

K-9 News



By Marsha Ferguson

Brittany or Epagneul Breton?

The paradox that surrounds the Brittany's origin is no less confusing than the present day arguments over what exactly constitutes a Brittany or Epagneul Breton. There is equally strong evidence pointing to its origins in Great Britain as well as Brittany, France. The breed that is seen today has come a long way, subject to influence by Celtic invaders, English and North American hunters' and breeders' interests and, of course breeders of the true Epagneul Breton. This sporting line was originally bred for its special abilities to find and retrieve upland birds.

The first Epagneul Breton standard was written in France in 1907. Separation of the breeds into Epagneul

Breton and Brittany by the UKC occurred in 2002. Hence, one can find the breed listed under any of the three names (Epagneul Breton, Brittany Spaniel, or Brittany) when doing research, depending on the registering body's or breeder's country.

The differences between the Epagneul Breton and Brittany are significant as they determine the uses they are best suited to in the field, but both are recognised as the "world's only pointing spaniel". They both are spirited companions, loyal friends and hunters extraordinaire.

Epagneul Breton

There are Breton-type dogs seen in European paintings as far back as the 17th and 18th Centuries. By the 1850's,

the people of Brittany were known for their small adroit spaniels. Until recently, it was known only as the Brittany Spaniel. Spaniel literally means "Spanish dog".

The Epagneul Breton, sometimes referred to as the French Brittany, was originally bred as a companion and hunting dog. It's size, colours and coat are its distinguishing features; the squarish body, the smaller muzzle, shorter legs, absent, docked or naturally bobbed tail and longer, possibly black or tri-coloured coat with abundant feathering, separate it from it's American cousin, the Brittany.

This breed has the historical scenting ability of famous European bird dogs. It also is an instinctive pointer with the ability to 'set' its quarry in

cover – a great advantage to those who wish to net birds for study or game stock! It is the smallest of the pointing breeds.

'American' Brittany

A Frenchman living in Mexico introduced the first Epagneul Breton to North America. From here, an American friend introduced them into the United States, and with a colleague in Canada, began a breeding programme. The American Brittany has been recognised in the US since 1935 and officially became recognised as "Brittany", in response to the national breed club's request. The term "Spaniel" was also dropped despite the confusion with other countries that retained the name.




Despite its heritage, the Brittany's conformation is quite different from that of its ancestor of origin. Any black in the coat or skin pigmentation is not permitted. Compared with the Epagneul Breton, the Brittany has a much lighter build and is much leggier; the ears are shorter and set higher; its coat is shorter and either flat or wavy. The Brittany has a very different hunting style. Unlike its French cousin that is more suited to hunting with its owner on foot, the Brittany is used for longer runs, especially with mounted hunters. Therefore the Brittany is similar to setters and pointers in looks and function (a pointer) unlike the proper spaniel, which is used for flushing, or the Epagneul Breton (also a pointer), but with a different conformation and hunting style.

Health-wise, both breeds have relatively few problems. The most common problems are of genetic origin — hip dysplasia and epilepsy. With proper nutrition and exercise, they will live 12 to 14 years. Their coat requires a brushing once or twice a week, with close attention to the ears.

More important than physical exercise, is mental exercise. These dogs need something to occupy their brain, anything from hunting to flyball to agility training.

Both breeds are known for their endurance on any terrain when after any type of

game, for ease of training and eagerness to please. They are adaptable, mentally balanced breeds, equally happy as hunters or companions to families and other pets. Sensitive to training, they must be handled gently, as they do not respond well to

rough treatment. Corrective measures must be dispensed with thoughtfulness. These are strong dogs with big hearts and amiable, inquisitive dispositions. They need to be with a family that is as intelligent, friendly and active as they are! 

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