

# Cavalier Movement

BY JEANIE MONTFORD JANUARY 5, 2022



*Cavalier Movement. Is it something special? Is it something unique?—By no means! (A version of this article was originally published in The Royal Dispatch.)*

The Cavalier Kings Charles Spaniel is quite normal—one could almost say their structure and proportions are generic—there are no extremes of proportions or conformation such as we find in the Dachshund or the Pekingese or the Bulldog, for example, which will dictate specialized and distinctive gaits.

How important is it to consider Cavalier movement? Where do we put movement on our list of priorities among head and expression, temperament, coat, and markings, etc.?

Do all breeders consider good movement an essential goal of their breeding program or are they more concerned with pretty faces and lots of coat? Why do we want our dogs to move well both in and out of the show ring?

If a dog is moving with all of its bones and joints in proper proportion in relation to one another, it will move more efficiently with less wear and tear on the joints, expending less energy to get from A to B. Hopefully the dog will live well into a comfortable old age without developing arthritis or other joint inflammations.



True and Parallel Movement in Front,  
with the Leg Forming a Straight Column of Support Under the Body



True and Parallel Movement Behind



#### Close Movement Behind

Our Standards for the Cavalier are mercifully clear and to-the-point when describing movement:

Country of Origin, UK Standard: “Free-moving and elegant in action, plenty of drive from behind. Fore and hind limbs move parallel when viewed from in front and behind.”

US Standard: “Free moving and elegant in action, with good reach in front and sound, driving rear action. When viewed from the side, the movement exhibits a good length of stride, and viewed from front and rear it is straight and true, resulting from straight-boned fronts and properly made and muscled hindquarters.”

I do not believe there is any difference in the essential meaning between these two standards. I interpret “move parallel” to be essentially the same as “straight and true.”

Some of the factors that affect movement are, firstly, structure and conformation. In order to produce the ideal movement described in the **Standard**, the dog needs to be well-angulated in both fore and hind quarters. If the angulation is balanced front and rear, then, ideally, at the trot, the hind foot should step into the place of the forefoot as it is lifted.



Lack of Drive, Little Flexion of Stifles and Hock



Over-Reaching, Causing the Dog to "Crab"



"Sound driving action" at a phase of the trot that shows flexing of hocks and stifles, good reach of hind feet well-forward under the body, and correct topline.





“Free moving and elegant in action.” This dog shows wonderful reach and drive, correct topline and tail carriage.

Ideally, in a well-angulated front assembly, the point of the elbow will be directly beneath the highest point of the shoulder blade when the dog is standing. If a dog is straight (upright shoulder blades and steep upper arm) in the front assembly and is over-angulated in the rear, the dog has too much “drive” behind and the hind feet will have to pass the front foot to the side (over-reaching), leading the dog to move at an angle to the direction of movement—i.e., crabbing.

To move “true,” the dog needs to move both feet on each side in the same plane. If the feet are tracking properly, then the dog will move “parallel” or “straight and true.” I believe that if a dog is coming towards me, I should only see “two legs” as in a horse coming down the center line in dressage.

Cavaliers should not single track when viewed from in front or behind—they have a low center of gravity and they should not be moved around the show ring at great speed. There should not be any tendency for the feet to converge! The legs should provide a straight column of support under the dog. Any deviation such as cowhocks, bowed hocks or crooked fronts will lead to excessive strain on the joints and ligaments.

The conditioning and musculature should not be underestimated—no matter how perfect a dog’s bone structure might be. It will be unable to move, as its structure would suggest, if it’s unfit and lacking in strong and responsive muscles and ligaments. It is these ligaments and muscles that enable a dog to move its bones from place to place! These begin to develop early in life, and growing puppies, if given too little exercise or confined to a puppy pen, may never develop strong ligaments. Too much or prolonged exercise and encouraging fast development with high protein foods may lead to malformed bone growth and problems later in life. Steady growth gains and free exercise (when and for as long as the puppy wishes) are best and will hopefully result in a good-moving dog when mature. Conditioning and the sensible development of fitness and muscles can make dramatic improvement to the movement of a dog with basically good structure but who is slack and soft in muscle tone.

And last, but not least: the dog’s temperament, attitude, and training. You can have the best-constructed and best-conditioned Cavalier, but if the dog doesn’t want to move with drive and enthusiasm its virtues will never be revealed to the judge in the show ring. Some wonderful dogs drive their owners to distraction through active or passive non-cooperation (I speak from experience here) while others show with flair and joie de vivre, demonstrating glorious, easy, ground-covering and true movement. You know that they will show this just as easily in parks and gardens as in the ring.

Watching our Cavaliers move with joy and animation forms a great part of the pleasure we derive from our dogs.

It's our responsibility to breed and develop the whole Cavalier: the meltingly beautiful expression; the amenable, loving temperament; and the silky-coated beauty, but also one who can live a long and active life, free from pain and discomfort because of its correct conformation and ease of movement.