



So you want a Cocker Spaniel. Congratulations on choosing one of the most delightful, spirited, talented members of the canine family!

However, there is a nagging doubt in the back of your mind. Do you really have the time, patience, and stamina to deal with a puppy; with housebreaking, feeding, grooming, and training? The challenges of raising a puppy are never ending – going out for potty breaks several times each night and during the day, coping with the trauma of teething, training to lay still while being groomed to tolerate baths and trims, clipping nails, when to bark or not to bark,

socialization with other dogs and people in public. Let me offer you an alternative suggestion – consider an ex-showdog!

They don't all make it to the top, to the coveted “*Champion*” Title, and even those who do will not always possess the necessary characteristics to be included in a breeding program. There are also many younger dogs who develop bad bites or other minor conformational qualities which will preclude them from competition in the conformation show ring-even though the untrained amateur eye may never notice the difference.

The advantages of bringing an ex-show Cocker into your family are many. For one thing, they have been intensively socialized from birth. They have been trained to remain calm for grooming, and are accustomed to being put into almost any position and remain quiet and still. They are used to being bathed and the noise of a blow dryer. They have been trained to a show lead, which is not the same as being trained to heel behind you, since show dogs are taught to go in front of the handler, but they understand the concept and will adapt readily to obedience style heeling. They embrace the challenge of learning new things with the enthusiasm only a Cocker can show!

They have also had their puppy shot series and exceptional medical care, food and shelter. They come from bloodlines which have been tested for genetic diseases for several generations and which have a proven track record of health and durability.

I still remember the first time I took our Winnie into our local small town vet's office; they could not believe that a Cocker Spaniel existed who had never had an ear infection or skin issues! Show dogs are accustomed to being around other dogs and behaving themselves. They know how to conduct themselves in a crate, a car and in public.

Although not all show dogs are housetrained, they are crate-trained, and the transition is thus made easier when they are integrated into a family household. Most show dogs are also not spayed or neutered until their eligibility in a breeding program is determined. In these cases a couple of weeks of careful vigilance and crating, coupled with belly bands for boys and bitches' britches for girls will greatly speed the housebreaking process.

Show dogs spend a lot of time training and travel many miles on the show circuit. They come in contact with many people during their career: owners, handlers, the public and other dogs. Although they form relationships with the central people in their life, they often are not around those people long enough to form a true lifelong bond. Once they are settled into their new family and realize that this is their *Forever* home, they will bond just as strongly as any puppy, and reward you with their lifelong love and devotion.

As I write this, my two ex-show Cockers lay next to me. They are sister and brother from the same litter. Winnie came to us at one year of age. Although she was a top-winning puppy, she was too small to compete successfully as an adult. Winnie is Miss Personality Plus! She loves the entire world, and fit into our family from the first day. Winnie now has her CGC (Canine Good Citizen) title; and is training for future competition in Obedience and Rally.



Her brother, Malcolm, achieved his *Champion* title and was then shown on the specials circuit (where Champions compete against other Champions) before being retired here at the age of two. Mal is more reserved than his sister. It took him about a month to settle in and realize that this was indeed, his *Forever* home and we were his family; but he is now just as loving, loyal and as much a clown as his little sister. Mal is currently working on completion of his CGC title and also has begun training for Obedience competition.

Even though neither of them had ever been around other animals; they both accepted our little white housecat, Lacie, without any problems and sleep and play with her just as they do each other and us. They enjoy their obedience lessons and rally training and going on outings to visit family and friends, both human and animal.

My husband and I both still work full time. Although we were originally in the market for a puppy, when Winnie became available to us, we realized that this was a win-win situation for all concerned. And so it was. We never even hesitated for a moment when brother Mal became available a year later.

How to find a potential retired show dog? Go to your local dog shows; meet and talk with the breeders and handlers there. Buy some of the breed magazines and make inquiries. Get online and find forums with your specific breed; put the word out that you are available as a potential retirement home, and what you are seeking.

If you are sincere in your efforts, the right one is out there for you.

*Terri Draeger*

*With unending gratitude to Stephanie Kaul of Samamari Cockers for our two special furkids!*