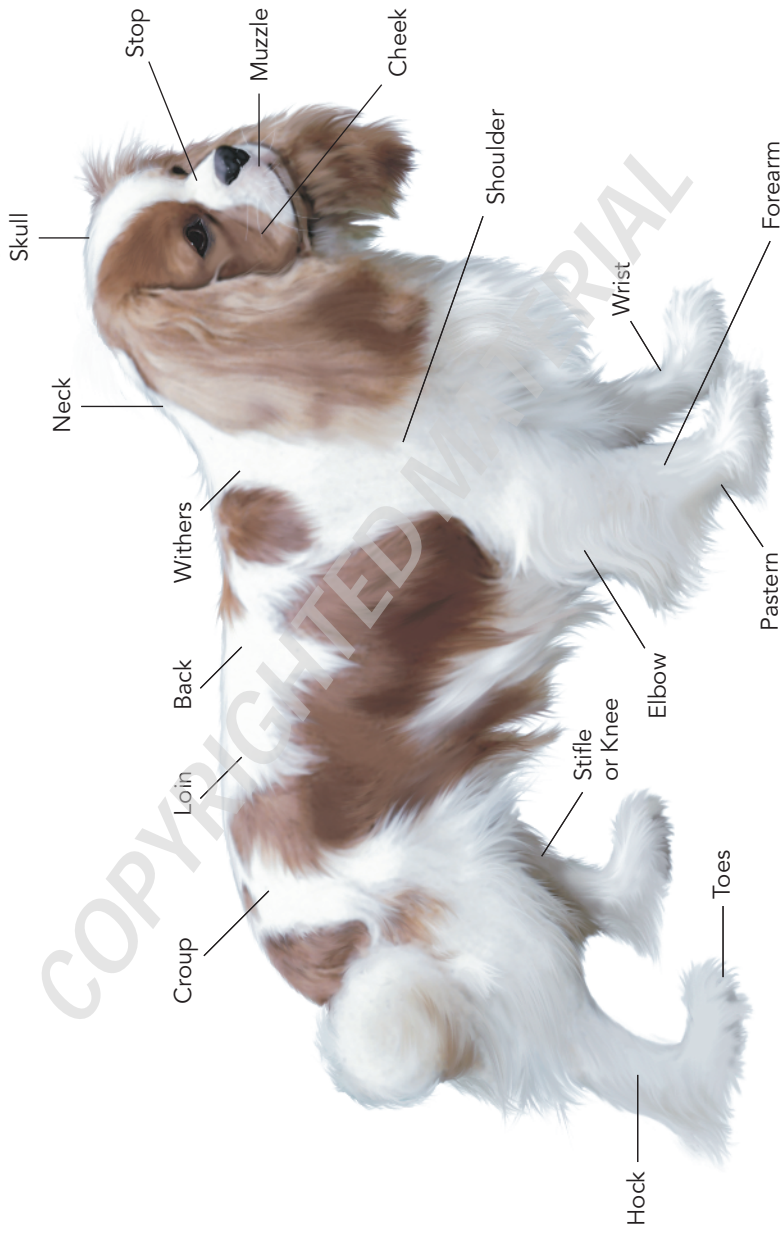


The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel





Chapter 1

What Is a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel?



The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is a sporting toy spaniel with a sweet, affectionate nature that makes him ideal as a family pet. Happy to be with you no matter what your activity, the Cavalier will love to snuggle on your lap while you watch television but will be equally enthusiastic about keeping you company on a hiking trail. He has all the lively sporting instincts of his larger cousins, but contains them all in a small, portable package.

This little spaniel is immensely adaptable to a variety of lifestyles. He will be at home in the city or the country, and he has but one requirement for his happiness: the companionship and love of a human family. There are so many variations of the human family, and the Cavalier will adapt easily to every one. He is the ideal companion for a retired older person or a couple whose lifestyle includes a daily “keep fit” walk. An active family with children will find the Cavalier affectionate with everyone and always ready for a run or a game of fetch.

Patience with children is a great asset of this breed. I have received a number of photos and e-mails from families that show children and their pet Cavaliers dressed in various costumes. The most amusing was a pretty dog named Cosy in a baby nightdress and frilly cap, complete with a pacifier in her mouth.

It may seem surprising that the Cavalier is also a popular choice for a young working urban couple with a busy life. I always check to make sure they are able to employ a dog walker so that the Cavalier receives enough attention throughout the day. But with this caveat, it can be a great match. These young people tell me that there is nothing like coming home to a Cavalier’s loving and enthusiastic welcome after their stressful days at work.

The Breed Standard

Every breed must have a breed standard, which is a blueprint that describes the perfect dog. Most people recognize a specific dog or breed by the dog's appearance. Although personality, temperament, intelligence, and character are vitally important, too, the dog's physical appearance provides people with that important first impression.

The AKC breed standard gives a mental picture of perfect Cavalier conformation, and it is this picture that all serious breeders will endeavor to bring to life in their stock. In this section I'll describe briefly the ideal Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. To read the official breed standard, go to the web site of the American Kennel Club, www.akc.org.

General Appearance

The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is an active, graceful, well-balanced toy spaniel, elegant and royal in his appearance, with the fearless character of a sporting dog and the gentle, affectionate nature of a true companion. The standard emphasizes that the dog must have no exaggerated features in size or shape and should have a totally natural coat.



The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel should appear elegant and royal, with the fearless character of a sporting dog and the loving nature of a companion.

The lovely, flowing stride of a dog with the correct structure (described in the standard as “free moving and elegant in action”) emphasizes the Cavalier's relationship to the larger sporting spaniels and his use as a hunting dog.

When it comes to temperament, the standard says the Cavalier should be friendly, with no tendency to be nervous or shy. Aggressive, bad-tempered dogs are not to be tolerated.

The Body

When fully grown, a Cavalier will stand ten to twelve inches at the highest point of the shoulder (called the withers) and weigh between twelve and eighteen pounds. The body should be just slightly longer

What Is a Breed Standard?

A breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect dog of that breed. Breeders use the standard as a guide in their breeding programs, and judges use it to evaluate the dogs in conformation shows. The standard is written by the national breed club, using guidelines established by the registry that recognizes the breed (such as the AKC or UKC).

The first section of the breed standard gives a brief overview of the breed's history. Then it describes the dog's general appearance and size as an adult. Next is a detailed description of the head and neck, then the back and body, and the front and rear legs. The standard then describes the ideal coat and how the dog should be presented in the show ring. It also lists all acceptable colors, patterns, and markings. Then there's a section on how the dog moves, called *gait*. Finally, there's a general description of the dog's temperament.

Each section also lists characteristics that are considered to be faults or disqualifications in the conformation ring. Superficial faults in appearance are often what distinguish a pet-quality dog from a show or competition-quality dog. However, some faults affect the way a dog moves or his overall health. And faults in temperament are serious business.

than it is tall—more like a square than a rectangle. The chest should be moderately deep, extending down between the elbows to allow plenty of room for the heart. The body should taper slightly behind the ribs, but should not have a tucked-up appearance like that of the Greyhound.

The tail should be carried level with or slightly above the line of the back and should be wagging happily when the dog is moving. Docking the tail—cutting off the end to give the dog a more balanced look—is optional. In Britain, where the practice originated, docking is now illegal. Docking began as a practical measure because the long, fanlike tail of the Cavalier could become tangled or caught in a bush or long weeds when the dog was hunting. Since we in North America own Cavaliers strictly as pets or show dogs, docking is now completely

unnecessary. If the breeder does dock tails, no more than one third should be removed and a white tip must be left on the tail of the Blenheim and Tricolor.

The Head

The beautiful head, with its essentially sweet expression and soulful eyes, best expresses the character of the breed. The neck is long, well-muscled, and gently arched at the crest. The head should be in good proportion to the body, with large, round, dark brown eyes that are not prominent and are set well apart. Cushioning under the eyes contributes to the dog's soft and gentle expression.

Cavaliers have long ears with lots of feathering—the silky hair that adds substance and glamour to the ears. The skull is slightly rounded but without a dome or peak, and it should appear flat because of the high placement of the ears. The ears themselves should be set well enough apart that, when the dog is alert, they fan forward to frame the face. The stop, which is the spot on the skull where the muzzle meets the face, should be moderate, and the muzzle itself cushiony, well-tapered, and about one and a half inches long.

The Coat

The coat should be moderately long, silky, and free from curls. No trimming is permitted for the show ring, and the standard says dogs who have been trimmed should be penalized severely. There should be long feathering on the ears, chest, legs, and tail.

This is the only spaniel breed in which the feathering on the feet, known as “bedroom slippers,” is left long and untrimmed. Hair growing between the pads and on the bottom of the feet, however, must be clipped away for the comfort of the dog. The emphasis, once again, is on the natural appearance of the dog.

Cavalier Colors

You have a choice of four coat varieties in Cavaliers. Two are known as particolors because they have white markings, and two are known as wholecolors because they have no white markings at all.

Blenheim and Tricolor are the two particolors. The Blenheim has rich chestnut markings on a pearly white ground. The chestnut color must appear around the eyes and on the ears. Between the eyes there is a white mark or blaze. The Tricolor is a handsome black and white dog with body markings placed similarly to the Blenheim, but with bright tan points over each eye, down the side of the cheeks, on the underside of the ears, and under the tail.

The wholecolors are relatively rare, but some breeders prefer them to the particolors, claiming that dogs with these colors are more lively and intelligent. The

Black and Tan Cavalier is, as her name implies, black with the same tan points as the Tricolor. She shares this type of marking with other breeds, including the Doberman Pinscher and Rottweiler, but there the similarity ends. To see a silky, shiny Black and Tan running in a green field is to have a moment of true esthetic enjoyment. The Ruby color of Cavalier is, like that of the Irish Setter, a rich true red all over. As in the world of humans, many owners of Rubies say these red-heads are more volatile but also more fun to live with than the other colors of Cavaliers. In truth, I believe there is not much difference in the temperaments of the four colors. They are all pleasing to the eye, and their sweet nature is such that color is just the icing on the cake.

Applying the Standard

While the breed standard describes the ideal dog, if you are thinking of getting a Cavalier as a pet your two main concerns should be temperament and good health. Although not every Cavalier is right for the show ring, every Cavalier is attractive and the small imperfections that cause a breeder to sell a puppy as a pet rather than a show prospect will not make your dog any less wonderful as a companion. In fact, you may not even see those minor flaws.

Imperfections in temperament, however, are another matter. In this case, settle for nothing less than the sweet dog the standard describes. The temperament of the Cavalier should be as loving and charming as his appearance. For hundreds of years this breed's function has been as a loving companion to humans; this is the greatest gift the Cavalier has to bestow.



From left to right, the colors here are Blenheim, Black and Tan, Ruby, and Tricolor.