

Review/Credits: The excerpt below is reprinted from Bird Dogs of the World, by Stanley W.C. Smith and was originally published by NIMROD PRESS LTD, Alton, Hants, England in 1989. Mr. Smith was a great supporter and admirer of the breed, and imported a number of fine Bretons into England from France. His book, as the title implies, was about all breeds of pointing dogs, but he devoted a substantial portion of the book to this breed. In his book, he included some of the original writings of the late Gaston Pouchain, who served as President of the CEB-France for thirty (30) years in the mid to late 1900's and further served as President of the French Kennel Club for six (6) years. Many fanciers of the breed credit the late Mr. Pouchain's leadership as being the chief catalyst for much of the progress of the Epagneul Breton breed/race made around the world, after he assumed leadership of the breed club in the breed's country of origin. Among his other many contributions, Mr. Pouchain was primarily responsible for the significant change in the official FCI conformation standard to accept black in the coat and pigmentation of the Epagneul Breton in 1956. This excerpt is reprinted from the writing of Mr. Pouchain, as translated and recorded by Mr. Smith in his book, and is provided to the membership as educational material and historical information about the Epagneul Breton Breed.

THE HISTORY OF THE TAILS by Monsieur Gaston Pouchain.

The natural short tail and the docked tail have given rise over the years to numerous discussions and controversies.

During the Heroic era, at the foundation of the breed, it was officially called "The Short-tailed Brittany Spaniel". At that time there was a great importance attached to the caudal end of the dog. It was, in effect, considered an irrefutable proof of the purity of the breed.

Our little Brittany then appeared with the visible cross-breeding with the long-tailed English dogs. Certain veterans like Mége for example, declared that it was more of an anomaly that this short tail, a sort of atrophy, was never previously seen. At that time, judges amongst them, even the most experienced, threw dogs out of the ring who were otherwise great field-trailers, solely because they had been docked. Other judges made mistakes. They maintained that exhibits had been docked when in fact they had not. Even in the same litter at the start of Champion de Beautie, some puppies were born with long tails whilst others were tail-less. By believing the established tail-less type, one was able to retrace in their descendants, the long-tailed type when the crossing of certain docked dogs gave the tail-less type and vice versa.

A controversy, a real battle, was then engaged between breeders, amateurs, officials and judges,

Before these difficulties it was decided, in 1930, that docked dogs could be Trial Champions but could only reach Very Highly Commended at Shows. This in fact was like half opening a door which should have been fully open only to find that it had been totally closed.

Logically, a hunting dog should be selected by its nose rather than by its tail being cut. The length of the tail is not proof of the purity of the breed. It is just an ancient belief which still exists even today. In other breeds however, this belief is slowly disappearing. This owes as much to a clearer teaching as to a higher level of general instruction amongst younger breeders.

Nothing hindered certain cheating breeders from cutting long tails and making out that they were naturally short.

In fact, they simply crushed the tip of the caudal vertebra with flat pincers to form a famous "wheat seed". This, in the eyes of some, constituted the proof of a natural short tail.

From their side the field-trials gave us, towards the start of thirty years, more and more Working Champions which were docked.

The agreement sought by the Club was designed as much for the docked dogs as for the others. The dispute ended, like many others, with common sense. The Paris Section then took the lead of a movement in favour of a referendum. This was decided upon in 1932 by the President, Lessard and the Vice-President, Kermadec, after all the discussions had ended and the position was known by the Club members. L Trottet and myself have made with the help of our friends, a campaign of good sense.

On 8th July 1933, the 'YES' triumphed in their logic over the 'NO' by 232 votes to 15.

As a result of the referendum, the word 'natural' was erased from the Standard which became simply that of "The Brittany Spaniel". Also, as a consequence, the section referring to tail-less or measuring around 10 cm. was modified. In this section it no longer mentions docked or natural. Peace had been restored and Brittany's have continued to prosper. This is indeed the proof, as mentioned previously, that it is much better to select a hunting dog on its nose rather than its tail.

This story is already more than 40 years old. It is definitely proof that the decision taken was a good one. Our little Brittany continues to delight and to follow an upward course with both a natural short tail and a docked one.

Reprinted from Bird Dogs of the World, by Stanley W.C. Smith, Nimrod Press, LTD, Alton, Hants, England pp. 150,153,154.