

Judging the English Spot by: Scott Wiebensohn – ARBA Judge 808

At shows I might overhear someone say that “The English Spot has to be the most difficult breeds to breed to perfection” or “The English Spot is definitely not for youth or beginning breeders because they are high strung” or even “English Spots are hard to breed because there are so many disqualifications to watch for.” Well, I am here to say that all of these statements are unfortunate stereotypes that are untrue and have scared off many potential breeders for decades. I diligently believe all judges and breeders should treat every breed fairly and work collectively to eliminate harmful rumors such as these not only for the betterment of the breed, but also for the image of the ARBA.



History: The English Spot is one of the oldest breeds, existing as far back as 1838. In the United States it has evolved from the stretched out posed animal bred to look exactly like E.G. Wippell’s painting to the right. Even as recent as the mid 80s

Spots more resembled a Silver’s body type than the animals we see running across the tables today.

Many thanks go out to Duane Schrader and the late Ivan Miller, Bob Berry and John Marshall. Their vision was to have an animal that moved across the table showing off its graceful markings.

Type: Besides examining for disqualifications, the most important item to look for in English Spots is type. I know, markings are 44 points and type is only 35, but the two have to go hand in hand, because without the full arched body type all you have is a marked rabbit. The type on the



Spot should be long bodied and exhibit a well arched topline that starts at the nape of the neck with the high point in the center of the hips rounding over into a full hip. A Spot’s sidelines (shoulders, rib cage, abdomen and hips) should blend smoothly, creating a sleek appearance.

Caution making comments that a Spot is too long (sloped, flat or lacking arch,

yes) but never too long! A long body is the best way to show off the side pattern and a complimentary high arch will also do the same. It can never be stressed enough how important the length of limb plays into the Spot’s body



type. Just like in the Checkered Giant a correctly structured Spot with legs perpendicular to the hip will track in a straight line while on the table. Animals exhibiting good to great length of leg will exhibit more daylight and hold their head higher. In any full arched breed, it is the most comfortable for an animal with the correct curvature of spine and correct length of limb to hold its head high and run uphill versus downhill. *Do fault animals that lack both or either of these qualities.* Just because a Spot runs does not necessarily mean it has good length of limb or a correct topline. Both full arch type and length of limb go hand in hand.

Head Markings: The head markings are typically the first thing you see staring at you when taking Spots out of their holding coops. Just as an outstanding head on a Holland Lop catches your attention eyes, so too should a sharp and cleanly marked head on a Spot. The butterfly should have a triangularly rounded fork, similar to a gum-drop in size and shape, with well-rounded wings encompassing the whiskers. *Do make comments pertaining to the shape of the wings either being squared off, running into the lip or not balanced.* The cheek spots should be round circles, never ovals, and balance from side to side. The eye circles are similar as they too are to be round circles, not thin bands like in Blanc de Hotots. Remember, Spots do not have an ear cap, they are to have colored ears on a white head. Stray spots on the head are a huge problem, but one is allowed and it is only a fault. *Do make comments and fault Spots with drags and/or runs on any head marking.*



Body Markings: The next marking to really consider is the spine marking, also called the herringbone. A good strong spine marking will have no breaks, exhibit the herringbone effect and have excellent tail coloration. The ideal spine marking will have no spots attached or within two inches of either side of the herringbone. *Be meticulous in looking for herringbone breaks near the shoulder and at the base of the tail.* The side pattern, also called the sweep, should not be the



first thing a judge looks at, but one of the last to be evaluated. A side pattern should start with one or two pea sized spots at or as near the neck as possible. Then the side pattern should graduate (increase in the size of spots) and increase in number of spots down along the lower flank almost as if it was the demarcation line on a Tan. The last part is for the side pattern to rise up and for the spots to again graduate in size over the hip. This marking should have round and distinct spots, look similar to a comma or a 9 on its side and be balanced from one side to the other. *Caution faulting animals too severely for lacking balance of side patterns and never discredit a Spot, simply because it is missing a spot here or there.*

Color: The quality of color will either enhance or distract from the markings. The color must be intense in the blacks, blues and chocolates. Golds should be a clear and a uniform straw coloration with absolutely no shading. The gray's base color is to be black with fawn ticking and fawn around the nostrils, eyes, and lacing on the ears. The lilac should be a dove gray with a slightly paler under color. The tortoise must show the orange factor down the loin and have the correct smoky shading. *While judging you will notice the differences in color and be sure to make comments of praise for animals exhibiting ideal color.*

Fur: Finally, fur is extremely important, because as Erik Bengtson puts it, "A great coat of fur on a Spot will make an average rabbit look good and a good rabbit look great!" Ideally, Spots should have a short dense coat of fur. This means that short guard hairs need to be present and prevalent in order to show off those sharp crisp markings. A poorly structured coat effects so many other things. Thin coats make a head look narrow, legs appear too fine in bone, ears thin and flimsy and dilute the intensity of surface color allowing the undercolor to bleed through. *Long coats will make all the markings look fuzzy and indistinct.* A short dense coat will compliment a Spot's distinctness of markings, intensity of color, sleekness of body and general overall appearance.

This is only a recommendation of how to judge the English Spot, and yet what is more important is that a judge will take all of these points into consideration the next time the breed is called to his or her table.

Helpful Tips

- **Allow them to run** – The English Spot has an internal desire to run. So be sure to allow them enough time to get used to the table. They have been sitting in carriers for half the day and need to stretch out, just like we do. While one is running on the table, begin checking the next one for general disqualifications. Remember, just because a Spot runs on the table does not necessarily mean that it has good type. They need to carry themselves up off the table and have a topline that is correctly arched, but again let them run!
- **Weight** – Some of the best typed animals may not make Senior weight. Put them on the scale as it is a service to the breed.
- **Pin bones** – Spots are notorious for having protruding pin bones. Even in the best typed animal, although minimal, one can feel these bones. Animals that lack arch and/or are chopped, typically have this fault. Be aware of this and fault animals with severe

protruding pin bones.

- **Feet & Legs** – Occasionally animals will exhibit weak ankles or have bowed front legs. Remember that dark toenails are acceptable.
- **Head spots** – A stray on the head is simply a fault just like a slipping coat or fair type. This fault is no greater or less than any other fault, so try not to consider it as one when it is sometimes so distracting and obvious. Do disqualify Spots with more than one head spot!
- **Split cheek spot** – The rabbit glossary in the standard does not have a definition for a split cheek spot. It is a regular cheek spot, which has a line of white completely through the spot. Not necessarily dividing the spot into two equal sections.
- **Double cheek spot vs. Stray Spot** – No official definition exists, but some believe that a spot must be of appropriately the same size and in close proximity to the cheek spot for it to be considered a double cheek spot. Any decision reached by a judge relative to these criteria is to be considered judgmental in nature. Not to be confused with stray spots, that may occur around the cheek spot.
- **Dirty ear base vs. Stray spot(s)** – The most effective way to distinguish between the two is by wrapping your index finger and thumb around the base of the ears and if there is a spot below your hand it should be considered a stray. Everything you cover up is considered a dirty ear base, a fault.
- **Spine breaks** – Only one break is allowed and this break cannot exceed ½ inch. Look for breaks near the shoulder and at the base of the tail.
- **Graduation** – A commonly misunderstood term. Simply, graduation is the increase in the size of spots, not the increase of the number of spots.
- **Big spots vs. Small spots** – In recent years, some select breeders have been working on increasing the size of the spots in the side marking. The standard allows for the extremes and what is in the middle as long as it fits the definition of a side marking. Only fault animals that lack graduation, balance and distinction of spots.
- **Refer to the standard** – It is a great idea that whoever judges has a standard in front of them and reads it before they begin. This shows that they are at least interested in what the standard says. No one can remember everything so use it for what it is, a reference.
- **Picking BIS** – Remember to allow spots enough time to strut their stuff. For the sake of time, have the three or so judges stand back and watch the spot simultaneously. Remember that a fault on a spot can be seen as equal to a fault on any of the other 46 breeds.

Paraphrased excerpts were taken from an article entitled “Choosing Breeding Stock” written by my English Spot mentors, John and Jan Marshall of Illinois.

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to be 9 showable out of 10, while the worst was 0 out of 8 and only 2 showable out of 12. What we are not able to control are death, genetic mismatches or just plain bad luck.

What do all of these numbers mean? The first two categories are fairly straightforward, although what qualifies as a showable animal can be sometimes quite confusing and most of all discouraging. The reason there are more marked animals than showable is because these 32 animals had some sort of disqualification. The majority of these disqualifications were marking DQ's (head spots, spine breaks, etc.). The remainder were either color DQ's (blue tortoise, sooty fawns, etc.) or structural DQ's (pigeon breast, nicks in the ear, missing toes, weight, etc.). Although minimal, this still accounted for 17% of marked offspring born, which could not pass the judging table because of the standard.

What does this data truly reveal about constant revisions of the standard? In actuality these findings say nothing profound about how the standard affects the English Spot. Instead, the data reveals that no matter how refined the standard becomes there will always be mismarked offspring, but it then becomes our duty to minimize these occurrences within individual herds.

Based on the above findings, the question arises; what are we able and not able to control in our herd? The reality is that we control more than we realize. Only through selective breeding (*the act of breeding together animals with desirable traits and removing those who are undesirable*) can we increase the percentage of showable offspring. Please note that if you use animals with hereditary DQ's or faults (stray spots, thin fur, poor color, etc.) you are then making these desirable traits. Be aware that if culling is not one of your strong points, have no fear because the standard is designed to do it for you, but try not to rely strictly upon it. Our ultimate goal as breeders is to continually tighten the standard. In doing this we are then taking the necessary steps in the right direction and essentially becoming better breeders.