SUSSEX SPANIEL ASSOCIATION

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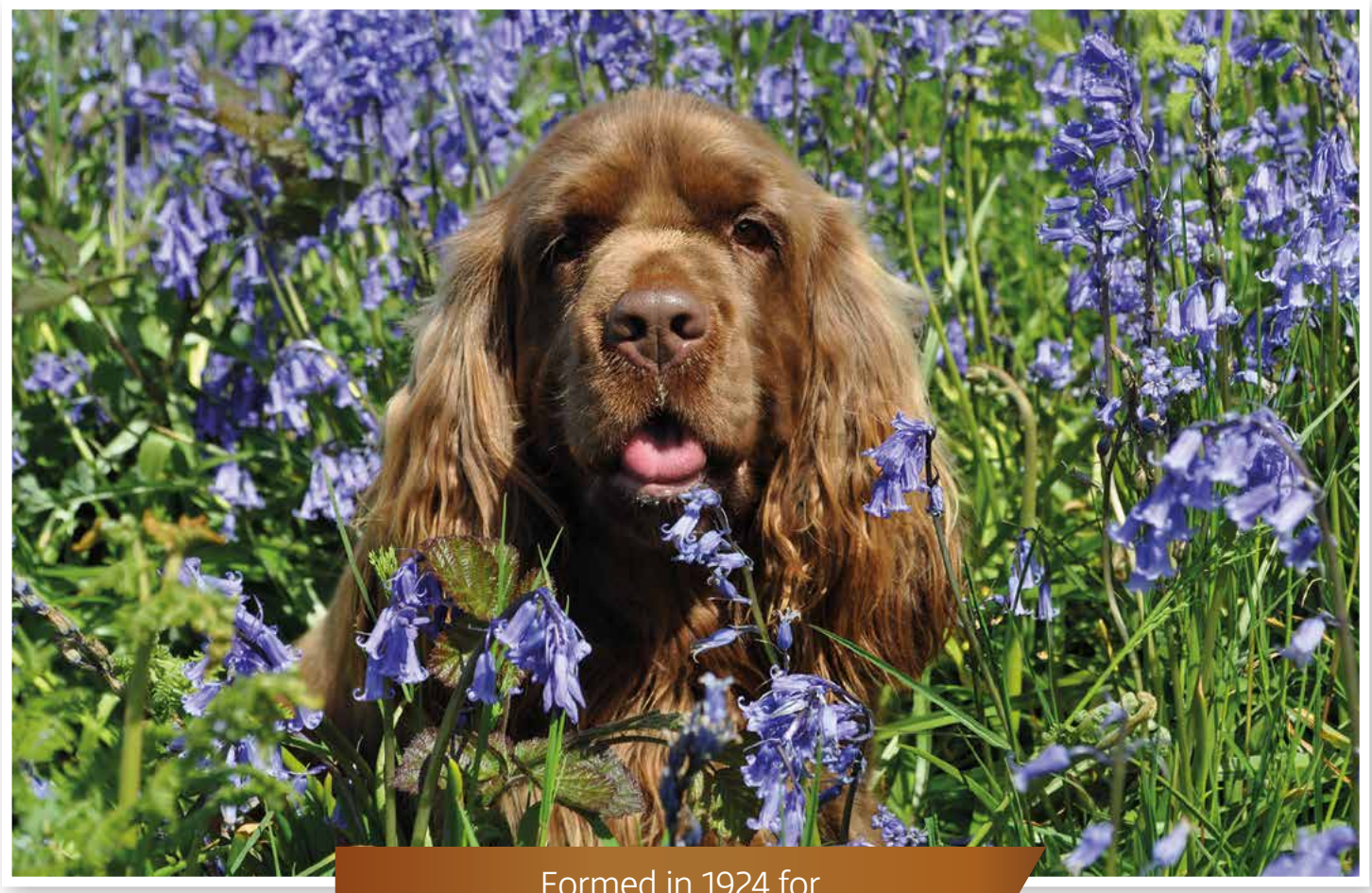
So you want a

SUSSEX SPANIEL?



Formed in 1924 for
'the protection of the Sussex Spaniel'.

www.sussexspaniels.org.uk

This booklet is designed to help those who are new to the breed. Although it is difficult to generalise, Sussex Spaniels have a small gene pool, so a lot of the characteristics will apply to all in the breed. Most people's introduction to the breed is either seeing a neighbours dog, or through books or the Internet. Their cuddly appearance and "I've had a bad day" expressions hide a huge depth of character. Hopefully this booklet will give a little insight into the breed.

Good and bad points of a Sussex Spaniel

We will start with a list of the bad points:

- Prone to howling, but various things can trigger 'singing' sessions during the day e.g. aeroplanes.
- They can be over protective - unless this tendency is curbed it can become a problem.
- They can be destructive.
- They need regular grooming to prevent coat tangles; they also have the ability to soak rain and mud up like a sponge and take forever to dry.
- Prone to grumbling verbally which can be misinterpreted as growling.
- Some have a habit of emptying water bowls and they can be fussy eaters.
- They can be strong willed and stubborn. They need reminding you are the head of the pack and that instructions should be obeyed, albeit often in their own time.
- The slime factor - when they have wiped their faces on your nice dark trousers you would think you'd had an encounter with a slug, such is the trail that is left.

Here are the good points:

- They are not yappy dogs, although they will bark when excited like most dogs.
- You will always feel safe when they are out with you either walking or in the car.
- They are great travellers, usually settling down for a good sleep in minutes, especially on long journeys.
- They will love your company - they will sit with one of their paws on your foot or as close as possible on the settee. Tremendously faithful and not prone to wandering.
- When you have visitors, they don't stay as hyper as some breeds and they tend to lie down and go to sleep.
- A great sense of humour, this is their absolute bonus. They will make you laugh EVEN when they have done something naughty they will grin at you!

As you can see the bad points numerically outweigh the good ones, but the strength of their character and loving makes the good points have a much higher value.

More about their characteristics

Raising a Sussex Spaniel is not dissimilar to raising a child. By being firm (inch and the proverbial mile), loving, respectful and having a routine you will be on the right track. The howling tendencies can be controlled, they do respond to being shouted at, but fortunately the howling sessions don't last for long periods of time. If you have to leave them in the day, try leaving a radio on to distract them from outside noises.

Their protective nature is also something that can be controlled. When a friend comes to the house, once you have greeted them, reassure the Sussex that the person is not a burglar by stroking them and encouraging them to say 'Hello'. Sussex Spaniels are natural protectors so try to make them understand when it is acceptable and when it is unacceptable, without shouting and frightening him even more into aggression and he will soon learn. It is better not to shut the dog away, try distracting him with a favourite toy, so he will learn that visitor's mean he gets to play and have some attention.

Not every Sussex is destructive, but if you have one that is, it can be a real problem. Floor tiles, cupboards, shoes, skirting boards, loo rolls can be annihilated. By keeping your puppy in a puppy run, (similar to a play pen) with his own bed and toys, he knows that this is 'his area', when you are out. This can be carried over into adult life if necessary. It does save having to shout at them when you first come in from work or shopping, making life more pleasant for you and the dog.

With a quick five minute grooming every day to prevent tangles in ears and feathering, it will save a half an hour struggle to get the knots out at the end of the week. Little and often prevents the tangles from becoming a problem. If placed on a table or chest freezer from a young age they soon get used to the habit. It will help when they get older and need to have their feet trimmed and nails cut.

The grumbling/growling a Sussex does is usually a verbal protest at something he is being told to do. If they get very grumpy, a few minutes shut in his run in peace (rather like sending a child to its bedroom) usually will calm them down. If the Sussex is really growling, he must be told off firmly, don't let him think you're frightened or he has won. If you have taken him to Obedience classes, doing some of the exercises performed at the classes helps. Try to understand what is upsetting him, sometimes they growl if they are frightened and just need reassurance, but other times they are just being bad tempered and like people need to be left alone to calm down.

Getting a puppy

In a numerically small breed like Sussex Spaniels, patience is the key word in finding a puppy. It can be frustrating to be waiting for a Sussex Spaniel puppy to become available in the UK and waiting for 2 or more years is common. Whilst waiting for your puppy, familiarise yourself more with the breed, become a member of the SSA, come along to one of the SSA events or visit one of our SSA shows. Events can be found on the 'What's on' page and we welcome everyone to join us.

At times breeders do not always inform the SSA that they are planning or having a litter, so there may be puppies that we are not aware of, and breeders often compile their own lists which they to go to first.

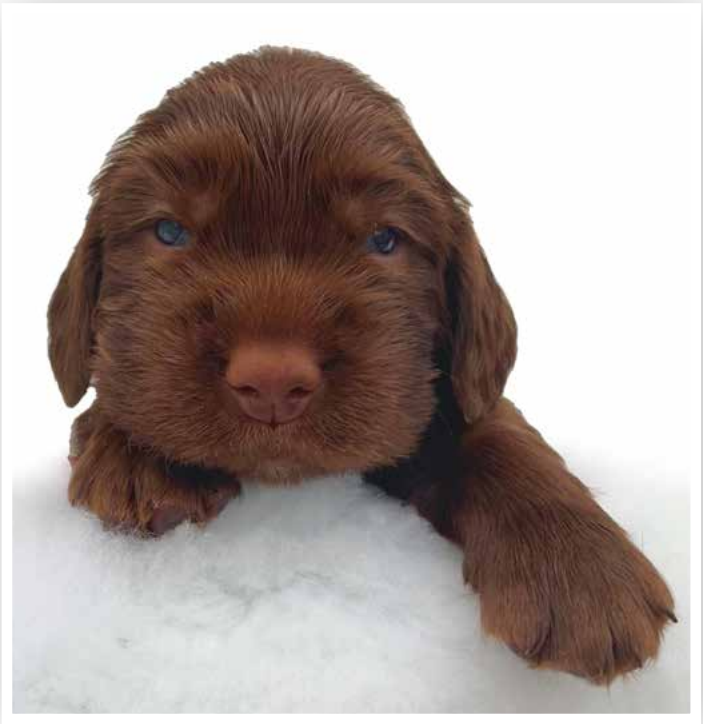
Children and dogs

Sussex spaniels do not always like small children and it is not advisable to get a puppy if your children are under five. Having said that there are many cases of young families and Sussex living happily together. Unfortunately there are as many cases of Sussex having to be re-homed because they have turned on small children. Sussex are not always a tolerant breed, and it's not fair on the dog or the children if they can't live together. Another point to consider is if you already have a dog of another breed. The Sussex dog can be dominant and the Sussex bitch can be bossy. If the dog you already have is of a dominant type you may have problems once your puppy gets to adulthood.

The breeder

Once you have found a breeder with a litter, ask if you can go and see them when they are four or five weeks old. They will still have contact with their mother, so you will be able to assess her temperament.

Occasionally the breeder may have the sire as well, so ask to see him too. The whole litter should look plump and well cared for, with warmth and space to play in. All puppies are better being reared in the house, so they can become familiar with household noises (washing machine, hoover etc) and the company of people. By the time you go back at eight weeks the puppies should be happy and outgoing. The breeder will ask you lots of questions to assess your suitability as a potential Sussex owner. You should let the breeder know your lifestyle, because at the end of the day it is the future happiness of the Sussex that's at stake. Don't be offended if the breeder decides not to let you have one of their puppies. If your circumstances change in respect of work, or children becoming older, the breeder may let you have or know of a puppy in the future.



When you and the breeder have selected the puppy that seems right for you, make sure that he or she has been checked over by their vet before you take the puppy home. General health and hearts should be tested before you get your puppy. Also find out when the puppy was last wormed. Once home a warm, secure sleeping area, regular meals (you should have been given a diet sheet by the breeder), not too much noise or fuss and plenty of space for the puppy to play in with toys is what a young puppy needs. As mentioned earlier a puppy run with his bed and lots of newspaper on the floor can be invaluable. If the puppy is destructive, at least by containing it when you are out, you won't have to shout at it for being naughty when you come home. There is little point in chastising the puppy long after the event.

House training

House training your puppy should be no different than any other breed and some are quicker to learn than others. Take the puppy outside when it wakes up, after a meal and at regular intervals. Remember their bladder is very small at this age. Encourage and praise them when they perform outside. Put a collar on at an early age. When it comes to lead training some puppies will throw themselves all over the place, sometimes screaming whilst they do so! Others behave as if they have always been on the lead. Encourage your puppy, they will soon get the hang of it.

Exercise

After the puppy has had its inoculations, take it out and about to socialise, but don't overdo the exercise. The puppy's bones are still soft and growing and they have to carry quite a weight. Too much exercise can damage fronts and limbs. Wait until it is about five months old and gradually increase the amount of exercise.

Showing your puppy

Should you want to show your puppy, it is a good idea to teach the puppy to stand in a show position at an early age, at any time and anywhere in the house or garden, once or twice a day until "stand" means just that. Not obviously for long periods and always with plenty of praise when being good. Find a local Ringcraft Class, but don't expect the organisers to know much about Sussex. When your young puppy first trots up and down the mat you will find that the front and back end usually work independently. Treat the classes, as fun and your puppy will enjoy the outings. With praise the puppy will realise that showing can be fun.

Problems

Sussex Spaniels are sometimes very strong minded and need firm handling. Let your Sussex know from the start that you are the pack leader and you should be able to live in harmony together. If you have any problems, please contact the breeder for advice or the SSA, before the problems get too big. Not everyone is suited to owning a Sussex; so don't see it as a failure if you have to part with the dog. It is better that the new owner doesn't inherit more problems than are necessary, for them and the dog's sake.

Feeding

This has been mentioned before and it is difficult to enlarge upon, as there are no hard and fast rules. Having said that, don't forget that when you get your puppy, in the next six months it is going to grow an enormous amount. A twelve-week old puppy can consume a large amount of food in its three or four meals, up to two pounds of tripe a day, plus biscuit, which is as much as an adult will eat. High protein feeds do not seem to suit Sussex, they need a balance of carbohydrate and protein. Tripe and biscuit suits them, but this may not be easy for everyone to use, as it can be rather smelly. Low protein, good quality tinned food with biscuit is advisable.

If they stop eating, don't panic, as a Sussex will be quick to start picking up on your worried state. They don't always start eating again the next day, but the more you worry, so will they. Although this may seem alien to those with breeds, which eat normally a Sussex can be quite happily force fed, by popping the food into its mouth and holding upwards until they swallow. Often two or three mouthfuls like that can start them eating their dinner, or they will eat their whole meal like that. They are slow eaters and its better to occupy yourself with the washing-up or something else rather than stare at them. Competition with another animal helps (no help if there are no other pets) and some have been known to prefer their food to be tipped out onto the floor rather than eat from the bowl or plate. It is a case of trial and error so ask around.

Health

Fortunately Sussex in the main is a healthy breed. Although they will squeal at a tangle or a bramble being removed from their coats, if they have a serious cut or injury they are remarkably stoic. There are the occasional heart murmurs. Make sure that the breeder has had the puppies' hearts checked before you collect your puppy. Even with serious heart murmurs a Sussex can lead a full and active life, but it is better to know your puppy is healthy when you collect it.

They have a tendency to get wet eczema and once they start to scratch or chew an area, they can make quite a mess of their skin. Teramycin spray or Dermobian, both available from the vet, have been known to help these conditions. Aloe Vera spray, Tea Tree Oil or Benzyl Benzoate is also good at stopping them chewing an itchy spot.

For some reason Sussex are also prone to getting warts. These can occur on ears, around eyes, on noses and legs. If they are large and unsightly, or irritating such as around their eyes, they can be removed surgically.

All spaniels are prone to ear canker and a Sussex is no exception. When you first take your puppy to the vets, ask his advice regarding eardrops etc. It is better to take precautionary action with a regular treatment than let the dog's ears get so bad that surgery is the only option. A responsible breeder will warn you about the possibility of ear problems.

With regard to hips, Sussex do not always have very good hip scores. The surprising thing is that even with a high score the Sussex doesn't seem to be lame or to suffer any great inconvenience.

They are a hardy breed and are able to live outside in kennels quite happily, with another dog for company. As long as they have draught and wet proof sleeping areas they can withstand the cold. They love being outside and having an enclosed area of grass to be in during the day is ideal. This seems to keep their coats in better condition than being inside all the time. Obviously it is not always convenient, but you will be rewarded with a shiny golden liver coat and a happy dog.

Insurance

Many breeders will give you an Insurance form for the puppy, which covers the puppy for the first few weeks in it's new home. Although one hopes that the puppy will not need veterinary care, either as a puppy or an adult with the escalating cost of medical care it is a good idea to take out insurance cover.

Conclusion

From reading this booklet, you will get insight into the characteristics of the Sussex spaniel. As with a lot of breeds, owning a Sussex is not a decision to be taken lightly. Their strength of character can be both rewarding and sometimes frustrating. Their ability to look you straight in the eye can be either defiant or loving. Whether you choose to have a Sussex or not after you have read this it is an individual choice, but once you have met the breed you will never forget the look only a Sussex can give you.

How to contact us

Any member of the SSA committee can be contacted by sending an email to:
sussexspanielassociation@gmail.com

SSA Honorary Secretary

Mrs Lesley Nesbitt

email: ssahonsec@gmail.com

SSA Breed Rescue

email: ssabreedrescue@gmail.com

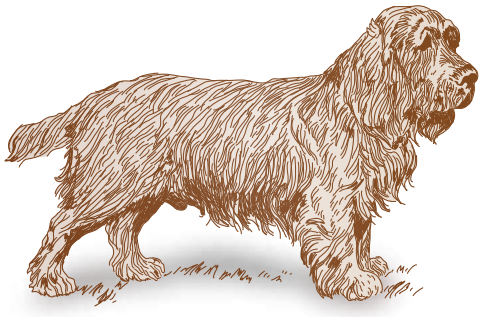
How to join the SSA

Download an application form from the SSA website. Find someone to propose and second you. They must be members to do so and this is easily done if you come to one of our events.

Recommended Reading

The Sussex Spaniel by Peggy Grayson

History of the Sussex Spaniel by Ted Orton



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