Gundog

JOURNAL



VOLUME I – ISSUE VI

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Welcome to the sixth edition of Gundog Journal. It's just over a year since we launched Britain's leading specialist gundog title and we have been bowled over by the reception and feedback from readers ever since. There is a voracious appetite for well-informed content about working, training and living with our fabulous gundog breeds, and it is our absolute pleasure to mine the huge depths of knowledge out there and share it with you. If you would like to ensure you never miss an issue then please do subscribe at: fieldsportsemporium.com

It's quite hard for me to select my favourite features in this issue but here's a flavour. Lindsay Corbett moved away from city life back to her beloved countryside and soon teamed up with a young cocker spaniel to enter the competition world. After many hours of sheer hard work training in the Welsh hills things started to click and now Lindsay and Molly have qualified for the Cocker Championship two years running. She tells us all about the ups and downs of the journey so far, and how nerves can make the big competitions a very difficult but ultimately intensely rewarding experience.

Sam Barber is a 25-year-old joiner who has cerebral palsy and an iron will, which means he hasn't allowed his disability to stop him from chasing his dream. In this issue trainer Damian Barson explains how the two of them have worked hard together to make picking-up a reality for Sam. He's an inspirational man and I enjoyed my brief chat with him and his words ring true and loud: "It's about willpower. If you've got enough determination, enough fire in your belly, enough grit in your teeth then anything is achievable. Just because you have a disability you can't expect to be spoon-fed. Put your disability to one side and get on with it."

How much should you pay for a puppy is one of the trickiest questions, and in this issue Patrice Fellows investigates the going rate. "How long is a piece of string" is a phrase which springs to mind, but it's such a common question that we asked Patrice to dig a little deeper and her findings make for a fascinating read. Elsewhere we have expert advice on everything from basic training and vaccinations, to daily routines and matching the right people with the right dog. With reports and results from the major championships, extensive interviews with the winners, breed profiles, great gundogs of the past and further features on fox red labradors and dog friendly hotels, we are confident you will find plenty to keep you entertained within these pages.

On 5-8 March we will be in attendance at Crufts, the greatest dog show on the planet. It's organised by the Kennel Club and it celebrates every aspect of the roles that dogs play in our lives. We will be there for the whole event and look forward to embracing this canine extravaganza – hopefully we will see some of you there.



Will Hetherington
Editor



“There are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source.”

For the full feature turn to page 70.

Photograph: Adam Godley





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Photograph: David Lain

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Gundog Journal is the UK's only dedicated gundog publication. This stunning collectible journal is packed with expert advice on training and a wealth of features on everything we love about our dogs. Written by the UK's most respected trainers, vets & breeders, it's a true celebration of man's best friend in the field.

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Contributors

Training and picking-up gurus, championship newcomers and winners, veterinary experts and gundog authors join the team this issue.



DECLAN BOYLE

In an unprecedented swoop Irish carpet fitter Declan Boyle won both the Irish Retriever Championship (see pages 118-123 of this issue) and the IGL Retriever Championship (as reported last issue) at the end of 2019 in conjunction with Int. FTCh Miller McDuff. Here he tells Anne McKay about his road to triumph and the secrets of his success.



BEN RANDALL

Gundog Journal field editor Ben has won the Cocker Championship twice. He is an 'A' panel judge and he and his family run the very successful Beggarbush Gundog Kennels, breeding cockers, springers and labradors. They offer residential training and one-to-one tuition and Ben also offers clients a gundog search facility.



GLYNN EVANS

BASC's Head of Game and Gundogs, Glynn was a full-time gamekeeper for 25 years working on estates in Gloucestershire and Norfolk. He has trained, worked and also competed with a number of different gundog breeds and has judged widely both in the UK and abroad.



JOANNE PERROTT

The founder of the Ladies Working Dog Group is a resident of south Wales who is heavily involved in shooting. In this new series Joanne speaks to trainers and handlers about overcoming their most challenging moments in the training field. First up is Abbie Reid from Riverlily Gundogs.



JAYNE COLEY

A member of our regular panel of Question and Answer experts Jayne is a labrador and retriever expert and top level field trialler. She has been both a competitor and a judge at the very pinnacle of the sport, the IGL Retriever Championship. She has made up and bred numerous Field Trial Champions and picks-up regularly throughout the season.



JEREMY ORGAN

A member of our panel of Question and Answer experts, Jeremy's background is in farming and he has spent his life hunting and shooting. He has been breeding the Edgegrove (edgegrovegundogs.co.uk) line of English springer spaniels for more than 30 years. He has produced many FTChs, and has been a Kennel Club 'A' panel field trial judge for 20 years.



LEIGH FELL

Founder and Chief Executive of mental health research organisation Caritas Neuro Solutions. A biologist by training, now a prominent public speaker and advocate in Scotland's mental health space. Leigh has been a lifelong dog lover acquiring her first working gundog breed (a Labrador pointer cross) in 2017. Learning how to train an unruly puppy to become an actively working dog has changed her life.



LAURA HILL

A member of our panel of Question & Answer experts Laura trains and breeds working labradors (*stauntonvalegundogs.co.uk*), as well as being a regular member of the England Gundog Team. She competes in field trials and working tests, as well as picking-up and shooting during the season. She is a 'B' Panel retriever judge, and has judged and trained throughout Europe. She has qualified for the IGL Retriever Championship numerous times, and made up six FTChs.



DAMIAN BARSON

Come rain or shine, Damian can be found in the fields surrounded by his Tessleymoor Gundog pack, including labradors, spaniels and the recent additional of a flat coated retriever. He is dedicated to helping owners and handlers bring out the best in their dog from his base in rural Lancashire, with a particular interest in dog behaviour and psychology. He is happy to take on more challenging dogs – or as is often the case, challenging owners.



PATRICE FELLOWS

Having grown up near Washington, DC, Patrice then spent 20 years in Milan, where she became involved with the Retriever Club Italiano, co-founding and editing its *Retriever Magazine*. Six years ago she moved to Richmond, Surrey, where she set up Pernice Press, a publisher of books about animals and nature. She continues to write, train and work her labradors, and is on the committee for the Kent Surrey and Sussex Labrador Retriever Club.



CHRIS WARNER

Having worked as an actor, stage manager, floor manager, opera and theatre director, promoter, drama teacher, sound recordist, farmer, oyster fisherman, sailing instructor, fundraiser, mentor for dance companies, venue manager and arts administrator, blown a jug in a skiffle band and built a 1,000 seat theatre and concert hall Chris has led a busy life. He now picks-up on a Suffolk estate and occasionally helps people to train their dogs.



LAURA KEYSER

After graduating from the Royal Veterinary College, Edinburgh, Laura's first job was in mixed practice in a typical James Herriot style practice in Yorkshire. After six years Laura moved on to a small animal practice and referral hospital with a particular interest in gundogs. Laura has always loved being involved with field sports and has been beating on local shoots, working her cocker and springer spaniels, Maya and Kanga.



LINDSAY CORBETT

After a yearned for return to the countryside from city life Lindsay Corbett didn't take long to team up with a working spaniel, and soon found herself entering a world of serious competition. Here she tells us exactly what it took to go down the road of top-level competition culminating in a nerve-jangling appearance at the Cocker Championship at Faccombe in early January.



WILL CLULEE

One of the established household names in the top tier of trainers and handlers Will Clulee has repeatedly earned his stripes at the highest level. He was at it again when he won the Cocker Championships at Faccombe in early January (see pages 106-109) and in this issue he tells us about the daily routine at his Shropshire kennels.

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EXPERT ADVICE

Does a Ferrari suit a learner?

Sometimes the wrong dog ends up with the wrong owner and Field Editor Ben Randall has some words of wisdom on how to avoid this happening.

Does every dog suit every owner? I often encounter two frustrating scenarios: an inexperienced handler trying to train a highly bred Ferrari and secondly, a competent handler trying to train an unsuitable dog for competition. Trainers like me are forever unpicking mismatches. When shopping for a gundog it is imperative you honestly assess your lifestyle and the desired outcome of the union, because it can save a lot of wasted time and heartache for both sides further down the line.

Anecdotally I hear of bad apple breeders selling pups to owners that are not suitable gundog owners. For instance, I recently encountered a stressed-out suburban couple in their 60s who had acquired an out-of-control springer spaniel pup as their first ever dog. It was to live in their semi-detached home and provide companionship to the man who worked as a landscape gardener. This couple did not shoot – they just liked the handsome appearance of the breed. The dog was extremely well bred and consequently very hot to handle. Definitely not a novice dog. Needless to say, the dog stayed with them for just four weeks before they admitted defeat. If someone had taken the time to quiz this lovely couple, it would have been apparent very early on that a slower-paced, more gentle breed would be a better match.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

Similarly, last month a client of mine who is an inexperienced handler went online and bought a fully trained three-year old springer spaniel to compete in working trials. Very frustratingly she bought this dog without consulting me. She showed me the pedigree and I sighed. She had bought a racehorse rather than a hacking pony. She was not given any demos of how to handle the dog – no knowledge of commands or how to communicate with the dog. The dog was way too hot for her. It would take her years to learn how to manage the dog and consequently her dream of competing is now on hold for an unknown number of years while she plays catch up.

In another example of a mismatch a fairly experienced handler started visiting me last year for training lessons with her labrador to get him up to speed for competition. Heavy set and lumbering, it was apparent on lesson one that her dog was never going to make the grade. She, on the other hand, showed real talent, giving clear and concise commands. As a handler, she demonstrated a real aptitude for working dogs. However, explaining to a client that their dog does not have what it takes is a very difficult conversation. These dogs are their babies and they often do not want to hear the truth.

ALLOW YOUR HEAD TO RULE OVER YOUR HEART

So how do you ensure you do not waste your time pairing with the wrong dog? Ask yourself: does your dog suit your character, and does your dog's character suit you? The first ↦







thing to decide is whether you want a puppy or a partly/fully trained adult. Either way, get as much information as possible about the dog's parents. If you go down the puppy route, ask to see the mother interacting with the owner in the garden. Do not underestimate how much you will learn from seeing the bitch carry out a few simple exercises so that you can assess how biddable her nature is. When presented with a puppy people often lose their heads and end up buying a dog that is not right for their lifestyle. Definitely do not take your children on the first viewing, otherwise it will become an emotional purchase – not a sensible, logical one.

REHOMING HEARTBREAK

If you have deeper pockets and want to buy a trained dog, ask to see it working on game, not just in a scent-free field. Also ask to see videos. A reputable trainer should have dozens of short clips readily available to demonstrate how steady the dog is in a range of scenarios. Personally, I prefer to sell trained dogs. In a litter of six I would only ever sell two as pups – and only then to very experienced dog owners. And as a side note - I would not sell a spaniel as a family pet, only a labrador.

If you are hungry to compete with your new dog and even hungrier to win, do not automatically seek out the fastest dogs with the strongest drive as they are not necessarily right for your handling ability. What is the point in having a dog that is years ahead of you? It is not impossible, but the likelihood of you catching up with your dog before you feel frustrated is unlikely. Far better to find a dog that matches your ability right now and grow together.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Perhaps the reason this scenario happens so regularly is that not enough trainers are raising awareness of the widespread problem. It is heart-breaking for the handler and for the dog. Rehoming a dog can be a very stressful process so let's try to prevent this problem in the first place. If you are inexperienced but super keen, seek the advice of an impartial trainer who can assess your capability then source a suitable dog for you. In short, leave it to the experts and you will hopefully be paired with a dog that brings you nothing but joy and can achieve all your goals. A reputable trainer will have no problem in speaking to their network rather than just pushing something in their own kennel.

IT'S A TWO WAY STREET

Likewise, any breeders that are reading this article – please ensure you fully vet prospective owners to nip this problem in the bud. Gundogs will always be a popular choice due to their good looks, biddable nature and trainability, but we all know that not all gundogs are the same. Please take the time to conduct a home visit and thoroughly quiz someone about their lifestyle. Do they really have what it takes to raise a working strain spaniel into a well-rounded citizen? If you do proceed with the sale, ensure you maintain regular contact to check the union is working. Your responsibility to the pup does not end the minute it leaves your property.

When the right gundog is paired with the right human, the union can result in a life-affirming friendship that brings inordinate amounts of joy to both sides. Get it wrong and it can result in unnecessary stress and heartache. So, my parting message is simple – to all prospective owners, breeders and trainers – let's all just take a little longer to quiz each other about wants and desires to stop this scenario from occurring as frequently. *GJ*



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN BUYING A NEW GUNDOG:

Why do you want a gundog?

What role do you have in mind for the gundog?

Which breeds best suit your criteria?

Would a puppy or trained adult suit you best?

Who would be available to train the dog during the week when you are working?

How much time can you dedicate to exercising the dog?

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WHAT'S THE GOING RATE?

Photographer: Scott Wicking

PUPPY PRICES

Just how much you should pay for a puppy is one of the most difficult questions because there are so many variables. But Patrice Fellows has some useful guidelines.

For anyone involved in shooting and gundogs, price isn't the first thing that comes to mind when looking for a new pup. We're more concerned with health, temperament and ability, and choosing the right breed for our own circumstances. That said, we all need to do our homework, and that includes getting an idea of going rates. How much should we pay for a good gundog puppy - and does this amount represent good value?

A WIDE RANGE

Getting an idea of going rates is easier said than done. If you're already involved in shooting or gundog competitions, you'll have friends and contacts you can ask, and you'll know what you've paid in the past for your own dogs. But for a newcomer to the gundog world, it isn't so straightforward.

In the past classified sections of magazines were a good guide. But now gundog puppy adverts have moved online, where you'll find a bewildering range of prices. I searched labrador litters on one of the most popular sites in the UK, Pets4Homes. Established 15 years ago, this website offers a free advertising service to anyone selling puppies – from individuals to responsible breeders to rescue centres. It accepts both unregistered litters (with no pedigree) and litters registered with the Kennel Club, as well as crossbreeds. I found labrador pups from unregistered litters for as low as £300, while 'dilute' or 'silver' labrador pups were listed as high as £3,500. Silver labradors are controversial because their colour is outside the breed standard, but litter parents may be registered with the Kennel Club. While these pups can't be shown, theoretically they could compete at field trials and working tests.

BEWARE THE PROFITEERS

So what is the bottom line, in terms of price, for a well-bred labrador pup? There are many costs associated with mating two dogs and rearing a litter in a responsible manner. While a pup from an unregistered litter at £300 may seem like a bargain, there are greater risks involved and in the long run you may pay out more in higher vet fees from chronic conditions or genetic illness. Without any proven lines in the pedigree, there is also a greater chance that a pup may not have the right combination of working traits or carry some faults, like hard mouth or whining. Buying a pup from a registered litter with health-tested parents isn't a foolproof guarantee of good health and working ability, but it considerably narrows the risks.

> "You don't get a racehorse from Blackpool Beach."

With that in mind, let's pare down our search to KC registered litters of health-tested parents. Considering the costs of health tests, stud fees, quality food for mum and pups, vet bills, worming treatments, microchipping and more, a baseline price of about £750 to £800 for a pup of any gundog breed seems about right.

Responsible breeders – whether amateur or professional – do not typically place profit first. They're more interested in continuing their bloodlines and keeping something for themselves from any given litter, aiming to cover costs associated with the mating and rearing of pups. Anyone selling a silver labrador pup for £3,500 is clearly interested in profit first – so walk, don't run, to the nearest exit.

ESTABLISHING A GUIDELINE

Champdogs is another website that features puppy adverts for amateur breeders. Unlike Pets4Home, this site is limited to purebred dogs and encourages breeders to follow Kennel Club guidelines, although there are no guarantees about individual listings – buyers are encouraged to do their own homework and ask the right questions. I looked at the results for four of the most popular gundog breeds – labradors, springers, cockers and Hungarian vizslas. Puppy prices were not always included with the litter details, but there were enough to arrive at a ballpark figure for each breed.

Labradors were by far the most popular breed, with 71 litters listed. Most litters were from working parents but there were also some show-bred litters. Prices ranged from £850 to £1,200, with an average of about £1,000. Most parents had been health-tested and pedigrees showed a mixture of black and red (pet or working and field trial lines) for both dams and sires. Health tests were not uniform for all breeding pairs, so this is clearly something that buyers need to research before talking to breeders. The Kennel Club and breed club websites give detailed information about which tests are deemed critical.

There were only 14 litters listed for the Hungarian vizsla and, not ↦

surprisingly, the average price was slightly higher at £1,200. All of the parents were health tested and pedigrees showed a mixture of black and red, with red denoting show or full champions. As HPRs, vizslas are newer in Britain, so there are far fewer field trial champions around. Vizslas are widely used as all-rounders on the continent and in the US and have become the fifth most popular gundog in Britain. Much of the breeding stock is both shown and worked so show credentials are not unusual for working dogs.

SPRINGERS ON THE CHEAP?

There were 16 English springer spaniel listings, with an average price of around £750, cheaper than both labradors and vizslas. Pedigrees were again a mix of black and red, and many working pups were already de-dew clawed and docked, as well as wormed and microchipped. Some of the parents, however, were not health tested, especially dams. Interestingly, this didn't affect the price – these pups were sold at the same price as those from health-tested parents.

Cocker spaniels, despite their smaller size, were more expensive than springers, with an average price of £900. There were only 19 litters listed, both show and work, so price may reflect higher demand. In recent years working cockers have become more fashionable, even in pet homes. In 2018 there were nearly 24,000 registrations of cocker spaniels, more than twice as many as springers, making them the second most popular gundog after the labrador.

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

I asked Ian Openshaw, one of Britain's top gundog experts, for his view on the price of a well-bred gundog pup. For the past 30 years he and his wife Wendy have bred and competed with springers, cockers and labradors, making up over 100 field trial champions. They have also won the Any Variety Spaniel and Cocker Championships multiple times.

"If you buy the best," he explains, "you'll pay more, from £1,500 to £2,000 for a pup bred from two field trial champions. There are a lot of pups on the market bred from dams that have done all the health tests but have sat in kennels their whole lives, and breeders ask the same price for them. I think the bitch is even more important than the sire. If you want a really good pup, go to the best kennels and get a well-bred one. You don't get a race horse from Blackpool Beach."

SOME PERSPECTIVE

Why do some gundogs cost more than others? "I no longer breed labradors, but I think the price has gone up because of so many health tests. There are a lot of commercially driven breeders who get all the health tests done, but don't work their dogs. For a well-bred springer, be prepared to pay from £750 to £1,500, depending on the breeding. Cockers can cost a bit more and that's because they're more in demand: they're great in the field, make good pets and come in more colours."

Overall, do puppy prices reflect good value? "If you go to a reputable breeder whose dogs are proven workers, you get what you pay for. If you're involved in shooting, you might pay as much as £3,000 for a good day's shooting, £25,000 to join a syndicate and £10,000 for a gun. In comparison, £1,500 for a well-bred dog that will work and provide companionship for many years to come is pretty good value." *GJ*





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DOUBLE DELIGHT FOR Declan

The extraordinary story of the carpet fitter from Northern Ireland who made history by winning two prestigious retriever championships in 2019. By Anne McKay.

Declan Boyle ended 2019 with a phenomenal flourish, winning both the IGL Retriever Championship and the Irish Retriever Championship, with his six-year-old black labrador dog, Int. FTCh Miller McDuff, bred by WRC Haughey. Winning both championships in the same year is a feat which has never been accomplished before.

Born in Newry, Northern Ireland in 1976, Declan still describes himself as a carpet fitter, rather than a dog trainer. Not really from a shooting family, as a youngster he did a bit of shooting and training with Tommy Hughes and his older brother.

When he was 20, he was given a black labrador bitch, Katie, who was so shy it was thought she would be untrainable. Declan kept her, trained her on her own, and she became a good shooting dog.

Next came a labrador puppy which was "too hyper", so was moved on. This pup was followed by black lab pup Glenanne Charlie, sired by FTCh Saxophone Express and out of FTCh Brookbird Tide. Declan trained him up to two years old, before selling him on to Lady Waterford, who won a novice Irish KC trial with him.

A BIG BEAST

The next dog was Glenloch Ruff, bred by Winston Kelly at his well-known and successful Glenloch kennel in Ireland, bought at 11-months-old. Declan trained the dog, and did a lot of picking-up with him, which made him a bit wild, so a lot of training was required to correct him. He says: "I didn't know enough at that time, or perhaps it was that I didn't know enough people in the gundog world – so I had to learn quickly."


WUFFITMIX

DECLAN BOYLE'S TOP TRAINING TIPS

- Make sure you practice marking, a lot
- Don't over-complicate retrieves and confuse your dog. Get the dog from A to B as quickly and in as straight a line as possible
- Don't do too much picking-up. It's important to strike a balance
- Do lots of memory retrieves in training
- Keep each retrieve separate. One job at a time
- Train for all eventualities
- Do a lot of shooting, particularly partridge training days
- Learn from watching other dogs/handlers – professional and amateur
- Learn distances
- Handle quietly
- Be humble and learn from everyone you deal with

He did a lot of snipe shooting at snipe trials, and won his first working test and first trial with Ruff, who had become a big, strong, hard going dog. He also ran in a lot of open stakes, and was normally in the awards, and then ran in one or two trials, where more success followed. He won the Top Dog of the Irish CLA Game Fair team, and qualified for the Irish Championships in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, only running in three of them, as he ended up selling the dog to the USA.

THREE STEPS ON THE PATH

Declan's next dog was FTW Newcam Gunner (Guinness) who won his first trial and qualified for the Irish Championships in 2010 and 2011. He was also in the Irish CLA Game Fair team, and was consistently winning, until an unfortunate injury on broken glass put him out of action for a while. During this rest period Guinness was sold to the USA, and then ultimately ended up in Switzerland where he proved to be a very useful sire, with a number of his progeny going on to do well in competition.

A Billy Lundy bred dog followed, black labrador Chief Lightning Bolt, who ran in a couple of competitions, and won some working trials. Again though he succumbed to a big picking-up season, which proved to be to the detriment of the dog's training, and he was sold to Italy.

FTCh Leadburn Jamie was purchased as a two year old in Ireland, from Gerard Conroy. Sired by FTCh Hillus Clyde out of FTCh bitch Rockingstone Hope of Leadburn, he was a brilliant marking dog, and excellent on the whistle. He ran at the Skinners World Cup and the Kennel Club test at Chatsworth in 2013.

PADDY PROVES HIS WORTH

Some five years ago, a friend rang to say his cousin had a pup he was selling, aged 11 months. This was Miller McDuff, otherwise known as Paddy, and Declan took him up on the offer. He said: "The pup proved to be a very quick learner, and I put a lot of time and effort into training. At 14 months, he got a run in a walked-up test, gaining second place, and the same year he was top overall dog at the game fair in Ireland, at 16 months. He ran in a novice trial at 18 months, and won it, going on to take second in an open trial the following week, and then winning an open trial the week after that. By the age of 22 months, he was made up to Irish Champion."

Following in the aforementioned Guinness' footsteps, Paddy won the Derby Stake, which is a qualifier for dogs under two years of age for the Irish Championships. On his second last retrieve, one cast saw the dog pick a little hen pheasant at 150 yards, but Paddy lost grip of the bird and dropped it about 50 yards out, then dropped it a couple more times. This was something he had done previously a couple of times, and Declan puts it down to the fact that the dog had done very little picking-up.

But since then Paddy has dropped the bad habits and taken the competition world by storm: "He takes competitions in his stride, whether they are walked-up or driven. He is now seven years old and has qualified for seven consecutive Irish Championships from 2014 to 2020, and five times for the IGL Championships, including for 2020." Amongst many other awards, in 2017 he was Top Dog at the Game Fair, has been Top Dog at Chatsworth twice, and has been a member of the Irish Team which has won there for the last three years. He was also third overall in the Skinners World Cup in 2019.

CONSISTENT EXCELLENCE ON THE BIG STAGE

At the IGL Retriever Championships at Glenalmond in Perthshire in 2019, Paddy had two retrieves on the first day: "His first retrieve being a blind on a woodcock shot before everyone was in line. The second retrieve was the only retrieve he had on the left hand side over the three days. It was a blind on a hen pheasant, but I had marked it, so all was good.

"On the second day, his third retrieve was past the pond. There were two duck shot towards the other side of the line, and I thought he was getting sent for the last one but he picked a duck halfway out, then was sent again straightaway for the next duck, which was beyond the previous retrieve. His fourth retrieve was a duck, which was shot down the right hand side, and was a delayed mark that took a couple of handles to pick it. The ground suited the dog, as it is similar to the natural type of ground he is used to."

On the third and final day Declan and Paddy were in line on the right hand side. It was a bright day, with great visibility, unlike the previous two days, which had been foggy and wet: "Paddy picked his first ever grouse. It was his fifth retrieve of the competition, in a lot of bracken, with the bird sat in front and away to the left. He went over a fence, into heavy cover of heather, long grass and broom, up 100 yards nearly to the next fence, and I had to leave him to hunt, as I couldn't see him. It was a blind for the dog, and the judge hadn't seen it either, but true to form Paddy returned with the bird."

HARD-EARNED GLORY

With 11 dogs left in the competition, Paddy's eighth retrieve was a cock pheasant shot in high white grass about 60 yards ahead in the centre: "I stopped him and gave him the hunt ↦



command. He spent the next three minutes or so searching for the bird which was a runner. He is not well practised on runners, as there are not many opportunities in Ireland, so on this occasion I had to trust him and pray! There was no need to worry however, as the bird, which had been shot at 12 o'clock, was picked by Paddy at 3 o'clock, in a grouse butt in heavy cover, where I couldn't see him." Paddy proved Declan's fears to be unfounded, and where better to do it than on the main stage? This was the game changer, and it was only then that Declan thought he could be sitting high up in the awards.

After a successful retrieve on the ducks Declan and Paddy were declared the deserving winners of the 2019 IGL Retriever Championships. However the win didn't really get a chance to sink in, as they were straight off for the Irish Championship (see report on pages 118-123 of this issue). Over the two days there, Paddy was tested with duck, partridge and pheasant drives on day one, followed by a very long swim across a lake for a duck and then walked-up partridge on day two. He won this Championship also, proving the dog is capable of success over all different terrains.

Paddy and Declan have a strong bond which has developed through sheer hard work together: "Paddy is an honest, consistent, reliable dog, and trusts me implicitly when it comes to marking, as we have put a lot of time in, perfecting the art. He will also go exactly in a straight line, no matter how heavy the cover. This is a quality which I am sure helped him win the Irish Championship in 2017, when three dogs failed to pick a live pheasant in very heavy briars and brambles up a hill, as they couldn't make it to the area."

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Declan is secretary of the Labrador Retriever Club of Ireland. He is an 'A' Panel judge under FCI rules, and a 'B' Panel judge on the UK Kennel Club list. He has organised the Irish Championships since 2013. In 2018 he received an award for Lifetime Achievement from Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine. He has previously been captain of the Irish team at the Kennel Club test at Chatsworth, and is captain of the 2020 Irish team for the Game Fair. A brand ambassador for WuffitMix, the most important thing for him when feeding his trialling dogs is that their diet is consistent and he can rely on it to keep them in peak condition.

Last year was not only a success for Paddy, but also for his progeny in Sweden, Batmoors Legend Blitz, owned and handled by Anna Ekstrom, who won the Swedish Championship. *GJ*



FASHION ACCESSORY OR SHOOTING BUDDY?

Fox red labradors have become increasingly popular in recent years but Chris Warner wants to find out whether they are fit for purpose on the shooting field



A hundred years ago, labs were black. End of. Then yellow became acceptable, and chocolate became a shade of dog and not just a sugar-laden treat. And now, originally culled, reds have become all the rage. A friend of mine trained one for a Russian. When the oligarch came to collect his new dog he was so smitten with it that he bought a second one – matching, obviously. Are reds the French bulldogs of the shooting world? What on earth would the beaters say about a diamond-studded collar on a labrador?

The Kennel Club says they don't exist; there are only black, yellow and chocolate labradors. You can't register a red as red. Very Kafka. And with no official red registrations allowed it's hard to determine how many reds are out there.

FITTING INTO THE TEAM

I pick up once a week on a medium-sized commercial shoot. In the picking-up team we have four black labs, three springers, three cockers and one red lab called Oscar. There's a lot of ribbing about whose got proper dogs. The people who work the bustling spaniels (which I have to admit do occasionally go self-employed) claim that the black labs just bumble about until they trip over a pheasant. But everyone, except the owner of the black labs, agrees that Oscar the fox red Oscar is an absolute star. Handsome, focused, trustworthy. Nose down, no fuss, no need for handling.

I asked Oscar's owner, who also works the three springers, why he had chosen a fox red lab. "As well as picking-up, I do a lots of wildfowling," he said, "and I mean who wants a white dog on the marsh? And you can't handle a black dog in the dark. I wanted a trustworthy dog, which could just get on with the job. And I needed a strong dog that was able to be patient, mark well, with a good memory. Oscar does all that for me. I'd seen other reds working and reckoned one would be right for me."

There was a ruminative pause. "I'd never have a white one though. They're too show bred. Nor a chocolate. You can't trust a chocolate." And then, raising his voice so that the guy who runs three black labs couldn't fail to hear, he added, "and anyway blacks are just SO BORING…"

"Mind you," said my friend, "the Kennel Club has done the reds a favour. By refusing to admit them as an acceptable colour for a labrador, the reds have held no appeal for the show world. Unlike the lemons, whites and chocolates which seem to have lost their working ability to the show bench, reds have thrived as purely working dogs."

PARAGONS OF VIRTUE

Four days later I found myself picking-up behind a gun whose wife was working a rangy red lab. I couldn't help but notice how effectively it collected several strong runners even while the drive was running. Without deviation or fuss even though it was raining pheasants. And its action was fascinating - it moved like a panther, slightly crouched and head extended. When the drive was over I complimented the couple on their dog's performance. They said they had six dogs; four of them labs and three out of the four of those were reds. The dog I'd seen working was a youngster and her mistress waxed lyrical about reds, how they had all been easy to train and how she was devoted to the colour. "Reds seem to have a very special working temperament – you don't actually have to teach them much," admitted the proud owner. "You just have to develop the brakes and general good manners in the young dog."

Also in the thin tweed line that day was a young couple with their two dogs. One of them was a pure white lab. I waited hopefully for it to disgrace itself but it set about collecting runners and fallen birds methodically. No useless show dog there. And it turned out to be only 18 months old and on its first big shoot. So what's all the fuss about colour?

The following week I was a Gun on a small day on a substantial estate. It was refreshingly chaotic, not least because all the vehicles, including a quad bike, got stuck up to their axles in Suffolk's finest clay. As we waited for a rescue from a 4x4 which turned out to have a flat battery, I had to listen to a fellow Gun who wanted to tell me all about his wonderful young labrador. The dog had chosen him, it was a puppy prodigy from day one, it retrieved at 12 weeks and at 18 months it was ready for work. Mercifully he had resisted the temptation to bring it with him. I listened politely until he let on that it was a red. Given what I'd already seen and heard about reds it was tempting to believe him.

PERFECT FOR PICKING-UP?

At summer training sessions there were two young red labs which were due to start work this season. So I rang up the (hopefully) proud owners to see how they had got on. One chap said his dog had often been rather strong-willed at training – a trait he'd put down to being more intelligent than other labs he'd owned. However when he'd eventually worked the dog on five days picking-up he was absolutely delighted. He described the dog as driven, just wanting to work, incredibly powerful and fearless in cover.

When I rang my other classmate, who is a keen shot and owns a beautifully trained black lab, his wife said he was somewhere in Yorkshire. I wondered if he had taken the red. When we spoke a couple of days later I did not get a glowing report. Phrases like boisterous, poor learner, needs ↦



to slow down, late developer, nervous, told of the owner's "struggles" with his young dog. It gradually emerged that the dog had been intended as a pet, and did not have a distinguished pedigree. It wasn't all bad however – it was still quite young, it was soft, it was keen and had a good nose even if sometimes it was "not on the case".

All in all, my friend reckoned it would make "a half decent picking-up dog but it would never be able to sit still enough to sit on a peg." I wondered what really lay behind the disappointment. Was it poor pedigree? Had it started complex training before grasping the basics? Did it just need some more time to grow up?

INCREDIBLY DETERMINED

So I went to consult Terry Strowger, trainer of dogs, trainer of dog owners, Suffolk Gundog Society committee member and owner of two red labs, including the brother of the aforementioned Oscar (from the picking-up team on the shoot). Terry, like many trainers, says what he means and means what he says. "Well, I've had three reds of my own and enjoyed training 12. I've trained around 40 yellow and black labs. If I was choosing a dream working team I'd choose two black, one yellow and four reds."

I asked him why the reds appealed to him. "They're incredibly determined," he replied. "Always focused and they just want to work. They'll take direction and I've never known one go self-employed. I've never met a nervous red either. They're confident too. Although I think they can sometimes be a bit thick.

"Working dog people don't favour reds just for their colour. I think they genuinely believe in the red's ability to work and when they make a conscious choice to buy a red it's because they believe it will be a good worker. Until recently there was no price premium on reds – people just bought them for their reputation as good workers."

We talked a bit about the obvious dangers of commercial exploitation through the pet trade. I asked Terry if he had come across any genetic defects in reds. "No, not really," he replied, "no more than you'd find in the other colours. Blacks and yellows produce red pups in a mixed litter – it's not like you breed exclusively from reds. The fact that they are not show dogs helps. Shooting people know what they want in a dog and they seem to be finding it in reds. I know a keeper who works five!" *GJ*



YOUR CORRESPONDENCE

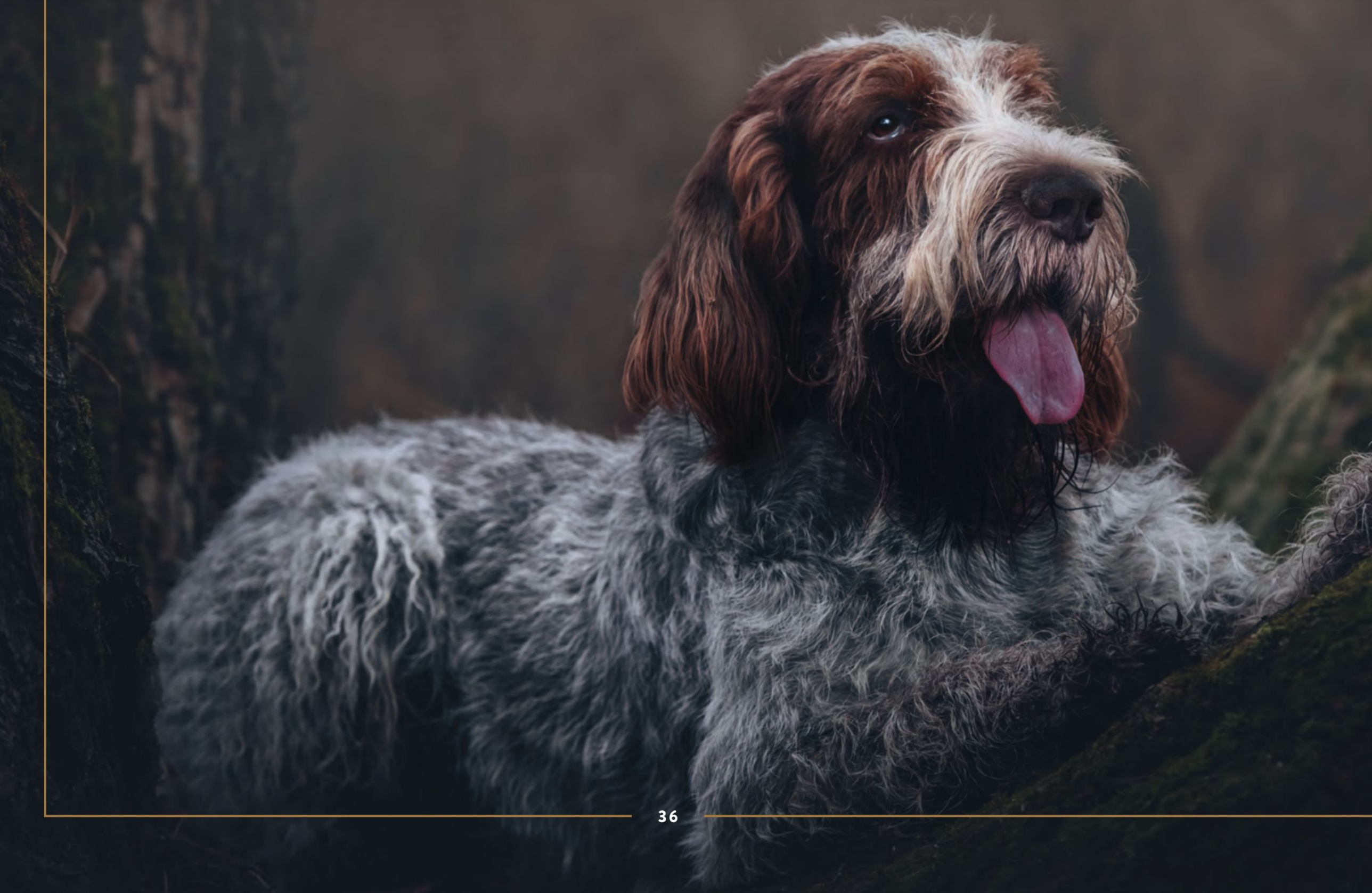
Developing new gundog clubs and making difficult decisions about retirement.

Spinones on the march

Where can I go for gundog training? This is a frequently asked question by new gundog owners. If you own a spaniel or retriever the answer is easy as there are many good trainers and breed clubs, but if you own a rarer HPR then that question is harder. This was certainly true for me when I owned my first spinone in 1991, so I joined a local spaniel group and learnt a lot of the basics. But I knew I wasn't unlocking the full potential of my dog, although he was biddable enough to be taken into the beating line on local shoots.

Some years on the same question was asked by Julie Kelly and Keith Wain when they acquired their first Spinone, Dino. Although the Italian Spinone Club of Great Britain (ISCGB) worked hard to promote the working side of the breed, all events and training were held in the south of the country because that was where the working secretary lived.

Keith and Julie lived in Congleton, Cheshire, but they made the journey down to the Elstead Estate in Surrey where the annual ISCGB working test was being held and Dino, at



the age of four, was entered into the 'special beginners' class. In this class tuition is usually given in the morning and then a mini test is held in the afternoon. Dino won it and made Julie and Keith more determined to create opportunities for the more northern reaches of the Spinone Club.

Their determination was rewarded in 2016 at the inaugural meeting of the North West Spinone training group at Congleton. Twelve spinone owners attended, some from the showing world who wanted to see if their show dog had any natural ability, some who were curious and others who had already started basic gundog work. I was the trainer at that first session and that day we started with basic obedience and retrieving, and finished the day with the dogs pointing caged quail.

However the ground used was too open for some of the more adventurous dogs and the format cumbersome, so the following month a new ground was found at the back of a local pub, which had the convenience of being an easy to find meeting place, plus the bonus of an excellent full English breakfast on arrival. There was a secure paddock for puppies and a larger open area for hunting/retrieving and the format was changed: puppies and beginners in the morning followed by novice dogs in the afternoon.

Going into its fourth year the group now includes helping another HPR breed, the Hungarian wirehaired vizsla. There are now two other trainers on board besides myself: Stevie Allerton of Eshadwell GSPs and an 'A' panel field trial judge and Matthew Kerfoot who works labradors and GSPs. We work in rotation throughout the year, always on the first Saturday of the month, apart from December when we meet for our Christmas dinner and just talk about gundog training. With new trainers come new opportunities and new grounds, so the group has expanded further and now does 'away days' on water training and hunting days in fodder beet, on moorland and this year on grouse.

Some of the group now trial, while others are tentatively stepping into the world of competitive gundog work. And for the first time this season a local shoot invited some of the members so they could get a taste of the real thing.

Today Julie and Keith have a homebred spinone pup that is looking promising and I have a young male HWV that I hope to trial, and with the support of this group I'm sure we'll get there.

CHRISTINE GUEST

If you would like to respond to anything in Gundog Journal, please email:
editorial@gundog-journal.com

When to retire?

As last season came to an end we asked our Facebook followers for some thoughts on how you know when to retire your aged gundog and here's a sample of the responses:

My black labrador is 11-years-old and I noticed last season that after a full day in the field it took him a day or two to get back to wanting to get out for exercise. He still loves it and I will take him all the time he wants to, however I will start restricting the number of drives he does next season.

JONATHAN HARRIS

Working bred dogs will always try to work when they should be retired. Retired does not mean shut away to do nothing - it means going for sensible walks in company with the people they love.

PAT PRICE

Watch the dog, when it can't perform as you want it to, then it's time to reduce its workload. I want to say it's common sense, but there's no such thing, as common sense when it comes to emotional decisions about dogs. Be aware of your animal and treat it kindly.

STEPHEN LEADBITTER

My girl is 15 and she enjoyed last season. I haven't pushed her with maybe two drives a day on easy ground. She's deaf and has worked the last three years on hand signals and experience. I love her to bits and can't bear to think of picking-up without her. We have taught each other so much.

CAROLE KENDALL



Preparing for the bang

Q What's the best way to prevent a dog becoming gun shy and what age should they be introduced to gunshot?

Ben Randall: I like to introduce a dog to noises as a puppy. I like to do it around positive environments, such as feeding time. I will slowly and quietly clap my hands and if a dog is showing no sign of anxiety, I'll increase the intensity of the clap. Sometimes I drop tins on the floor, but I tend not to do that often as it does shock them more. Instead, I will use my clap and make it louder and louder as the puppy eats. Every time I throw a dummy or an object in the air or on the floor I use a clap, so the dog starts to associate the actions. Once I'm happy that a dog is responding positively to the clap, I can then start introducing a shot. I'll get someone to stand 50-60 yards away with a starting gun in their pocket for a few retrieves. Once I can see the dog is keen, happy and comfortable with the other person out there, we can then begin to release the gun out of the pocket and move closer and closer to each other. This is a slow but important process and if there are any worrying signs early on you must go very slowly and seek further advice because it's very hard to rectify if it sets in.

Q We will be travelling 200 miles with our new pup when we collect him. Any tips for the journey?

Jayne Coley: Ideally, travel up the night before so you can pick your puppy up early in the morning. If this is not possible, I would recommend setting off really early, so you can arrive back home hopefully around lunchtime, giving your new puppy time to begin to settle in to his new home before bedtime. Weekends are normally the best time to do a long trip, depending on the time of the year.

Take a suitable travel dog crate, a towel, kitchen roll, toys to chew, cleaning stuff (in case of a toilet accident) a small bowl and water. Ask the person who bred the litter to let you have a reasonable piece of the puppy's bedding/vet bed, which has recently been placed in the puppy's bed. Your puppy will find it comforting to be able to smell the familiar scent of his siblings during the journey.

Ask the breeder not to give your puppy any breakfast, instead putting his food in a container with a lid (a large washed out yoghurt pot with a lid ideal) so it's ready to give him when you get back home.

Leaving the family nest is a huge experience for any eight-week-old puppy, so you want to make it as stress free as possible. Introduce yourself to your puppy, spending time playing with him, ideally taking him on to some grass so he goes to the toilet before you set off.

Place the used piece of bed in the crate, which should be on the back seat secured by the seatbelt. Take your time putting the puppy into the crate and have your passenger sitting in the back next to the crate to reassure him.

If the trip home takes over three hours, you might need to stop to let the puppy go to the toilet and offer him a drink of water. It is absolutely imperative that you find a clean area, as he will be susceptible to all sorts of diseases before he has been fully vaccinated. However, if your puppy is sleeping, crack on and don't stop unless you need a comfort break.

Q During the season my spaniel took to running in when a pheasant was flushed or shot. This was his second season and I have shouted and blown the whistle but he will not listen and I'm not sure if I should chastise him when he returns?

Jeremy Organ: This is a common problem with dogs that have gained some experience and think they know better than the handler. Although you have covered all the basics in your training you do need to return to them whenever problems occur. When the dog runs in don't shout or blow the whistle as this will only teach the dog to ignore you. Put your gun down and take off after your dog. The element of surprise when you catch up with him will be beneficial. Then put him on the lead and don't allow him any more retrieves or the opportunity to flush and chase again. Never chastise your dog on his return as he will never want to come to you even when he's been good. If you are unable to rectify the problem on your own please seek help from a professional trainer. *GJ*

Photograph: Schoffel Country

My dog of a lifetime

Lindsay Corbettt

COCKER CHAMPIONSHIP COMPETITOR

Managing to get out of living in the cities and moving back to Wales with work finally allowed me to get my long awaited dog. I hadn't had one since childhood when I had an untrainable Jack Russell. I liked the idea of a spaniel, having grown up with my dad's retired springer. I remember playing with her on the lawn, throwing dummies, and sending her for them in order. I thought it was incredible that she was so well trained. She'd then get fed up of me doing the same thing over and over, and just wander off.

I'd seen some pictures of a friend's cocker on Facebook, having never seen the breed before, and decided this was the way to go. I liked the size, they wouldn't take up too much space in the house, were smaller than a springer but still full of character and energy.

I started looking for litters, but had no idea what I was doing in selecting a pup and was really worried that I wouldn't ask the right questions, or end up picking the one with one leg shorter than the others. So I was relieved when I found a litter based in North Wales. I sent my dad, the only person I knew that knew anything about gundogs. This was possibly the best decision I ever made. He visited and selected my girl Molly for me. For a good few years I was confident his selection process must have been well thought out and considered, using his knowledge of gundogs to select just the right pup for me. I later discovered that my gundog guru's selection process was solely based on the first one he could catch. But I guess it worked out.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A GUNDOG

Once I'd had Molly for a year, mostly being a sofa dog and best friend, I started thinking I'd like to do some sort of training with her. I went to a country fair and watched the gundog demo, where I developed aspirations to train her well enough to be able to take her beating. The demo was being done by Huw Jones of St Clears Dog Training club, who held local training groups for pets and gundogs, and after a chat I got into the weekly pet class to start basic training. That autumn Huw was then happy we had the obedience that we could move into the gundog class, and this was the start of it all.

We progressed though the training, and my lack of experience started to show in the problems we were having. My early mistakes playing in the garden had caused problems with delivery and it wasn't until she was nearly two years old that I managed to get her to deliver dummies to hand. With Huw's constant encouragement and months of trying different things out in training and sitting on the sofa in the evenings, she finally did it, and in my sheer joy, she got a massive handful of food. She twigged pretty quickly then that I wanted the dummy in my hand, not on the floor two feet away. Thank god she was so food orientated, it helped me crack a few issues that I had caused by my lack of knowledge.

BLIND RETRIEVES CAUSE A PROBLEM

I was only around on the weekends due to work, but Molly started to pick things up quickly and people began to notice she had some promise. We were encouraged to have a go at tests, which I found terrifying. We quickly discovered that our training was not yet up to scratch. We were eliminated from every test we did in our first year, mostly down to handling problems and me struggling to get the accuracy to pick blind retrieves. I hated the idea we could be beaten by this, and it made me more determined to train more and get better. I was very lucky to spend a year out training with Nigel Probert of Llangynidr Gundogs who I met at a retriever test. He owned and competed very successfully with labs, and after many months out training up a mountain learning the retriever handling and accuracy, and endlessly being asked the question 'are you happy with that?' our handling started to come together.

Molly was such a high drive dog we could keep doing the retrieves until we got them absolutely perfect. Learning this side of the training from retriever handlers made a massive difference. This is their forte and there is lots to be learnt from them. But you can learn from everyone, no need to stick to just the people who train your breed of dog.

Not everyone is keen on this approach, but in my mind, if you could have a spaniel that hunts like a spaniel and handles like a retriever, that's got to be the perfect combination hasn't it? I liked the idea that no matter where, or what distance the retrieve was, I would be confident I could get my dog there. Once we had this nailed, we were away. Through the summer we went to a few training days put on by clubs like the Bristol & West Working Gundog Society, spending time with judges and people who had been competing, asking for help, feedback and advice.

LEARNING FROM TRIALS

We then managed to win the Wiltshire cold game test in September 2016. Finally all the training had come together and we managed to have some success. It spurred us on to give trialling a go. I had no idea if we would be good enough, but my aim in our first year was to see if we could finish a few novice trials completing our two runs, and maybe, if we were really lucky, get into the awards.

The trials were a new challenge all

together, seemingly bringing out every failing in your training, including things you thought you'd fixed. Not wanting to be beaten I couldn't let things go. If we were eliminated for something that was the next challenge to overcome in our training. We did 11 trials that first year, finishing and getting awards in seven of them, and learning from each one. Every trial throws something new at you; highlighting training that you need to do, making you learn better ways of handling the dog, judging the ground you are running on, how your dog handles different types of ground, and the situations thrown at them. Learning to do all of this over your nerves is the hardest thing about trialling for me. I don't know why it's so nerve-wracking, but my heart was in my throat for the entire day.

We eventually finished the year with a win on the stunning bracken banks of Tregynon, Mid Wales. I was so chuffed with her that day, it felt special, and still feels like the most special run we have had. She was flying, always a terrifying experience as her handler as she has extra gears that are never seen in training - they only ever come out at a trial. But this day she hunted beautifully, very quick and stylish, was sharp on the stop to flush and did a couple of cracking long retrieves. I can still remember these runs - they'll probably stay with me forever. I had no idea if we had done well enough to win, and if I'm honest it didn't really come into my thoughts, I was just so pleased with her, but what a thrill to get awarded first place. Off into opens we go (how scary).

IN DEEP WATER

Our next year in the opens was an utter disaster. My nerves (which were bad in the first year) got even worse. I didn't feel like we could cut it with the big boys in opens, looking around at a trial and seeing Ian Openshaw, Will Clulee and many others who have such impressive track records, I felt totally out of my depth. I still didn't really see Molly's ability, or have the confidence that we could compete at that level. I spoilt many of her runs with my nerves affecting my decisions and handling. She was to blame for some too. It was a horrible year where my partner had to contend with bad moods, early texts on trial days saying "we're out" and me getting more and more frustrated wondering if we could cut it. I needed to sort my head out or walk away from this.

> "I don't know why trialling is so nerve-wracking, but my heart was in my throat for the entire day."

I gave myself a talking to, and decided that we weren't giving up (after all I wasn't sure what I'd spend my time doing), so more training was needed. Through the spring and summer we worked hard on all the problems that we had encountered through the trialling season, and with the help of my training partner Dai, who was a massive help, someone I could always rely on to tell me straight, would drag me out training even on the worst of days, and give me a kick up the backside when I was doing stupid things. I got back to feeling confident we could do far better than we had. I sharpened up every element of her training, from her hunting, the flush, stop to shot and handling, and hoped that our efforts would pay off.

I don't have much access to birds being shot over my dog for training, a few walked-up training days in September and early October is it, and that is the final opportunity to put all the elements of training together before the trials. So I have to train all the elements separately. Marking, retrieving and handling on dummies, and the hunt and flush when I'm dogging-in for my shoot. Then I hope on those few training days that all the parts have been trained well enough that they go together smoothly, as there is only a short time to get it right for the trials.

I had also had some helpful tips and words of advice from some truly lovely people at the trials, which really made the difference for us. I'd found the trialling community surprisingly supportive and willing to offer advice if you ask for it.

THE CHAMPIONSHIPS BECKON

The following year (2018) we were back to try again, spurred on by realising it wasn't just us getting eliminated from trials, it happened to everyone. Year two in the opens was far better, things felt like they were coming together, her handling was fantastic and she was more 'with me'. We were finally working as a team. She finished five trials, getting awards in each one, and then we finally managed to finish the year with a win at the Cocker Club Open trial at Hartham Estate in Wiltshire. It was something I had quietly hoped for but never spoken of, or really thought would happen, I didn't honestly know if we had what it would take. I was so pleased the dog I see every day in training showed what she could do, and it was enough to get the win. What a high. Shooting dog to shooting dog breeding, trained by someone who had no clue what they were doing, and we were off to the 2019 Cocker Championships. Subsequently


Gundog Working Test
10

I realised I hated every minute of the 2019 event, and it didn't end well for us. Nerves got in the way again, and too much focus on training on our weaknesses created new issues (as it does). I was gutted. My partner Neil was a huge support - he dragged me back to watch more of the trial after we were eliminated, kept me positive and a few days later I was back to just being happy with the pretty amazing year we had had.

SECOND TIME LUCKY?

As we entered the season which has just finished I realised it was game on. She'd won one open, so she must be good enough mustn't she? I still wasn't totally sure to be honest. But this season was a mission to see if I could get another win, and make her up to Field Trial Champion (FTCh). October came around really quickly. I discarded my usual travel limit, picking the trials based on the ground that best suited her, and decided to go for it. She is six and a half now and I wasn't sure if we would manage another year, with her having enough edge to beat the younger dogs, so 2019 could well have been our last chance.

We started well with a third place at the North Devon, and then had a couple where our lead was on and we were heading home pretty quickly. I was more philosophical about it all this year, not every day is great and I didn't let it concern me. The new attitude certainly made the whole experience far more enjoyable. At our fifth trial of the year, soaked to the skin on a miserable day at Neston Park in Wiltshire, we did it. Our second Open win and she was nearly a FTCh. She had two lovely runs, but I was convinced we hadn't done enough to really shine that day. As they started announcing the awards from the Certificates of Merit, then calling fourth, third and second I got the sinking feeling that maybe we had done something stupid that I didn't realise, and been given no award at all. I was so shocked when they called her name in first place. I then attempted an appalling speech in the pouring rain.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

That night she got the biggest dinner she's ever seen, and was happy with a full belly having a cuddle on the sofa (same as every night really). My sofa dog had done me very proud. It's such a shame that these little dogs have no idea what they have achieved.

A few days later she then went on to do her water test, the final stage required to make her into a FTCh. In a very unceremonious event with two A Panel judges watching on, I threw a dummy down a flooded gulley we found on a trial ground (now I was glad for all the rain we had had) and sent Molly swimming down the gully to retrieve it. She had entered water freely, and swam and that was it - she was a Field Trial Champion. With a soggy and thoroughly unimpressed Molly (clearly wondering why on earth I had just got her to do that), I went back to the car in disbelief at what she had achieved, and that moment stood alongside a flooded gulley in mid Wales will forever be the moment I remember making up my first FTCh.

KIND WORDS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

I spent November and December competing with her son in the opens. He had won out of novices the week before. So it had been two weeks of trialling highs. Our second Cocker Championships (2020) was a short affair. We were first dog in on day one and we had a fast run up some very open woodland. Molly decided to take a few steps closer to a retrieve she desperately wanted the judge to send us for, and that was us sent for an early bath. Never mind - I certainly enjoyed the experience far more the second time around, and I left happy that my little girl against all odds had her name in the championship programme as FTCh Rootytwo Rocket. A good end of season catch up with everyone I had spent the winter with, and we went home wondering if we will be up for trying again next year.

I've been surprised at how welcoming and friendly the trailing community have been to a newbie, and there have been some quite special people. A kind word from a competitor that watched your run, or some encouragement from a judge, have made a big difference, and spurred me on. I don't think they know the impact these little things have, but it kept me going and I owe them for that.

If you are thinking about having a go, do it. Train hard, never be happy with OK. Surround yourself with people who are better than you, people who won't just say "Yes that's great", but those who ask "Are you happy with that?" Be open to criticism, listen to it and get better.

I can honestly say it's been the best decision I have ever made.

This little dog has changed my life, she is the way I met most of my friends, gave me a somewhat obsessive focus/hobby and an amazing sense of pride. Don't get me wrong, she's been no angel, and I wondered if we would ever crack it, but she has pushed me to be a better trainer and handler, and she's been the best companion I could ask for. She has certainly made me fall in love with cockers despite their reputation - and my collection is growing. I can't wait to see what next season will bring.

She was only supposed to be a pet, this all got out of hand really. *GJ*

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TRAINING ADVICE

DIFFICULT DAYS

In social media world every dog handler seems to be perfect, but this is not reflective of real life training. In this first of a new series Joanne Perrott speaks to handler Abbie Reid from Riverlily Working Dogs about what to do when things go wrong

HOW DID YOU START WORKING DOGS?

My first dog was a black lab called Mya. This was 12 and a half years ago now. I tried to train her myself. I started with books and CDs, but decided I needed the help of a gundog trainer. So I found someone to help me. That's where my passion for working dogs started.

TELL US ABOUT THE DOG YOU HAD YOUR MOST DIFFICULT MOMENT WITH?

I now have seven dogs and my most difficult dog to train so far has been Sherman. He's four years old now, a lab, and bred by me. He's a fantastic dog, but his younger years were a challenge.

WHAT HAPPENED AT YOUR MOST DIFFICULT MOMENT?

Well, Sherman is a full-on lively lad, a little bit like a bull in a china shop. Between me and my friends, he unofficially had the title of Running-in Champion Of England. He's always been a bit of a challenge, but two years ago I thought I finally had him ready. I trained so much before the season with him. I made sure he was steady and I took him to working tests. He was doing so well so I decided to trust him that season and take him out in the field. And for two months he was fantastic. Then one day, for a reason only he knows, on one drive he decided it was his turn to pick-up and he wouldn't wait. Sherman flew forward into the line of Guns to go and pick up a bird.

Once he got there he didn't just pick up the bird and bring it back to me. He decided to parade his joy by running up and down the Guns. I whistled for him. I called for him. I did everything I could to get him to come back to me, and he just wouldn't. He just kept running up and down, as all the birds fell around him, as the Guns kept on firing, and I was so embarrassed.

I think Sherman had seen the 'red mist', he was so overexcited and thought that was it. He decided he could rekindle his love of running in. It was so unexpected as we had done the training, he'd been great for eight weeks of the season already and we were standing way back. I genuinely thought I'd covered everything. But there was nothing I could have done to stop it. I knew I had done the work with him. But this day, the red mist was down, and there was no way he was listening to me. In the end, I couldn't watch. I thought: "Oh no this is disastrous!"

HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR MINDSET AT THE TIME?

I guess it knocked my confidence with him. I thought I'd sorted everything in training him. I was so embarrassed. But everyone was so kind. Guns came up to me and said, it happens to us all. But I really thought that he was ready to be out there. What was really annoying was that I'd spent all summer working on it. He had won some awards in working tests in the summer. I had my confidence in him and we were two months into the season. But on this day he decided he was the dog that was going to go and pick-up.

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?

We went back to basics and two years later he is now really good. For the rest of that fateful season he was on a lead for all drives. I stood right back behind the Guns. I took him on his own, no other dogs with me, and we would just watch. In between shoots, we trained hard, and went back to the fundamentals, heelwork, sits, stops, everything. I didn't give him an inch. I'm a positive reward-based trainer, but there were no chinks in my armour with him. I took it slowly. I introduced more and more distractions and kept on making sure the basics were rock solid. If I saw a change in his behaviour we would step back, and go through it all again.

Now he is in a team of four and he is lovely and steady and a pleasure to work with. So it can be fixed when a dog runs in. I've tested and tested his steadiness, and I still continue to do so.

➔





WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF, IF YOU COULD GO BACK TO THAT MOMENT?

If I could go back to that moment, I would remember, he's only a dog, and not to take it seriously and that he did nothing that couldn't be fixed and overcome with training. At the time I was so embarrassed. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me. But with the correct training you can put everything right. It's about hard work, dedication, perseverance and getting your dog back to basics. You must never give up.

HOW HAS THAT MOMENT IMPACTED HOW YOU TRAIN YOUR DOGS TODAY?

I guess I take it more slowly, and definately one thing at a time. I ensure the goal is met 100 per cent before I will ever move on.

WHAT ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE STRUGGLING TO TRAIN THEIR WORKING DOG?

My advice is to have a goal in your heart and never give up. When you have an issue see it as a training challenge and go right back to basics. Work on heelwork, recall, steadiness and general good manners as these are the fundamental basics needed for gundog training success. Take it slowly and work as a team with your dog.

Always end each training session on a positive note where your dog achieves success. When you get back on track you can be proud and say that you trained your dog and overcame the problem and it's onwards and upwards again for you both. With a positive outlook you can achieve anything, and with patience, dedication and a great sense of humour you can achieve your goals. Enjoy your time with your precious four-legged friend. *GJ*

Joanne Perrott is the founder of The Ladies Working Dog Group and in this series she will speak to different dog handlers about their most difficult moments. If you would like to share some of your difficult moments in training and how you overcame then please email: editorial@gundog-journal.com

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GOODWOOD

A MODERN SPORTING ESTATE

In the build up to a brand new canine event on this famous estate we take a look at the history of dogs at Goodwood.



Goodwood Estate, the setting for some of the world's most loved horseracing and motorsport events, has had a long and devoted relationship with the dog, and this year the 11th Duke of Richmond and Gordon has decided to create Goodwoof, an event dedicated entirely to man's best friend. The dogs will indeed have their day and so will their human friends.

To be held over the Bank Holiday weekend of 24th - 25th May, Goodwoof will celebrate dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes. The event will take place at The Kennels and a more apt location there couldn't be.

A glance back through history reveals that it was the 3rd Duke of Richmond who had a real passion for dogs and commissioned architect James Wyatt to create The Kennels in 1787, the building of which took some three years to complete. Introducing the very latest technology, central heating was installed for the hounds within the neoclassical brick and flint building – an entire century before Goodwood House had the same luxury. It's no wonder it was described at the time as 'the most luxurious dog house in the world'.

"Many people I know share the 3rd Duke's philosophy; they would far rather spend time and money on their dogs than they would on their human guests," says the current Duke of Richmond.

For hundreds of years, the 12,000-acre Goodwood Estate has been hosting shooting parties, of which dogs are of course integral. Today the shoot is run by husband and wife team Johno and Vanessa Newton. Prior to them it was Vanessa's father who ran the shoot for some 30 years - his great knowledge of the shoot was passed on from father to daughter upon his retirement last season. The shoot concentrates on partridge and pheasant; with days taken by the family and private sporting members from the UK and abroad.

The shoot is run and supported by a wider team consisting of headkeeper and underkeepers, pickers-up, beaters and with them some 50 to 60 dogs, made up of 50 picking-up dogs and 10 line dogs/keepers' dogs.

On an average shoot day, up to eight guns enjoy the sport – and guns are perfectly entitled to bring their own dogs and the estate picking-up team are mindful when they do, allowing them plenty of room to work their charges.

Habitually, the beating line is a split of springer and cocker spaniels alongside labradors; a collie regularly joins the line up (as well as a much-loved and pampered Jack Russell who likes to oversee the shoot whilst being carried when the vegetation beneath her reaches four inches or over). Quite the character, she will be the only dog on the shoot wearing a coat.

DOGS THROUGHOUT TIME AT GOODWOOD

Away from the shoot, dogs have historically played a large part in life at Goodwood as evidenced by the estate's art collection – aside from the cossetted foxhounds, dogs of various breeds appear in many a family portrait around the House. When Queen Alexandra came to stay, her dogs came too.

In 1860, Goodwood introduced the first Pekingese to the country. Of the five seized from the Chinese Imperial Court where they were kept as pets, one was given to Queen Victoria and two were presented to the Duchess of Richmond. All dogs have the seal of approval on the estate irrespective of size and breed, throughout history to the modern day.

AN ENTIRE EVENT FOR DOGS

Presented by Mars Petcare, Goodwoof will feature a superb line up of activities to satisfy and entertain every whim. As well as high-calibre disciplines and world-class demonstrations from competitive and working dogs, have-a-go arenas will encourage all dogs and owners to take part.

A Wellness Centre will focus on canine and human health and performance, nutrition and wellbeing; there will also be high-end retailers, a dog friendly open-air cinema and, of course being Goodwood, those on four legs and two will be well catered for in terms of sustenance.

With a nod to the luxurious Kennels of the 3rd Duke of Richmond, 'Barkitecture' will feature great modern architects offering their visions for 21st century kennels; these will be auctioned after the event to raise funds for the charity Canine Partners.

This year also coincides with the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Very much at the heart of the British Army, dogs played a huge but largely unsung role in the Second World War, saving countless lives. Goodwoof will present a moving tribute to the four-legged soldiers in recognition of their extraordinary bravery, an event not to be missed.

A final word from the Duke of Richmond explains why Goodwoof was created. "To this day, Goodwood is an entirely dog-friendly estate – dogs can stay at the hotel, accompany their owners in the restaurants, and even join our members' clubhouse, The Kennels. We thought it was only fitting to dedicate an entire event to them, just as we do with cars and horses at our other flagship meetings."

Goodwoof presented by Mars Petcare runs from 24-25 May. Visit Goodwood.com/Goodwoof or call 01243 216610. Tickets are available now from £19.50. 12 years of age and under go free. *GJ*





READERS' COMPETITION

WIN ONE OF FIVE PAIRS OF TICKETS TO GOODWOOF



On 24 and 25 May 2020 the grounds of Goodwood House will be consumed by Goodwoof; the all new event celebrating everything fabulous about our four-legged friends. The event, presented by MARS Petcare, will make the most of the rolling fields of one of Britain's most beautiful country estates.

Devised by real dog lovers and delivered with the charm, wit and style for which Goodwood's other world-leading events are renowned, Goodwoof will feature a fantastic line-up of activities to entertain dogs and their human companions.

There will be competitive disciplines and world class demonstrations to watch, and opportunities for owners and their dogs to have a go themselves. The skills and requirements of working and rescue dogs will be on show, alongside a full centre dedicated to canine and human health and performance, a dog friendly open air cinema, and a bespoke selection of high-end retailers, all accompanied by a range of delicious food and drink to keep everyone well fed and watered.

Goodwoof will also present an inspirational collection of 21st century kennels, designed by the great and the good of modern architecture. This display will be the subject of a grand charity auction after the event, in aid of the charity Canine Partners.

TO ENTER THE COMPETITION SIMPLY VISIT THE FOLLOWING SITE: WWW.GOODWOOD.COM/GUNDOGS

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DON'T ACCEPT DEFEAT

Trainer Damian Barson reports on a remarkable man who has not let cerebral palsy stop him working his dog on shoot days.

Photograph: Caroline Dell

In the course of my work I come across all kinds of dog owners. First time owners are often excited at the prospect of having a working dog but unaware of the training commitment this will bring. More seasoned handlers have chosen their dog with care for certain characteristics, perhaps with the memory of a former companion in mind to whom the new pup may unfortunately never compare.

As much of my training is on a one to one basis, I get to know the owners very well. We share the highs and lows of not only dog training, but other aspects of their lives too. Increasingly, I meet people who are struggling with their health, either mentally or physically. Often, the behaviour of their dog is not the only aspect of their lives that is causing them anxiety. Perhaps a reluctance to spend time training is a result of the reality of living with a physical illness.

DOGS ON PRESCRIPTION

In my experience, there is very little that dog ownership can't cure. Broken hearts, obesity, social anxiety, high blood pressure, grief - dogs should come as an NHS prescription. One of the joys of dog ownership is that it's sociable. Whether it's working your dog on a shoot or exercising them in the park, dog owners talk to one another. You have to leave the house to take your dog out so isolation is tackled on a daily basis. You should walk with your dog at least twice a day, so that's your daily steps taken care of, plus fresh air and hopefully, a little sunlight. If you have the bond with your dog that every handler should have, you will have a companion that is always pleased to see you. They are known as best friends for a reason.

HANDLING WITH A DISABILITY

This brings me to Sam Barber and his springer spaniel, Harry. From a young age, Sam watched Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall on television and became interested in the idea of self-sufficiency, catching his own game and eating it. This led to an ambition to work his dog on a shoot and so he approached a gundog trainer to help him achieve this aim. Over the course of a few lessons, he was told that his dog was no good and that Sam and his dog would never make it onto a shoot. Perhaps I should mention here that Sam has cerebral palsy, a lifelong condition that affects movement and mobility.

I am never afraid to take on a challenging dog or a despairing handler. After our initial conversations and then meeting up with Sam for the first time, I was disappointed at the way he had been treated. There are good dogs and there are great dogs, but to write off a dog and an owner, to deny them access to a long held dream, that is harsh. Training gundogs is by no means a soft touch profession but we're not only working with dogs, we're working with humans too and we have a responsibility to our customers.

MEETING CHALLENGES

Over the past two years with Sam I have had to adapt many techniques to accommodate his physical restrictions. Sam couldn't work as a beater because of his limb limitations, so we have been training Harry, a very headstrong and enthusiastic springer, as a peg dog for picking-up. This has presented its own set of challenges; Sam was told when enquiring about shoots that he would never pick-up with a springer. Each setback has left Sam all the more determined to succeed. It's certainly a lesson to us all that, no matter what our background, wealth, age or ability, we should encourage and help everyone who wants to be involved in country sports.

I often have to pull my clients up on the lack of effort they put into their training. This has never happened with Sam. I have seen 100 per cent commitment from him at every training session, and from the work he has put in between lessons. When something that we all take for granted, walking across the fields with our dogs, is more like a mountain climb, his achievements are beyond impressive. In Sam's own words: "I have seen massive improvements in my dog and also myself. Damian has given us both a lot of confidence, he shows me where I am going wrong and how to correct it."

A DREAM FULFILLED

Last season Sam attended his first shoot in Rutland and thoroughly enjoyed the day: "We visited the Thistleton Shoot and over five drives Harry picked up 25 birds." Sam received compliments on Harry's training, that he didn't run in on drives but sat well on peg. With Sam's disability, it is especially important that his dog responds well to the stop whistle and to direction. Despite other dogs running in to pick-up, Sam stuck to shoot etiquette and as a result was invited back.

For the remainder of the season, Sam and Harry picked-up at the Upperwood Shoot on Saddleworth ➳

Moor. Of course he has more to learn and work on over the summer months, and this is the case with any novice on a shoot. However, this season has not just been a one-off dream fulfilled, a whole new world is opening up for him.

Sam's physical disability is for life - nothing can change that but everything else can change. Fieldsports have given him purpose, ambition and joy. He has proved the doubters wrong and grown in his self-esteem - what an achievement. And he told us a little more about his ambitions and the support he has received from the shooting community: "The only thing I am trying to do is show people it can be done. And that if you put yourself out there and ask for help people will step forward. Everyone has been really supportive on the shoot days. For instance if I can't get somewhere the keeper will take me in the Gator and others will offer to undertake a long retrieve when it's obvious I won't be able to make it. From a young age I have always been told I couldn't walk so I'm used to overcoming pessimistic forecasts. It's about willpower. If you've got enough determination, enough fire in your belly, enough grit in your teeth then anything is achievable. Just because you have a disability you can't expect to be spoon-fed. Put your disability to to one side and get on with it. Don't sit back and let life go on without you.

"Also it's very interesting to see the assumptions people make. They tend to think that shooting is only for the upper class, but I'm a 25-year-old joiner. All you need is a pair of wellies and a coat to get involved in beating and then a dog if you want to go picking-up. I think shooting is missing a trick by not publicising the diversity of backgrounds of the people on shoot days. It needs publicising that shooting helps many people in many different ways. For me at the very least it provides great exercise for us both, but it's given me a lot more than that.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed attending the shoots this season and we have been invited back next season so we are already looking forward to it. I am hoping more people with a physical disability will read my story and not let it defeat them. I have been left overwhelmed with the amount of support I have received and the opportunities the shooting community has provided. These people have helped me achieve my dreams."









How dogs lead to contentment

IS YOUR GUNDOG ALSO YOUR THERAPIST?

Can you imagine life without them? Do you lose yourself in the routine of taking care of them? Do you focus so hard on their training that every other thought disappears from your head? This is the way it should be. I see lots of owners for whom gundog training has become a form of therapy. Issues such as anxiety, depression and grief are worked out through forming a bond with their dog.

It's good to see that week after week, the owners who come to me with the world on their shoulders gradually lift their heads. They see the potential in their dog and that gives them a focus. They feel fitter and more able to enjoy their country pursuits. There is something to strive for, an achievement on the horizon. The country sports community has an important role to play in using these benefits for the wellbeing of a wider audience. The more we diversify, the more we attract those not traditionally associated with field sports, the more people will benefit from this lifestyle that we enjoy.

DOG TRAINING HELPS CHILDREN FOCUS

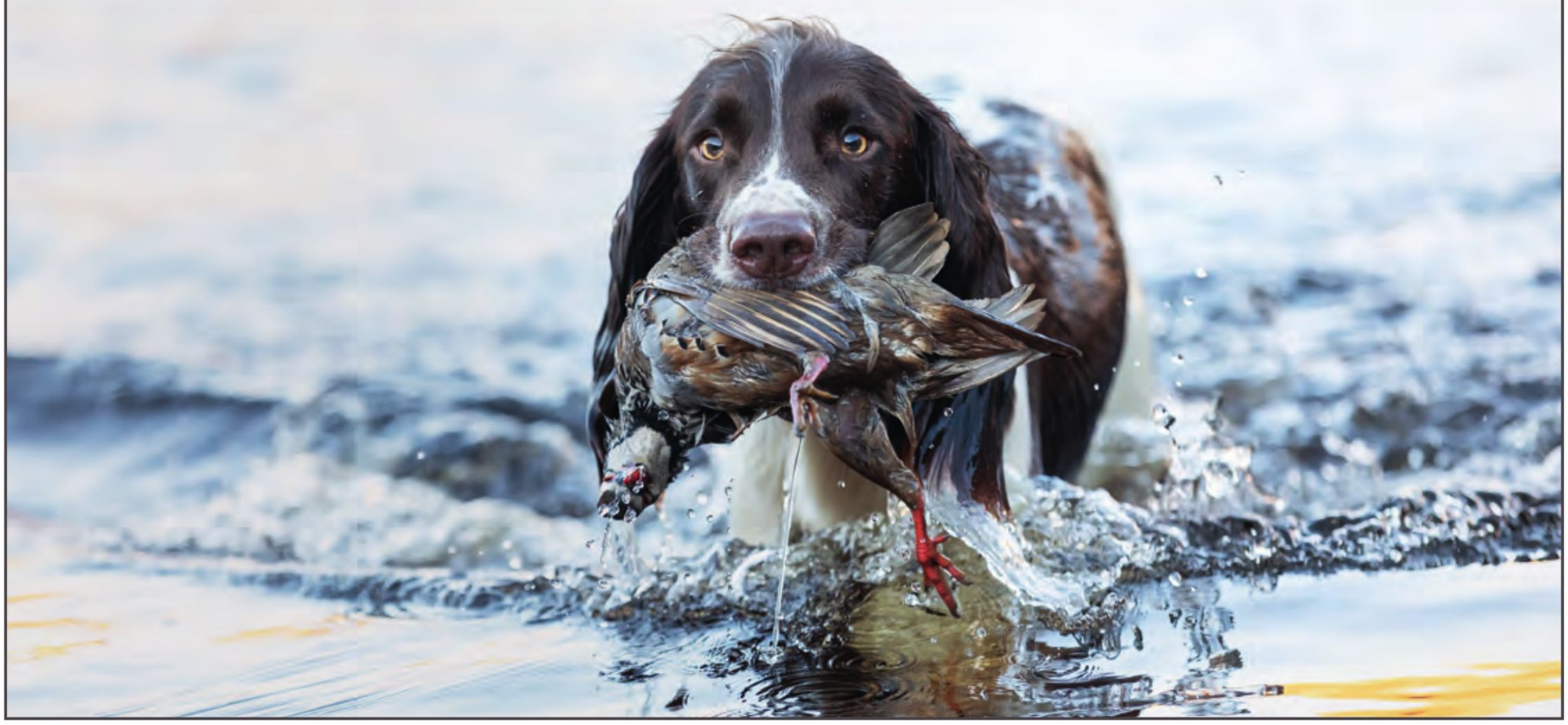
I see the benefits of gundog training with young handlers too. They find a new focus and forget their screens as they spend time outdoors achieving small victories, week by week. My training method is built on the foundation of the bond with your dog. This is intense and when you're young, it will occupy you before school, after school and at the weekends. Once that bond is built, it's unbreakable and that young person will have a friend who will never let them down.

SEEING THE LIGHT

Many clients with gundog breeds initially have no intention of working their dogs. They come for training because they are experiencing the behavioural issues you would expect from working breeds - running off, lack of recall, poor focus. I encourage these clients to train their dog to their breed standard and during that process, something happens. The owners get hooked on the idea of working their dog. Every year I have clients taking their dogs into the shooting field for the first time. The rewards they experience are immense - seeing just how much you can achieve with your working dog is a great feeling.

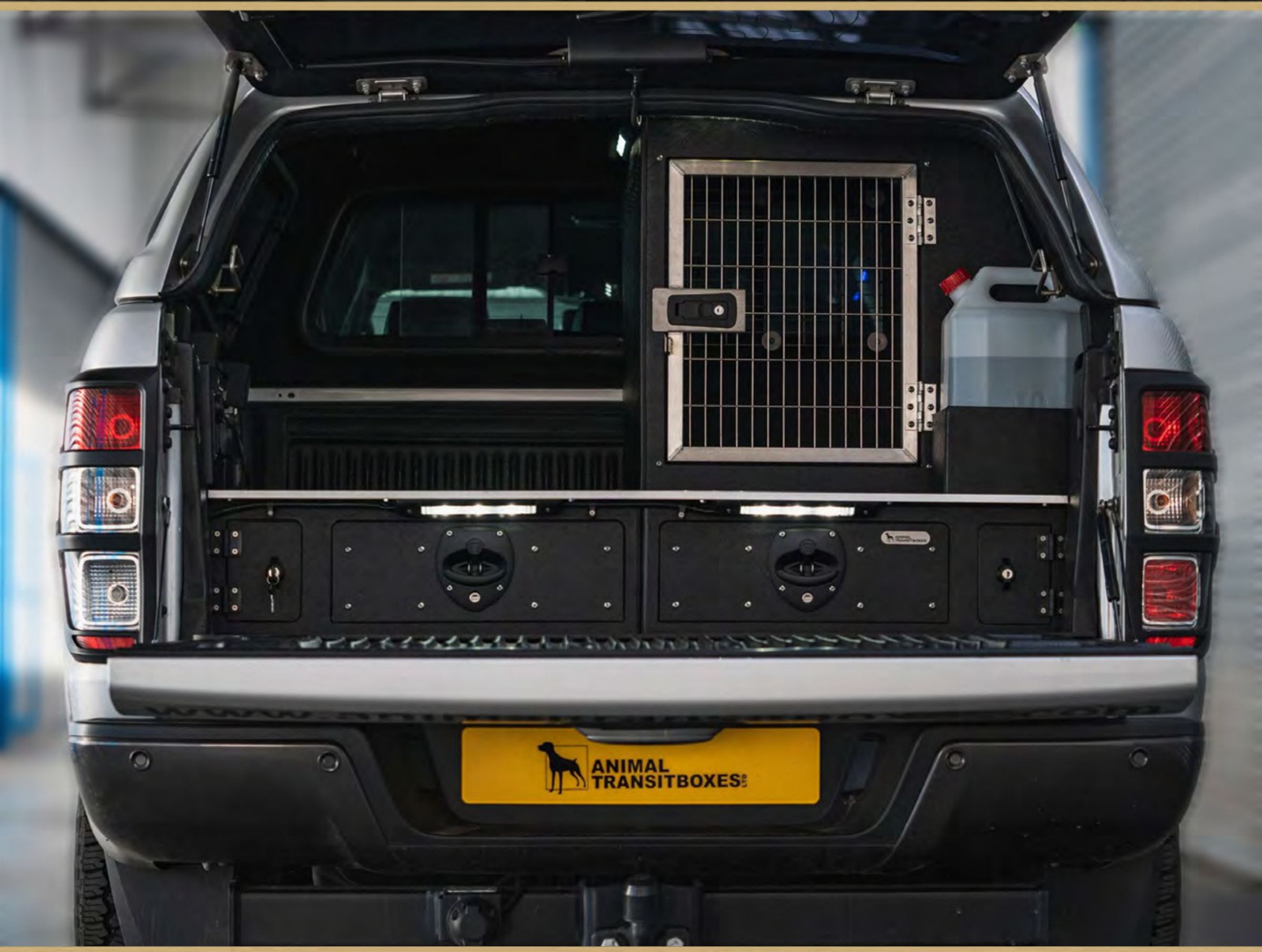
Don't let your physical condition or your mental state stop you from enjoying your dog. Let them inspire you to do greater things. As we have seen from Sam Barber's gundog journey, anything is possible with drive and commitment. If you need some help in taking a step in the right direction, find a gundog trainer who will support you in your goals. Set yourself achievable targets and stick to them - it took years for Sam to get on a shoot, but he got there in the end. Let yourself into the secret of a happy, healthy life and spend more time with your gundog. *GJ*

Damian Barson runs Tessleymoor Gundogs.



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TRAINING ADVICE

Here's one I made earlier

BASC's head of game and gundogs Glynn Evans considers the options when you haven't got the time to train a puppy from scratch.

Open pretty much any book on training a dog and there will be a section providing advice and tips when buying a puppy. But for those looking to buy a trained or part-trained dog there is not always that much advice on what to look for and the dos and don'ts. Asked recently what I thought the options were, I came up with these possibilities:

YOUR FOUR OPTIONS

First, an older puppy of about 6-10 months; at this stage I would expect that it should at least know its name, come when called and have some of the basics such as walking to heel, sitting and staying, plus an ability to complete a simple retrieve.

Second would be an older, part-trained dog; the basics of heelwork, recalls and retrieving will be more advanced, there will be some whistle and hand signal training and perhaps a passing familiarity with gunshot.

Third would be a trained dog which should have all the training and be ready to go shooting, with the ability to sit stay, retrieve, stop on the whistle and take hand signals. It will have picked some game but probably due to its age this experience will be limited and it will need introducing into the shooting field in a controlled way to ensure the work of the trainer is not undone.

Finally I think we have the fully trained dog which should basically be the finished article, encompassing all of the above but possessing significant experience in the shooting field and, once settled with the new owner, capable of coping with any day's shooting and being a paragon of virtue.

WHAT WILL IT COST?

So, if we are considering a part-trained dog ready to bring on for the season, what should such a dog cost? This will vary immensely but there needs to be a bit of a reality check. Although there can be some well trained dogs available for not much more than the price of a pup, depending on how much work the owner has put into the dog you may need to pay a more realistic price.

A Kennel Club registered pup will often be £500-£600 or more depending upon the breed and individual breeding and also on what health tests the parents have had (see Patrice Fellows article on pages 24-27 of this issue for more on puppy prices). If both parents are Field Trial Champions the price can easily reach four figures.

Then factor in that a dog such as a labrador, once it is 12 months old, will often have undergone a number of health tests which can be expensive ➔





- a figure of £500 being a reasonable estimate of these costs. Finally add in expenses such as food and inoculations and consider the time spent training.

So while we all like a bargain - and there are some out there - I think a decent part-trained dog with good health test results is starting to look like a pretty fair buy at £2,000. But how much should experienced peg dogs cost? Even more time is needed to polish and complete their education and without the expertise of the trainer (and sometimes even with it) a problem such as hard mouth or squeaking could develop. If this process is managed wrongly a dog's value would be substantially decreased. So now we are looking at perhaps double the price of a part-trained dog. A spend of £4,000 isn't unreasonable but there can be some really good dogs available at less than this.

WILL THE DOG FIT YOUR LIFESTYLE?

When considering a potential trained dog your first thoughts may be about what type of shooting it will be used for and what the dog can do. But there are more important considerations - will it fit in with you and your lifestyle? It's no good having the greatest gundog in the world if it doesn't. It is worth making a list of requirements - the ones that are musts and those that are desirable. So for instance if you want the dog to live indoors it must be house-trained. But say you want a yellow labrador, could you be flexible enough to go for a good black one which ticks all the other boxes?

When you have decided what you want it is a case of doing your homework. The internet is a useful research tool but remember that a great website or advert does not necessarily mean a great trainer is behind it. Personal recommendations from someone you trust, such as a friend who has bought a trained dog, or a keeper or picker up on your shoot, can be more reliable.

Always when looking at a trained dog get a full demonstration and take a friend or partner with a 'sound head on' with you to make sure you do not get swept along and forget important questions. Finally, remember that not only will you be assessing if the dog is suitable for you, any good trainer selling a dog will also be assessing you to see if you are suitable to have their dog. *GJ*



IMAGE: RICHARD FAULKS

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Mud, glorious mud

Q It was so wet and muddy last season have you got any insider tips on how to deal with all the mud the dogs inevitably cake themselves in? What's your cleaning routine?

Michelle Oseman: Last season was the wettest for a long time. Working six spaniels means every shoot day is a bath day. I'm convinced they could get muddy in a desert. When I built my kennel block I had an electric shower and raised bath built in and this has been a godsend. When I get home every dog is individually washed with warm water – I only use shampoo if really necessary. I have found that using warm water is not only more pleasant for dog and handler but also removes caked on mud and debris such as thorns much more easily. Each dog is washed, checked over for any injuries I may have missed throughout the day, towel dried and then put into their kennel with a heat lamp on for a couple of hours to dry them off. Four of my spaniels are clipped out and I do find this makes them easier to wash, and they dry much more quickly than those with a full winter coat.

All my dogs are fed salmon oil, which I believe adds to the coat's drying abilities. I am also a big fan of Tail & Mane conditioner spray which I apply to the whole dog when I groom them after drying. This makes the coat and especially those tangled spaniel ears much easier to brush out, and also provides a small amount of protection again those darn thistles and burrs when working the following day.

As I load my dogs into the truck on a shoot day morning I ask them not to get wet, muddy or smelly but obviously this is an impossible task when you're a full-on working gundog – roll on bath time again.

Q Now the season is over I am interested in entering my three-year-old lab in working tests. She is a fabulous picking-up dog but are there any pitfalls I should be aware of?

Laura Hill: It's good that you have enjoyed picking-up with your dog, and this will have given her a proper education in game finding. Working tests can be a useful way of seeing how your training is going over the close season. Tests not only provide a competitive fun day out, with like-minded people, but they can help you highlight where any particular weaknesses are in your training, and inspire you to brush up on your handling and schooling.

If your dog is Kennel Club registered then you will be able to enter working tests run by local clubs (a list of which can be found on the Kennel Club website). Most clubs allow non-members to run in their tests, but it is probably worth joining a handful of local clubs as they will often provide other activities such as training and social events.

Before you enter a test, you should also order or download a copy of the KC J Regs which relate to Field Trials and Working Tests (again from the Kennel Club website). You will need to read these to familiarise yourself with the rules. It would also be useful to find a local trainer who can assess you and your dog to see if you are ready to enter tests, and give you some help and guidance on how to prepare and what to expect.

For retrievers, working tests usually comprise a set of tests based on marked or blind retrieves, or a combination of both. They may involve working in crops or woodland, and sending your dog over obstacles such as fences or water. There may also be a walked-up scenario. Your dog should be steady to shot and fall off the lead, and be quiet and well mannered.

Whilst entering a test for the first time may be a bit daunting, you will soon learn the ropes and perhaps end up getting bitten by the bug. Good luck. *GJ*

Photograph: Mary Murray




“It’s important that we recognise the real value of the game industry as it fits in so well with our efforts to produce quality, healthy food on a more sustainable basis, and it employs tens of thousands of people.”

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VOLUME III - ISSUE II

As the nation becomes increasingly conscious about what they put on their plate, we decided it was time to create our very first food-themed special. Therefore, we called upon none other than the world famous chef Michel Roux Jr to be Guest Editor.

FIELDSPORTS-JOURNAL.COM

How a dog can save a life

Working with gundogs is good for us on so many different levels and, as Leigh Fell reports, dogs provide great support to people suffering from mental illness.



Photograph: Jo Shepherd

MENTAL HEALTH

Doris Day famously said: "I have found that when you are deeply troubled, there are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source." As a member of the Scottish National Rural Mental Health Forum I personally believe truer words have never been spoken. Bearing in mind the ever-increasing incidence of mental illness and suicide in rural and farming regions, the vital, unspoken role that dogs can play in remote communities is sometimes overlooked. And how can we better understand the effect that dogs have on us?

HOW DOGS CAN HELP

I recently had the pleasure of attending my first ever pheasant shoot on a tranquil estate in the lovely rolling hills of Perthshire, beating with my three-year-old labrador pointer cross, Sebastian. It was only when I was driving home that it struck me I hadn't once that day, thought about work or business or any other of life's stresses that normally circle round my head constantly. For the first time in months my mind was completely clear. Entirely focused on working with the dog and nothing else. An almost meditative experience.

There is a wealth of scientific literature that proves owning pets, especially dogs, is beneficial for wellbeing, particularly cardiovascular health but I wondered if there is something about the act of working with a dog that gives a little extra boost for our mental health?

First, I decided to ask around my fellow rural forum members to find out if they had come across any examples of gundogs supporting mental health and sure enough, it wasn't long before I found some. Helen Benson, Chief Operating Officer of the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust, had a number of stories from her work, saying: "We have a video of a gentleman who was a gamekeeper and was made redundant. He then became mentally unwell. He had lost his dog and lived on his own. We identified that part of his recovery should include replacing his dog who had died and he could not afford to replace. So we found a trained spaniel named Stan who has become his constant companion. After that he improved, found a job and felt much better.

"Another case was a gamekeeper's wife who was suffering from depression when her husband was made redundant. Taking her dogs picking-up to another local shoot gave her a purpose and kept her identity as part of the community. For keepers who have been made redundant or retired their identity and connection with the gamekeeping community is very important. Working their gundogs keeps that connection in a legitimate way. ↦



"We had a gamekeeper's mum, whose son died in tragic circumstances. In coming to terms with her horrendous loss she has focused on looking after his dogs which she still does four years on. There is also a gamekeeper's widow who lost her husband to cancer and who lives for his dogs - her only solace since they have no family."

Helen continued: "There are many instances and there is no doubt that gundogs can be literally a lifeline. I know many retired gamekeepers who have kept their connections to their networks and community by picking-up, beating etc on shoots and others who keep their connections by being a part of a gundog club. With mental health issues a routine is really important, and having to take a dog out to exercise and take part in shoots is a strong motivation they may not have had without the dog."

HERE COMES THE SCIENCE

So what has science got to say about this special bond between dog and handler? There are a number of proven physiological benefits to owning a dog. The first and most obvious being that they keep you fit and active and therefore maintain good cardiovascular health. Studies have repeatedly shown that dog owners have lower blood pressure, reduced cholesterol and triglyceride levels, resulting in fewer heart attacks and better survival for those that do suffer cardiac events.

But there are more and more studies now also showing that spending time with dogs has a dramatic effect on our "happy hormones" therefore reducing stress and depression.

The hormone in our brain most commonly linked to depression is serotonin. In fact the majority of anti-depressant medications centre around increasing this chemical. So finding ways of increasing this naturally in our lives is vital and dogs are one way of achieving that.

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A CUDDLE?

Researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia tested a group of 50 dog owners and 50 non-dog owners sitting in a quiet room with either their own dog or someone else's. The results showed that stroking their own dog increased serotonin in the dog owners but did not have the same effect when stroking someone else's dog. Interestingly blood pressure also reduced for both the dog and the human.

Oxytocin is another hormone that has been widely researched. Often called the "love hormone" or "cuddle hormone," it is the hormone that is released through compassionate and caring human interactions and we now know that it has a similar effect when we interact with our dogs. Takefumi Kikusui of Azabu University in Sagamihara, Japan, found that when dogs and their owners gazed into each eyes, oxytocin levels shot up by 300 per cent in humans and 130 per cent in their dogs.

Other experiments show that interactions with dogs increase our dopamine levels and reduce the stress hormone cortisol.

ELEVATED BENEFITS OF WORKING GUNDOGS

But what of the working dog interaction? Maria Petersson and colleagues at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm proposed that the actual way in which we interact with our dogs is also significant. Based on the information that has been studied in pet dogs, it stands to reason that someone who works with a dog and therefore spends an extended period of time during the day, out on a shoot for example, fully engaged with the dog for the duration of that time would receive even more elevated benefits.

And last but not least there is the element of companionship and social opportunities. In psychology, the much cited "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" suggests that it is imperative for a human to feel "love and belonging" in settings of friendship and social connections. Needless to say, as noted in the examples given above, it appears to be this companionship and connection with a dog (or associated connection to other humans through the dog) which has one of the most profound benefits. The evidence confirms this also as science has shown that dog owners make friends more easily, partly due to speaking to other dog owners whilst out on walks and in the current setting this is particularly true of those who attend shoots with their dogs. In often isolated parts of the country, the dog and the pursuit of shooting give people that much needed connection.

A CONVERT TO THE FIELD

I was lucky enough to experience this first hand when I was invited to my second shoot in late December. This time it was a non-commercial friends and family shoot and festive get together. As we sat around the breakfast table, local farmers joked about the fact that they hit so few birds that they consider themselves conservationists. Meanwhile our lovely host Ian MacDonald, who farms in Midlem, near Selkirk, explained the ethos of the day to me. He told me that it is first and foremost about spending time with loved ones. It is about enjoying a day out together, having fun with the dogs, introducing new people like me to the pursuit and that the absolute least of the priorities is the actual shooting of birds. During the day my dog contributed to the light-heartedness of it all when he grabbed one of the ↦



Photograph: Nigel Kirby

other beater's sticks from her hand and began tossing it around in puppy-like fashion – OK we maybe have a bit more training to do but it certainly gave everyone around us a giggle.

I came away from the day feeling incredibly grateful to all who had been so welcoming. To Ian's family for looking after me in the field, to his wife for cooking an incredible meal for all 16 of us – wow. And to everyone else, as I don't think I've laughed so much in a long time as I did from start to finish that day.

As the drinks and merriment of the day continued into the evening, I was given one final reminder of the powerful effect our dogs can have. Professor Sarah Skerratt, fellow forum member and Director of Policy Engagement at Scotland's Rural College, told me the story of a farmer who had approached her at the Royal Highland Show last year. He told her that a few months earlier he had found that life had become unbearable and that he had made the decision to end it. He took his gun and walked up the hill… but when he sat down, his dog rested his head on his leg and in that moment he couldn't go through with it. He credits his dog with saving his life. *GJ*

Leigh Fell is the founder and chief executive of Caritas Neuro Solutions.

LOOKING FOR HELP?

The Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust supports gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies, and their dependents past and present. The helpline number is 0300 123 3088.

The National Rural Mental Health Forum is a collaboration of over 140 organisations, many with expertise in tackling mental health issues and others that have memberships that reach out to all parts of rural Scotland.

The Samaritans hotline is available free 24/7, 365 days a year on 116 123.

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TO JAB OR NOT TO JAB?

Most British dog owners are familiar with the need for jabs and boosters, but here Laura Keyser explains more about the conditions we are vaccinating for.

Vaccinations help to prevent contagious and potentially fatal diseases in dogs. Vaccines work by stimulating an immune response, which lasts a varying amount of time depending on the vaccine and the disease it is trying to prevent. The vaccine contains a small dose of either dead or inactivated bacteria or virus. This means it is unable to cause disease, but is sufficient to invoke an immune response, so the immune system develops specific antibodies against the disease.

There are four core vaccines, which are essential, and the kennel cough vaccine, which is highly recommended but not essential. There is also a rabies vaccine, which will be required if you plan to take your dog outside the UK.

When puppies are first born, they rely completely on antibodies transferred across the placenta and provided in their mother's colostrum (first milk) to protect them against harmful bacteria and viruses. This is called passive immunity. It involves one animal producing antibodies and then transferring them to a susceptible animal to provide immediate protection. Because of this, it is vital to ensure that bitches are fully vaccinated if you are breeding from them. Over the first few months of their life, this protection wanes, making the puppy more vulnerable to infectious diseases. Therefore it is important to vaccinate puppies at the right age and then ongoing throughout their lives.

Most vaccinations are given as a single, combined subcutaneous injection (just under the skin), usually in the scruff of the neck where there is plenty of skin to hold. The only one that differs is the kennel cough vaccine, which is an intra-nasal vaccine in the UK, given up the dog's nostril. Although recently, an oral vaccine has been launched.

The four core vaccines

DISTEMPER

Also known as hard pad this is a highly contagious, often fatal, viral disease. It can take many forms and affect several of the dog's body systems, making it often quite difficult to diagnose. It is often characterised by fever, reduced white blood cells, nasal discharge, gastrointestinal signs and inflammation of the lungs and brain.

A dog will become infected by inhaling the virus from droplets spread by an affected dog. Usually a short spell of fever follows for about three to six days after infection. This may go unnoticed or may be accompanied by lethargy and a loss of appetite. If blood tests are taken at this point, they may show a low white blood cell count.

> "It is important to vaccinate puppies at the right age and then ongoing throughout their lives."

A second episode of fever may be accompanied by lethargy, loss of appetite, plus nasal and ocular discharge. Gastrointestinal signs (vomiting, diarrhoea) and respiratory symptoms (coughing, breathlessness) may follow and are complicated by secondary bacterial infections. The classic sign is overgrowth of the skin on the footpads and nose, hence the nickname hard pad.

Neurological signs can include walking in circles, a head tilt and uncontrolled rapid eye movements (nystagmus). Also there may be muscle twitching of localised muscle groups (e.g. the leg or face), slight or complete paralysis of the hind limbs due to muscle incoordination, weakness and paralysis in all four legs. Seizures may develop with jaw chomping, involuntary urination and defecation. The seizures become more frequent and severe as the disease progresses.

Distemper infections may be mild with few or no signs with a short time course, or may be severe with most of the symptoms described. Sometimes the onset of neurological signs can be delayed for several weeks.

It's treated with antibiotics, intravenous fluids, anti-inflammatories to reduce fever and control pain, and anticonvulsants if the dog is having seizures. A dog would need treating on an individual basis, depending on the symptoms. Dogs may make a full recovery but a prompt diagnosis and aggressive treatment is essential. However, even with the right treatment, some dogs do not make a satisfactory recovery and euthanasia may have to be considered.

HEPATITIS

Canine infectious hepatitis, caused by canine adenovirus, is a contagious disease spread by the ingestion of urine, faeces, or saliva from an affected dog. Recovered dogs can even shed the virus in the urine for up to six months.

Symptoms range from a slight fever to dark red mucous membranes (gums), to vomiting, depression, clotting disorders, abdominal pain, jaundice and severe hepatitis (inflammation of the liver). Mortality rates range from 10 per cent to 30 per cent and are highest in very young dogs. ↦

The first sign is a fever of over 40°C (104°F), which can last up to six days. Dogs are usually lethargic, anorexic (off their food) and thirsty. They can have discharge from the eyes and nose, abdominal pain and vomiting. The gums can appear very red or covered with red dots caused by small bleeds (petechiae). The tonsils can be enlarged and there may be swelling of the head, neck and trunk. Despite the liver being involved, jaundice is not always seen.

Clotting times are prolonged, causing spontaneous bleeding, which can be difficult to control. The nervous system is rarely involved but in severely affected dogs, this can lead to convulsions. In about 25 per cent of recovered dogs, a cloudy corneal opacity (blue eye) develops in both eyes seven to 10 days after acute signs disappear and usually resolves spontaneously.

Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, involving antibiotics, intravenous fluids and blood transfusions in severely ill dogs.

PARVOVIRUS

This is a highly contagious virus that attacks the gastrointestinal system, causing severe vomiting, bloody diarrhoea, fever and loss of appetite. Extreme dehydration ensues and can be rapidly fatal (within 48-72 hours). It mainly affects young dogs. Generally unvaccinated (or incompletely vaccinated) dogs, and certain breeds, such as rottweilers, dobermans, German shepherds and English springer spaniels, are thought to be predisposed. The virus is resistant to many disinfectants, sunlight and heat. It can persist for many months, possibly even years, in the outdoor environment. Higher incidences are found in dog rescue centres or breeding kennels.

The virus is shed in the faeces of the infected dogs after four to five days of exposure and is spread by faecal-oral spread (the ingestion of faeces) or by contact with contaminated clothing, shoes or equipment.

Symptoms generally develop within five to seven days of infection. Initially signs may be non-specific, including lethargy, loss of appetite and fever, with progression to vomiting and haemorrhagic (bloody) diarrhoea within 24-48 hours. Severely affected dogs can progress quickly to being in a collapsed state, with weak pulses, high heart rates and hypothermia (cold body temperature), consistent with septic shock.

A faecal sample and blood tests help to confirm the diagnosis and reatment must be instigated promptly otherwise Parvo can sadly often be fatal. However, puppies that survive the first three or four days of illness are more likely to make a full recovery. Treatment involves intravenous fluids to correct dehydration and electrolyte imbalances, plasma transfusions, anti-sickness drugs, antibiotics, antivirals and good nutrition, sometimes requiring a feeding tube to be placed and syringe feeding provided.

LEPTOSPIROSIS

This bacterial disease is transmitted by rodent urine, which can be transmitted to humans as well as other animal species. There are several strains present in different species in different countries of the world. The most common in the UK are L. canicola and L. icterohaemorrhagiae.

Symptoms in dogs include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, weakness and lethargy, stiffness, muscle pain and kidney failure (with or without liver failure). Signs of kidney injury can either be urinating excessively or, conversely, producing less or even no urine. Acute liver disease may also occur, causing affected dogs to be jaundiced. Less commonly, bleeding disorders can cause small bleeds on the gums and skin (petechiae), a bloody nasal discharge and blood in stools and vomit.

Blood tests can confirm the presence of the bacteria. Supportive treatment includes intravenous fluids, antibiotics such as doxycycline, anti-sickness drugs, gut protectants, phosphate binders and drugs to support the liver.

There has been a lot of press about the safety of the leptospirosis vaccines in the last few years, namely one known as L4. Previously most drug companies produced the L2 vaccine against the two common strains L. canicola and L. icterohaemorrhagiae, but more recently strains have been discovered in populations of wild animals, so an L4 vaccine was manufactured containing four strains rather than two. L4 has potentially been associated with more adverse reactions, simply because more antigen means the immune system is stimulated more, therefore the greater the risk of side effects. The overall risk of an adverse reaction with either L2 or L4 is still 'rare' meaning that less than 10 dogs out of every 10,000 vaccinated will have a reaction, ranging from mild to severe. With L2, this risk is less than two in every 10,000 and with L4 the risk is less than seven in every 10,000 dogs.

In summary, the risk of an unvaccinated dog getting Leptospirosis far outweighs the risk of an adverse reaction with a vaccine, and the consequences could be far worse. Unless you travel abroad with your dog, or they are likely to swim in natural watercourses on farmland, then the L2 vaccine should be sufficient. ↦



Non-core vaccines

KENNEL COUGH

Infectious Tracheobronchitis (ITB) or kennel cough, is predominantly caused by the bacterium Bordetella Bronchiseptica, which may be combined with parainfluenza. It is a sudden, or sometimes chronic, inflammation of the trachea and smaller (bronchial) airways, causing their walls to become inflamed and swollen, in turn, narrowing the airways.

Spasms of coughing are the most prominent sign. The cough attempts to remove accumulations of mucus from the airways. Often it is most severe after rest, when the dog is excited or during exercise. The dog's temperature may be slightly increased. The acute stage of bronchitis passes in two to three days but the cough may persist for several weeks.

Generally, the diagnosis is made based on the history, symptoms and physical examination of the dog. In severe or prolonged cases, x-rays, endoscopy and fluid samples taken from the lungs may be recommended by your vet.

Infections often self-resolve or may require anti-inflammatories and cough suppressants to help ease the symptoms. Antibiotics are sometimes required if a bacteria component is confirmed. On rare occasions, severe cases can lead to pneumonia. There is an annual vaccine and in the UK, this is currently available in intra-nasal or intra-oral form.

PARAINFLUENZA

Canine parainfluenza is a virus that contributes towards Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis). It is highly contagious and spreads easily when dogs are in close proximity to each other for a period of time, such as boarding kennels or within groups of working dogs and hunt kennels. Parainfluenza, sometimes combined with Bordetella Bronchiseptica, causes the classic signs of kennel cough to result.

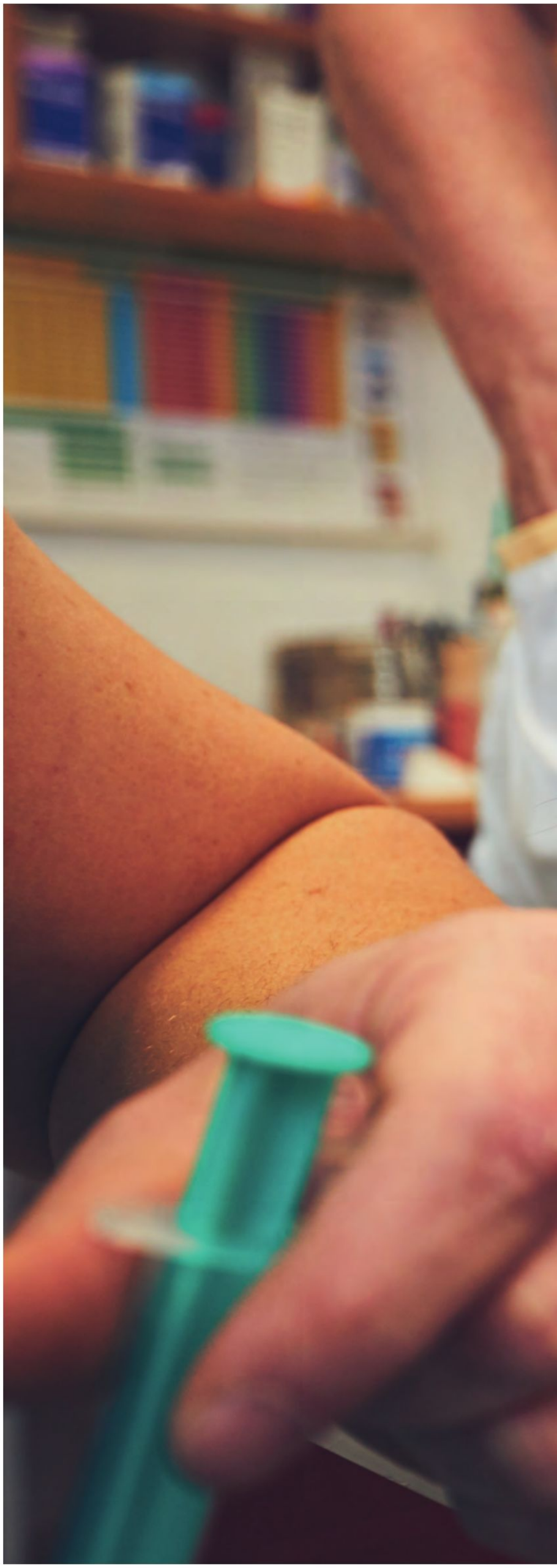
Symptoms, in addition to a dry, hacking cough, may include fever, sometimes a nasal discharge, sneezing, inflamed eyes, occasionally depression, lethargy and lossof appetite.

Treatment is usually just supportive including anti-inflammatories to ease the fever and cough. Antibiotics are not generally required. A vaccine is available in injectable or intra-nasal forms.

RABIES

Rabies is a fatal disease for both dogs and humans, characterised by a swaying gait, painful neck, excessive salivation and convulsions of facial muscles. Aggressive behaviour can be seen, even with biting and not letting go.

If you are planning to travel outside of the UK with your dog it will need a rabies vaccination before travel. UK licensed vaccines last for three years but on the continent, some are only licensed for one year. With Brexit it is unclear when or how the requirements will change for the Pet Travel Scheme so please make sure you contact your vet to discuss the protocol for travel at least four months before your proposed travel date.





The jab routine

Depending of the brand, dog vaccinations usually involve a combined annual injection, containing all the core vaccines, given in one subcutaneous injection. Rabies and kennel cough vaccines are also available and given separately.

The primary vaccinations for puppies involve two injections, generally given two to four weeks apart. Sometimes a breeder may decide to give the first vaccination prior to selling puppies and this can be given from six weeks of age. The second vaccine must be given after the age of 10 weeks to ensure that all maternity antibodies have waned and the puppy develops their own immunity.

After the primary course of injections, the next injection is given 12 months later and should be given annually thereafter. If your dog has gone three months overdue with their booster vaccination (i.e. it is over 15 months since their last vaccination), it is recommended to re-start the vaccination course, so two primary vaccines will be given again, two to four weeks apart.

Just to reiterate, it is vital that potential breeding bitches are fully vaccinated to ensure that antibodies are passed on to the puppies via the uterus and through their colostrum.

The alternative to vaccinations is titre testing. A blood sample can be taken to check antibody levels in the blood. The test helps reduce vaccination failure and some people believe it prevents over-vaccination and helps owners to make informed vaccination decisions. If an animal already has a protective level of immunity, revaccination will not be required. If titre levels are inadequate, then revaccination is recommended.

The downfall of titre tests is that only hepatitis, parvovirus and distemper can be tested for. *GJ*

NEXT ISSUE

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The woodcock mystery

Q There were plenty of woodcock around last season, but none of my dogs even registered the scent. How can I train them for woodcock for next season?

Laura Hill: You were lucky to attend some shoots where there were woodcock in abundance as they are not common in all parts of the country. There are many myths about the difficulty that some dogs seem to have in scenting or picking woodcock. Some say that the birds have an ability to hold in or 'lock down' their scent, rendering it impossible for dogs to find them. How (or if) they could do this would be the subject of a whole other debate. I don't think we will ever fully understand the intricacies of scent.

Suffice to say woodcock do seem to present problems for dogs, not only because they give off such little scent, but also in that they smell or taste rather odd to dogs – perhaps due to their long journey over the North Sea in some cases. Some dogs will happily pick them up, but then quickly discard them again due to this bitter taste.

It may also be that woodcock present more issues to gundogs because they are just not as common as our other game birds. If your dogs have never picked woodcock before then this would explain their unfamiliarity with the scent and size, which is very different from that of a pheasant or partridge.

You are in a fortunate position now, in that you have access to a supply of woodcock to take away and use in training to familiarise your dogs with this different quarry. Get them used to picking the bird up and returning to you with it, giving them lots of praise and encouragement for doing so.

Q My yellow lab is 21 months old and is being very trying with recall. Could it just be an age thing or is she playing with me?

Jayne Coley: It could be that she has got to an age where she is trying it on with you, or you are being too soft and inconsistent, letting her do as she pleases. All dogs must be taught from an early age to respond straightaway to commands, not only whilst training, but all the time.

At this stage I would strongly recommend you only let her off the lead in a small area, maybe your garden, having a little leather collar on her. Tell her to go for a run or whatever command you use. When she is preoccupied, use the recall whistle. If she ignores you, calmly go up to her, grumbling at her. Holding her collar, firmly pull her towards you – as you walk back to where you were originally calling her from – using the recall whistle at the same time.

It's imperative you do not lose your temper. Then, walk her back to where she was when she ignored you and sit her up. You walk back to where you were and recall her. If she responds straightaway, give her plenty of praise. Your tone of voice is so important – a light positive voice when she is good, and a gruff negative one when she is not, so she learns right from wrong.

As well as the recall, if she has been taught to stop on the whistle, sometimes use the 'stop' whistle, with one hand up in the air. If she does not stop straight away, run towards her, still with your hand in the air, telling her to "sit" in a grumbling voice. If she sits, stop when you get to her, wait a second and quietly praise her. If she runs off, get after her (hence the small area) grumbling all the time so she knows she is doing wrong. Hold the collar and calmly frog march her back to the spot where you told her to sit. It can be a battle of the wills, but it is imperative you set this up again and keep doing it until you win. Never, ever lose your temper. You are simply proving to her who the boss is.

Once she is responding every time, find another small fenced area, like a little paddock, or a friend's garden. Taking her somewhere new will be an ideal test. Repeat what you have been doing at home.

When you are confident to let her off the lead during walks, only do so in confined areas to start with, for example on a track, or narrow part of a field and where there are no temptations, such as meeting other dogs, water, game, etc. Occasionally, use the recall (sometimes using the stop whistle first), always giving her plenty of praise and maybe the odd dog treat. If she loves retrieving, keep a small dummy or ball in your pocket and very occasionally, put this down as a blind retrieve (provided she is confident being sent for unseen retrieves). Or once she has responded to your recall immediately, it could be thrown as a marked retrieve instead. This is a good way to keep her guessing whether you are just calling her back, or going to let her have a retrieve. Don't use treats when you send a dog for a retrieve. The retrieve is the reward. If anyone else walks her, you must put down some ground rules, so her progress is not affected. *GJ*

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A TOUCH OF CLASS

The Gordon setter is a handsome and stylish dog with a characteristic black and tan coat. Tough and hardy, this breed is noted for its intelligence, bold nature and stamina. By Patrice Fellows.

It is believed that setters descend from 'setting spaniels' developed in the Middle Ages. The first reference to the setting spaniel was written by the French sportsman Gaston de Foix in his work 'Livre de Chasse' in the late 1300s. These gundogs were used to hunt wide open terrains for game birds. Once a bird was found the setting spaniel crouched and crawled towards it, allowing the sportsman to throw a net over the dog and quarry. Although modern setters descend directly from these dogs, it's probable that outside crosses with hounds or pointers were used over the years.

By the 18th century there were several kennels producing a black and tan setter in the British Isles. Alexander, the 4th Duke of Gordon established his kennel at Gordon Castle, north of Fochabers near the Moray coast. Bred to work on the Highland moors, his dogs were valued for their exceptional stamina and gamefinding ability. Originally, the Duke's dogs were black, tan and white, which made them easier to see while working in heather.

When Alexander died in 1827, the 5th Duke reduced the kennels, giving away dogs to friends and gamekeepers. Nine years later the Gordon estate passed to the 5th Duke of Richmond, who saved the bloodlines and rebuilt a strong kennel of working dogs. Today his descendent, the 11th Duke of Richmond, carries on the tradition and is the honorary president of the British Gordon Setter Club. In 2019 he and his family launched a campaign to help save the breed, inviting Gordon owners from all of the world to the annual Highland Games and Country Fair at Gordon Castle.

Before the invention of the breech-loading gun in 1865, pointers and setters were the most popular shooting dogs in Britain. Many sporting estates maintained large kennels with teams of dogs for visiting guests to shoot over. As driven shooting grew in popularity, shooting over bird dogs for small bags fell out of favour and large estates gradually reduced or sold their kennels.

In 1924 the Kennel Club officially recognised the breed as the Gordon setter, in honour of the work of the 4th Duke of Gordon to develop the breed. At that time there were 54 black and tan setters registered, and they were mostly bred in Scotland. Throughout the 20th century the breed was further developed and refined, and breeding kennels spread throughout Britain. During the war years numbers dropped dramatically but, thanks to the work of a few dedicated breeders, numbers gradually regained a firmer foothold by the 1970s.

Today Gordons are again in decline and have recently been designated a 'vulnerable native breed' by the Kennel Club. In 2018 there were 172 puppies registered, placing the Gordon setter at the lower end of the scale for gundogs, behind the Irish setter, pointer and English setter. Only the Irish red and white setter had fewer registrations at 51. Despite declining numbers, the Gordon is well represented in both shows and field trials and continues to excel, with several field trial champions made up to date. Although more popular as a family pet, the split between working and show strains has not been as divisive as in many other gundog breeds.





BREED CHARACTERISTICS

The Gordon setter is a large, tough and hardy dog well suited to cold and windy weather on upland moors in northern England and Scotland. With a noble and dignified bearing, it is slightly heavier and bigger than the other setters and tends to work at a slower pace, although this is less marked in today's field trial lines. Gordons are noted for their exceptional stamina and are capable of covering more than 50 miles in a day's work on the grouse moor.

Physically the Gordon is a stylish and handsome dog. It has a coal-black coat with distinctive tan markings of a rich chestnut colour. The coat is medium length and straight, with feathering on the chest, stomach, ears, legs and tail. Its deep head has a long muzzle and large nose, bright brown eyes and low set hanging ears. Its body has a level topline, long neck, sloping shoulders and muscular hindquarters. The tail is long and straight carried horizontally below the line of the back. The gait is steady and galloping with plenty of drive.

They are known to be extremely intelligent with a bold, outgoing temperament, although this often depends on who they're with. They can be less extroverted than other setters like the Irish setter and are known to form a strong bond with just one person. As dogs that have been selected to hunt independently, they are curious and headstrong by nature. They are well suited to people with strong personalities that are able to channel their intelligence and establish a bond based on respect. They require firm but gentle handling, and are slow to mature, reaching their prime at about three years.

Although originally bred in large kennels, today Gordons also make good family pets. They require about two hours of exercise a day, and once grown will take as much activity as you're willing to give them. Both puppies and adults can be very boisterous, so they're not the best choice for homes with young children. The coat should be groomed more than once a week. With people Gordons have an excellent disposition but can have moments with other dogs, so early socialisation is advised.

The breed is supported and promoted in the UK by four breed clubs and three rescue organisations.

VET'S CORNER

The Gordon setter is on the whole a healthy breed and can lead an active working life for 10 to 12 years, longer than many other gundogs. Like all purebred dogs, there are a few hereditary health conditions that can affect the breed, for which screening schemes and DNA tests are available.

They can be subject to a late onset form of Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), which can lead to loss of sight and blindness. The Kennel Club recommends that breeding stock undergo annual eye tests. The mutated gene has been identified (rcd4) and there is now a breed-specific DNA test to identify carriers and affected dogs.

Gordons are not as prone to hip dysplasia as some other large dogs, but the condition is present within the breed. Breeding stock should be screened under the BVA/Kennel Club scheme. There is a DNA test for Cerebellar Ataxia, a hereditary condition affecting balance and coordination, although so far few dogs have been affected.

Other health conditions to be aware of are bloat, primarily affecting large deep chested dogs, and hypothyroidism. In the latest Kennel Club health survey, based on over 200 dogs, the average life span was 12 years, and the most common causes of death cited were old age and tumours. Amongst living dogs, 103 reported no health problems. The most common health conditions reported in the remaining dogs were skin cysts, lipoma, otitis externa and mammary lumps.

IN THE FIELD

The traditional role of pointers and setters is to range far and wide over open terrain where game is not plentiful. Gordons are expected to hunt by quartering the ground and, once game is scented, to remain staunchly at point until their handler arrives. They then walk forward next to their handler to flush the bird or birds. They are expected to remain steady to wing and shot, and are not normally asked to retrieve fallen game, although this may happen on the Continent and in America.

As opposed to retriever, spaniel and HPR breeds, setters are expected to work at great distance from their handlers, hunting independently by using their initiative, intelligence and natural abilities. They hold their heads high to use the air to search body scent, rather than low to the ground like a spaniel. To sportsmen and spectators, the work of setters is thrilling and dramatic - the purest and most natural form of gundog work. In the words of the late gundog author Graham Cox, "Full gallop to seemingly instantaneous immobility is gundog work at its most visceral: the elements laid out on a vast canvas in stark relief. Classic work with bird dogs, it goes without saying, involves much more: but that moment of elevated drama lies elementally at the heart of it."

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING

Preparing pointers and setters for the field is different from training retrievers, spaniels or HPRs. No artificial means or simulated scenarios, like hunting and retrieving a dummy, can be used. After establishing the basics of early obedience most training takes place in the field, where young dogs have to resist many temptations and work at a distance.

Most handlers begin field training in the spring, when their dogs are about nine months to one year old. At this time game birds are paired, sit tight and are well distributed over the ground, so young dogs have plenty of opportunity to succeed and benefit from favourable scenting conditions. The goal is to teach a dog to use its natural abilities to range wide and fast and quarter the ground in a methodical manner, while remaining responsive to commands and under control. Handling is minimal, carried out mainly by hand signal and whistle to prevent the disturbance of game.

Early on a dog is taught to drop to command; to range and turn to whistle, hand signals and verbal commands; and to be steady to shot, fur and feather. Dogs are walked upwind and taught to range well out on moor or in stubble, turning on command when they reach their ranging limit. They are also taught to completely ignore hares and rabbits, and to drop on command at flush and when a shot is fired.

IN THE FIELD OF COMPETITION

Unlike spaniel, retriever and HPR field trials, pointer and setter field trials are mainly held outside the shooting season and no game is shot. The calendar begins in early March, with spring trials held on grouse in Scotland and on paired partridges in young corn in East Anglia. Stakes are again held in July and August before grouse shooting begins, starting in the north of England and working to the north of Scotland on the eve of the Twelfth. Autumn trials are held in early September, mainly on partridges and pheasants in stubble fields in the east of England. The season ends with the annual Champion Stake the second week of September, with the best dogs of the season taking part.

Within this year-round calendar, dogs may be run in three or four stakes in one week or several times in one month. Up to 45 dogs can compete in a stake, so getting a run is rarely a problem. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive as trials are organised by a small community of enthusiasts who genuinely enjoy the dog work and a day in beautiful scenery.

Stakes are held for all levels of training – puppy (under two years), novice, open and all-aged, in addition to specific breed stakes. At the start of the day a draw is held to establish the running order. Competing dogs are run as a pair or 'brace'. Two judges assess their work and decide whether or not to call back each dog for a second or subsequent rounds.





Two judges, a referee and a Gun walk forward upwind with a handler and dog spaced out at either side so that their work does not overlap. At the judges' request the dogs are cast off to quarter ahead. When a dog goes on point the handler goes up to it to walk forward with his dog to flush the bird or birds, at which point a blank is fired and the dog is expected to drop. The other dog is expected to back the pointing dog by either coming to point himself, standing still or dropping. If all goes well, the handlers return to the judges and make a new cast.

Judges assess dogs for an overall high standard of work, including excellent pace, stylish work, systematic hunting, firm and positive point and confident flush. Dogs may be discarded for a number of eliminating faults including false points, chasing, bumping (flushing) game, running out of control or making a noise. With so many dogs to be assessed, any dogs that commit a fault or fail to display quality work are quickly discarded, allowing more time to assess successful dogs. It is not uncommon for top awards to be withheld if the work on the day is not satisfactory. Many conditions can influence the outcome of a trial, such as weather, ground and the time of day. An element of luck is always involved, which adds to the excitement and makes the trials more like an actual day of shooting.

IS A GORDON RIGHT FOR YOU?

Many sportsmen today enjoy several days of driven shooting and will opt for a specialised worker like the retriever or a general-purpose gundog like spaniels and HPRs. But if you like the classic sport of shooting over your dog on upland moors or farmland, where enjoying dog work in beautiful scenery is more important than the size of the bag, the Gordon may be a good choice. This breed is well suited to an active sportsman or handler with a strong personality and experience with other gundogs. With the black and tan you'll not only have a handsome and stylish worker, you'll also help save one of Britain's most distinguished native breeds. *GJ*

Gordon setter

Group
Pointers and setters

Physical Traits
The largest and heaviest of setter breeds. Black medium-length coat with tan markings. Long muzzle, brown eyes and low set hanging ears. Long neck, sloping shoulders, muscular hindquarters and long straight tail.

Character
Intelligent, bold, outgoing. Curious, independent and strong-minded. Sensitive core that requires firm and fair handling. Slow to mature, remains active and fun loving for life. Excellent disposition with people but can be boisterous with small children. Early socialisation with other dogs recommended. Well suited to large home and garden in the country.

Daily care
Requires two hours of daily exercise and running. Should receive obedience and gundog training. Grooming more than once a week.

Health
Tough and hardy, lives on average 10 to 12 years. Annual eye tests, PRA (rcd4) DNA test and hip dysplasia screening recommended for breeding stock. Some cases of Cerebeller Ataxia. Can be subject to bloat and hypothyroidism.

At work
Noted for stamina, thoughtful work and excellent nose. Well suited to wet and windy conditions of native Scotland. Traditionally used to range far and wide in upland moors and stubble to hunt, point and flush grouse, partridges and pheasants.

Resources

Websites

britishgordonsetterclub.co.uk
www.gordonsetterassociation.com
www.gordonsetterclubofscotland.co.uk
www.workinggordonsetters.com

Books

The Story of The Gordon Setter
by Mildred Adams

The Field Gordon Setter: The Black and Tan Bombshell
by Susanne & Norman Sorby

Working Pointers and Setters
by David Hudson

Pointer and Setters
by Derry Argue





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GLENEAGLES, PERTH AND KINROSS

Starting from £390 B&B

◀ Golfers are no strangers to Gleneagles' reputation of being a premier destination to tee off. However, its proximity to remote Scottish wilderness means that its sporting opportunities are held in equal regard. Gleneagles is set amongst open hills, ancient royal forests and moorland – all of which is in the shadow of two Munros: Ben Vorlich and Stuc a'Chroin. This is surely the perfect venue, then, to glass for red deer under the guidance of one an experienced deerstalker or shoot blisteringly fast grouse.

A warm welcome for dogs is also par-for-the course here. All of Gleneagles' rooms are dog-friendly including its six luxury suites, allowing small to medium-sized dogs to stay in each room. For a £100 surcharge, dogs are granted with a dog bed, foam duvet, plastic floor mats with two bowls and a poop scoop. Dog-friendly accommodation is also available at The Gundog School, with state-of-the-art indoor heated kennels exclusively for dogs, with each furnished with a king-size dog bed with a deep and comfortable mattress, ensuring dogs stay in the lap of luxury.

Fee for staying with dog: Rooms £100 per dog per night; Kennels £48 per dog per night, and each additional dog sharing a kennel is £25

Allowed in bedroom: Y

Dog bed provided: Y in kennels

Allowed in restaurant/bar: N

Welcome pack: Y - foam duvet, plastic floor mats with two bowls and a poop scoop set

Kennelling: Y

USP: Luxury heated kennels with king-size dog beds

Hotel rules: Only small/medium sized dogs allowed in rooms. Dogs should have vaccination certificates with them and are expected to have been treated in advance for worms, fleas and kennel cough, and must have a dog registration form filled out and returned prior to arrival.

MUCKRACH COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, MORAYSHIRE

Starting from £129 B&B

▲ Muckrach is a former grouse shooting lodge with 16 luxurious bedrooms, a self-catering cottage and quite often, a piper who pipes for dinner guests. Many use Muckrach as a base during the shooting season but with this recently having come to a close, Muckrach presents the perfect opportunity to dust off the fly rod. The River Dulnain is directly in front of the hotel and offers two fishing pools just a short amble along the bank will take you to its confluence with the Spey – one of Scotland's iconic salmon fishing rivers.

There are five dog-friendly rooms here, which are all deep cleaned prior your stay to ensure the your pooch gets the very same high standard of cleanliness as the last. Dogs can also stay in The Dulnain Lodge – a private retreat in the grounds where owners can enjoy the hot tub. Dogs can dine with you in The Library, where they may even bump into Muckrach's very own resident dog, Murphy. Dogs stay at Muckrach for free.

Fee for staying with dog: N

Allowed in bedroom: Y

Dog bed provided: N

Allowed in restaurant/bar: Y - Dine with your dog in 'The Library'

Kennelling: N

Welcome pack: N

USP: Option to stay in exclusive, dog-friendly Dulnain Lodge

Notable points: Resident dog: Murphy, riverside location



CARNELL HOUSE, AYRSHIRE

From £3,250 plus VAT per night (based on a minimum of eight guns and £4,250 plus VAT with partners)

▲ Exclusive, fully-serviced hire of a stunning 14th century tower and mansion house with all your friends? Excellent craic. Part of the 2,000 acre Carnell Estate, Carnell House is at the heart of an illustrious Scottish driven shoot and is a popular stay for shooting parties. The shoot has been established for over 100 years, with 200 – 500 birds days run throughout the season.

The house itself consists of ten ensuite bedrooms, elegantly decorated and furnished with fine linens. Possessing equal grandeur are several reception rooms, including the impressive hall, and two dining rooms. As is standard issue with country houses, all feature roaring open fires and a fascinating collection of antiques. Two dining rooms, seating 22 and 14 respectively, create the perfect venue to enjoy post-shoot merriments and traditional Scottish fare cooked on the premises.

Carnell has lodged all sorts of interesting characters throughout the years. Not least Robert Burns, Scotland's National poet, who was born only a few miles away and is reputed to have visited Carnell frequently throughout his short life. It gives them a reason to raise a toast to his memory with a regular Burns Address to the Haggis! More contemporarily, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie rented out the whole house whilst Brad was on-set in Glasgow. Your dog may not be a revered poet or actor but it will still receive the same celebrity treatment – all areas of Carnell House are dog-friendly.

Fee for staying with dog: N

Allowed in bedroom: Y

Dog bed provided: N

Allowed in restaurant/bar: Y

Kennelling: Y

Welcome pack: N

USP: Whole house dog-friendly

Notable points: Secure gundog kennelling,

Hotel rules: exclusive house hire only

THE FIFE ARMS, ABERDEENSHIRE

Starting from £250 B&B

▶ Surrounded by the Cairngorms National Park, the Fife Arms promises a strange, surreal and eclectic aesthetic. There are over 200 works of taxidermy on the back stairs alone and a flying stag above the public bar. This alludes to its past as a former hunting lodge, and in unison with its fascinating collection of artwork, antique rugs and dashes of tartan promises a truly authentic Highland retreat.

It feels as if some grand hound should inhabit the Fife Arms. And so he does because the big, beautiful Bruno, who belongs to the hotel's owners, can often be found napping in the lobby along with fellow mutt Rosie. This extraordinary boutique hotel welcomes dogs in seven of the bedrooms and suites and all its communal spaces – just notify the hotel beforehand.

Everything about the place seems to go that little bit further than most and that includes its approach to dogs. Earlier this year, The Fife Arms partnered with award-winning pet accessory company, Dogrobes, to supply the hotel's canine guests with specialist tartan drying coats, which dry your dog in 30-minutes – perfect after exploring the hundreds of trails which cut through the Cairngorms. For real dog lovers, book into the 'Sharpe The Dog' room, a fitting tribute to one of Queen Victoria's favourite dogs, a loyal Collie companion who was always ready to scare off intruders.

Fee for staying with dog: N

Allowed in bedroom: Y

Dog bed provided: N

Allowed in restaurant/bar: Y

Kennelling: N

Welcome pack: N

USP: Quick drying 'Dogrobes'

Notable points: seven bedrooms and all communal spaces dog-friendly, resident dog: Bruno

Hotel rules: Notify hotel before arrival





KINLOCH LODGE, ISLE OF SKYE

Starting from £150 B&B (dinner included)

▼ Kinloch is in a particularly beautiful part of the Isle of Skye: located at the bottom of a long drive, the foot of a mountain and the head of Loch na Dal. Here you will find roaring fires, whisky on tap and plush beds. Use Kinloch as a base for fishing, foraging and wild walks with the dog or as a cosy retreat from tempestuous Inner Hebrides winds.

Nearby stalking opportunities mainly present themselves in the north-west of the island. Depending on your level of fitness, or the drams of whiskey had the night before; you can embark on a woodland stalk lasting three-to-four hours or a hill stalk around the Cuillin Mountain range. The latter promises outstanding views over the Isle of Skye. Marcello Tully, the only Brazilian-born chef in Britain to have held a Michelin star and former protégé of Michel Roux, heads the kitchen here and affectionately refers to the Isle of Skye as a "chef's paradise". This is reflected by the fine dining experience at Kinloch Lodge – showcasing a field-to-fork menu including seasonal venison, scallops and lamb - with even a sausage or two on the menu for your dog. Dogs can stay in all bedrooms (£20 per night surcharge) and grounds but not public areas.

Fee for staying with dog: £20
Allowed in bedroom: Y
Dog bed provided: N
Allowed in restaurant/bar: N
Kennelling: N
Welcome pack: N

USP: All bedrooms dog-friendly

Notable points: Countless nearby wild walks

Hotel rules: Dogs allowed in bedrooms and grounds but not public areas.

TRIGONY HOUSE HOTEL, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Starting from £125 B&B

▶ Trigony House Hotel are no strangers to hosting guests of the four-legged variety – they picked up first prize for the best dog-friendly hotel in the UK at the Best Loved Hotel Awards. So why do they have such a high calibre for hosting canines?

On arrival, you will get a welcome pack including a map of the best walks in the area and gourmet doggy treats. Once you've picked a route and explored the four acres of woodland or nearby dog-friendly beach that surrounds Trigony, there's every chance that your dog may be soaked through – cue free washing facilities, towels, doggy bed and dog food to prepare for their evening kip. Also, if you want a day out without your dog, with prior notice they can arrange a dog sitter for you. All this is included in the £9.50 surcharge and every dog that stays at Trigony gets their own passport, so after 4 stays your furry friend gets the 5th stay for free.

Trigony was once a hunting and fishing lodge for nearby Closeburn Castle. Those close links remain today, with salmon and trout fishing on the River Nith or walked up shooting on the Queensbury Estate available on enquiry.

Fee for staying with dog: £9.50
Allowed in bedroom: Y
Dog bed provided: Y
Allowed in restaurant/bar: Y
Kennelling: N

Welcome pack: Y – walking map, dog treats/food, towels

USP: Doggy passport

Notable points: Voted Best Dog-Friendly Hotel in the UK at the Best Loved Hotel Awards







KNOCKDERRY HOUSE, ARGYLL AND BUTE

Prices from £135 B&B

◀ This picturesque country house hotel, which sits on the shore of Loch Long, is just 45 minutes from Glasgow Airport yet is remote enough to explore the beautiful Loch Lomond and Trossachs area. The owners are doggy through and through, and said: "We feel it is important that our guests with dogs receive exactly the same experience as any other guest". The proof lies in their resident border collie, Rosie, who has been part of the team since 2005 and provides a warm welcome to all guests - although she is more interested in snoozing these days.

Your canine lad or lassie is allowed in four dog-friendly bedrooms and all public areas apart from the main restaurant. However, they do offer dog-friendly dining in their 'Ante-Room' with beautiful views across the loch. A large lawn out the front the hotel or the nearby beach lends themselves to endless throws of the tennis ball.

Their pet package costs £10 per night for one dog or £15 per night for two dogs, with a house limit of four dogs at any one time.

Fee for staying with dog: £10 for one dog; £15 for two dogs.

Allowed in bedroom: Y

Dog bed provided: N, although soft crate available upon request should guests wish to dine alone

Allowed in restaurant/bar: Y except main restaurant

Kennelling: N

Welcome pack: Y - biscuits, towels and bowls

USP: doggy owners ensure dogs treated the same as any other guest

Notable points: Resident border collie

Hotel rules: House limit of 4 dogs

Fabulous Faccombe

This splendid Hampshire estate played host to the 90th Cocker Championships at the beginning of January.

PHOTOGRAPHER: NIGEL KIRBY/KENNEL CLUB













Will Clulee and FTCh Trochry Eau Rouge of Poolgreen from Kidderminster took the honours at the prestigious 90th running of the Kennel Club's Cocker Championship in early January. The three-year-old bitch, better known as Tink, is owned by Philip Lewis from Llanelli, Dyfed, and handled by Clulee from Kidderminster, Worcestershire.

The competition is sponsored by Skinner's Field & Trial and was held at Faccombe Estate, Hampshire, by kind permission of Faccombe Estate Ltd. The event saw a total of 35 entries, demonstrating the continuing popularity of the working cocker in competitive gundog sports.

Will said: "I am absolutely thrilled to have made Tink a Championship winner, and even more delighted for the owner of the dog, Mr Lewis. The ground suited her perfectly as she has natural talent and plenty of drive. Thank you very much to all the judges for awarding us first place."

This is the fourth time that Clulee has won the Championship, having been awarded the title most recently in 2013. *GJ*

The judges were: Martin Deacon, Wayne Greig, Martin Ford and Martin Smee.







RESULTS

FIRST ▲
FTCh Trochry Eau Rouge of Poolgreen,
owned by Philip Lewis and handled
by Will Clulee

SECOND
FTCh Endowood Faith,
owned by Jay Lowrey and handled
by Ian Openshaw

THIRD
FTCh Endowood Francesca,
owned by Alex Hayes and handled
by Ian Openshaw

FOURTH
FTCh Mallowdale Shine,
owned by Steve Charlton and handled
by Ian Openshaw

DIPLOMAS OF MERIT

FTCh Glenugie's Nalani,
owned and handled by Jamie Reid

FTCh Poolgreen Griffin,
owned and handled by Will Clulee

FTCh Omachie Beinn Lui,
owned by Mike Forbes and handled
by Alec Coutts

FTCh Howesyke Daisey,
owned and handled by James Luxford

FTCh Wolferton Drama,
owned by HM Queen Elizabeth II and
handled by Ian Openshaw

FTCh Murrayeden Majestic,
owned and handled by Andy Skinner

FTCh Glenugie's Tempest,
owned and handled by Jamie Reid

FTCh Howesyke Amey,
owned and handled by James Luxford

Kiltonbeck Iron,
owned and handled by Martyn Elliott

GUNS' CHOICE

FTCh Glenugie's Tempest,
owned and handled by Jamie Reid, whilst
the Peter Hall Salver was awarded to FTCh
Timsgarry Alpine, owned and handled by
John Robertson.

MY DAILY ROUTINE

WILL CLULEE





WILL CLULEE of Poolgreen Gundogs in Shropshire won the 90th Cocker Championships in January with his three-year-old liver bitch Tink (FTCh Trochry Eau Rouge of Poolgreen). He has now made up an impressive 34 champions since 1989 (28 cockers and six English springers) and here he tells *Gundog Journal* about home life with his dogs.

I live in a cottage in rural Shropshire with my partner Sue and our two daughters Catherine and Jessica. We run Poolgreen Gundogs from our home. I have been training gundogs for more than 30 years. We breed, train and compete cockers, springers and labradors as shooting companions and for trialling. We have a selection of field trial champion stud dogs - springers and cockers. We also take dogs in for residential training and clients come to our home for one-to-one tuition plus we do the occasional training days. We work seven days a week, 365 days a year. But just two dogs live in the house – both retired champions.

WHAT IS YOUR DAILY ROUTINE WITH THE DOGS?

We start at 6am – cleaning kennels, feeding and exercising the dogs. Then it's breakfast for us. After that we will take out dogs which are at different stages of their training. Sometimes it is just playing with our young puppies or working on some sitting, retrieving and dummy work, going to different places to cover all ground terrain - common land, bracken, woods, steams and even into town. It depends on the time of year and the dog.

If we have puppies then we have to fit in extra feeds – normally up to three a day. At 3.30pm it's feeding time again, and time to clean kennels once more. We have an enclosed half-acre paddock that is surrounded by secure six-foot fencing and floodlights so it can be used year-round. While we are cleaning out the kennels the dogs are allowed to free play in this area. In the summer we allow the dogs to be out there for two hours on some warm evenings. We also segregate the dogs and bitches to prevent any accidents – we don't really want unplanned puppies.

During the season we also take the retired stud dogs picking-up and the younger up-and-coming dogs beating. We perform regular health checks of all the dogs which includes grooming and flea and worming treatment. In amongst that we have to answer the phone and email for all enquiries. Although I will admit Sue does all the emails and paperwork. During the shooting season I am focused on keeping the dogs fit and trained and ready for competing. If I am not competing, then I am training. There is always something to do.

We feed the dogs on CSJ complete dry food. This natural food for working dogs was developed by champion sheepdog triallers Ceri Rundle and her father H. Glyn Jones from Denbighshire. We have used it for the past 20 years and swear by it. It is a very consistent, good quality food. *GJ*

For a full report on the Cocker Championships turn to pages 106-109 of this issue.

SUPERB SPRINGERS

The historic and beautiful Blenheim estate was a memorable venue for the 2020 Springer Championships, where a familiar name took the honours.

NIGEL KIRBY/KENNEL CLUB







FTCh Mountvue Heidi, a three-year-old English springer spaniel bitch, and her owner, Ian Openshaw from Shropshire, won the prestigious Kennel Club Any Variety Spaniel (excluding cocker) Championship for 2020, alongside Simon Dixon, who handled Heidi during the competition.

The Championship is sponsored by Skinner's Field & Trial and was held at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, in the middle of January, by gracious permission of the Duke of Marlborough.

The Championship received a total of 66 original entries for the competition, with 59 dogs and handlers ultimately running in the event, and saw some outstanding dog work on display from the competing spaniels.

Ian Openshaw said: "Heidi has always been a good dog – she was a field trial champion at 18 months old and we always felt that it was her destiny to win the Championship. She's able to face any type of cover, and in brambles she's the best hunting dog I have ever owned. The Championship judges said she was the best dog on both sides and we are absolutely delighted to have won at Blenheim."

Heidi was also awarded the Gun's Choice, as well as Best Bitch and Best Hunting Spaniel. The judges at the competition were Peter Avery, Martin Ford, Chris Thurston-Woolnough and Mick Walsh. *GJ*













RESULTS

FIRST ▲
FTCh Mountvue Heidi, owned by Ian Openshaw and handled by Simon Dixon.

SECOND
Int FTCh Meadowbeat Neala of Greenbrush, owned and handled by Raymond Wilson. (Also best newcomer handler)

THIRD
Cornermarsh Charisma, owned and handled by David Horseman.

FOURTH
FTCh Surefly Sassy, owned and handled by Terry Siwek.

DIPLOMAS OF MERIT

FTCh Hagghouse Warrior, owned and handled by Andy Cunningham

FTCh Broomfield Anna, owned and handled by Eddie Scott

FTCh Bucklawren Krusoe, owned and handled by Simon Jones

FTCh Murrayeden Brandi, owned and handled by Andy Skinner

Spirocon Annie of Jenoren, owned and handled by Jim Adamson

FTCh Helmsway Harrington, owned and handled by Ian English

Int FTCh Luthmhor Draco, owned and handled by Steve Blackwell

Cornermarsh High Scar Girl, owned and handled by David Horsman

FTCh Bucklawren Luna of Stockingford, owned and handled by Maurice Stanbury

Kansas Kate, owned and handled by Sarah Higgins

FTCh Fuselea Delight, owned and handled by Ian Clarke

Int FTCh Gardenrath Cheyenne, owned and handled by Ed McCauley

Cowarnecourt Keisha, owned and handled by Angelo Lo Curto

FTCh Gorsebay Snipe, owned and handled by Craig Lewis

FTCh Willowsaul Whizz, owned and handled by Kev Richardson

FTCh Syncerus Solo of Creccamarsh, owned and handled by Richard Biggs

FTCh Hillfighter Alps, owned by Veronica Selby and handled by Jon Bailey

FTCh Hilluxdream Clipper of Cheweky, owned and handled by Mark Whitehouse

FTCh Dawsonlee Jellybean, owned and handled by Simon Dixon

FTCh Walkers Winkle, owned and handled by Aubrey Ladyman

Delflush Dice, owned and handled by Martin Bell

IRISH RETRIEVER CHAMPIONSHIPS

On testing ground

The glorious Glenoo shooting estate in County Tyrone provided perfect conditions for the best dogs to shine, as Mary Murray reports.





IRISH RETRIEVER CHAMPIONSHIPS

The winner of the 53rd Irish Retriever Championships left no doubt he is a dog that can face any challenging retrieve on any type of ground. If the value of a working gundog is measured in versatility then Int FTCh Miller McDuff is the worthiest of winners.

He won the Irish Retriever Championship in 2017 at Shelton Abbey where he proved his worth as a dog capable of sitting steady under one of the heaviest pheasant drives in the country. In early December 2019 he won the IGL Retriever Championship in Scotland, from an entry of 64 dogs over three days and then, less than two weeks later, he emerged victorious at the 2019 Irish Championship for the second time.

A GENEROUS HOST

The venue for this year's championship was the Glenoo shooting estate. Nestled between the south Tyrone mountains and the valleys of Slieve Beagh, the shoot spreads out over 30,000 acres of the wildest Irish landscape. It offers a wide range of ground with drives developed around the natural topography of the area.

We were here by the kind invitation of Mr Tom Woods, who has been a long-time supporter of gundog trials and has hosted spaniel trials, HPR trials and retriever trials at Glenoo over the years. This was the first time, though, that a Championship from any of the gundog sections has been held here.

The work to make the ground ready for the championships was very evident over the two days with ample supply of game and the smooth transition between drives. The committee are indebted to Tom and his team for his patience, help and support throughout the year of preparation. As always this event relies on the generosity of donations from the various retriever clubs throughout the country and also from another long-time supporter of Irish dog sports Connolly's Red Mills.

THE QUALIFIERS IN NUMBERS

The judges were Paul Toal (Ireland), Gary McCutcheon (Ireland), Ian Openshaw (UK) and Roddy Forbes (Scotland). Forty six dogs qualified initially but only 39 made the card for the first morning with one withdrawal on the day. Of those running, 25 qualified as stake winners with the remaining 13 dogs eligible through second placings. All the dogs running were labradors with the exception of one golden retriever bitch. FTCh Tealcreek Isla is owned and handled by John Williamson. She has a strong record in the championships, having gained a Diploma of Merit two years ago at Shelton and making it to the final 10 dogs last year at Corrard.

The oldest dog to make the running order was FTCh Rosenallis Enzo, at more than eight-years-old. And having broken his leg earlier in the year it was an amazing achievement for him to be able to take his place in the running order. Meanwhile the youngest dog competing was two-and-a-half year old Tullyah Jasper, owned and handled by Tony Rodgers, who qualified by winning the Derby Stake at Mohill last year.

On the first morning low clouds over the mountains with little wind and heavy persistent rain saw us heading into the lower valley, down through a moisture laden old spruce wood which opened up to an area of rushy fields and bracken for a pheasant drive.

Even numbered dogs were judged by Gary McCutcheon and Ian Openshaw for the first round. And uneven numbered dogs were judged by Paul Toal and Roddy Forbes, who took their place up on the hill to the left of the drive, separated from a wood by a wide bank of bracken. The drive was short, but produced enough birds to see us through the majority of first round retrieves. Dogs were sent from open ground into woodland out of sight. Although these retrieves were not long distance it does require the handler to be patient and to trust their dog to find the bird unaided.

Five dogs went out on this round, and once the ground was cleared, our host invited us to follow him to the duck drive. On the way I was told this particular drive is fondly known as 'The Congo' because once a dog or a person steps into the cover they become invisible until they emerge back from whence they came. However, this cover caused few problems to the dogs on the side of the line where Paul Toal and Roddy Forbes were judging.

AN ELUSIVE DUCK

Down by the lakeshore the dogs under judges McCutcheon and Openshaw were facing quite a different scenario. A mark had been given on a duck which had landed hard in a cluster of tall old spruce trees to the left far bank of the lake. It was a long swim, the width was about 90 yards with an added distraction of the drive continuing and duck landing to the far right of the lake.

Two dogs were tried initially and failed to reach the fall. The next dog Tievenamara Eve, handled by Davis, was sent to retrieve a duck from the lake which had fallen in line with the duck on the far bank and was successful. The next dog Tamrose Aragon, handled by Matty Lambden, was then sent for the original bird on the far shore. He made the long swim across, but unfortunately, he pulled too far to the right out of the area of the fall and was called up. Then Quarrypool Glenda handled by John Behan was also tried and failed. ↦









Next up was Int FTCh Miller McDuff. He crossed the lake, hunted the area asked, and held the ground well but found nothing. The dog was called in and on his return the judges asked that he pick a bird that had fallen in the water while he had been working the far bank. This he did and he was credited with a retrieve.

FTCh Tealcreek Isla handled by John Williamson was sent next. She made it to the far bank and did a good job holding the area without a find. When she was called up, however, she persisted in hunting which saw the end of her time in the competition. Finally Dorretsland Goshawk handled by Hazel Murphy was also tried but again pulled out to the right of the lake and was called in.

AQUATIC DOGS PROVE THEIR WORTH

The judges then moved to clear the ground in the woods along the lake and several tidy retrieves were undertaken here before we moved back to the lakeshore again. The low winter sun had broken through the clouds and was sitting just above the level of the pine trees as two more dogs took their place along the slipway at the lake.

Tullyah Jasper, the youngest dog in the championships, owned and handled by Tony Rogers was sent for a retrieve across the middle of the lake to the far shore. The retrieve was directly into the sun but by now the high trees that surrounded the lake cast the far bank into deep shadow. So, not only was the distance longer than the previous water retrieve, it was also extremely difficult for the handler to help his dog once it entered the shadows on the far side. Tony's dog made the far bank and flushed a duck that had been marked by the judge standing there. He was credited with the retrieve. For a dog so young he showed incredible maturity in coping with such a technically difficult retrieve.

Next up was Trefalwyn Kribensis of Shadowbrae, (second last year), owned and handled by Richard Johnston. He cast his dog across the lake to follow the ribbon of sunlight that danced along the surface. One more push to encourage the dog before he disappeared into the shadows on the far shore. Our judge on the far bank radioed in to indicate the dog had reached the area of the fall. With a little handling from Richard simply to steady the dog in the area a duck was flushed and flew low over the lake. He was credited with the retrieve and was called back across the lake. It was a long cold swim back to the shore, part of which he had to negotiate his way between two rafts of duck that had drifted into his line. He showed incredible self-control by swimming straight through without disturbing a single bird off the water.

With the clouds breaking up we took advantage of that little extra daylight and headed up the valley to a drive called the Watchtower. This was a small compact drive across



bracken and heather. The judges were hoping to finish out all second round retrieves before closing their books for the day.

Unfortunately darkness crept into the valley sooner than hoped. On the final retrieve of the day we saw FTCh Drumgoose Fabagas of Aithness fail to make the fall and called up. FTCh Ringbarn Fletching, handled by Mr Michael Corr, followed up on that retrieve. He made a lovely job of going straight to the area and finding the bird, but unfortunately switched on his return seeing him out of the running. The judges conferred and finished for the day.

THE DAY TWO DOZEN

Twelve dogs and handlers lined out for day two. Four of the 12 were still to complete their second round retrieves. A cold night gave way to a bright morning with broken cloud and the odd snow flurry. We were headed to the valley. This is the place for which Glenoo is best known as a walked-up trialling venue. Long sloping sides are cut through by a small fast flowing river which seems to run on to infinity. It offered wonderful viewing for the gallery and the dogs would be tested greatly on their ability to mark and to run directly to a fall without hesitating at the white water rushing through at the bottom of the valley.

Last year's winner FTCh Shimnavale Jasmine of Drumnamoe handled by John Barr Jnr, was the first dog sent. Hesitation at the water cost her and she was called up quickly.

Lost on this round also were: Crosstone Trickster handled by Kieran Coey, Copperbirch Arthur of Scappaflow handled by Martin Fitzgerald and FTCh Mayberry Boitien handled by David Fitzgerald.

A PLEASURE TO WATCH

So we were down to the final eight and as we made our way along the valley the terrain changed making it a little less straightforward. Rocky outcrops on one side of the valley matched by small birch and spindle woods on the other pushed the dogs, handlers, guns and gallery higher up both of the valley sides, meaning retrieves were longer and more technically difficult.

But the final eight dogs were a true pleasure to watch. Casting without hesitation and crossing the river without difficulty. FTCh Skerryview Alisha at Annaloughan (the only bitch in the final eight), Int FTCh Miller McDuff and Dees Companion handled by Damien Kelly really stood apart in these final round of retrieves mainly due to their casting skills, style and ability to hold an area when asked.

The final retrieve of the day epitomised, for me, just why Glenoo is such a wonderful ground for testing the merits of good trialling dogs. Dees Companion was sent for a retrieve that had fallen in line with the last Gun onto the top crest of the valley on the far side. He took the line, never hesitated when crossing the river, and headed up the far bank with speed and style. It took just one further push to get him past the scent of a previous fall but then he did not stop until told to do so by his handler. A quick find then he was on his way home with as much style and speed as before.

When this ground was offered we knew it would be challenging for all sorts of reasons and it did not disappoint. Glenoo proved itself as an unforgiving master. It is ground where mistakes on the part of dog or handler cannot be hidden and where really the best dogs on the day shone through. *GJ*

IRISH RETRIEVER CHAMPIONSHIPS





The judges

RESULTS

FIRST ▲
Int FTCh Miller McDuff owned and handled by Declan Boyle.
Trophies for 1st place were: Redmills perpetual trophy, winners trophy sponsored by Albert Titterington, The Knight Frank Ganly Walters perpetual trophy, The Barbara Eustace Duckett memorial trophy and the Maude perpetual Challenge Cup.

SECOND
Dees Companion owned and handled by Damien Kelly. He received The Auckland perpetual trophy.

THIRD
FTCh Corrib Darcy owned and handled by Mr Paul O Brien. He received The Barra Flynn Memorial perpetual trophy

Top placed bitch was awarded to FTCh Skerryview Alisha at Annaloughan owned and handled by Peter Colville. He received The Fred McGuirk perpetual trophy.

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SOFA SURFING SPANIELS

Having fallen in love with shooting later in life Jo Bennett and her springer Clover won top-placed spaniel at the Chudleys Championship in 2019. Jo's dogs are now proof that being allowed on the sofa is no barrier to success.

Tell us about your home life?
I live in a little cottage on the outskirts of Faversham in Kent. I have no children and I am single, working as a personal assistant in the private sector. I break all the usual rules when it comes to my dogs, Clover, Chilli and Monty - not only do they sleep in the house, but on my bed and sofa.

What is your daily routine with the dogs?
If I am working, I wake up at 7.30am and I take the dogs to a quiet field somewhere or nearby Ashdown Forest for hunting in the bracken. They go out again at lunchtime and I normally spend one and a half hours training a day across them all. But it really depends on the time of year, how well they are doing and all the other variables of daily life.

What exercises do you carry out when training?
I split it across hunting and retrieving. Spaniels are obviously born busy little hunters - I love watching them hunt cover and watching their body language. For retrieving, I vary long distance retrieves, blinds, and crossing ditches, cover and fences – basically anything that could be a distracting obstacle to finding a dummy/game. I alter the terrain and cover as much as possible – not only to keep it interesting for the dogs but to also teach them different sight and scent situations. If I think they are running a bit bored during the summer I will defrost some game for them to retrieve.

To improve fitness I take them to the beach to free run. I know many trainers do not allow playtime, but I think it is good for their heads to have a bit of time off and enjoy themselves, especially if we've been doing some intense training or competing.

I do not allow it the day before a competition however - I like them to be focused and have their serious heads on as part of their preparation. Sometimes I just take them for a long walk on the lead, controlled walking is great for fitness too. Mainly I train alone, but I get together with my friend Mike Hazell-Smith when possible, as it is important to train alongside other dogs and help each other with putting out blinds and throwing dummies.

I always structure our training time so that we train to our weaknesses, but I also make sure we regularly revisit exercises that we are usually good at so that we cover everything. It's easy to take strengths for granted and these can become rusty if left too long.

Where do you go picking-up?
We are out picking-up once a fortnight at Finedon in Northampton. It is a long way to travel from Kent, but it is worth it as I have some great friends on this shoot. The picking-up team is organised by Mick Maher who bought one of Clover's pups, Chip, two years ago – so it's lovely to be out working dogs from the same family together. I did not grow up with shooting, so I am happy to have found it later in life as a result of acquiring Clover. I am hoping to find some local picking-up in Kent, now that we have settled in following our house move and renovation a couple of years ago.

How did you get started in competing gundogs?
I was 38 when I acquired Clover, my first ever gundog. At the time I was living and working as a yard manager for one of the horse followers of the Old Surrey & Burstow hunt. My friend asked me to help look after her litter of springer pups, which I jumped at as they were adorable and in exchange I was offered a puppy. I adored the mother, Meg, and had taken her beating, so had no reason to hesitate.

However, Clover was way more than I could handle, and by the time she was six months old she was fast becoming feral. I had underestimated her drive for hunting and she was pretty much self-employed. I went to the late John Pay, chairman of Kent Working Spaniel Club, who gave me a few lessons and I started to get the measure of her. We worked hard and when she was 18 months old he suggested we enter a novice working test – which we won. ↦

At that point I realised Clover was a gifted dog and I owed it to her to compete regularly. He then suggested we enter an open working test - we won that as well plus two more, including a water test. She was also awarded Edenbridge & Oxted Best Hunting Spaniel in 2014 and then she had a career break to have puppies - that's how I ended up with Chilli. I then trained Chilli with Robin Russell for a few years to learn about field trials. And in the summer months I started taking Clover to scurries.

Competition was actually the last thing I wanted to do with the dogs, as I suffer terribly from nerves. I much preferred the idea of picking-up or beating or even enjoying dog walks with them, but the girls seemed to enjoy the training and competitions. I'm glad we chose this road now as it's been a brilliant learning curve for me, and I've met some lovely people along the way too.



Tell us about Clover?

She is not a typical springer. She is demure and quiet. In a way she is quite cat-like because she doesn't like it if you instigate a cuddle - she only likes cuddles on her terms. If you trim her nails or brush her teeth she finds it a complete invasion of privacy and has a sulk. A friend of mine is a vet nurse and once cleaned Clover's teeth and she wouldn't acknowledge her for two years.

She is also quite two-faced – she will happily go off with a stranger if she thinks that person might have something she wants. She really sulks if I take Chilli out without her. When it comes to training, I cannot tell her off – she will either hold a grudge or stop working completely, so I have to make sure she is happy the whole time. She is quirky but I know what makes her tick.

If I go to the same field to train too often or she thinks we are being repetitive, she puts a face on and has even refused to get out of the car. And then will hide between someone else's legs to show her disapproval. It's amusing, because she thinks she's training me to do things her way – luckily she doesn't realise I have the measure of her. I love her tenacious attitude to work and she absolutely loves competitions and rises to the challenge every time – she can take the pressure of being handled, which is brilliant. I'm very lucky with her because she gets me out of trouble when I mess up my handling – she makes me look a much better handler than I am and is the architect of her own successes.

Tell us about Chilli?

Chilli is demonstrative with her affections and constantly wants to be the closest person sitting next to me or walking next to me. She likes being centre of my attention and will literally put her face between me and my phone/laptop to be in my line of vision. She's only my second dog to train, so I'm still learning too. It has been fascinating to watch how differently she has developed from how Clover did. As a youngster she wanted to negotiate on the finer details of training, for example she wanted to only squat as oppose to sit properly and it took some consistency and perseverance to win - it's obviously an important exercise to perfect.

Now mature, in the field Chilli is keen to please and doesn't want to go wrong. She isn't much of a fan of scurries yet, she needs her confidence building up - but watch this space because we are working on it. Fingers crossed she will be mated soon and I simply cannot wait for a new pup to train and see what he/she is like in personality.

You and Clover won top placed spaniel and reserve champion at the Chudleys Gundog Championship last year. How did that feel?
It was the strangest, but loveliest feeling. I was nervous in the mess tent but once I got into the ring and saw the exercises we had to do, then we just focused. I wasn't nervous about her because I know she is a good dog, but I wondered if the crowd might put her off – it felt like there were thousands of people watching and as the day wore on I could really feel the atmosphere. I didn't help her as much as I should have done in the final, so that was my mistake. But she didn't put a foot wrong all day and when she finished her final water retrieve I came out in goose bumps and had a lump in my throat. I remember the crowd cheering her home and she seemed to find a new gear for the last stretch. I could quite easily have had a cry – I was so proud of her. All that hard work culminated in that moment and I was just so thrilled we had had the chance for people to see how good she is. Although I'd love to, I do not do this full time or professionally, or with lots of ground and equipment, but I'd love people to see that these achievements are all possible for normal folk like me - whose dogs sleep on their owner's bed.

What have been your other most notable wins?
Chilli won a novice field trial first time out, and had a Certificate of Merit and a 3rd in an Open. And Monty (my rescue mongrel) had his first competition this year and won Best Veteran at a Blindley Heath TractorFest in the summer – very proud moment, 14 years in the making.

Who do you turn to for training advice?
Literally anybody who I see doing well with their dogs. I'm quite happy to walk up to people and say "how do you get your dog to do that?" Sometimes Clover loses her head and thinks she knows better. This has been an ongoing battle with her, however I've put her in scenarios to train this out and I think we are winning – but I don't take it for granted. Chilli is not always good at going a long way back and stops to ask for help. I need to build up her confidence with this. I am appalling at throwing dummies, which is one of the reasons I like to train with Mike. I actually have very little equipment. I am not a big believer in buying every training gizmo on the market, mainly because I couldn't afford to. I generally rely on a variety of dummies, a starter pistol and borrowing some quiet spaces to train in.

What advice do you have for a newbie wanting to compete for the first time?
Observe the people who are doing well and ask them for some tips. Book lessons with people that are achieving what you want to achieve. Be kind, consistent and committed to your dog if you want to achieve your goals. Learn about your dog's personality – what works for one dog won't necessarily work for another dog. If you have a bad day, just get back in the car and go home - there is always tomorrow, dogs are not machines and can have an off day just like we do. *GJ*



DUAL CHAMPION BANCHORY BOLO

This dog with a dreadful past was nurtured by a remarkable woman to become a Dual Champion. By Patrice Fellows.

Banchory Bolo was the first labrador to become a Dual Champion. He and his owner, Lorna, Countess of Howe, led remarkable lives and left an enduring legacy on the breed. In Lady Howe's words, Bolo was a gundog of exceptional intelligence and unique talents: "I think it is only fair to such a great labrador that he should be paid tribute to and be made known as a dog who could train and handle human beings, because through my intimate knowledge and personal devotion to him I certainly learnt more from him then he did from me."

Lady Howe is considered one of the early benefactors of the breed. She acquired her first labrador Scandal of Glynn in 1913, became very active on both the bench and field, and co-founded The Labrador Retriever Club with her friend Lord Knutsford in 1916. She served as its Honorary Secretary and then Chairman until her death in 1961.

A DICKENSIAN TALE

Bolo's rags to riches story is worthy of a tale by Charles Dickens. It began when Lady Howe's first labrador Scandal sired his only litter of 13 puppies in December 1915 before dying early of canine typhus in 1917. Lady Howe had been devoted to Scandal and set about trying to find the one male puppy from this litter to fill the gap left by his loss. Her husband eventually traced the puppy, named Bolo. He had been through several owners and trainers and had what she called "a really bad police record", despite his excellent pedigree. Bolo was offered to her by the current owner, with the proviso that if she could not make anything of him she would have him 'destroyed'.

She collected Bolo at Liverpool Street Station in London in February 1918, a surly and ill-tempered dog that was heavily muzzled and chained. At her home she released his chains to find that he was terrified of people, refused to come near her and eluded recapture. Furthermore, he had caught a chill during his journey and became seriously ill. Lady Howe nursed him back to health over three weeks and gradually won back his trust and confidence. He became her devoted, life-long companion. She later took him to Scotland to test his worth as a gundog and trained him to be steady to the gun by "shooting rabbits with a rifle from a pony cart."

ANOTHER CLOSE SHAVE

Bolo had one more close call with death in Shropshire, where Lady Howe took him to prepare for field trials. One evening in the stable yard the sound of a cracking whip brought back his old terror of dog 'breaking' methods; he bolted over a spiked gate and disappeared for several hours, eventually returning home with serious injuries. Although Lady Howe was once more urged to put him down, she resisted and found a veterinary surgeon to stitch him up. Bolo could no longer compete that season, but the following year he ran in trials and quickly won two open stakes, making up the title of Field Trial Champion and then Show Champion.

As her constant companion Bolo was not heavily used at stud, but he was an influential sire and produced many offspring that also won at trials and in shows. In Countess Howe's words, he was one of the most intelligent dogs she'd ever seen, quick to learn and never forgetful of what he'd already learnt. He loved to play with children, was gentle with puppies and never sought to fight with other dogs.

In the field he had an exceptional nose and natural ability, collecting runners after other dogs had failed, and was always anxious to please. Physically, he had a beautiful head with a kind and intelligent expression, and excellent hindquarters - a trait he passed on to his progeny.

A REMARKABLE WOMAN

Lady Howe was one of the few breeders of her era to successfully combine show and work by making up a number of dual champions in the breed. She is also one of the few distinguished handlers to win the IGL Retriever Championship four times: three times with FTCh Balmuto Jock, and then again in 1936 with FTCh Balmuto Hewildo, this time handled by Mr T Gaunt.

She also made up field trial champions with spaniels and pointers and won the AV Spaniel Championship back to back in 1926 and 1927 with Banchory Bright. Lady Howe proved in the earliest era that, in the gundog world, women could compete alongside men and reach the highest levels of success.

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