The Gun Dog Supreme

NEWS BULLETIN of the WIREHAIRED POINTING GRIFFON CLUB OF AMERICA
EDUCATION & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

http://www.wpgca.org

June 2015 Volume 90, Number 1 June 2015

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings:

It's summer; new pups are heading to their homes and it's a great time to be playing with and training your dogs. Take advantage of it while you can, and slide under a shade tree to enjoy this issue. Thanks to all who contributed material.

Rem DeJong

On the Cover

Silvie Neradilová holds **Argo z Hřibáku** in Prague with the Woodrow Wilson railway station in the background. Silvie and Pavel Dostál are shipping Argo from his homeland to the United States and his new home with Jane and Mike Chlapaty near Chicago. It's an exciting time for us on the receiving end, a bit scary for the little pup and bittersweet for the breeder sending a pup across the ocean.

Breeders in the U.S. can often keep in contact with at least some of their pups. We see the pups at our tests, maybe even hunt over them with their owners. Czech breeders who are exporting their puppies here don't have that opportunity. How would you feel about sending one of your pups across the ocean? Fortunately, we can now readily share photos, videos and stories via the Internet through our club web pages and Facebook, and doing so helps maintain the Cesky Fousek world community. So please share your photos and videos of our Czech import pups as the grow.

Photo by Pavel Dostál

For information requests or to join the WPGCA please email Robin at:

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SUBSCR./BACK ISSUES

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WPGCA Photo Gallery:
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BWPGCA News

Ballot Proposal

The Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America is now the **Bohemian Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America.**

WPGCA members were asked to vote in April on changes to the WPGCA Constitution. Eligible voters were club members who had paid their dues for the 2015 calendar year.

The Issue:

The Board of Directors recommends these changes:

1. Club Name: Bohemian Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America.
2. Breed called: Bohemian Wirehaired Pointing Griffon.
3. Annual dues listed as $60.00 per year.
4. Include email as acceptable communication means

A complete draft of the revision proposal was published in the April 2015 GDS. Or see: http://www.wpgca.org/about-us/wpgca-constitution/

The results were 142 in favor of the changes and 12 opposed, well above the 2/3 majority required to amend the constitution. However, it was pointed out that members did not have an opportunity to vote on dues as a separate issue. At the 2014 Board of Directors Meeting, the BOD had erroneously moved to increase club dues from $40.00 to $60.00 per year, but this action requires a simple majority vote of the membership. The BOD has agreed to accept the voting results regarding club name, breed name and use of email for communication, but will require a second ballot proposal in October 2015 on the issue of raising club dues to $60.00 for 2016. This is required to comply with nonprofit organization governance procedures.

Dues for 2015 are $40.00 per year. Members who paid the printed amount of $60.00 for 2015 may consider the $20.00 over-charge as a donation to the BWPGCA or they may request a $20.00 refund, or a $20.00 credit toward their 2016 dues. To request a partial refund or a credit toward 2016, please mail your request by July 31st to:

Zeb Breuckman
4433 7 Mile Rd.
South Lyon, MI 48178

Be sure to include your return mailing address.

BOD Officers

Treasurer Andy Rupp has resigned his position to focus his attention on family matters. We thank Andy for his service and wish him all the best moving forward. An election of new officers is scheduled for December 2015. More information will follow in the August GDS, but candidates are being sought for the positions of President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary for the club BOD.

Zeb Breuckman has been appointed by the BOD to fill the interim treasurer position. It's challenging stepping into this position, and we appreciate Zeb's willingness to take on the job.

2014 General Rogers Award Winner

The Bohemian Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America takes great pleasure in announcing the General Rogers Award winner for 2014: Tawna Skinner and her dog, **JOSETTE GRIFFOND'OR**

General Thomas DeForth Rogers founded the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America 1951 in 1951. In 1969-1970, shortly after his death, this award was initiated in his memory. The award goes to the griffon that receives the highest score in Utility Field Test each year. In her book *Griffon: Gun Dog Supreme,* author Joan Bailey points out that very few dogs are entered in Utility Field Test each year, so the award does not always indicate a superb performance. However, that is definitely NOT the case this year! **JOSETTE GRIFFOND'OR,** scored 4s across the board for a total score of 254 and a Prize I. A truly outstanding performance by dog and handler!

When asked for some insights on how to be successful in the Utility Field Test, Tawna was at first reluctant to respond, not wanting to appear to be bragging about her accomplishment. I assured her that her BWPGCA friends just wanted to share in her significant achievement. Reacting to receiving the General Rogers Award, Tawna writes:

> It is an achievement for which I have strived for nearly 30 years; ever since I saw my first UT test at the Big Sky Chapter of NAVHDA back in the 80s. After I saw those UT dogs working in the field and water I knew: "I want a dog like that!" So thus began my journey toward that end, which has included tremendous amounts of time, education, trial and error, success and failure, money, birds, various dogs, lots of help, people, desire and perseverance. Josette and I achieved my dream in September, 2014 and I feel pretty darn pleased about it.
>
> --Tawna

Having witnessed the performance firsthand, Dennis Carlson described the performance in his report on the Fall 2014 Northwest Chapter Test:

> I'm still high from watching Tawna Skinner's **Griffondor Josette** achieve a nearly perfect performance in the Utility Hunting Dog Test. I hope someday you all have the opportunity to watch a dog do this well in Utility. Very few of us will ever have a dog this well trained and with this much talent. It was a joy to see.

We're all thrilled for you, Tawna. Go buy that fine dog a steak and celebrate.

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http://www.instituteofcaninebiology.org/

The Pox of Popular Sires

by
Carol Beuchat PhD

The most common admonition of the geneticist to the dog breeder is to "avoid the Popular Sire Syndrome". At the same time, the most common advice from breeder to breeder is "breed the best to best". So the conundrum is obvious and the consequence predictable - the "best" dogs are the most sought after, so they sire the most offspring and become popular sires.

Even a century ago Williams Haynes (1915) was writing about the "Effect of the popular sire", noting that in three terrier breeds that he examined - Irish Terriers, Scottish Terriers, and Fox Terriers - about 40% of the puppies were sired by only 20% of the sires. Back then, "popularity" was quite different than now - his "prolific" dogs sired 5-7 litters, which would be completely unremarkable today. And surprisingly, Haynes thought that popular sires actually benefitted the breed by contributing to the preservation of variability in type.

Superficially it might appear that if approximately 40% of the puppies each year are sired by but 20% of the stud dogs this would eventually result in the greatest uniformity of type. The selected sires are all to a greater or lesser degree exceptional animals, but they are not selected by any uniform system. Most of them excel in some particular physical point, but they do not excel in the same points or in the same degree, nor even, in some cases, in the same direction. Here the personal equation, the ideals of different breeders, is at work, and the result is that since a few males not themselves of uniform type sire a greater-than-average number of offspring they disturb the race average of the following generation and introduce abnormal amounts of variation. The fact therefore, that artificial selection gives to certain selected, but not uniform, males an undue preponderance of influence must always keep the type of domestic animals in an unstable state. This seems to me an important factor in the great variability always noted among domesticated breeds.

Haynes thought popular sires were a good thing, because he thought they were sufficiently different from each other that they prevented the breed from becoming too "uniform". How then did the popular sire go from contributing to the quality of the gene pool in 1915, to the source of a problem to be avoided by breeders 100 years later? What is this "syndrome" that today's geneticists are so concerned about?

Breaking Bad: DNA

To understand the problem, you must understand a bit of genetics. You probably

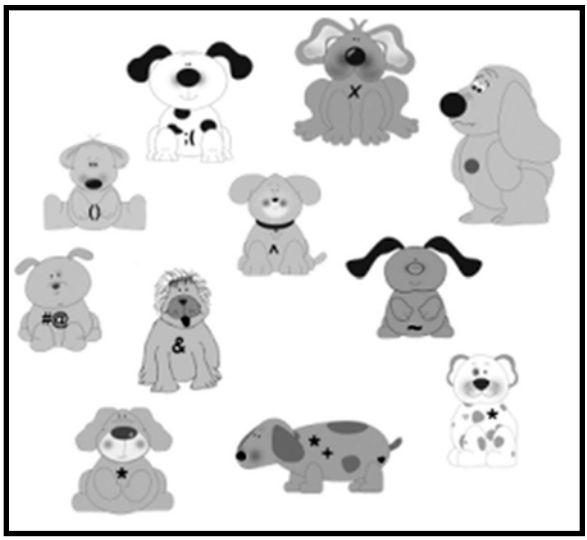
know about mutations - bits of DNA that are not replicated perfectly or are perhaps damaged by some environmental toxin. If the mutation is dominant and affects some vital process, it is removed from the gene pool by natural selection when that individual fails to pass its genes on to the next generation successfully. But many mutations have no ill effects because their paired, dominant allele functions normally. These "recessive" mutations are silent in the genome and can be passed to the next generation the same as any other gene, and as long as the offspring has a copy of a normal allele the mutation remains silent. The mutation becomes a problem when an individual inherits two copies so is homozygous at that locus. Without at least one copy of the normal, unmutated allele, the gene does not function properly, and the consequence can range from something relatively trivial (e.g., a different eye color, or slightly shorter legs) to the catastrophic (e.g, blindness, disruption of a critical biochemical pathway, cancer).

Mutations happen all the time. The ones with immediate ill effects are removed from the gene pool by natural selection, while the recessive, silent ones remain in the genome as the "genetic load". Every dog - in fact, every organism - has its own unique collection of damaged alleles that causes no harm as long as there is also a copy of a normal allele of each that can do the job it is supposed to.

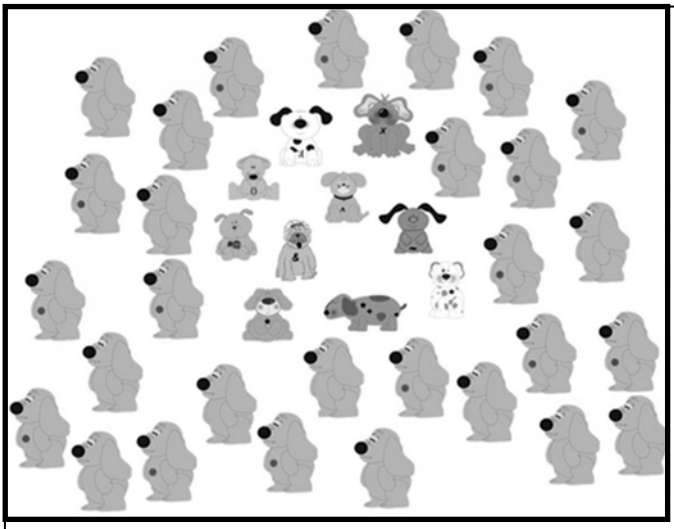
A Star is Born

Now consider what happens in a population of purebred dogs. Let's pretend that this cute collection of dogs represents your breed, with the phenotypic variations among them representing the nuances of type that would be obvious to a serious breeder. We've given each dog a (typographic) recessive mutation, a bit of DNA damage that is not expressed so it has no detrimental effect on the dog. If each dog in our population has a litter of puppies this year, the frequencies of these various alleles in the population will stay about the same in the next generation.

But what happens if one of these dogs wins big at an important event and becomes a star? If it's a bitch, she will have a litter of much sought-after puppies, and it will probably be at least a year before she is bred again.



But if our star is male (let's call him "Hank"), he will be bred many times and produce dozens (or more!) puppies in a single year. Hank will pass half of his genes, both good and bad, to each of his offspring, so many copies of his recessive,



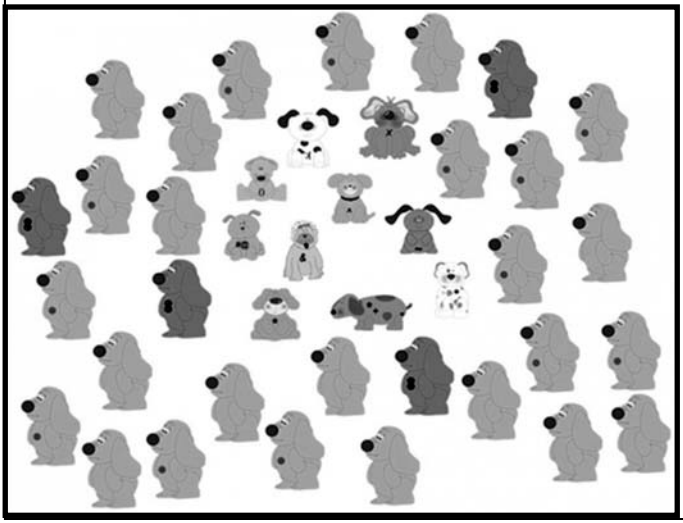
silent mutations get distributed in his puppies.

As long as Hank's deleterious mutations are paired with a normal allele in his puppies, they are not expressed and cause no ill effects. But if you could view the gene pool of the breed in the new generation, you would see that now it is markedly different.

Hank's mutation has in just a single generation gone from being rare to common, and now lurks silently in the genomes of dozens of his offspring. In this generation, no one is any the wiser. The prized puppies that carry their sire's recessive mutation will appear to be no different than the ones that don't.

The Next Generation...

But in the next generation we start to see the first hint of trouble. Perhaps there were a few half-sib matings, or father-to-daughter, and some puppies are produced that are homozygous for Hank's mutation. Perhaps the mutation is lethal and these are stillborn pups, or maybe the puppies are born with a disease. But the breeders will be mystified - they have never had this problem in their line, or even in the breed, so maybe it's just bad luck? Nobody can see yet that this is just the tip of the iceberg.



In one more generation, however, the trouble really begins. Carriers produced by the first generation will pass on the mutation to half of their offspring, and half-sib matings or line breedings back to the sire will begin to produce affected puppies. Even while the number of affected puppies is still relatively small, the

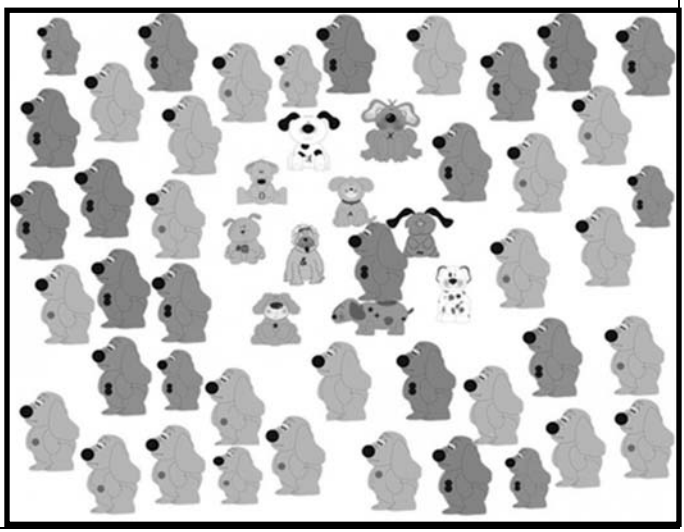
number of carriers will by now be significant, and remember that our popular sire probably continues to produce more than his fair share of the offspring in each generation. You can see where this is headed. The seeds have been sown.

Every litter produced by this popular sire is one less reproductive opportunity for any of the other potential sires in the breed, so the frequency of genes carried by those unused sires will decline in the population. At the same time, multiple bitches are producing puppies sired by Hank that will be half-sibs to the dozens of other puppies in their generation. The temptation to capture a bit more of that popular sire's star qualities will probably result in a few line breedings that will put carrier with carrier.

Uh--oh, We've Got A Problem

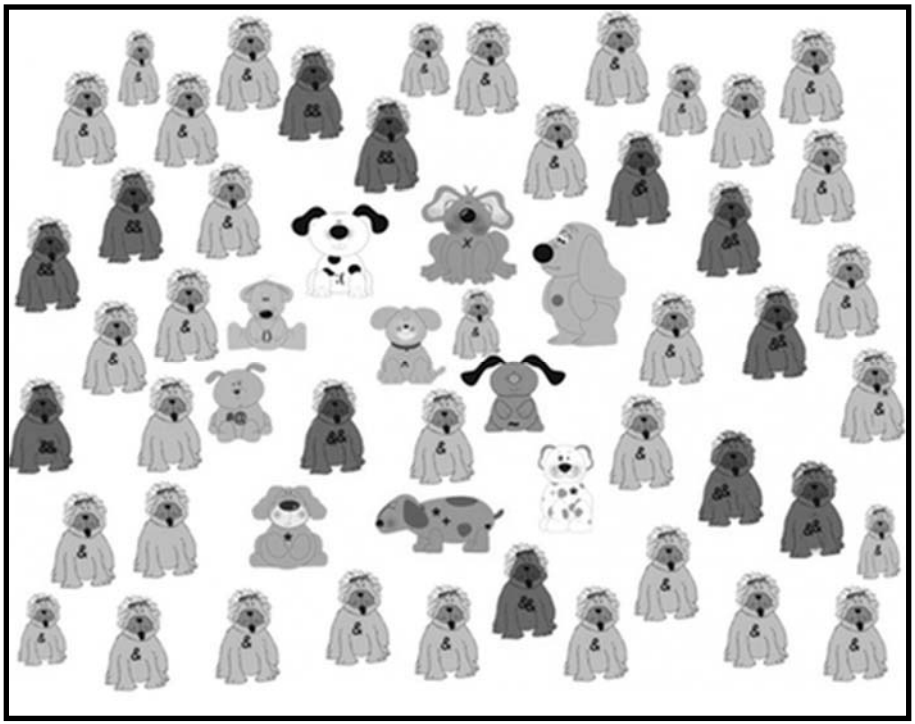
This is about the time breeders begin to notice that there is a "problem" in the breed. It won't take a pedigree sleuth to trace the growing population of affected dogs back to Hank, our popular sire who will now be blamed for introducing this new disease into the breed. Geneticists will be called in to hunt for the defective bit of Hank's DNA and to develop a reliable test. Then breeders will begin the mission of trying to eliminate Hank's formerly valuable genes from the gene pool, with proportional collateral damage to the genetic legacy of all of the bitches he was bred to. The genetic carnage resulting from attempts to purify the breed of the unfortunate mutation will continue for generations. The ultimate damage to the gene pool can be catastrophic.

This happens over and over again in breed after breed. Of course, the problem isn't poor Hank. Wind back the clock, and if the judge had pointed to a different dog at that fateful show - let's say it was Rosco who got the nod - the trajectory of the breed would have been completely different but the consequences pretty much the same. Rosco will leave his genetic legacy behind in dozens of lovely puppies, half of which will have that one nasty mutation that will emerge a few generations down the road to bite the breed. Breeders will eventually catch on, sound the alarm, and the effort to identify and eradicate the offending mutation will begin. The gene pool will be purged, and the next time a big winner appears that happens to be male, the cycle will begin anew.



The Unfortunate Legacy of the Popular Sire

The really unfortunate thing about the Popular Sire is that the negative genetic consquences of his popularity don't begin to manifest for generations, by which time the breed already has a really significant problem. The large number of breed-specific disorders known to be caused by a single recessive gene (175 as of this writing; OMIA) is testimony to the prevalence of the problem (indeed, some breeds now suffer from multiple recessive genetic disorders).



Of course, it is not just the recessive mutations that are disseminated widely by popular sires. Any genetic disorder can become quickly widespread, especially in the absence of any means of documenting the appearance of a new disease and if breeders are not willing to be completely transparent about issues they are aware of. Unacceptable aggression in English Springer Spaniels, which used to be one of the most popular family dogs in the US, appears to be genetic and has been traced to one popular sire from a prominant kennel (Reisner & Houpt 2005; Duffy 2008). Twenty-five percent of Bernese Mountain Dogs die at an average age of only 8 years old from histiocytic sarcoma (Dobson), a fatal cancer that apparently originated from a single dog in Switzerland, and the flames were fanned by a prolific great-grandson in the US that spread the malignant genes far and wide in the gene pool (Dobson 2013; Moore 1984; Moore & Rosin 1986). Many Dobermans die at an early age from sudden heart failure caused by dilated cardiomyopathy, which can be traced to seven popular sires in the 1950's, three of which died of heart failure

(http://bit.ly/1anuinN). A serious - usually lethal - susceptibility of Miniature Schnauzers to infection by Mycobacteria avium (referred to as "MAC" for Mycobacteria avium complex) is thought to be traceable to a sire popular in the mid-1980s and is found now in dogs all over the world (http://bit.ly/1gZbGy7; http://bit.ly/1ciVxNP). There are no doubt many other similar examples that I am not aware of or have never been documented.

Leroy (2011) has identified popular sires as the single most important contributor to the dissemination of genetic diseases in purebred dogs. Recognizing this, the FCI has issued a recommendation to breeders that no dog should have more offspring (presumably in its lifetime) than equivalent to 5% of the number of puppies registered in the breed during a five-year period, and a number of national kennel clubs have followed suit (e.g., Finland). But without cooperation of breed clubs, or in the absence of some authority that would oversee registrations and be in a position to police such a breeding restriction, it is hard to see how such a recommendation would have any effect at all on current breeding practices. (Which 5-year period? Which population of dogs - the worldwide breed, or just the dogs in your country? Who does the counting - the owner of the sire, the owner of the bitch, the breed club, the kennel club??).

The only people benefitting from the explosion of breed-specific genetic disorders are the molecular geneticists, who have discovered dogs as an ideal research animal because many of the same disorders occur in humans (Ostrander 2012). But as useful and fascinating as dogs might be for their research, I suspect all would prefer to see dogs that are free of genetic disease, for they have so much more to offer in the family home than in the lab.

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A Tick in Time… is Trouble

by
Jon Coil

Hunting grouse and woodcock or just a walk in the woods, almost anywhere from the Lakes States to the Northeast will expose both the dogs and hunters to black-legged ticks and the diseases they harbor. If your woods doesn't host black legged ticks now, don't relax, they may be coming. Fifteen years ago we didn't find these ticks on our land, now they are common and I believe our dogs brought them. While the exposure to the ticks is bad enough when in the woods, the threat may linger as the ticks hide in your clothes, the dog's kennel, your car or even your house. Beside that uncomfortable fact, if your dog is bit by a tick and acquires one of the several diseases, the incubation period varies from a few days to several weeks before symptoms present themselves and in the early stages the symptoms are not striking.

Several years ago when **Bartos of Marsh Stream** was in his glory, we completed a tough hunting weekend and Bartos showed a slight limp. Hunting our thick woods, dogs occasionally pull a muscle or run into a down log or other obstacle and come up lame but they recover with a day or two of rest. When Bartos was still limping in the middle of the week I was wondering if he would be recovered for the coming weekend hunt. The limp was slight and it shouldn't have taken three days to heal. Recalling a conversation with a friend a few weeks before revealed that his lab had a recurrence of anaplasmosis. Bartos had tested positive for anaplasmosis several months previously and lameness is a symptom. My veterinarian thought it could have been a new infection of Lyme disease or anaplasmosis, and prescribed a ten day treatment of antibiotics and in three or four days Bartos was back on track.

Fast forward ten years. Some of you have had the opportunity to meet Petunia, a Yorkshire terrier we inherited. We had the six year old for less than a year when she became very lethargic over a couple days. A trip to the veterinarian showed anaplasmosis and one sick dog. Poor Petunia. An overnight at the Veterinarian's hospital rehydrated her and the antibiotics did their magic and she was spunky

Coco of the Sandhill owned by Jon Coil. Does she look sick to you?

Photo by Kirk Dilly

again. Petunia likes our daily walks and is exposed to the blacklegged ticks like the big dogs, we keep her hair cut short but her thick fine hair makes tick searches almost impossible. We treat with topical tick repellent/killers as needed but the effectiveness varies towards the end of the treatment period.

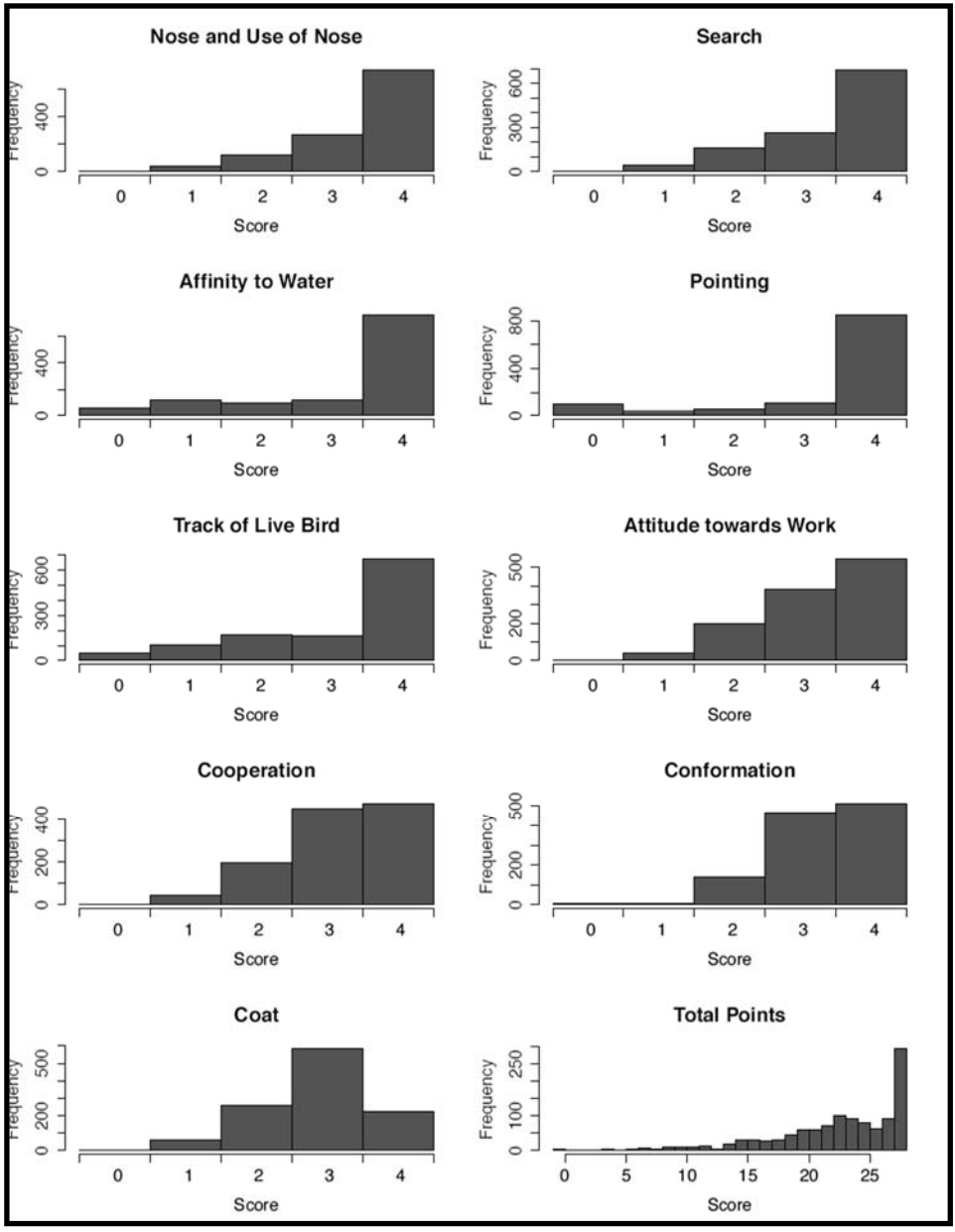
A few months later we noticed that Petunia wasn't able to (my apologies to those who find this household casualness abhorrent) jump up on the couch and though her conformation doesn't provide for smooth movement, it looked like she might have a slight limp. Her normal gait is a trot with an occasional sprint but I wasn't seeing any sprints. A visit with the veterinarian and the antibiotic treatment had her jumping up to her place on the couch in three or four days.

It had been three weeks since the Minnesota deer season had put our grouse hunting to bed this past November and cold enough with a dusting of snow to make the blacklegged ticks go to ground but they were still in the game. The weekend after Thanksgiving, **Coco of the Sandhill** hunted hard during a pheasant hunt with Kirk Dilly and Coco's littermate **Cedar** and Kirk's young Cesky Fousek "Ike" **Ivar od Vavřineckélto rybníka** in the relatively tick free prairie of west-central Minnesota. Coco has the usual search we see at the dog tests, nose up and down as required to check out the scent. It was unusual for her to put her nose down and keep it down in one track after the other, seldom showing her normal search mode, but that was what she did all weekend. Sunday promised a high in the single digits and a strong northwest wind, Coco was somewhat reluctant to leave the house but hunted hard, though tracking all the time. She also showed more reaction to the cold than normal, shivering and hunching slightly during breaks, in those conditions it was understandable but it was more visible than the reactions of Cedar and Ike. At home after the weekend, Coco had the slightest of limps but what was more pronounced was; while on our walks, Coco usually jumped the road ditch, and though still active, she would trot through the bottom of the ditch rather than her long soaring jumps. A trip to my veterinarian and a discussion of the slight limp and description of her not quite normal behavior and he affirmed my hunch that those ticks were still after us. He said the treatment for Lyme disease and anaplasmosis was the same and a ten day treatment of antibiotics were prescribed. When he checked by phone in a few days I was able to report that there had been improvement and Coco was jumping the ditch and the slight limp was gone.

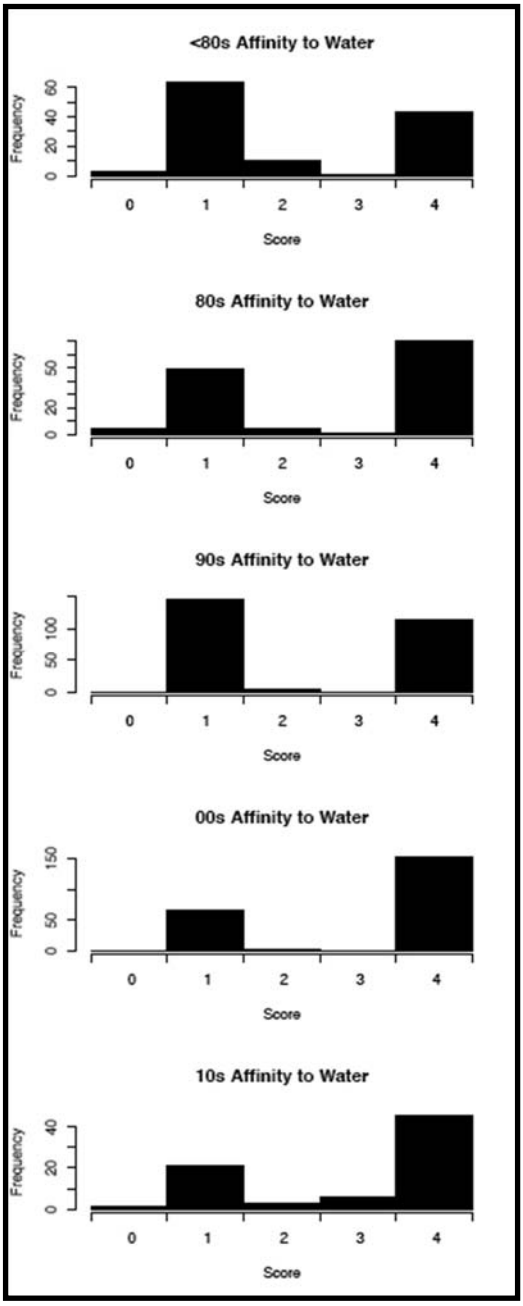
The key is to watch your dog for any slight symptoms, especially if you hunt, live or visit in country that has illness carried by ticks, and always keep the possibility of the diseases in mind. A slight limp may be from a strain or sprain but if you are seeing a combination of peculiarities that are not adding up, it may be worth a trip to the veterinarian. Nip any infection as early as possible. We do inoculate our dogs against Lyme disease and treat with topical products to kill and repel ticks and apparently, have Lyme disease somewhat in check but have more problems with anaplasmosis for which there is no vaccine. The illness can present symptoms weeks after you have hunted the tick areas and can be hard to detect at first but can be a life threatening illness for your dog if left untreated.

Are Scores A-Changin'?

by
Jennifer Lachowiec, PhD,
Breeding Committee Apprentice



We have gathered many years of data on dogs tested at our events. It is interesting to analyze how the scores have changed over time, especially with the introduction of the Cesky Fousek.



Using the club database of test scores that Laurie Connell, Rick Sojda, Larry Semmens, and Ann Pool have compiled, I have examined how test scores have changed over the years. I have picked some of the most interesting trends to show in this issue of the GDS, but you can see all the results for NAT and IHDT, pooled together and separated by decade at *http://huntersgriffon.org/resources/*

The main observations follow:

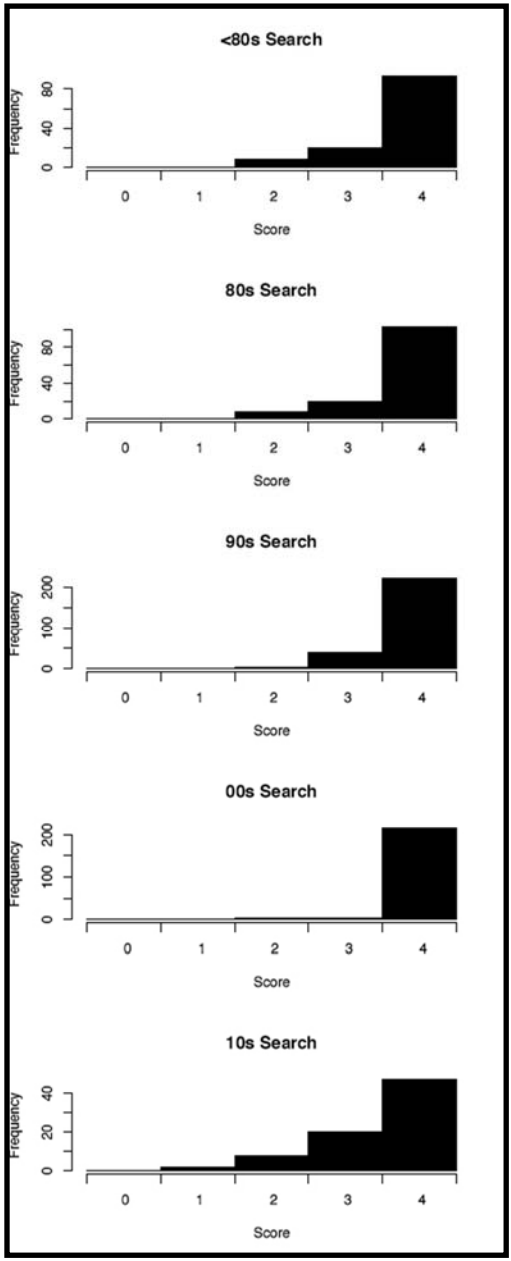
Natural Ability Test

- Affinity to Water has long either been a 1 or a 4 with most dogs scoring a 4. The same goes for Pointing.
- Interestingly, in the '00s, nearly every dog scored a 4 in Search, Track of the Live Bird, and Nose and Use of Nose.
- In those three disciplines, there is significantly more variation in scores for the last five years.
- Low scores in these three disciplines have led to a few very low overall scores in the last five years, similar to the low scores seen in the '80s.
- However, overall, our score distributions for NAT are very high, reflecting the instincts of our dogs..

Intermediate Hunting Dog Test

IHDT scores overall have been holding steady since we have kept records. This is due to increasing scores in some areas and decreasing scores in others.

- Pointing and Track of the Live Bird have been scored primarily 4 all along. We truly have pointers!
- Nose and Use of Nose has been steady over the years at a 3-4 score.
- Blind Retrieve shifted dramatically from mostly 0s to 3s in the '00s (see graphic).



- Track of the Duck greatly improved in the '80s and has stayed the same since, with many dogs receiving 4s.
- Drags have also improved, but there is great variation in scores across decades.
- Attitude Towards Work has slightly improved since the '80s to the '00s, but now leveled off.
- Conformation and Cooperation peaked in the '80s and have been decreasing slightly since.
- Obedience has been slowly decreasing since before the '80s.

Comparisons across NAT and IHDT

Cooperation in NAT is holding steady, but declining in IHDT.

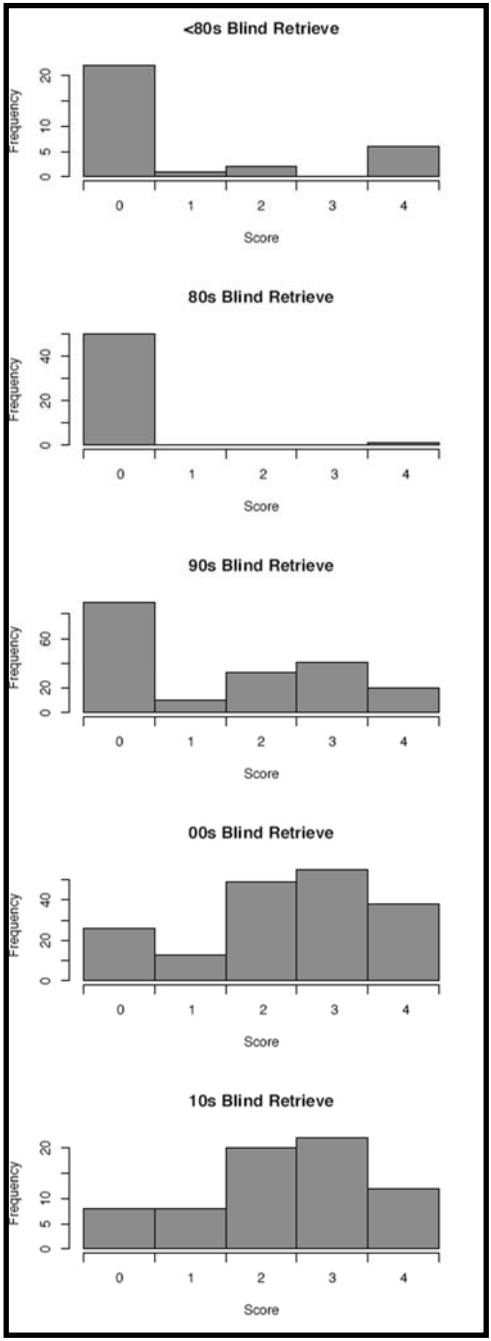
In both NAT and IHDT Coats are headed to a 3.

In both NAT and IHDT, we have more (but still very, very few) poor scores in Nose and Use of Nose in the last fifteen years than in previous decades.

Overall, our dogs score well in most events, with a recent, but small, increase in very low scores observed.

All these observations make me ponder why we see some of these trends. It is interesting to consider the causes to the changes over time. We began breeding to the Cesky Fouseks in the mid 1980s. Did the injection of Cesky

Fouseks cause changes that began in the mid-'90s? I think the tests that might reflect the injection of the Cesky Fousek would be the improvement in the Blind Retrieve (see graphic), though the decrease in Attitude Towards Work may also be due it.



Are there systematic differences in our tests over the years? In regards to judging, overall, I don't believe so. Tests in which our dogs have scored nearly all 4s have been that way since the Club's beginning, like Pointing. Though I do wonder if the lack of low scores in the '00s in Pointing, Track, and Nose and Use of Nose reflects some tradition in judging that has shifted very recently. Along the same vein, has the quality of birds available affected our tests? Dr. Laurie Connell, Breeding Committee Apprentice shared that discussions among judges at the recent Northeast Chapter tests suggested that bird quality might be changing, especially with the rise of very low scores (i.e. Nose and Use of Nose or Pointing) since the '90s not previously seen.

"We just got done with our test [Northeast Chapter] last weekend, and the first day there were no wild birds around, the chukars were in sad shape, and none of the dogs pointed. I think the dogs see these birds as cripples. How does this affect our scores on average?" Air-washing birds by hanging them in a fresh bag in a tree for a while may be one way to approach this issue, though further discussion on whether this is a good approach is necessary.

Are we less strict (requiring Obedience, Cooperation) with our dogs since the mid-20th century? I noticed that the scores in those two tests have slowly decreased from 3 to 2 over the decades. I suspect that those changing scores reflect changing attitudes and time investment in dog training. There was discus-

sion on this topic at the recent Northeast Chapter in Maine. Judges were reflecting on whether in the 80s and 90s there was more dedication by the average owner, according to Breeding Committee Apprentice, Laurie Connell.

Finally, an important point to consider is randomness. Are some of these trends just chance? Did we just happen to breed dogs that had certain tendencies without noticing? I think that one piece of information supports this idea. Overall IHDT scores have been very similar since our records in the '50s. We have not produced overall improvements in scores, but have certainly improved areas that lacked, like Blind Retrieve and Drags.

What do you think?

You are encouraged to look at the data plots on the website at:

http://huntersgriffon.org/resources/

and let us know your thoughts about explanations for the score distributions over time. Please email your comments to: *dejongrem@gmail.com.* If we get sufficient response, we'll publish comments in a future issue of the GDS and/or on-line.

Editors Note: As our organization moves toward becoming the Bohemian Wire-haired Pointing Griffon Club, it's important to remember that our goal remains to breed the "Gun Dog Supreme." Ed Bailey articulated exactly what that is when he penned this article some years back. Thanks for allowing us to reprint it here.

Der Jagdgebrauchshund
The Versatile Hunting Dog

by

Ed Bailey

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First printed Gundog magazine

Twenty-something years ago, when a handful of us were introducing NAVHDA (the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association) to North American hunters, I got a call one evening. The fellow belligerently told me his dog pointed pheasant, quail, grouse, woodcock and even pointed a crippled duck at the edge of a cattail patch. After his catalogue he said "And if that's not an all-purpose, versatile dog I don't know what is."

"No argument from me," said I.

He told me how glad he was that I agreed that he had a versatile hunting dog. He was a tad upset when I told him I was only agreeing to the last part of his statement. He owned a pointer and had his own ideas of what made a versatile hunting dog. Yet even now, after all these years and all the publicity, the Jagdege-

brauchshund is still not understood and certainly not fully utilized in N. America.

The term "versatile hunting dog" is a very liberal translation of the German Jagdgebrauchshund. In those early days we agonized over many things while trying to develop a valid testing format that followed as closely as possible the well-established German tests for our non-specialist dogs. One thing we struggled with was what to call the dogs we were testing. Jagdgebrauchshund could be translated as "all around hunting dog" or as "useful hunting dog" or more precisely as "dog useful in all aspects of hunting" because one dog is expected to do all things necessary for hunting game in the field, forest or marsh.

The compound word Jagdgebrauchshund works well in German but is both pretentious and cumbersome if translated literally into English. But because our dogs, referred to until then as "the continental breeds," were unspecialized compared to the specialist pointing, retrieving and tracking breeds, we came up with the term "versatile hunting dog." It was more positive than "unspecialized dog," less pretentious than "all purpose: and far less cumbersome than "do everything necessary for all types of hunting dog." Versatile better (though not completely) described our dogs than did "continental breeds" or "useful hunting dog." The name caught on and most other adjectives disappeared from use, replaced by the new concept-versatile hunting dog.

But what is a versatile hunting dog?

First, being a versatile dog is more a case of function than of form. It is what they do and why they can do it rather than how they look and what breed they are. However, there are breeds which are noted for their versatile abilities. Most of these non-specialist breeds were developed in Germany with some originating in other middle European countries. The German longhair (Deutsch Langhaar), German shorthair (Deutsch Kurzhaar), German wirehair (Duetsch Drahthaar), Griffon, large Munsterlander (grosser schwarzweisser Muensterlaender), pudel pointer, small Muensterlander (kleiner Muensterlaender), stichelhaar and Weimaraner were developed in Germany.

The Vizsla is the Hungarian contribution, the Cesky Fousek is from Czechoslovakia, the Spinone is from Italy, and the popular Brittany is from France. These are the best known today, though there are also several more which are less well known.

Most of the breeds were developed from crossing pre-existing specialist breeds and combinations of breeds which today we would call crossbreeds or more unkindly, mongrels. But all the dogs used for creating the versatile dogs were proven hunting dogs which possessed certain desirable characteristics. By crossbreeding and with a planned purpose, periodically infusing genes from specialists, the various breeds were developed and improved to be more useful dogs for the type of hunting intended.

Most North American breed clubs would rather cut off their collective trigger fingers than mix breeds, no matter how badly the breed has deteriorated or how pathetically narrow the gene pool. But the truth is, all our so-called versatile breeds are basically mixtures, bred according to a specific goal - one dog that would do the

combined jobs of three specialists.

Often we find a specialist dog that apparently does it all. It points, retrieves on land and from water, and it tracks. My good hunting friend has a chocolate Labrador retriever that points staunch as a statue, tracks and retrieves cripples whether in 10 year grass or in a swimming depth pond. Undoubtedly a specialist breed, but she does all the things that any respectable versatile dog would do. She fits function without regard to form. But is she a versatile hunting dog? Not really, nor are lots of pointers that retrieve and track and even enjoy retrieving from water.

If this were all there was to a versatile hunting dog, we could rename them "functional hunting dog" and leave it at that, saying any breed might have dogs that are versatile hunting dogs. However, a truly versatile hunting dog has additional functional characteristics. At this point I want to say, very loudly, it is counter-productive to think a versatile dog is somehow better than a specialist. The only way to better a pointer is to breed a better pointer. Similarly, a retriever. And to get a better versatile hunting dog, you must breed a better one. One type of dog is not necessarily better than another; they are different. Only through careful, planned, selective breeding and rigid objective testing of progeny can any breed be improved. Improvement might mean infusing genes whenever the gene pool needs a shot to upgrade the qualities of a breed. But what are those qualities that separate the versatile dog from the specialist?

True, the versatile dog points, tracks and retrieves, wet or dry. That is what it does or should do, but it is not a definition of what it is. The truly versatile dog has unique characteristics which are not found in the specialist, even the specialist that purportedly does it all. The most unique of these characteristics is his ability to shift gears. He can shift up or down as the situation requires. And the versatile dog "knows" what the situation requires.

Each of the specialist breeds, be it pointer, retriever or tracker, is a one-gear dog. And that includes my friend's brown Lab. The inherent locked-in temperament of specialist breeds dictates their job and the speed and range with which they do it.

The versatile dog, on the other hand, should be in control of his own temperament. A truly versatile dog adjusts range according to height and density of cover without commands or pressure from the handler. He will move rapidly on a fresh trail, but pick his way very slowly and carefully on a faint 12 to 18 hour old blood trail.

He can go head high on a fresh track or snuffle carefully on a cold one. If he can't control his temperament - hence his speed, range, his general attitude towards working, and in short, his concentration on his duties - he doesn't qualify as a versatile hunting dog no matter what breed he is. It is still a case of being a functional hunting dog.

A versatile hunting dog in total control of his temperament does not need a calm-down period after a week off from working and a two hour ride to the hunting area. He should be able to concentrate on any task, be it a search of a large stubble field with head high, making best use of wind and scenting conditions, or picking his way delicately along the track of a rooster that has sneaked out of the road ditch

right beside your parked wagon. He should show even more concentration on a blood track laid down the evening before. He will be able to do either job equally well although just two minutes out of the car. He must search with controlled abandon if needed or be one-step-at-a-time calm when that is called for.

But there's still more. The truly versatile hunter should be a pointer when the birds and conditions allow and should be a flusher when that is required. Sacrilege? Not at all. Of what use is a dog that points and holds steady forever when hunting a quarter section of a 10 year stand of chest-high switchgrass crawling with a hundred or more sneaky wild pheasants? Unless you accidentally stumble on him or his beeper is yelping loud enough for your imparied-by-30 years-of-unprotected-shotgunning auditory system to hear, your dog is lost. Then, as the tall tale goes, you find a skeleton pointing two years later, beeper faintly chirping because you were clever enough to use the same batteries that smart-ass pink rabbit with the bass drum uses.

Your dog is more functional if he becomes a close-in-to-30 yards flusher, and a super tracker/retriever of cripples.

A versatile dog is by definition schizophrenic, a multi-personality dog for all seasons. The versatile dog had its greatest development during the last half of the nineteenth century when the upper middle class emerged in Europe. Each tradesman and professional could then afford a fine gun or two and the time and space to hunt. But he could not afford to house large kennels of specialist dogs complete with trainers, handlers and all the trappings the aristocracy had for all those hundreds of years.

The middle class tradesman (women in those days performed duties of driving the game but did not carry weapons louder than a clapper noisemaker) needed one dog that was easily trained to hunt upland birds, waterfowl, track small game animals like hares and rabbits and to run them much as a hound would, and to follow the blood trail of a wounded deer or a wild boar, bring it to bay if necessary, or bark dead or return to his hunter to lead him to the dead game. Or, on an evening deer hunt, the dog would need to lie quietly at the foot of the ladder leading to the tree stand while the hares and roe deer emerged from the forest cover to feed in the fields all around him, waiting until the right trophy buck walked out and the shot was made, just in case he was needed to do some tracking if the shot was less than perfect. He was also required to live in or at his master's house and perform guard duty, aggressive to strangers but lamb-gentle to the family members. All the various personalities had to be on call at the wish of the master, not at the dog's whim. Even his schizophrenia is under control.

There is another major characteristic absolutely required in a versatile dog. It is in many ways the most important. This super, all-pervasive characteristic is cooperation. Cooperation mediates and directs all the other characteristics. It is the way and how of being a versatile hunting dog. Dog and master are as one in all things, in the field, the forest, in the marsh or at home. Few commands are needed; the dog anticipates what is required, does it and looks for the next thing to do. Cooperation is what allows the dog to shift gears and to call up the correct personality.

But herein also lies a versatile dog paradox. The retriever specialists are by nature generally cooperative or they could not do their job. Pointing specialists are by their calling quite independent, light on cooperation so they can do their job. The tracking breeds are independent in the extreme, with almost no cooperation needed to fulfill their job specs. Versatile dogs do all three jobs so they must balance cooperation and independence in varying combinations.

When searching for upland game, the versatile dog must show enough independence to hunt with minimum direction but must be cooperative enough to maintain contact with his on-foot hunter, pointing when possible or flushing when that is the best way to go. After the shot, he must be independent enough to track a running wing-broke pheasant a quarter of a mile or more, yet be cooperative enough to pick up the bird and return it to his handler. He is in a constant dilemma of being both cooperative and in a controlled uncooperative state of independence. He must be looking for direction one instant and off on his own initiative the next. Like everything else about him, cooperation runs up and down the gears too.

It is naïve to think every versatile dog has the same balance of cooperation and independence. They don't. Versatile dogs are not all the same. They were developed from different sources, from different specialist combinations, so some breeds do some things with more dash, some things with less. In some a fast, wide search and stylish, rock-hard points are the long suit; in others pointing doesn't have equal luster but tracking and retrieving are the breathtaking performances. In each case they do passable or even good to excellent jobs in all the things required, but most breeds and even lines within breeds have greater strengths in one area than another.

This doesn't matter if you use your versatile dog in all, or at least in a broad spectrum of, types of hunting. If you prefer only upland bird hunting, all will do the job, but some are faster and "classier" than others. The faster, farther, classier ones are invariably harder to handle. Usually these have several infusions of pointing specialists in the breed's or line's ontogeny.

In European countries where breed clubs control the breeding practices, some breeds maintain strains within the breed with different strengths in the various requirements for hunting. The various strains are then used to beef up the performances of other strains when the breeding director or committee sees the need. There also may be borrowing from other breeds if the desired characteristics are not available within a breed, or if the breed's gene pool gets too small for its own genetic good. Of the versatile breeds in North America, I know of only two breed clubs with enough control over their breeding program to accomplish here what has been going on in Europe for the past 150 years. Some individual breeders do these infusions and breed-crossings surreptitiously followed by linebreeding for a few generations. These breeders are few and apparently dare not come out of the closet for fear of being accused of "ruining the breed." Individual efforts such as this do little or nothing for breed improvement as the breeders usually have their own agenda.

So what is the in-a-nutshell versatile hunting dog? First, he is always the result of

mixing breeds, but with the breeding done for a specific purpose. Those not measuring up to the proposed purpose should not be used in further breeding. He is a dog that is always in control of his temperament. No matter the level of excitement, he is self-controlled. He can shift his temperament up or down as needed. The versatile dog has multiple personalities which he can juggle effectively enough to do an efficient job of whatever task at hand. He is primarily a cooperative dog, slipping out of his cooperative mode only long enough to perform some function which, in the big picture is actually something very cooperative, like taking off for parts unknown in order to make a spectacular retrieve. And finally, he is easily trained because he has all these qualities.

With these characteristics all working in sync, the dog can search, point, track, retrieve, be equally effective on land, in water, in field or forest or marsh, in open cover or in dense. But more, he should point when the situation warrants and flush when that is called for. He should track quickly or carefully and slowly as required. He should be smart enough to retrieve the most efficient way - not necessarily swimming a straight line out and back if the land route is faster.

He is not just a pointer or a flusher that can track and retrieve, or a retriever that can point and track, or a tracker that retrieves and points. He is a dog that specializes in being a non-specialist. He is the dog European hunters developed to satisfy specific needs - to hunt in relatively small spaces, in fields, forests, marshes, within the restriction imposed by dense human populations, a condition much of North America now faces. He is a dog that can adapt to just about any condition and so can handle a wide range of hunting requirements - he has a multi-range set of gears and he can shift as required.

We imported various versatile dog breeds from Europe to fill the same needs the nineteenth century middle class European hunter faced. Hopefully we can keep the qualities intact and the dogs will continue to be able to perform as they were developed to do. There is a danger we will Americanize the versatile breeds with our penchant for competitions, even those held under the guise of field tests. That would be a travesty and a great disservice to the dogs. This danger is not that farfetched. The rules originally set out for testing North American versatile hunting dogs have already been quite eroded. Changes in rules have downplayed true versatility while increasing the misguided tendency to equate run with desire to do the job. The newer changes lean even more toward the field trials for the pointing specialists with a few retrieves thrown in. These scarcely test versatility.

On the up side, however, several versatile hunting dog breed clubs have affiliated with the German parent organizations and adhere closely to the original German Jugend Prufung (young dog test), Herbst Zucht Prufung (fall breeding test), and Verband Gebrauchshund prufung (governing clubs full versatile test for fully trained adult dogs). These breed clubs are trying hard to keep their breeds as they were intended to be. With this dedication there is still lots of hope for preserving the versatile dog's special characteristics. There is hope for survival of the dogs that specialize in being non-specialists. With luck they will remain the dogs for all seasons, functional and just as they were bred to be.

What's Happening

Summer/Fall Events

Heartland Chapter Training/Exposure Days

Michigan One Saturday per month
Country Kitchen, 15508 Old US 27 N Marshall, Michigan
Contact Jim Crouse for information, dates and to reserve birds.
Jim Crouse <jcrouse01@yahoo.com>
(614)562-1860

Iowa Training-Exposure Day
Location: Bellevue, IA, July 31-August 2
Contact: John Pitlo
(563)599-2487 jvpitlo@iowatelecom.net

Fall Test
September 5-6, 2015 (Tentative)
Location: Mazomanie, WI

Northwest Chapter Fall Test

Fall Test
September 5 – 6, 2015
Contact: Dennis Carlson carlson@gorge.net

Rocky Mountain Griffon Club

Exposure day Saturday, 15 August 2015, at Randy and Diane Ross's Ranch near Willow Creek, MT
Contact: Angie McDunn mcdunnk9@hotmail.com

Northeast Chapter

Fall Test
Sept 26 and 27th in Bristol ME (if we have dogs.)

See Regional Chapter web pages for updates and to download details.
http://www.wpgca.org/regional-chapters/