

Early Characteristics of the Rustic Epagneul Breton in Bretagne

The following historical excerpt is a reprint from a publication of the original American Brittany Club magazine known as “Brittany Field and Bench” edited at the time of publication by Jack Whitworth. The information below is quoted from a writing by a French observer of the breed, M. Lefournier where he was describing the qualities of the Brittany Spaniel in a French cynogenic and canine review “L’Eleveur (The Breeder)” in an edition published May 3, 1908. At the end of the article, there is a recount of some observations by a veterinarian in the French Cavalry assigned to duty in the Bretagne region. This information was written and published at the time the CEB-France was being established and the mother club was seeking to have the Societe Centrale Canine (French Kennel Club) accept the first conformation standard for the “newly organized” breed:

The Brittany Spaniel of good origin[^] is a very rustic dog, who sets instinctively*, tracks at a small gallop, is always in motion, ferrets everywhere, needs no urging. He is a bundle of nerve, enduring in all trials, which no thicket can stop.

Very intelligent, he loves his master, listens to him, has always an eye on him, waits for only a gesture of a sign to obey, seems to anticipate the wish of the one who employs him.

His nose is good, and as the dog knows how to use it, one is surprised to see the results one may obtain with so small a dog. The Brittany dog, who is mostly a dog of the plains, excels in hunting the woodcock in the wood, and in the thicket; he untangles with a rare skill the track of the long beaked lady.

What may we say of his courage and his endurance? He would not be a Breton if he did not have a heart. He retrieves with pleasure and is an excellent retriever in the woods as well as in the marsh.

When I have told you that by his very nature, he is the faithful companion of his master and the friend of children, I shall have depicted his good disposition.

Such was the Brittany Spaniel in the beginning of this century. At least, such were some specimens, for this picture, painted by an enthusiastic lover of dogs of this breed cannot be generalized.

Besides, the author was careful to specify “The Brittany of good origin.” On the whole the firm setting* is more doubtful before the many cross breedings, which in spite of some excesses have just the same contributed to adapt this regional dog to the general type desired by present dog hunters and to spread it in all the regions of France and even in foreign countries.

The one thing that is certain is that the Brittany Spaniel was a small, very sporting dog, and admirably adapted to the nature of the grounds and to the method of hunting in Brittany.

In 1906 the Brittany Spaniel was described by P. Grand Chavin, a veterinary officer [in the French cavalry], while stationed at Pontivy [in the Province of Bretagne] as a small spaniel, with short tail, with black and white coat, the latter with an approximately homogeneous type and flame colored spots on the cheeks and below the eyes, of lively countenance, smart bearing and intelligent. “Fearless in the thicket, they point well. They possess a rapid gallop and are tireless in their search and throw themselves with pleasure in the marshes, with a reckless high spirit.”

“Point is made according to the calm manner of the French Spaniel type, or in the well known manner of the English Setter. Their rusticity and their endurance were often revealed to me [P. Grand Chavin]. There were then Brittany Spaniels who had a long tail and who were none the less marked as belonging to the breed. In one litter, they did not all come with the rudiment of a tail.”

Editorial notes:

^The carefully chose phrase “of good origin” was designed to emphasize that these general observations were made of the more attractive early representatives of the breed.

*To the extent that the writers used the terminology “sets instinctively” and “firm setting,” this was the terminology commonly employed in that day to describe the Brittany Spaniel’s method of indicating the presence of game and going on point. The infusion of setter blood into the little spaniels found on the French farmsteads and villages, had caused some of these early breed representatives to “set” or crouch closely to the ground when in the presence of game and to “set” like a setter. From time to time, one can observe that present representatives of the breed will still “set,” although this posture is not preferred under the working standard.