



ECSCA Head Study

Understanding the Correct English Cocker Spaniel Head

Presented by the Breed Education Committee April 16th, 2019



The make and shape of the historic Spaniel came about because of the function it was developed to perform, the breed's original purpose. Eventually, individual breeds splintered off to create unique varieties of Spaniels with different requirements in the field and distinctive physical characteristics. Notable among these traits are height, weight, body length and most definitely the head shape and expression.



**Not only the hallmark of each breed,
the distinctive features
of each Spaniel's head represent the
function they were bred to perform.**



The beautiful, yet functional head of the English Cocker Spaniel can be challenging to comprehend.

In this presentation we will look in depth at the subtle features the standard calls for.

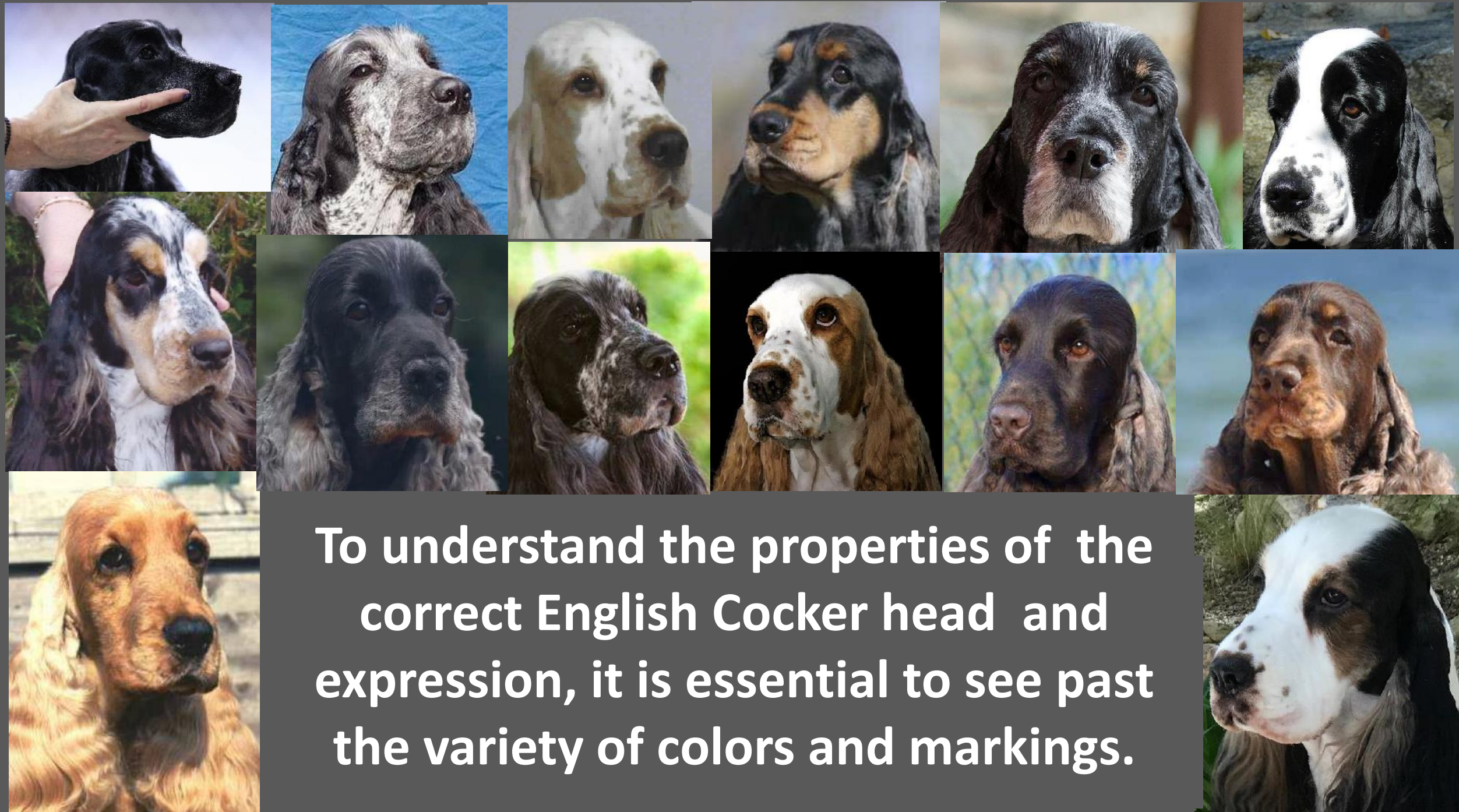


This painting by the French artist Leon Danchin (1887-1938), shows a lovely type English Cocker, despite the age of the painting. Note the typical head with eyes facing forward and the large nostrils.



English Cocker Spaniels are built to find, flush and retrieve game that is often quite large in relation to the dog. In order to pick up and carry such quarry, they must have strong jaws.

Therefore, their heads must provide the infrastructure to support the muscle required to perform the task.



To understand the properties of the correct English Cocker head and expression, it is essential to see past the variety of colors and markings.

General Appearance

Standard:

General appearance: strong, yet free from coarseness, softly contoured, without sharp angles. Taken as a whole, the parts combine to produce the expression distinctive of the breed.



“Taken as a whole, the parts combine to produce the expression distinctive of the breed.”



This is a photo of a 7-month-old puppy, yet even at a young age you can see the all the components of a correct head. Note the grooved stop, the correct eye shape, the plush muzzle, a clean back-skull and the balance between muzzle and skull.

The head is strong but clean and gently contoured. A correctly fashioned headpiece allows for important functionality in the field.



Eye Shape and Expression



Standard:

Expression

Soft, melting, yet dignified, alert, and intelligent.

Eyes

The eyes are essential to the desired expression. They are medium in size, full and slightly oval; set wide apart; lids tight. Haws are inconspicuous; may be pigmented or unpigmented. Eye color dark brown, except in livers and liver parti-colors where hazel is permitted, but the darker the hazel the better.

“Expression - Soft, melting, yet dignified, alert, and intelligent.”

The head and particularly the kind, endearing expression are the appeal of the breed.



“Eyes - The eyes are essential to the desired expression.”



The soft eyes draw you in and you instinctively know that this is a breed that exudes a willingness to please and is game for anything involving human companionship.

Correct Eye Shape and Expression



There is a slight lift to the top eyelid which gives the English Cocker an alert expression, and not "hound-like" or mournful. His expression should never appear hard or startled.

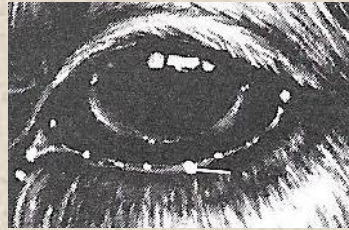


Four different styles of heads, all illustrate beautiful expressions and correct eye shape.

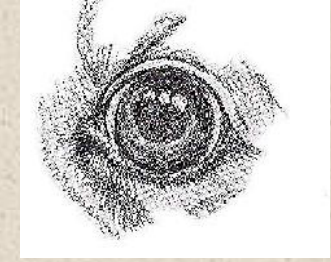
Correct eye shape



Incorrect, almond-shaped



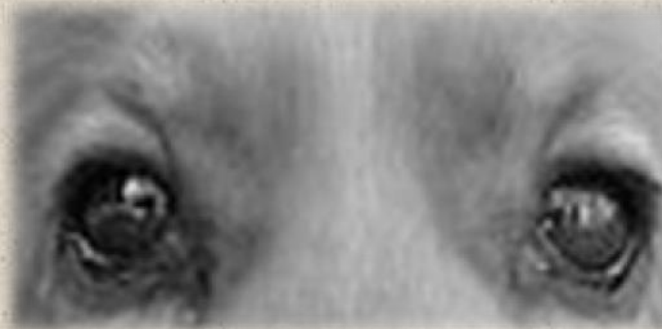
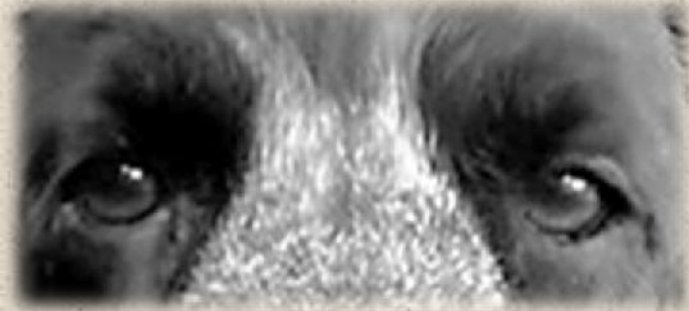
Incorrect, round



The correct eye shape is “medium in size, full and slightly oval”. English Cockers DO NOT have almond-shaped eyes, which causes a squinty, harsh expression. Round eyes are also incorrect for the breed, causing a startled expression.

The haws, or second eyelid should be inconspicuous and the eyelids tight, never loose or droopy.

Common Eye Shape Faults



Loose lids, round eyes, close-set, sunken, almond-shaped, triangular-shaped and small eyes, all are incorrect for the breed.

“Eyes - set wide apart”



**The eyes are wide set and forward facing.
On the correctly fashioned head,
the muzzle is only as much narrower than the
skull to allow for a full eye placement.**

“Eye color dark brown, except in livers and liver parti-colors where hazel is permitted, but the darker the hazel the better.”

**Hazel is
acceptable in
liver colors, but
the darker, the
better!**

**A light eye in all
colors other
than liver is not
desirable.**



“Haws are inconspicuous; may be pigmented or unpigmented”



The haws, or second eyelid, should not be obvious. Light haws may be in one or both eyes. The eyelids should be tight, never loose or droopy, which is a hindrance in the field.

Skull

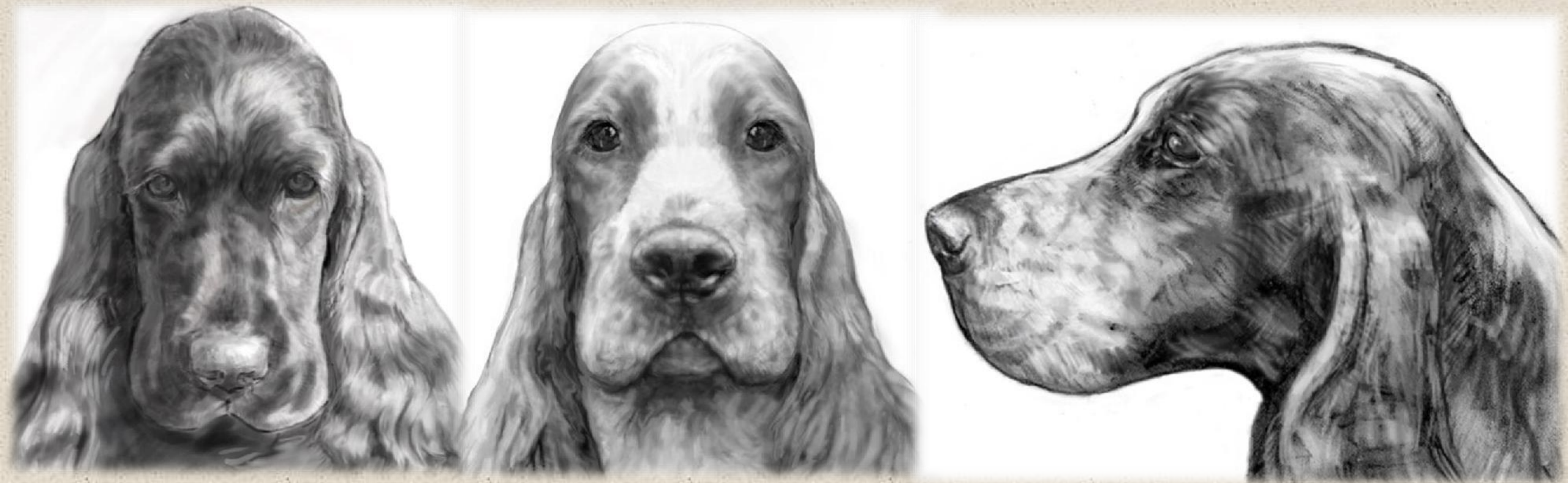
Standard:

Skull

Arched and slightly flattened when seen both from the side and from the front. Viewed in profile, the brow appears not appreciably higher than the back-skull. Viewed from above, the sides of the skull are in planes roughly parallel to those of the muzzle. Stop definite, but moderate, and slightly grooved.



Three illustrations showing correct heads viewed from above, the front and in profile. Note the balanced proportion of skull to muzzle, softly contoured and free from angularity.



Parallel planes are referenced when looking straight on at the head and NOT from the side.

“Skull- Arched and slightly flattened when seen both from the side and from the front.”



The skull is arched, but not a complete arch like an American Cocker.

It has a slightly flattened top.

When viewed from the front, the planes of the skull and muzzle are nearly parallel, the muzzle is only slightly narrower than the skull, allowing for a full eye placement.

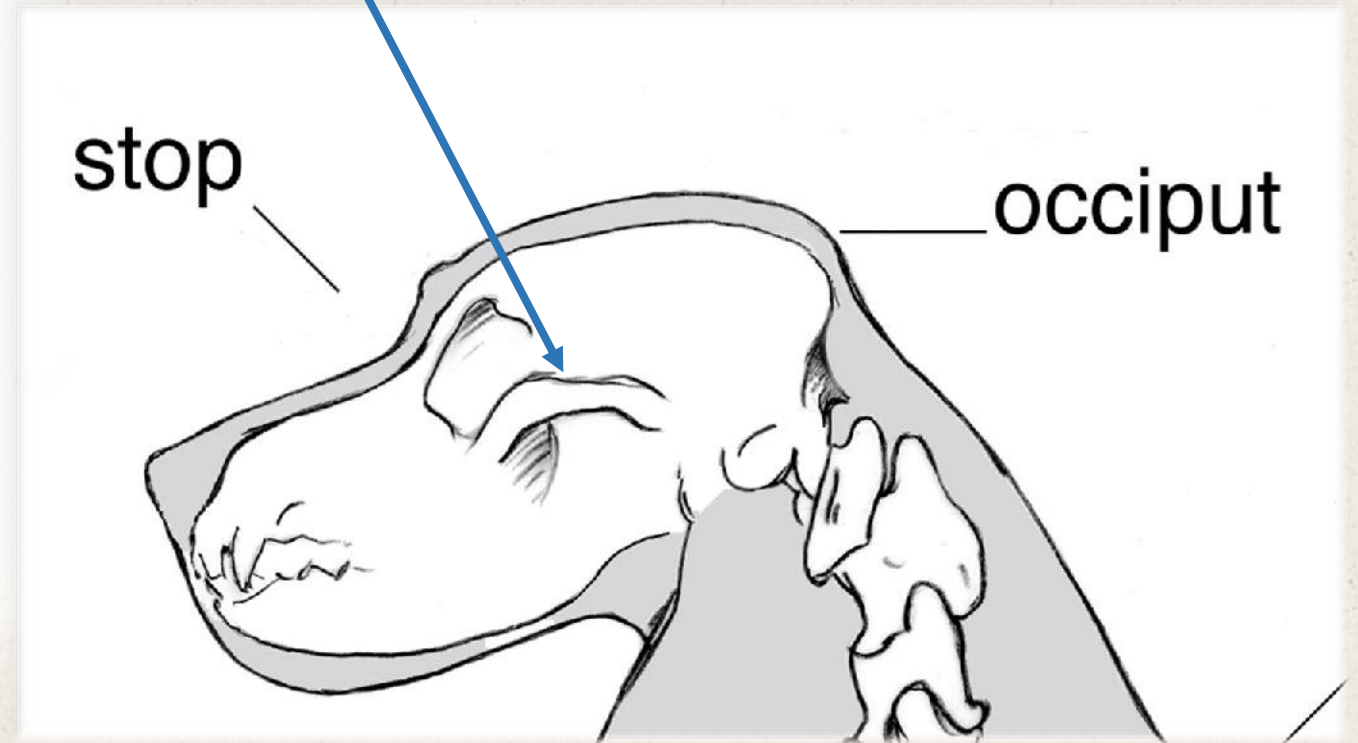
When viewed from the FRONT:



Front on, the sides of the back-skull and the sides of the muzzle appear to be approximately parallel, indicating that the zygomatic arch is not prominent, and the back-skull is not coarse or rounded. The sides of the back-skull above the zygomatic bone are elevated and arched, to allow good jaw muscle attachment which aids in carrying heavy game.

The very top of the back-skull is only slightly flattened.

What is the Zygomatic Arch?



The bridge of bone extending from the temporal bone at the side of the head around to the upper jawbone in front and including the zygomatic (cheek) bone.

When viewed from the FRONT:



Here again you can see that the zygomatic arch is not prominent, allowing for the muzzle to be “only as much narrower than the skull as is consistent with a full eye placement; cleanly chiseled under the eyes”

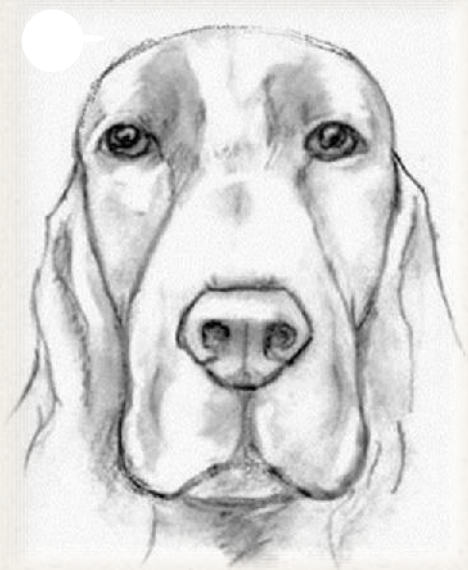
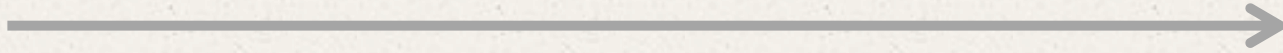
The sides of the back-skull above the zygomatic bone are elevated and arched, to allow good jaw muscle attachment which aids in carrying heavy game.

English Cockers must have a strong foreface (everything in front of the eyes), never a “scooped out” appearance under the eyes.



Skull From the Front

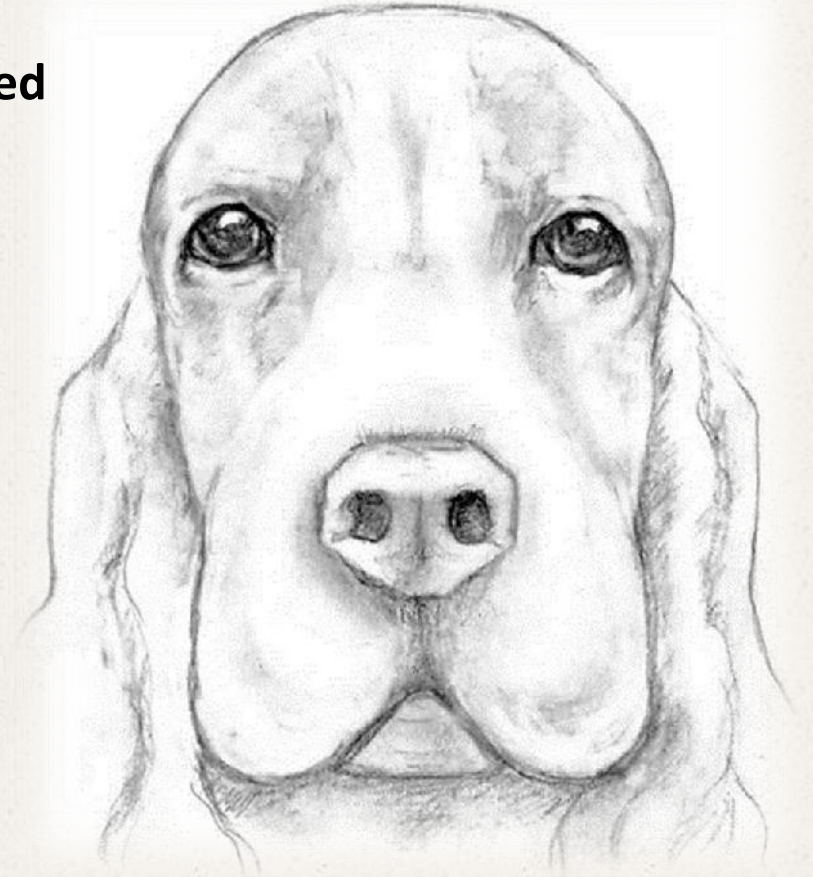
Correct and well-balanced skull that is arched and slightly flattened



Flat, lacking the softly contoured shape, appears harsh. This angular head appears much more setter-like than is correct.



Domed, overly arched and missing the slightly flattened top. The round eye adds to the American Cocker appearance.



Correct

Skull arched and slightly flattened on top

Haws are inconspicuous

Eyes, medium in size, full and slightly oval

Cleanly chiseled under eyes.

Eyes set wide apart

Lids tight

Ears set low, lying close to the head

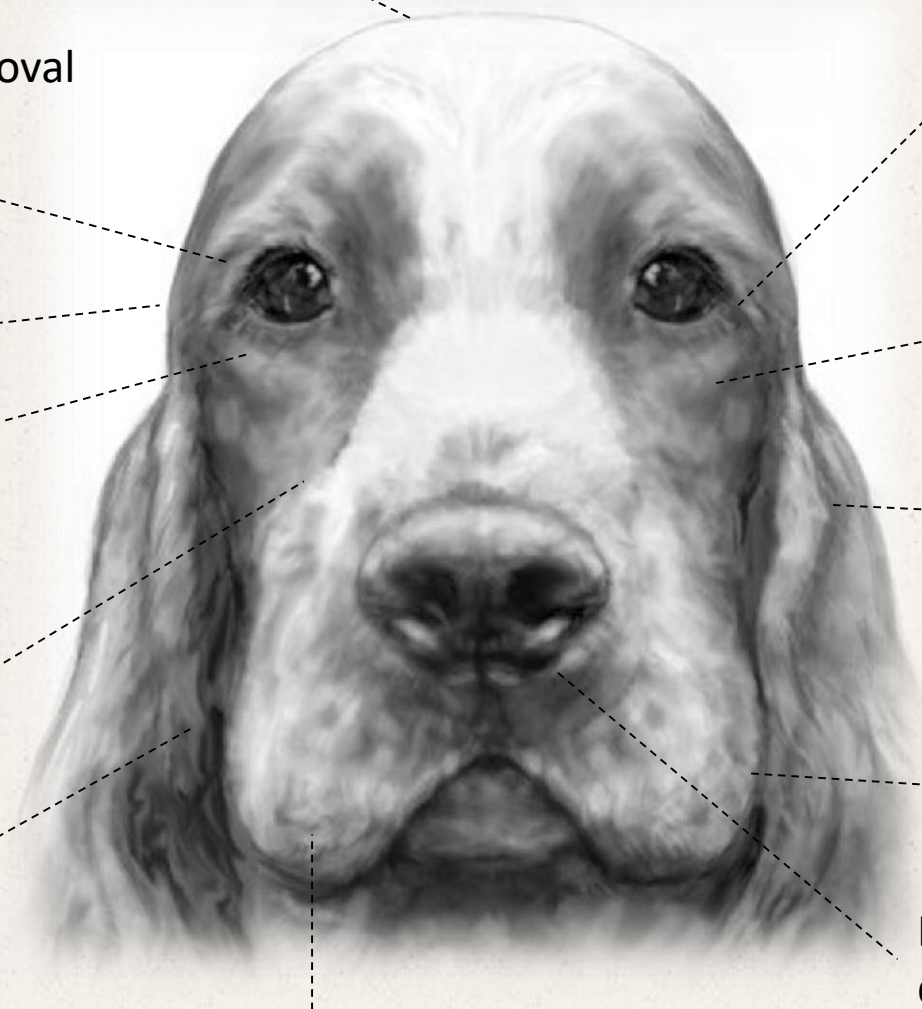
Muzzle only as much narrower than the skull as is consistent with a full eye placement

Well cushioned muzzle

Jaws are strong

Nostrils wide for proper development of scenting ability

Viewed from above, the sides of the skull are in roughly parallel planes to those of the muzzle.



Back-skull



**Clean back-skull,
balanced with muzzle**



**Broad back-skull, out of
balance with muzzle**



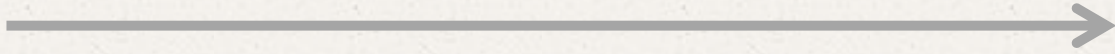
**Clean back-skull,
balanced with muzzle**



**Back-skull broad,
divergent head planes**

In Profile

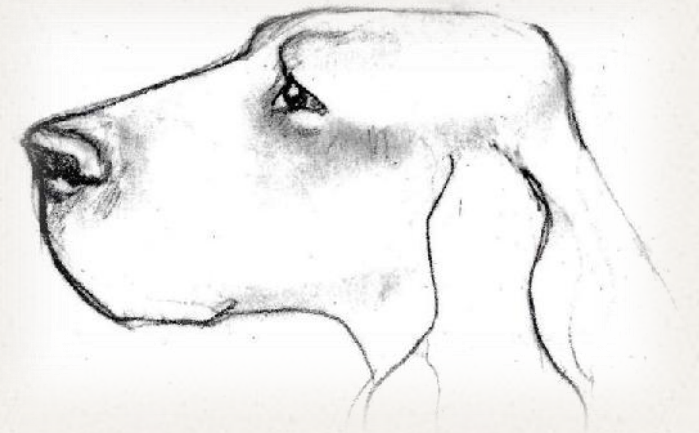
A well-balanced head with a definite, yet moderate stop.



**Skull too deep, stop too pronounced,
muzzle too short.**

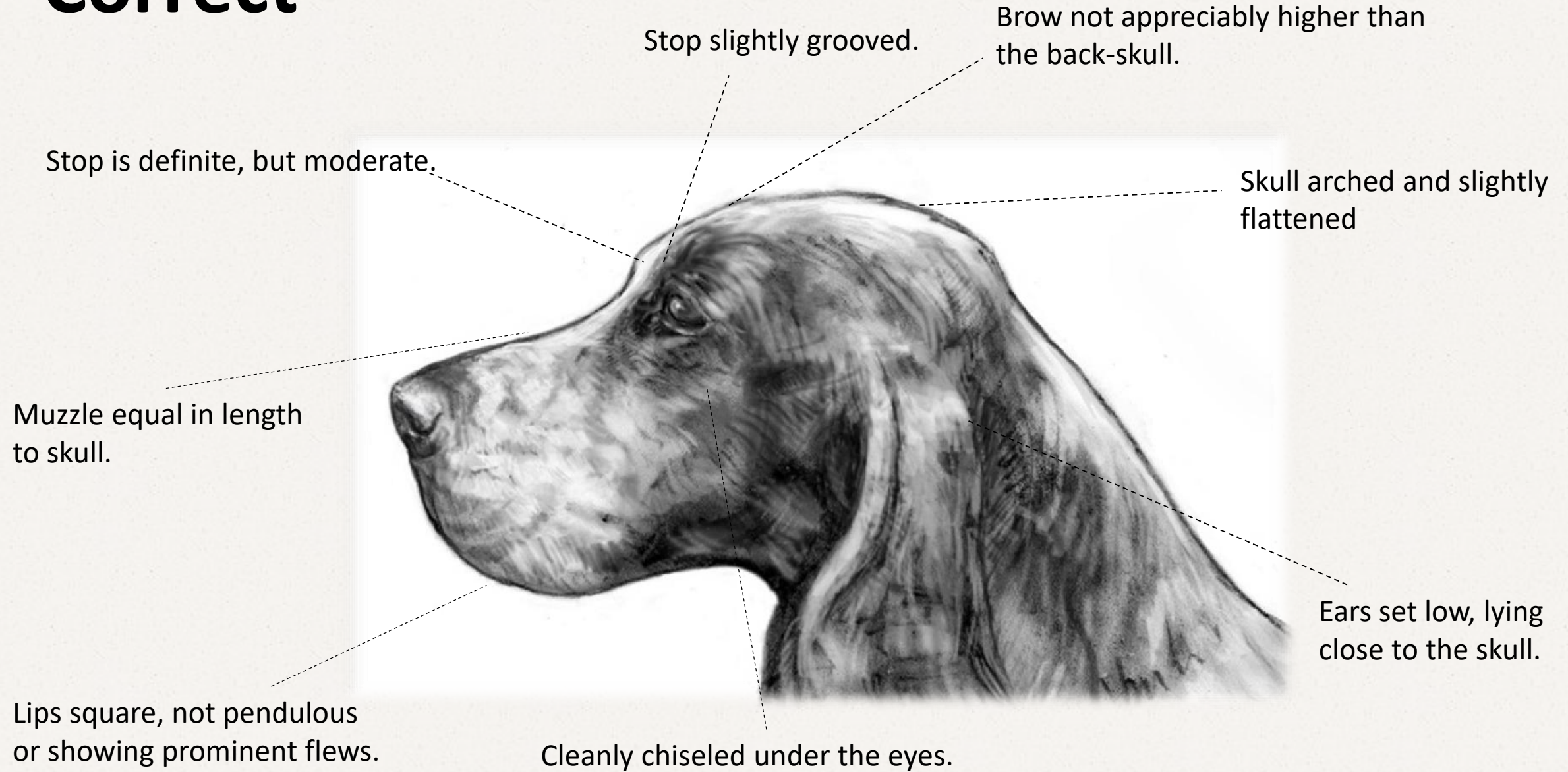


**Back-skull falls off too sharply,
prominent frontal bone.**

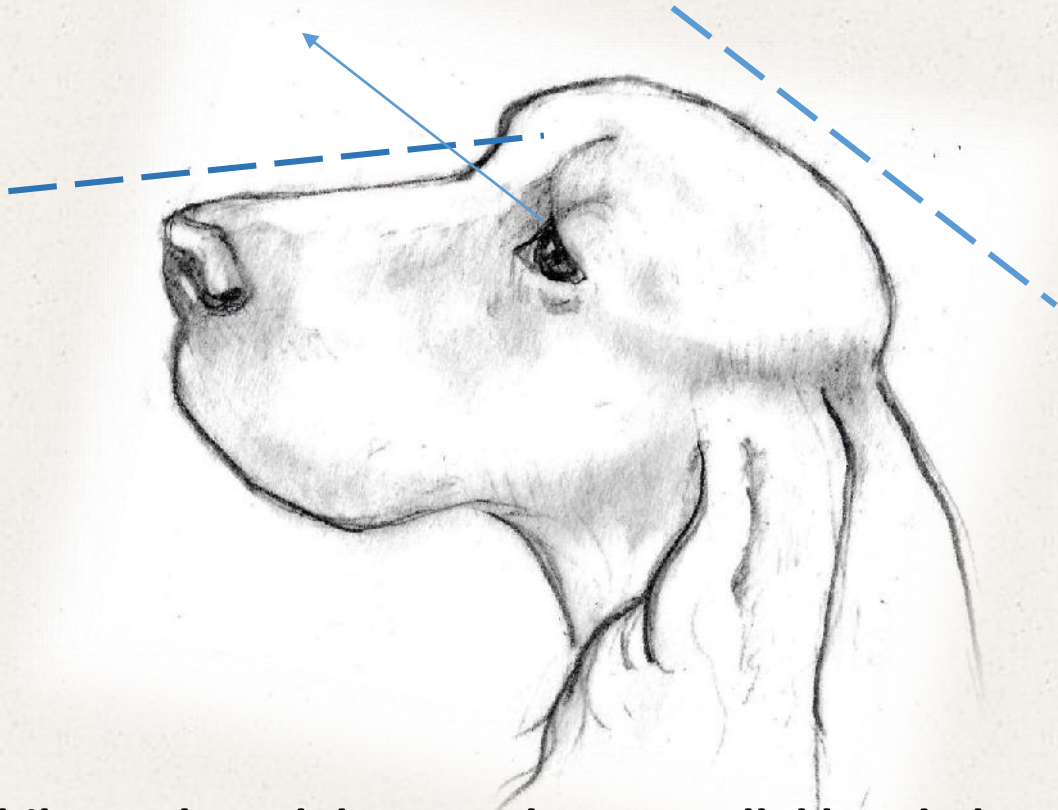


**Lacking stop, flat skull with
small eyes.**

Correct



“Viewed in profile, the brow appears not appreciably higher than the back-skull.”



While our breed does not have parallel head planes when viewed from the side, downfaced dogs are incorrect.

On the left is an illustration of a dog whose back-skull drops off steeply, causing him to be “downfaced” (note the excessively divergent head planes).

The English Cocker, being a Jack-of-all-trades hunting companion, is required to retrieve game from water. Therefore, he must be able to carry the game and not be looking up into the sun while keeping his nostrils clear of water.



A correctly made head allows for functionality in the field.

“Ears - Set low, lying close to the head; leather fine, extending to the nose, well covered with long, silky, straight or slightly wavy hair.”

The ear set is “low”, but never so low as to appear to be in the neck.

As with all gun dogs, the ears should lay closed, not open. Open ear leather exposes the ear to harmful debris.



Muzzle



Standard:

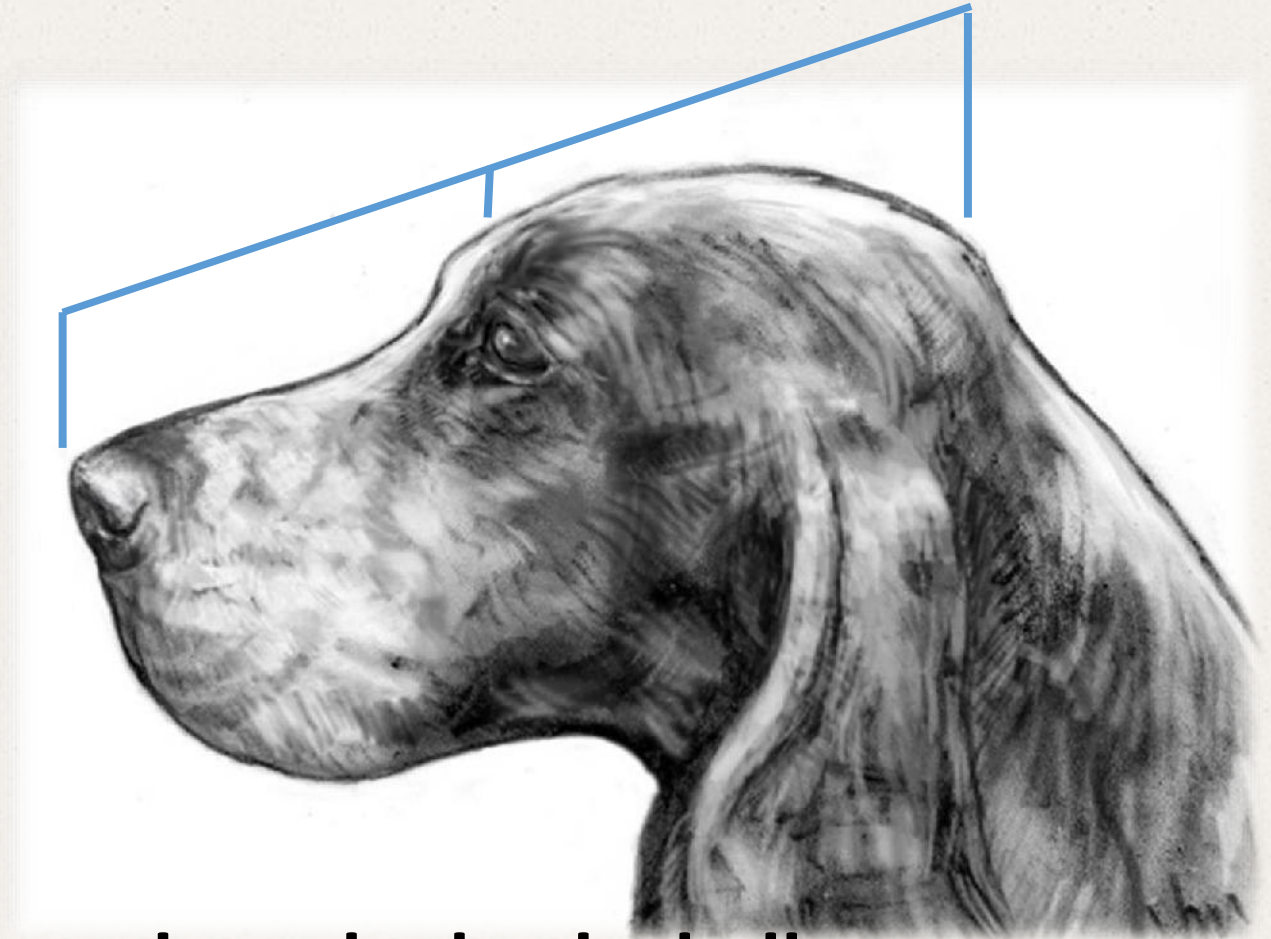
Muzzle

Equal in length to skull; well cushioned; only as much narrower than the skull as is consistent with a full eye placement; cleanly chiseled under the eyes. Jaws strong, capable of carrying game. Nostrils wide for proper development of scenting ability; color black, except in livers and parti-colors of that shade where they will be brown; reds and parti-colors of that shade may be brown, but black is preferred. Lips square, but not pendulous or showing prominent flews.

Bite

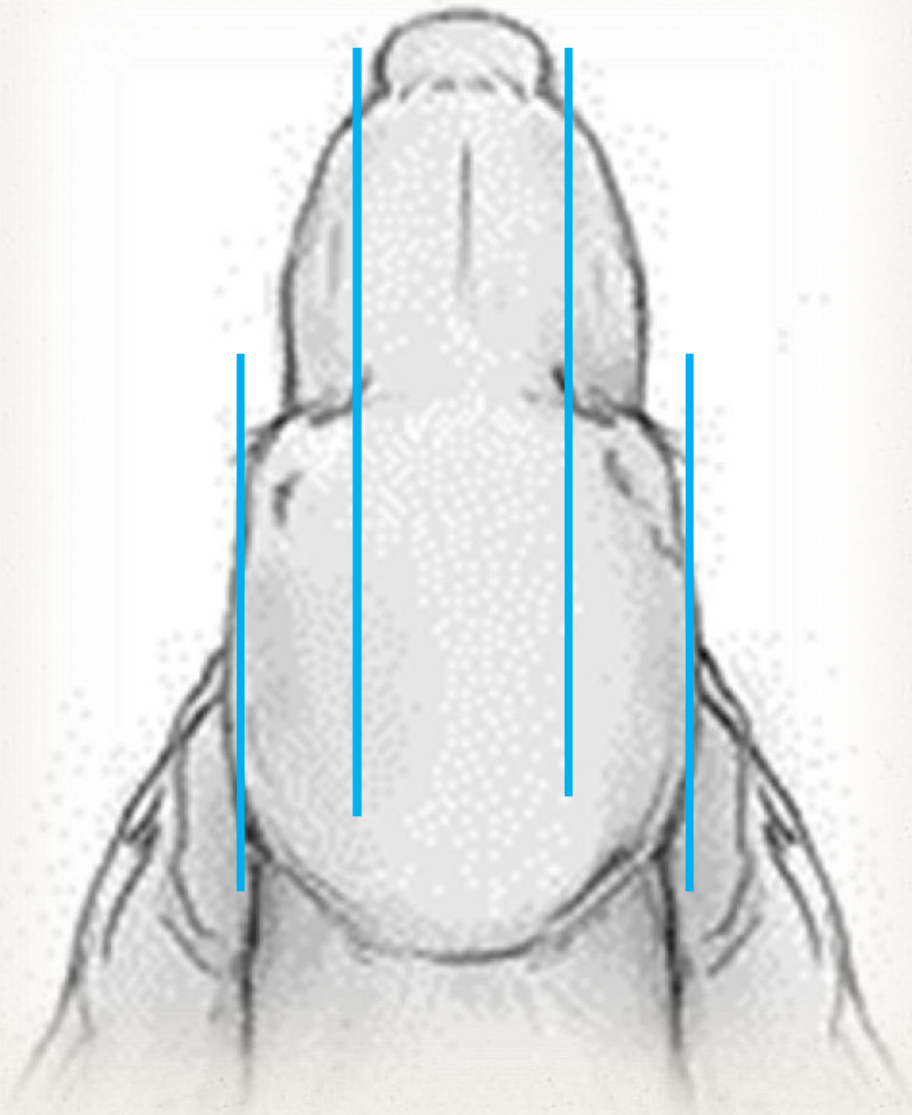
Scissors. A level bite is not preferred. Overshot or undershot to be severely penalized.

“Muzzle - Equal in length to skull”



**The muzzle is equal in length to the back-skull
and only slightly less in width.**

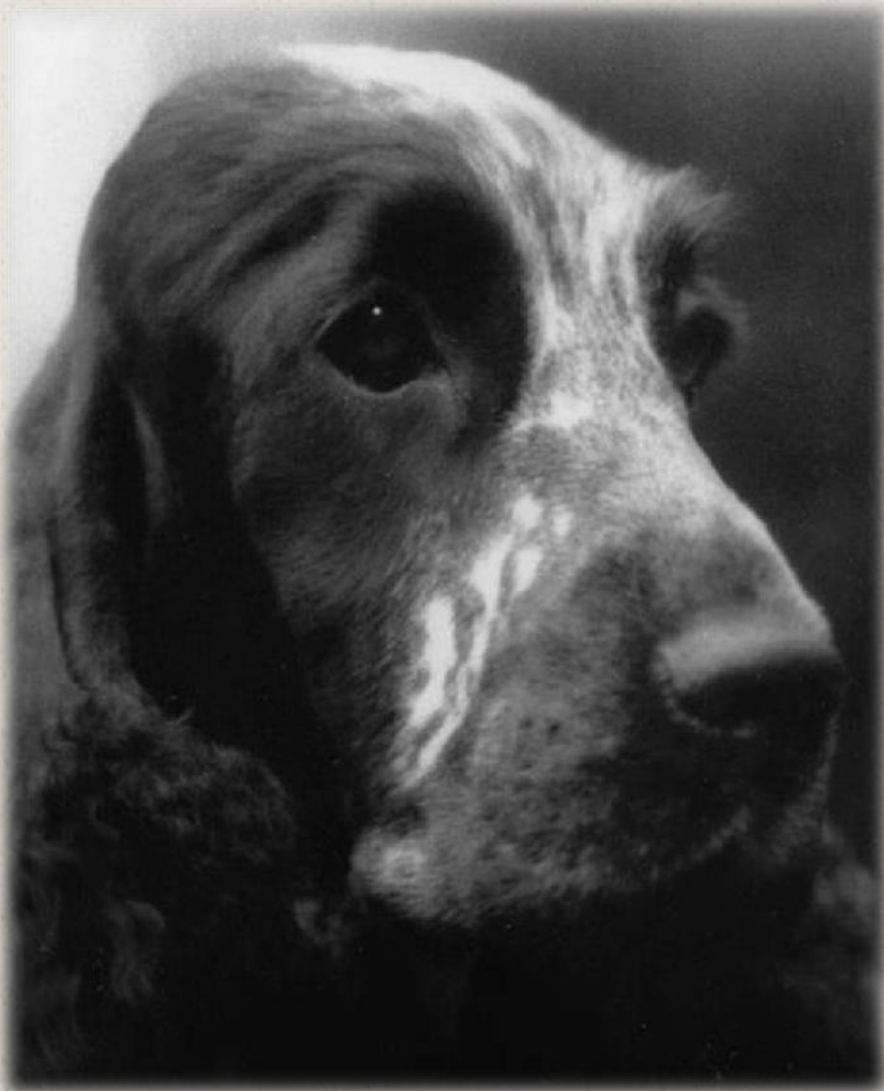
“only as much narrower than the skull as is consistent with a full eye placement”



“cleanly chiseled under the eyes”

Chiseling under the eye, meaning clean cut and finely finished.

The grooved stop is indicative of future chiseling on an adolescent head, once molars have finished dropping.



Beautifully chiseled head



Cleanly chiseled under the eyes



Lacking chiseling under the eyes

“Jaws strong, capable of carrying game.”



Narrow underjaws are incorrect and can be detrimental to a dog's ability to carry heavy game.

“Nostrils wide for proper development of scenting ability; color black, except in livers and parti-colors of that shade where they will be brown; reds and parti-colors of that shade may be brown, but black is preferred.”



“Muzzle - well cushioned”

The lips are well cushioned for protection and cover the underjaw but are not pendulous with prominent flews.



“Bite - Scissors. A level bite is not preferred. Overshot or undershot to be severely penalized.”

The teeth are of good size and the nostrils wide open for scenting.



Thank you for joining us!



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We sincerely thank the members of the English Cocker Spaniel Fancy for the use of their photos.



"Duchess"