

Brittanys

Speed Is Not "Reach and Drive"

Most show dogs are raced around the ring far too quickly, and "Brittany handlers are among the worst offenders. Many judges confuse speed with reach and drive — but they are not the same. Good reach and drive are the result of correct structure, specifically proper length, and correct angulation of the bones joined and supported by well-conditioned muscles. Speed is nothing but fast movement without regard to structure.

"Reach" is the position the front paw reaches and at which it is set down. Exhibitors often pull the head back over the shoulders on a tight lead to create the impression that the front paw reaches farther than it actually does, but all this does is show the Brittany with the wrong head carriage. Don't be fooled.

"Drive" is the push of a good powerful rear. A Brittany should place its hind foot into or beyond the print left by its front foot. In a square dog this takes great athletic ability, and a Brittany must be a great athlete. A short-striding rear is a disaster for a hunting dog because it makes the dog work twice as hard.

Our standard says gait viewed from the side should be "smooth, efficient and ground covering." (A Brittany that can't cover ground — I don't mean run fast, but really covers ground with each stride—shouldn't win. It is a serious fault in a working bird dog.) A high-stepping or side-winding gait is inefficient and usually results from poor shoulders being overpushed by the rear. Judging the breed's gait coming and going is not nearly as important as its gait when viewed from the side. Judges should insist on seeing a dog move freely on lead at a moderate pace. Only then can they evaluate its true reach and drive. This is the most important evaluation of a Brittany. It is from the side that you see the sum total of all the parts.



Owners and breeders must be very aware that correct side movement is critical for an easy, smooth performance in the field. A Brittany needs good shoulders to cushion its stride over rough ground because 75 percent of its weight is on the front end, and it needs a powerful driving rear because 75 percent of its drive comes from the rear. A good front and a good rear will combine to give the smooth, balanced, side gait that makes up a well-moving Brittany.

— Dorothy Macdonald, P.O. Box 332, Carmel Valley, CA 93924