

The adventures of Miss Briony in the moorlands (Week 1)

I am writing in English as I get messages from people from all over the world asking me questions, an Italian version might follow.

Well, I finally have a moment to write down what I experienced during last week. I reached the UK (after a long trip through Switzerland and France) only seven days ago, and so many things have already happened. First of all I AM HERE! There had been moments and happenings during which I felt almost sure this dream of mine was going to remain... Just a dream.

Let's go back to what happened last year. In July 2015, I came to the UK to watch the Champion Stake. I liked everything I experienced here and I was especially impressed by the dogs' training level. I liked the way the dogs were trained and how this kind of training allowed them to produce nice performances. Italians are believed to have great English Setters, great English Pointers and great field trials: this is true, in some ways, and false in some other ways, at least in my very humble opinion! I recognize the strenght of our trials and of our breeding choices, but I perceive the UK FT trials to be more suitable to my mindset. Also, our English Setters are trained differently (let's say they are sort of wilder) and I have never thought that a dog belonging to this breed could be trained to such high obedience standards.



At that time Briony was finishing her Show Championship (her full name is IT. Ch. Briony del Cavaldrossa) and I was already planning to train her for Field Trials in the hope of having a Dual Ch. She comes from a working bloodline, she had been my personal rough shooting dog since she was about 7 months old and she had proved me (and other people, including judges who shoot over her) to have all a dog needs to compete in Italian field trials. However, things were not so easy: I knew I could train a dog to be a rough shooting dog, but I was aware I was lacking the skills needed to train a dog for field trials. Once again, Italy is different from the UK: most of the dogs running at trials are prepared and handled by professional handlers/trainers and the dog needs to live with them at their kennels. I knew I was not going to give "Princess Briony", who sleeps on the couch, to anyone and that I wanted to learn how to train her.

So... the quest for a good trainer began and, as happened in the past, with my very first English Setter, the smart great people willing to help me were the Deutsch Drahthaar (GWP)

people: they are so keen on obedience that they were just what I needed. The first part of the training, from Sept 2015 until Spring 2016, was done under the supervision of a retired gamekeeper known as "the shaman" or "white feather". He now owns a drahthaar but he used to own an English Pointer and had trained hundreds of dogs belonging to different breeds (he is much into deer tracking dogs at the moment!) to the highest levels. He worked with us for months, asking absolutely no money while teaching us so much... I am not sure I will ever be able to thank him enough. After the shooting season ended, however, he no longer had access to any grounds suitable to train an English Setter and I had to rely on a tiny piece of ground an estate and its gamekeeper offered me. This gamekeeper (who goes under the name of Ezio) did his best to help, but I felt I was still needing some supervision. To my surprise, Briony began improving very quickly, and at this point I started thinking I could maybe trial her in the UK. It was May when unexpectedly my friend Claudio (who trains GWP's and GSP's professionally) stepped in. I think he was so intrigued by my plans, that he really did his best to help us, especially scolding me each time I did not feel good enough as a trainer/handler. So well... Thanks to you all: White Feather, Ezio, Claudio, the GWP training group Amatori Drahthaar (Fabrizio, Bruno, Monica, Gianluca...) and all the people who, in the years, allowed me great opportunities to go shooting with Briony on private (expensive!) estates and to those who took me snipe shooting and woodcock shooting. No

na



June came and, after I passed a HUGE university exam (besides being a freelance journalist, I am studying Veterinary Medicine), I began to apply to some of the English trials. Things got a little complicated at this point: a club refused my entry as I could not send a check in sterlings, other clubs had all their trials oversubscribed (In Italy if you get more dogs than you expect to get you simply set up another stake and call more judges); this was all new to me, also some people seemed concerned about the “Italian dog” (I think Italian dogs are believed to be a little wild!). It was not easy, and If I am here now I owe it to my STUBBORNES, not a quality I wish I had, but a quality that can be helpful sometimes. The Scots were great too: as their trials were not oversubscribed they happily accepted us.

We eventually arrived on June 16th and on the following day we were already on the moor with Mr. Steve Robinson. He kindly offered to introduce Briony to grouse and, on that morning, we went counting grouse at Muggleswick Estate. I was really happy

to go and see the counting, as I was really curious to witness this activity. The fact I could be there with my dog (at the beginning she was on lead) was simply amazing! In the afternoon we moved to another ground where we meet other people (Terry Harris, Roy Heath, Maria Jaques, John Naylor and probably someone else I forgot) who really did their best to help us and make us feel "at home".



On the following morning Briony had her first trial, the IGL Novice Stake and I think she did well as we were given a second round! On Tuesday the organizers let her enter the Open Stake and, well we were out because she "missed" a grouse but I liked how she behaved. Things went ok at the English Setter Club trials in Muggleswick where she ran in the Breed Stake on the first and in the Open Stake (they kindly accepted me) on the following day. On the second day she was shot over after she produced the bird, but we were eliminated because, despite not moving forward... she sort of moved her whole body in every other directions!!! But it was fun and it was fine as we both need to gain experience and refine our skills.

Later in the week we given again the opportunity to go counting/training again with Therry Harris and other people on Eggleston Moor, this sounds like such a privilege to me.

We will see what happens next. This article is mostly about Briony and the trials but I might later write something else on daily life here, stones which run under my car, far away pubs and anti-flea sprays to thank all those involved. I am grateful for all this! (Ps. I love grouse!) Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).