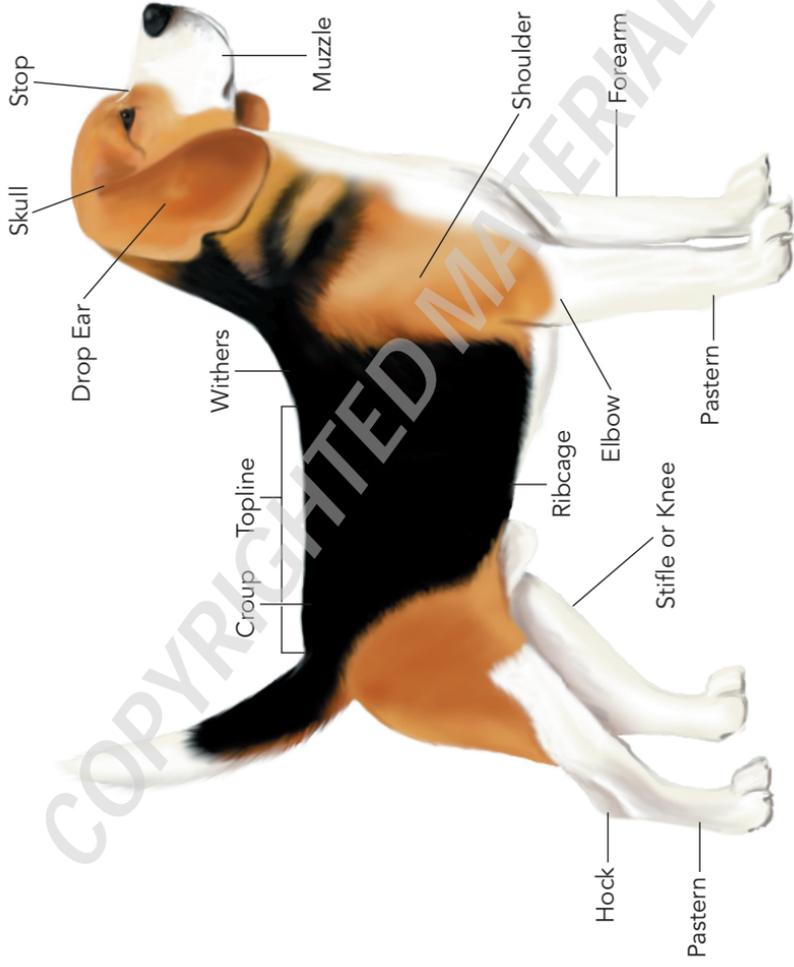


The Beagle





Chapter 1

What Is a Beagle?



Dream big. That's what Snoopy, one of America's best-loved icons, liked to think. Snoopy was Joe Cool, World War I Flying Ace, Big Man on Campus, Literary Agent, Flashbeagle, and Foreign Legionnaire. There wasn't any persona this extroverted Beagle with the overactive imagination couldn't assume. Snoopy was cartoonist Charles M. Schulz's lifelong muse.

Although it's difficult to imagine this marshmallow of a cartoon canine running after rabbits—or anything else for that matter—Snoopy's intelligence and quick wit embraces the spirit of all Beagles the world over: enterprising, mischievous, and downright cuddly loveable.

Apparently, everyone agrees. From 1953 through 1959, the Beagle was the top dog among all breeds registered by the AKC, and the breed has ranked either fourth, fifth, or sixth ever since. Certainly, the Beagle is one Joe Cool dog.

Something Like a Hound Dog

The Beagle is a hound, a scenthound to be exact, who hunts prey primarily by scent. A member of a select fraternity within the canine world, the Beagle was originally bred to hunt as part of a large pack.



First and foremost, a Beagle is a scenthound who hunts with his nose.

He is the little cousin of the Foxhound, who is depicted in paintings of horses and hounds in the English countryside. He is also the more active, less melancholic cousin of the Basset Hound. Like the Basset, the Beagle's primary quarry is the hare or rabbit.

The little puppy asleep on your lap may not know all of this, but it's important for you to know this, because it will help you understand this marvelous little creature.

How the Beagle's mind works, why he acts the way he does, and why he looks the way he does isn't a big mystery. The more you know about your little hound, the easier it is to keep him healthy, happy, and very well adjusted.

The Ideal Beagle

The perfect Beagle is probably already taking a nap in your house, and chances are you don't care whether he is taller than fifteen inches, his coat is thin, or he's long and lean. All that matters to you is the way he looks up at you with love in his eyes and follows you from room to room.

All Beagles have that natural appeal and an inner beauty all their own. If you read the official breed standard for the Beagle though, the ideal hound needs to have more than the look of love. By working hard to meet the standard, breeders try to produce the best Beagles they can.

In this chapter, you'll find a basic description of the Beagle, as set out by the breed standard. If you're wondering if your Beagle fits the standard, give it a read. You can also ask your dog's breeder. Most responsible breeders are true Beagle experts and are happy to share what they have learned over the years with a new owner, both for your benefit and for the good of your puppy. Your veterinarian can usually let you know if anything structural is amiss with your dog.

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).

Usually, 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. You can read all the AKC breed standards at www.akc.org.

Overall Appearance

A miniature Foxhound, the Beagle should be big and solid in relation to his height, and look like a dog who can go the distance in the chase to follow his quarry until the end. This description applies to the field dog as well as the show Beagle.

He should be nicely proportioned and built squarely, with a straight back. This overall structure enables him to run all day in the field if he has to, or to look like he's floating around a show ring.

Two Sizes Fit All

The AKC breed standard divides Beagles into two varieties based on size: under thirteen inches in height when measured at the withers (the top of the shoulder), and over thirteen but not exceeding fifteen inches in height. In the show ring, these two sizes compete separately. Beagles who are taller than fifteen inches cannot be entered in field trials or shows. In general, though, Beagles tend to vary from about ten to sixteen inches at the withers.

Beagles under thirteen inches should weigh less than twenty pounds. Dogs from thirteen to fifteen inches weigh from twenty to thirty pounds.

According to the standard, there's no height or weight difference between males and females.

Body, Neck, Chest, and Shoulders

The Beagle standard has 100 points, and each feature of the dog is assigned a certain number of those points. The number of points is based on how important those features are to the breed overall. The highest number of points is given to the body (35) and the running gear (30), which includes the forelegs, hips, thighs, hind legs, and feet.

The key to evaluating a Beagle's conformation is assessing the overall picture. Basically, a good Beagle will be square in appearance, have good bone or substance, and have straight front legs. Look for a deep chest with an area that



Beagles were built to run and chase with tenacity and courage.

What's a Pocket Beagle?

Paintings from the days of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) depict short-legged, somewhat pointy-nosed Beagles measuring nine inches at the withers. These were referred to as Pocket Beagles. Even shorter dogs, called Glove Beagles, were small enough to be held in a gauntlet—a glove of armored leather with a long sleeve. These dogs were also popular with the royal family.

Today there are very few *really* small Beagles of the size shown in those paintings. If a breeder tells you that she has one, it's not because the dog is just little, but rather because the Beagle suffers from dwarfing or chondrodystrophy, a serious physical deformity and an inherited health disorder.

Even if the parents of a puppy are under thirteen inches, breeders do not have a crystal ball to predict what size a puppy will grow up to be. If a breeder tells you differently, they're mistaken. If you want a Beagle under thirteen inches, wait until the dog is nine months old and full grown, and you'll know for sure.

curves upward behind the ribs and before the pelvis (this is known as the *tuck-up*). His hindquarters are strong and well-angulated. This refers to the angles that are formed by the bones of the hip, pelvis, thigh, and feet.

There should be symmetry and fluidity in his motion. Proportion and balance are important dimensions in assessing good Beagle type.

It is understandable why the authors of the standard would put so much emphasis on the body and the running gear. Originally, these dogs were expected to hunt for hours over all types of terrain and, through courage, patience, and persistence, overtake a hare capable of reaching speeds of forty miles per hour.

Unable to run that fast themselves, the little hounds had to use their highly developed sense of smell, pack instincts, and intelligence to stay in the chase until their quarry was tired. Therefore, all the emphasis is on strength; propelling power; sound, firm feet; freedom of action; ample lung capacity; and other structural traits.

Of course, having a white tip on the end of the tail makes it easier for the hunter to keep a Beagle in sight when the dog is far out in front.

Head

Why is the head given so many points (25)? When the cranium is described as “full and broad,” this assumes the dog is very brainy. The wide nostrils and the moderately long, straight muzzle should help with the olfactory wizardry required of a hound who is expected to follow the trail of the rabbit—the game animal that leaves the least amount of scent of any quarry.

Eyes

Soft and houndlike, gentle and pleading, those brown or hazel eyes are a window into the Beagle’s good nature. The typical Beagle expression is just one of the things that make him so compelling. Looking into a Beagle’s eyes should reveal the honesty, loyalty, affection, and intelligence that make the Beagle so beloved in the field, in the home, and in the show ring.

The eyes should be brown or hazel, large, and set well apart. They should give the Beagle a gentle and pleading expression. Those soft eyes are also responsible for all the treats people just can’t resist handing out.



Sweet, round eyes and long, low-set ears characterize the Beagle’s head.

Ears

A pretty head usually has pretty ears to go with it. Beagle ears are very distinctive. Sitting low on the head, they’re long and should reach almost to the end of the dog’s nose. Turning slightly toward the cheek, the ear is rounded at the tip and should never stand up.

Beagles have long ears so that they can pick up scent from the ground. Besides, who can resist stroking that soft face and fingering those luxurious flaps? Just keep them out of the water bowl. When Beagles drink water, those ears have a way of going for a swim.

Because of the length of ear flap covering the ear canal, Beagles do

tend to get ear infections. Keep the ears clean and dry and your dog shouldn't have any problems.

Coat and Colors

The Beagle has a medium-length double coat. This means that his outercoat is hard and protects the dog from brush and bad weather. The outercoat should lie smooth against the body. Underneath that topcoat is a finer undercoat.

Although most people think that all Beagles are the traditional tri-color pattern of black, brown, and white, according to the standard, any hound color is acceptable. What's a hound color? Hound colors include all shades and combinations of white or cream, black, tan/lemon/red, brown/liver, and blue/gray, and the colors of the hare or badger.

The second most popular color combination is red and white, sometimes described as lemon and white or tan and white. Tri-color patterns can also be faded or diluted colors such as blue, deep brown (chocolate), liver, or lilac. Two large patches of two or more colors on the Beagle's sides or across the back are referred to as *piebald*. Badger-pied is a pale cream with blended black, silver, and fawn, which resembles a badger's coat.

Another color, Belvoir tan, is named after the famous Belvoir pack in Britain. The Belvoir hounds had a distinctive tan coloration that was all the rage in the 1890s. If a hound has flecks of color, either tan (red) or muted black (blue), this pattern is called *ticking*. When someone refers to a blueticked Beagle, the name refers to the coloration.

A mottled coat has round, dark blotches on top of a lighter coat color.

Temperament

Happy-go-lucky—this accurately describes the Snoopy dog everyone knows and loves. If a shy Beagle does come along, it usually means he wasn't properly socialized when he was a puppy or that his ancestors were shy.

Unless they're having a food fight, aggressive Beagles are rare.



Beagles should be sweet and family-oriented.