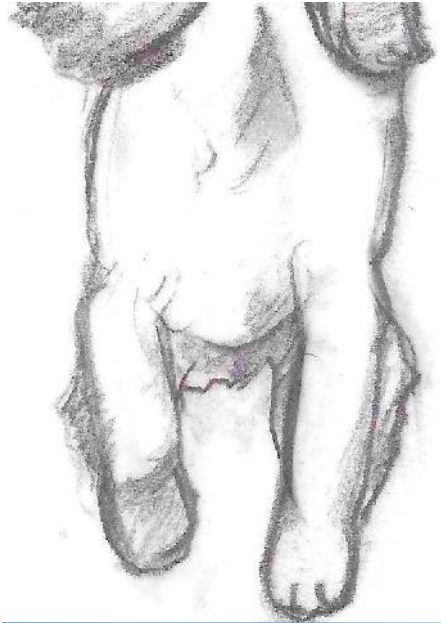






<http://share.yesvideo.com/s/aZKdiE8fwMfLI5IJ>

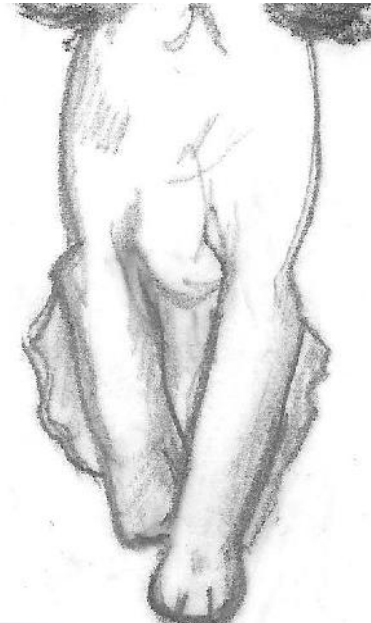
# Fronts Coming Towards



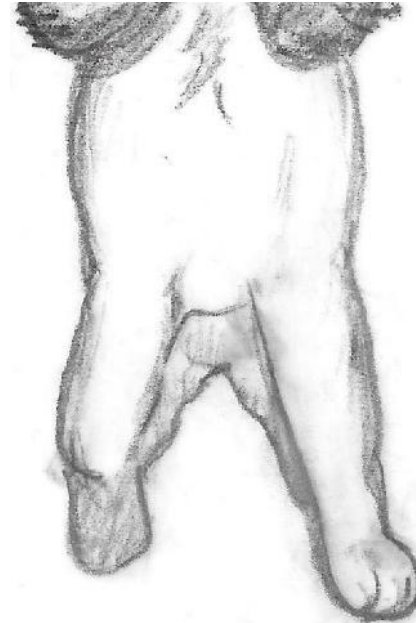
correct



elbowing out



narrow

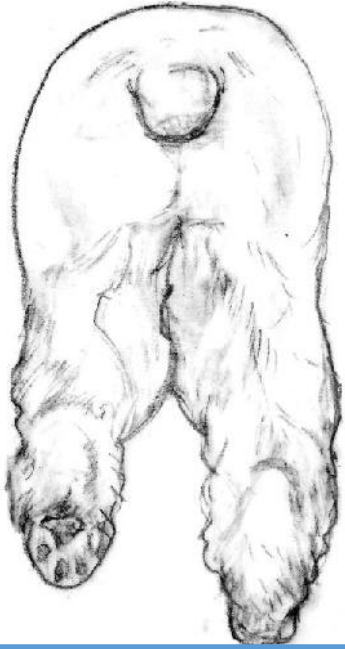


tied in at the elbows



paddling

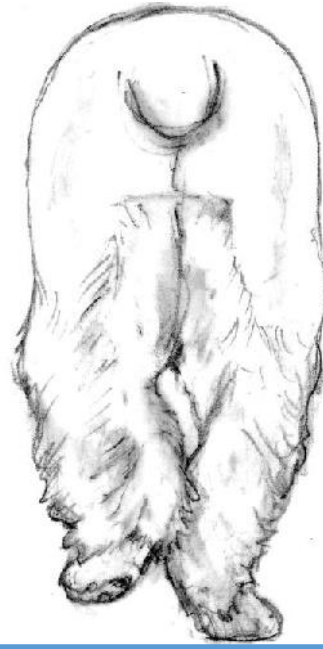
# Rears Going Away



**correct**



**bowed hocks**



**cow hocked**



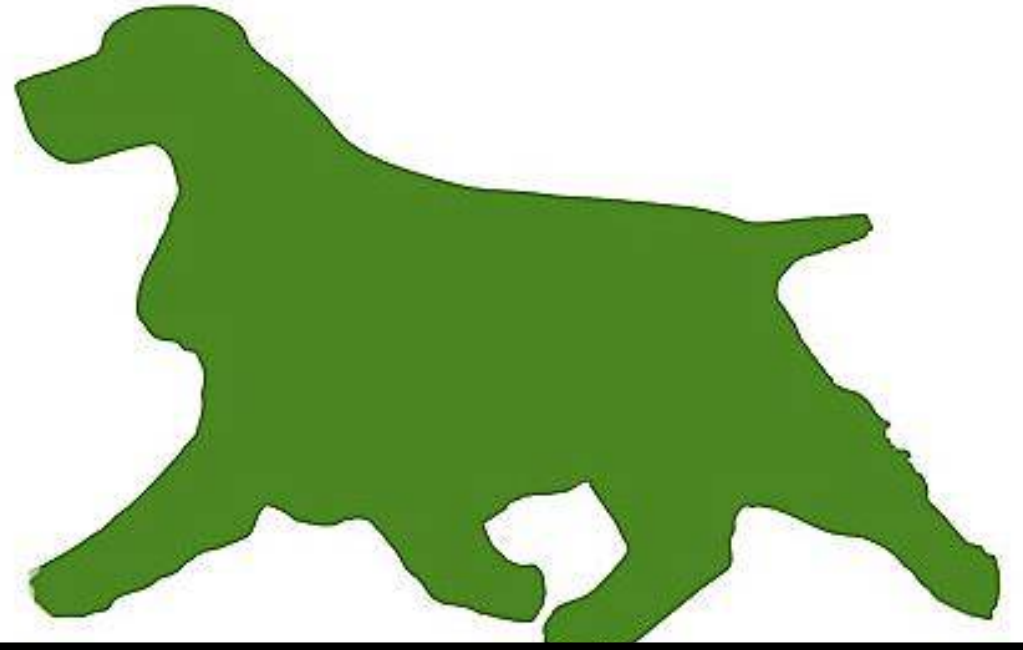
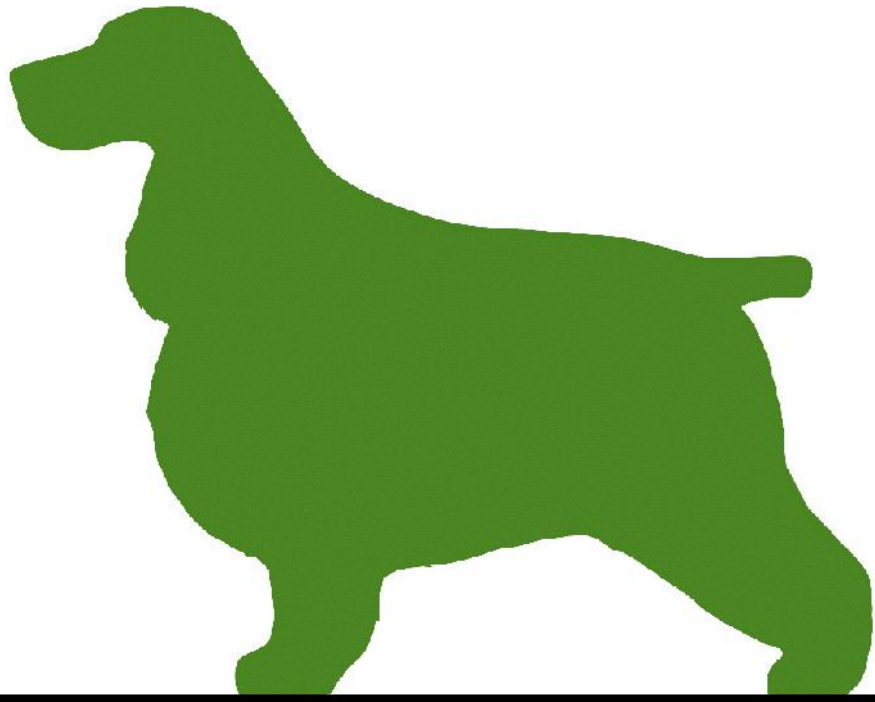
**narrow**



**weaving**

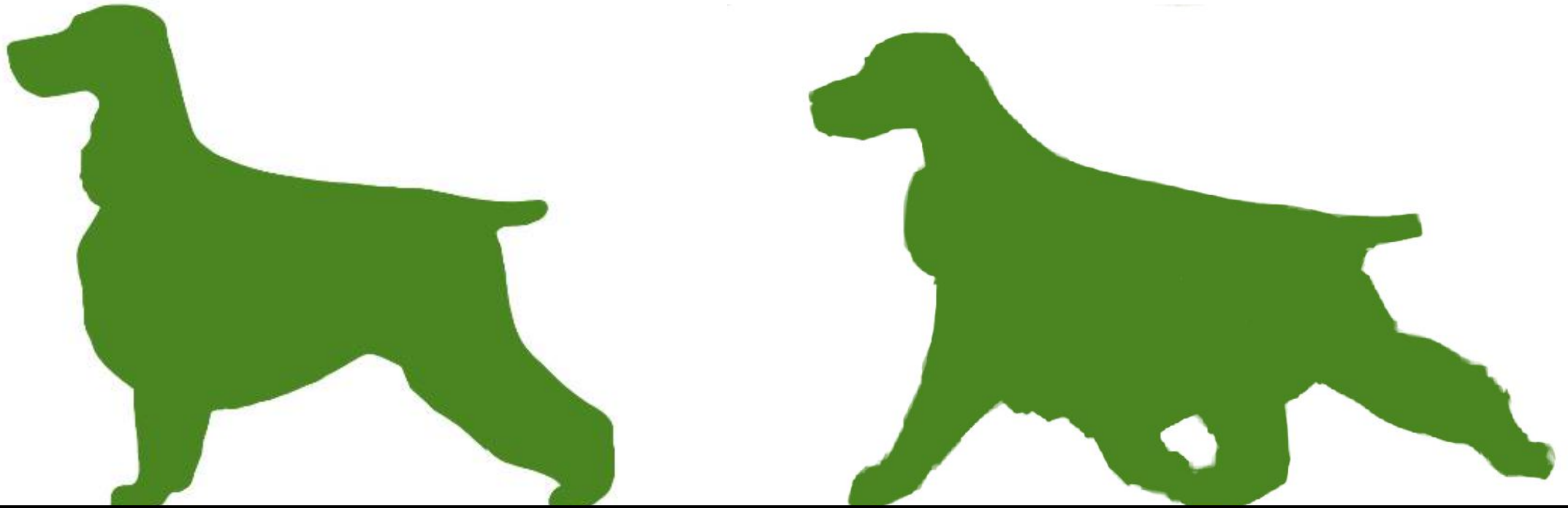
# This Brings us Back to Balance

A dog that is balanced front and rear will move with ease and good foot timing, keeping his feet low to the ground with no wasted motion. He will keep much the same outline standing as moving, holding his topline and maintaining his stationing.

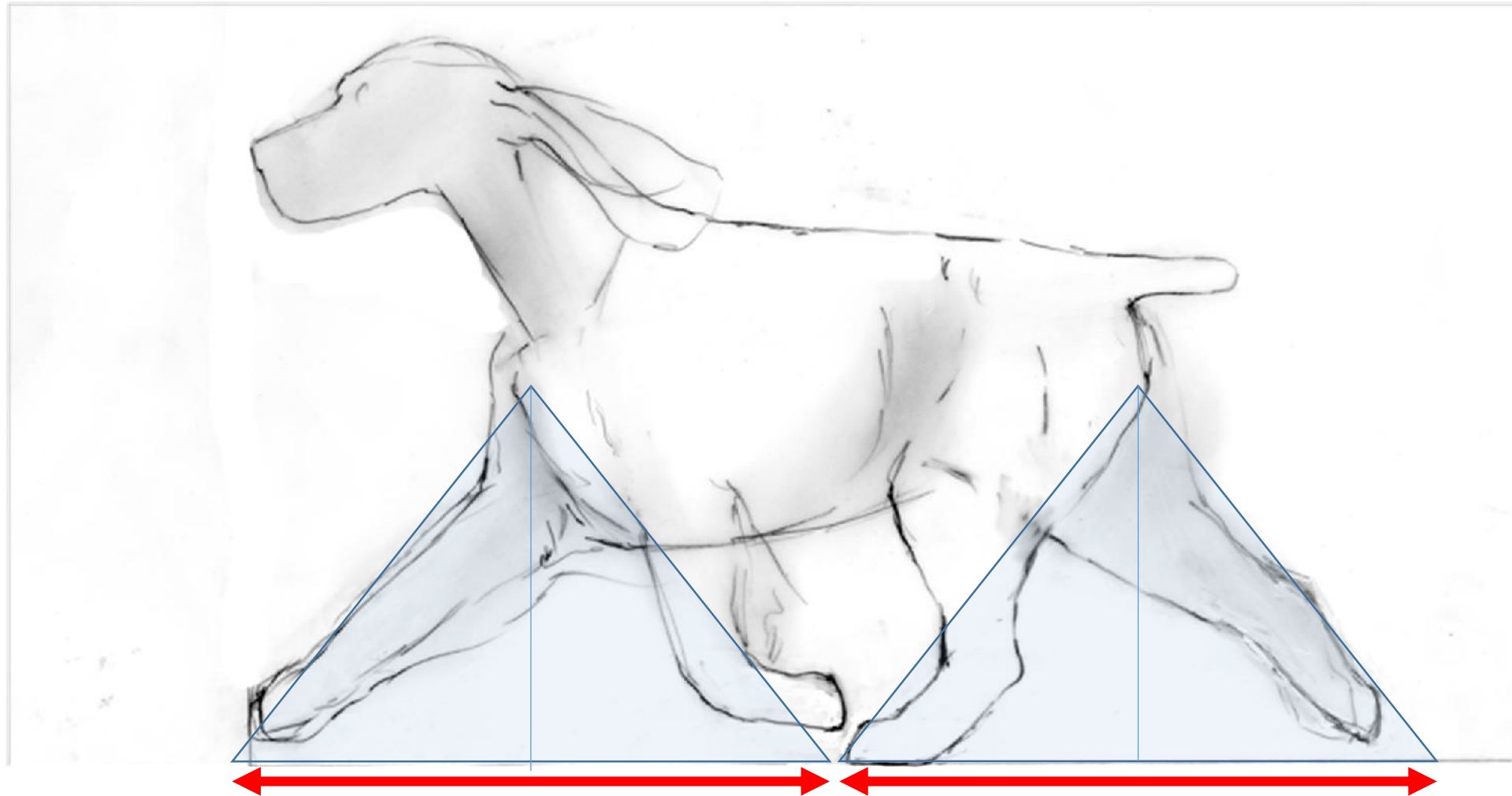


# Extreme and Lacking Balance

When a dog is out of balance, with a straight front assembly paired with an over angulated rear, he will be unable to move with equal reach and drive. This will result in inefficiency and wasted motion, which can quickly lead to exhaustion.



**If a dog is made correctly, with moderate and balanced angulation, the legs will move the same distance under the body as they do in front of / behind the dog.**









# Evaluating Puppies

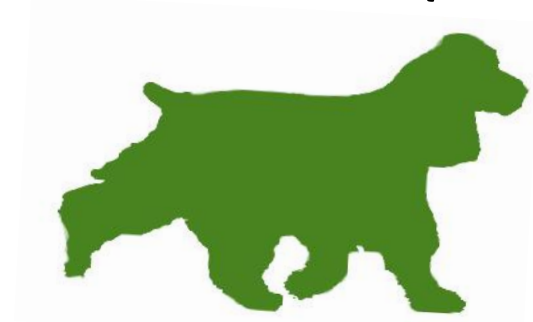


# Handling errors can negatively impact the way your dog moves.

stringing them up



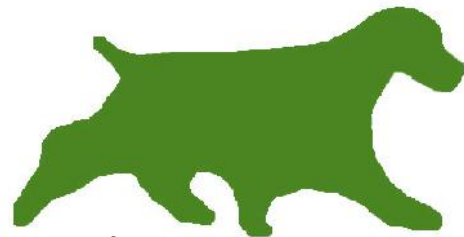
letting them pace



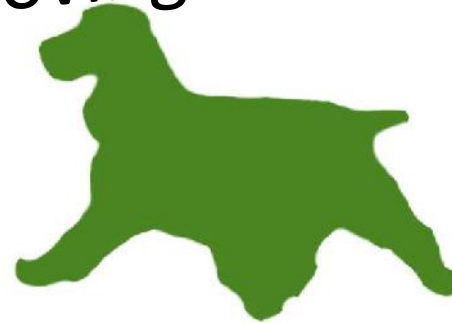
zig zagging



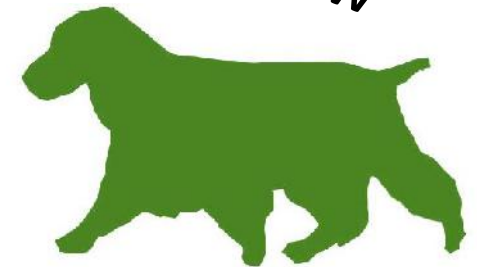
lead too loose



moving them too fast



too slow



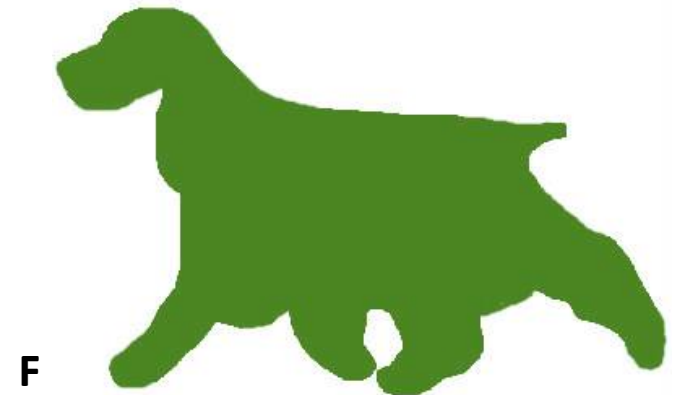
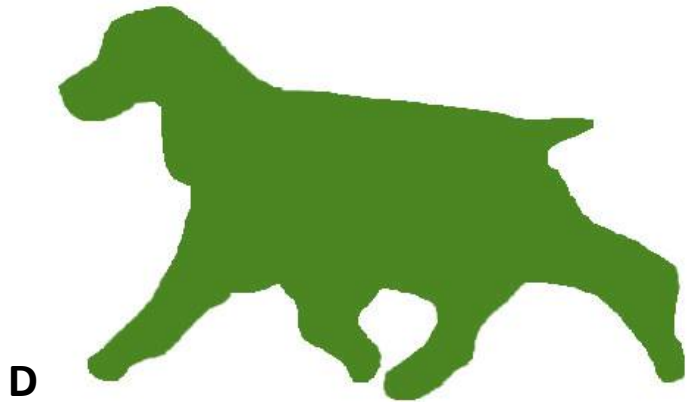
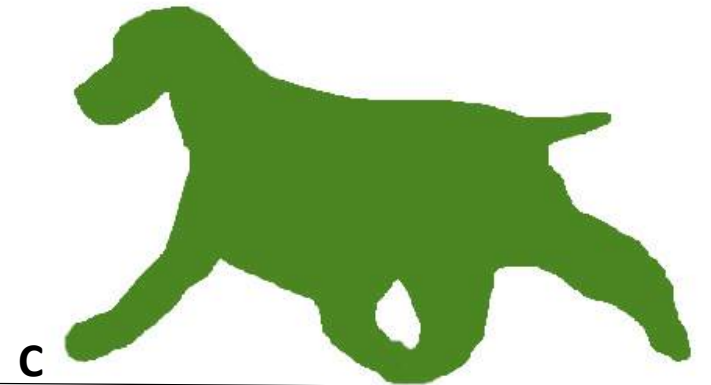
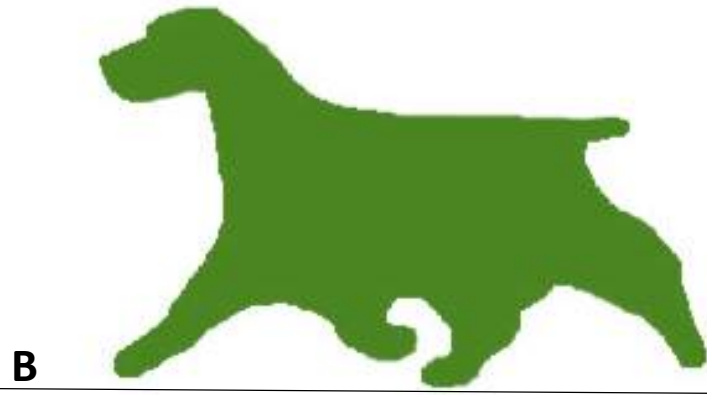
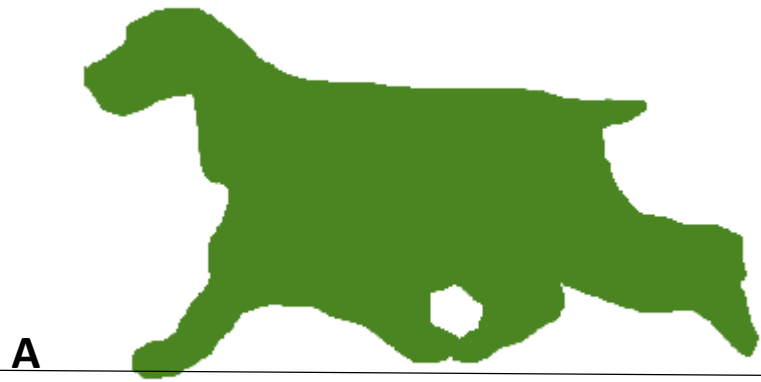
collar under the ear

moving them off the mat



**Grooming errors can also interfere with the appearance of correct gait.**





**Can you pick the four best moving Cockers?**

The End



**Don't forget they have to be MERRY!!**



**Presentation by the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America's  
Breed Education Committee**

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**Illustrations by Patricia Janzen and Genelle Joseph**

**Photos are the courtesy of Rebecca Parchman and Shannon Loritz**

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