

The Courtly Cavalier



The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is descended from the small Comforter Spaniel of the 16th century. Toy spaniels were quite common as pets of the aristocracy on the continent and in England during Tudor times. Ladies of the court found the little dog was not only a wonderful adornment, but served equally well as hot-water bottle and flea catcher, companion and confidant. When the Stuarts ascended the throne, the dogs were rewarded with the royal title of King Charles Spaniels. When William and Mary became co-regents of England, the favored Pug eclipsed the spaniel's popularity for some years. One exception was the strain of red and white spaniels bred at Blenheim Palace by various Dukes of Marlborough. Early paintings by Titian, Van Dyck, Stubbs, Gainsborough and Reynolds show a small dog with a flat head, high-set ears, almond-shaped eyes and a rather pointed nose.



By mid-19th century, the breed had been altered to a dog with a domed skull, long, low-set ears, a retroussé nose and undershot jaw and large, round eyes. A number of Landseer paintings document the changes and by 1900, the dog bearing the name King Charles had been transformed to what we know in this country as the English Toy Spaniel.

In the mid-1920s an American named Roswell Eldridge traveled to England only to be dismayed that he could find none of the old type "nosey" spaniels. For five years, he offered a prize of 25 pounds at Crufts Dog Show to the persons who presented the dog and bitch "as shown in the picture of King Charles II's time, long face, no stop, flat skull, not inclined to be domed and with the spot in the center of the skull." A few people accepted the challenge, one of them being Amice Pitt, who took up the stewardship of the breed and influenced its development for 50 years. The revival of the breed did not go so far as to return to the small eyes and snipey muzzle, opting instead for a softer, gentler look. A club was formed on the second day of Crufts in 1928 and a standard drawn up using the dog winner Ann's Son as a model. There was little support for this renewed breed, but dedicated breeders persisted and in 1946 they were given separate registration status and the first set of C.C.s was awarded. The breed grew in numbers until it was the number one toy breed in England, where it remains so to this day.

In 1952, the first Cavaliers were sent to America, as a gift from Lady Forwood to Mrs. W.L. Lyons Brown. The American club was formed in 1956 and soon after sought AKC recognition, but because of small numbers was relegated to the Miscellaneous Class until the breed matured a bit in this country. In 1962, Mrs. Lyons Brown's sister-in-law, Gertrude "Trudy" Brown-Albrecht, took over as patroness of the breed and the first specialty show was held at Sutherland, her home in Kentucky. Trudy Brown-Albrecht remained the club's guiding light until her death in 1983. Entries and membership in the club grew to the point where specialties attracted entries of 100 to 300 Cavaliers.

In 1993, the club was issued an invitation to become the official AKC parent club as recognition seemed imminent for the breed. This was declined and, fearing the breed would be without proper guidance, a new club was formed, the American Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club. Full registration for Cavaliers opened in March 1995 and the club has been busy with educational seminars for future judges to learn about the breed. On January 1, 1996, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel enters the ring as the 140th AKC-recognized breed.

History compiled by the American Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club.