



INDIA LAWSON

Vital Stats

Origin: Spaniels have been in Europe since at least the 14th century, but the first dog show to feature cockers was in 1859 in Birmingham, England, where the winning cocker spaniel was named Bob. In America, the cocker spaniel's popularity peaked when the breed topped AKC registrations from 1936 to 1952. That popularity came with a price, though, as mass breeding created health and behavior problems.

Average height: 13-15" at the withers

Average weight: 24-30 lbs.

Average life span: 12-14 years

Appearance: The cocker spaniel's trademark characteristic is long, silky ears. Cockers can be black, cream, red, and chocolate, or a combination of two colors. There are American and English versions, though you won't see many of the slightly larger, longer-faced English cockers in the United States. Famous cockers include Lady from the Disney film *Lady and the Tramp* and Richard Nixon's dog, Checkers.

Genetic Problems: eye problems, ear infections, epilepsy

The Breed Report: Cocker Spaniels

BY ADAM GOLDFARB

Our Expert

Kathi Alexander is the secretary of the board for Oldies But Goodies, a cocker rescue in Virginia. She has lived with cocker spaniels for 20 years and has worked in breed rescue since 1998.

General Information

Grooming: Cocker spaniels' ears are their trademark. They can also be a major problem if they're not regularly cleaned. Because their length doesn't let much air into the ear canal, cockers' ears are prone to infections. Alexander recommends weekly ear cleaning. (To help new employees and volunteers learn how, visit www.AnimalSheltering.org/cleanears.) You can also help cockers keep their ears from drooping into their munchies by providing small food and water bowls.

Cocker coats need to be brushed one to two times per week to prevent mats. If your shelter gets a cocker with overgrown or matted hair, your best option may be to shave him, since knots and mats can be painful for the dogs.

Behavior: Alexander cites housetraining problems as a primary reason for cocker surrender; cockers are notorious for their submissive urination and difficulty with housetraining issues, she says. While shelter staff may not have the time to completely correct this behavior, it's important to inform potential adopters that urinary problems can be fixed with training and commitment.

High-volume breeding of cocker spaniels has caused some problems for the breed, including temperament issues. Of course, not all cocker spaniels are biters, but when handling the dogs in the shelter, keep in mind that cockers can be high-strung in stressful situations.

Cherry Eye: Cockers are prone to cherry eye, a condition in which the dog's third eyelid swells up and turns red. Often caused by stress, cherry eye isn't a major problem, but its appearance may turn off potential adopters. But "understanding the condition and being able to explain it to the public can facilitate adoptions," Alexander says.

Playgroups: Shelters that provide dog enrichment through playgroups should be careful about which dogs the cockers play with. "Cockers do well with dogs their own size (or smaller), but many cockers don't seem to like larger dogs," says Alexander.

Adoption: Cocker spaniels are generally loyal, affectionate, and adaptable to apartment life. But they're not the right dogs for everyone. Potential adopters need to know that these dogs require a serious commitment for regular grooming. Additionally, many cockers want to be "the baby of the family," says Alexander. If a family with small children is interested in a high-maintenance cocker, it might be worth nudging them toward a dog who's content to be one of the herd. 🐾