

Strictly his own?

The English Springer Spaniel movements



Few breeds have written in their breed standard that there is something that is so special, even unique to the breed that you basically never see it in any other breed. But in the standard for the English Springer Spaniel it actually says "strictly his own" about the movements and that cannot be understood in any other way than that the movements are unique to this particular breed. But how often do we see those unique movements in our breed? More and more rarely unfortunately, but in more and more breeds you nowadays see the breed specific movements disappearing. So so sad. Even though it's more and more talked about the fact that we must reward movements that are breed-typical and not just what we "generally" call good movements. But how do we do that when many judges don't know what to look for? How do we go about gaining an understanding of what is special for one breed when it comes to movements? I don't have a simple answer to that, but I will try to explain here what I mean is what "strictly his own" stands for.



GBSHCH Hawkhill Connaught, born 1969 and the one considered to be the original English springer spaniel. Simply the best of the best.

Most in the standard for the English Springer Spaniel should be adequate. Words such as medium, fairly, slightly, moderately, neither nor can be read in several places. The only thing that should really stand out and be a bit "extreme" if you may say so - are its movements, which is something very special. I daydream sometimes to the time when I saw the old springers in England, the ones that had a docked tail that went around like a little propeller and then stilted forward in a gait to finally fall in the absolutely incredible movements that it is when you see what is "strictly his own". That's real goosebumps.



GBSHCH Graftonbury Genghis Khan, grandson of the above Hawkhill Connaught. Khan was born in 1978 and is one of the few English Springer Spaniels to win the group at Crufts.

So why is it so, that we see less and less the correct movements for our breed? I think one reason is the poor translation from the English standard to the Swedish. Now I will say in defense of the translators that it is not entirely easy to translate English into Swedish when it describes something, as we all know English contains many more words than the Swedish language.

In the English standard, this is what to read about the foreleg movements: "Forelegs swing straight forward from shoulder, throwing feet well forward in an easy free manner". The Swedish translation reads "The front legs should be brought well forward from the shoulders so that the paws are brought far forward in light and free movements". It's not the same for me at all. The "swing" in the shoulder is almost never seen today, usually it is only the forearm that moves forward, which means that the paw is definitely not thrown forward - but rather falls straight down to the ground.



It is very difficult to show the correct movements in a photo, many times it can look very good when you see it like this. But, what is important is that the movements are slow. If the steps are too fast, you will not get the right "swing" or throw forward with the paw. The movements should be easy, effortlessly, slow and low to the ground.

What is meant by swing straight forward is difficult to explain, once you have seen it you know what you are looking for. But I would describe it as the power when the leg is brought forward comes from the shoulder, you should see the shoulder working and stretching forward as far as it will go. For this to be possible, there must be plenty of flexibility in the shoulder. The paws should be thrown forward, not just brought far forward. A throw is more explosive than just moving something forward. If you imagine the front leg directly under the dog when it starts to run, the throw of the paw should come from below and then be lifted forward as far as possible. Then the paw goes the same way back again so that a pendulum occurs when the dog moves. Incorrect movements for an English Springer Spaniel are when the paw is lifted without seeing that the shoulder is working. It is important that the paw is thrown straight forward from the shoulder, if you think you are going to throw something away

yourself, you use the shoulder don't you? If you're only going to use your arm, it won't be much of a throw, just a small throw.



Surely one can imagine here that the paw has been thrown forward?

It happens that the springers that have the correct front movements are criticized for being loose in the front, and yes many times it can look like that. But I would say that the ESS with the correct movements must be a little loose in the front when young. A throw is often a little unstable, so I think it is a much more breed-typical movements on a young dog than totally rigid and stable in the front.

The correct movements are best seen if the dog is shown on a loose leash, sometimes it is almost impossible to show young springers in that way if they are either very happy and wild or those who have to look for food on the ground. But bad front movements are often hidden by lifting the dog around the ring in the leash. So, as much as possible, encourage the handler to let go of the leash a little so the dog carries himself.

The movements should therefore be low to the ground, slow, flexible and completely effortless. The minimum possible amount of energy must be used. So don't think covering a lot of ground is the thing to look for, look for "effortless" - completely without effort instead. The paws should remain close to the ground during the movements, high foreleg movements is not the correct movements. Look for a tiny little delay in the step just when it's at its longest – before the paw goes back down again. You can also note the paw to fold upwards a little when the step is at its longest. Thus, you can see a bit of the tread pad when the stride is at its longest, when looking at the movements from the front.



Here you can see that the paw goes up a little when the step is at its longest.

It is also written in the standard that the pasterns should be strong and flexible, and something I have noticed is that if they do not have the flexibility, they do not get the right soft foreleg movements either. They can have a good length of step in the front, but the soft and flexible is lost.



This dog could have more flexible pasterns and this makes the movements in the front a little stiff.

Any form of high steps, upward kicks or excessive stride length is untypical and also requires a huge amount of energy for the dog, those movements cannot be sustained for a long time and are therefore completely unsuitable for a working dog.



This bitch has a tendency to too high front leg movements, which means that more energy will be used.



These types of movements are often seen in the rings these days. A lot of drive behind, but the front legs go straight into the ground without the right "swing" in the shoulder.

The hind legs then? Well, not as interesting as the front legs actually. Many times you can read in critiques on an ESS that they should have more drive from behind - but that is not what is sought for in the standard. In the English standard it says "hocks driving well under the body, following in line with forelegs". The Swedish translation is "the hocks should be brought well under the body and follow the line of the front legs". The back leg should end up exactly in the same place where the front leg was on the ground, for the right pendulum and balance. The back legs thus follow the same line as the front legs, then the movements are also smooth and oscillating. A bit like a perpetual motion machine, an English sprinter that moves correctly should look like it could run like that forever.



The back leg has been set down exactly where the front leg is just being lifted.

Here is an illustration of the movements of different spaniel breeds (photos taken from the Swedish breed clubs' compendium).

Spanielrasernas rörelser



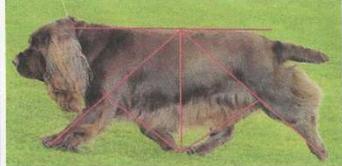
ACC: Det starka, kraftfulla bakstället ska ge gott påskjut, ett vägvinnande steg framåt som balanserar den påskjutande kraften från bakstället. Framförallt ska rörelserna vara samordnade, mjuka, obesvärade och vägvinnande



Cocker: Rörelserna ska vara fria och regelbundna, täcka mycket mark och ha kraftigt påskjut



Field: Steget skall vara långt, utan brådska och med kraftigt påskjut från bakstället



Sussex: Fria och regelbundna fram- och bakkensrörelser med den för rasen karakteristiska rullningen



Clumber: Rörelserna ska vara parallella med ett kraftbesparande påskjut



IWS: Rörelserna är mycket karakteristiska för rasen. De skall, på grund av den tunnformiga bröstkorpen, vara rullande



Welsh: Jämna, kraftfulla och vägvinnande med bra påskjut från bakbenen



ESS: Rörelserna är mycket karakteristiska. Frambenen skall föras väl framåt från skulderna så att tassarna förs långt framåt i lätta och fria rörelser. Hasorna skall föras väl under kroppen och följa frambenens linje

If you look at most other spaniels' breed standards about movements, several of them say ground covering movements with lots of drive. But not in the ESS standard. The word drive is not mentioned at all in the standard. With that said, I do not mean that a ESS should move with short steps, but an easy - almost flying step that is completely effortless.

What then makes a ESS move in this special way? There have been many theories about it over the years. Some say it's because of their proportions, that they have to be high on legs and short in the body in order for them to be able to move like that. Some believe that it is due to the fact that they should not have excessive angles, really neither front nor back. If you look at photos of dogs from the past, they didn't have deep angulations, especially not the hind legs. The hooks were also higher than what we see many times today. I don't know if any of it has to do with the movements, but something I do know is that something has happened to the breed that resulted in us losing what is most important and typical for the breed, its movements which should be "strictly his own" .

Helene Björkman