

Finding Diamonds in the Marsh: Snipe Field Trials

I have a thing for snipe and I cannot help it. Yes, I do love grouse probably more, but snipe is not too bad and help me to cope with absence of the first one. Snipe and I are very old and very good friends: we met, by chance, in 2004, the same year I got my first shooting license. To make the long story short, books and hunters' tales made me aware of snipe existence, but I had never spotted any of these tiny waders until Spina, an English Setter, pointed one. I was so fascinated by her work that I decided I liked snipe. Not all dogs point snipe, not all dogs like them: snipe live in uncomfortable places, such as rice paddies and marshes. More specifically, local snipe live in rice paddies inundated by water, the muddier the better. It is not easy to run on these grounds and weather conditions tend to be equally unfriendly to dogs. Autumn and winter here are notorious for fog, rain, dampness and absence of wind. A dog must really like snipe to go looking for them and he also needs to possess great stamina and prey drive: snipe are scarce and the dog is likely to end up running for hours on "empty" and unfriendly grounds. Furthermore, if the dog is lucky enough to find one, the bird might still be able to outsmart the mammal and fly away before the four legged creature has a chance to point.



Cuore

Snipe are nervous, fast, light and incredibly tricky creatures but, needless to say, a few brave handlers dare to enter their dogs in snipe field trials. Trials that, given the bird itself, are different to from any other trials. They are believed to be for “specialists” only. Rules and judging standards make them special, British Pointing dogs, for instance, run “solo”, without a bracemate, something which is not normally allowed. Why do they run alone? Because, otherwise, it will be even more unlikely to work a bird properly. Judges want the dogs to be fast and run wide while exactly the where the birds are. They speak of “snipe sense”: the dog is supposed to quarter nicely in the wind and find a bird effortlessly during his 15 minutes run. This is not easy: dogs who trot around acting suspicious and proving unable to discern between scent and snipe, hence exhibiting many false points, are not appreciated. The dog must look decisive, run, locate and point, there is not usually any roading, due to snipe being extremely eager to fly, sometimes too much. You can't have two dogs running at full speed in the same rice paddy, snipe, if present, would explode like landmines! Also, you can't whistle much, you can't talk, you have to be extremely careful when closing your car's door, make too much noise and you will end up running on snipe ghosts.... Oh... I was forgetting jack snipe, a critter meant to further complicate things.

What I just wrote is clearly enough to re-direct handlers somewhere else, provided they are wise. I have always considered snipe trials to be the Olympus and dreamt about them like normal women dream about holidays on a tropical island. I like snipe, Briony likes snipe, we live in (ghost) snipe land, yet my autumn trial plans were about ordinary birds, such as pheasant and partridge. My smart planning, however, lasted until my stake at “normal” trial was suddenly cancelled, two days before it was supposed to take place.

Disappointed, I went online to check for other nearby trials taking place during that weekend, snipe were the only option. I picked up the phone and spoke directly to the [Snipe Club](#)

(yes we have a snipe club!) president who referred me to the secretary. Surprise! I knew the secretary well: he entered me in his trial right away.



Blus

On the morning of the trial, when I reached the venue, I felt quite intimidated. Everybody looked tremendously professional: there were snipe stickers and snipe patches everywhere. People were wearing waders and everybody was, or at least professionally pretended to be, professional. Once on the ground things continued to be the same: people blew talcum powder in every directions to assess the wind (there was no wind indeed & I had no talcum powder); people were being picky about the grounds and so on. The Snipe Club asked me to take pictures for them, which allowed me to follow the stake closely. What I saw during that trial did not impress me: some dogs (including mine) had to be casted on empty and dry grounds, others had more luck and got a run on wet paddies with plenty of snipe but could not handle them properly. We had blank points, dogs bumping into birds, dogs chasing and so on. But, while dogwork did not fascinate me, people did: everybody was kind, supportive and friendly. Well, they became like this after they had studied me for a couple of hours: they initially thought I was there “just” to take pictures and they could not match me with the dog. Those men thought the dog was there “just” to watch and that she was too pretty and too white to compete. When they finally accepted the fact that she was going to run... they expected someone else (male) to

handle her. I do not know where the supposed male could have been located, as my car contained no human beings besides me, it might be they thought he was going to arrive just in time for her run. Seeing me walking straight into the trialing ground with the dog on lead, thus signalling I was the handler, generated quite a silence and put us under unwanted spotlights. We had an awful ground: stream on the left, railway in front, tractor on the right and no water under the stubble. Briony worked nicely in the wind and explored the ground with method, but unfortunately there were no snipe waiting for her. Her good behaviour, nevertheless, erased suspicions: in the beholders' eyes I suddenly became a good handler, silence ceased and people stepped towards me to congratulate and ask questions. It was fun! Someone asked if I trained her by myself; which was her bloodline; whether I intended to continue trialing her and so on: good feelings.



Us

At the end of the day, I was confused and unsure whether to continue trialling on snipe or not but, by the end of the week, I had made my mind up and Mauro, the secretary, as promised, had saved a place for me. This time, at the venue, I had several new "friends" who happily welcomed me and made me feel part of the pack or, rather, more like their family pet. The snipe club itself self decided to adopt me as their "photographer" and it became a routine, for the handlers, trying to look good in pictures. I ended up taking 5 of the 10 (?) field trials that compose the autumn snipe trial circuit,

and this is what happened. Out of five trials Briony had the occasion to properly work snipe only twice: on the first occasion, she scented it and started roading along the scent but, in the same instant she was about to stop and point, the snipe flew by itself so we were out. The second time, instead, she made a mistake and she missed the bird. We did not meet any other snipe until the last trial, which was run in a monsoon like setting that forced snipe to be light and fly by themselves miles ahead of dogs. I was forgetting about trial number four in which she pointed a pheasant: it was the only bird she could find, yet it was not a valid point. The dog who ran after her was equally unlucky, finding the only hare every spotted in that county! Me & Briony did not have a chance to be graded during those five trials, but all the judges encouraged us to keep trialling (or I would have saved my money!) and she was once mentioned – a little achievement for us – during the award giving ceremony: judges here are allowed to talk about that nice dog who was doing so well but could not be graded due to bad luck, or to minor mistakes.



Him!!! (Oldrado)

On the average, during a trial, only 20% of the dogs had a chance to meet snipe, this might not sound fair but snipe cannot be “planted” and you have to deal with the scarce birds you have. Or, maybe, you can try to purchase a huge amount of luck in advance. In my case, it never seemed to fit in the shopping cart but, I have to admit, that my fellow competitors have often behaved like gentlemen, trying to provide me with

promising grounds and some little extra hints. It is usually easier to find snipe if you know the grounds, yet they can still surprise you!

So, are snipe trials as difficult as they are rumored to be? I think so: birds are scarce, wary (& wiry) and deeply influenced by weather conditions. Snipe are diamonds and, like diamonds, are little and not easy to find, but they are shining, so if you are careful enough you might find one! We ran the first trial on a damp, windless warm day; the subsequent ones were all run in misty and windless cold mornings, all but for the last one during which we finally had some wind... accompanied by a torrential rain! Pointing snipe without wind is not easy, and these conditions also hardened the judge's job as dark skies and mist made more difficult to see everything and correctly discern between mistakes made on snipe (which lead to an elimination) and on jack snipe (the dog can miss them). What about the handlers? As it happens in other trials, you get all sort of handlers: some had perfectly trained dogs and some dogs had wilder specimen who liked to chase, bump into birds and run away, tendencies that sometimes prevented them to be graded but, did I see any good dogs? Yes, I think so, and I must admit that, even if English Setters were the most represented breed, I also saw good dogs who were not English Setters! Among them I have to mention a couple of Irish Setters (they were not graded), a flashy pointer (he was not graded either) and a wonderful Gordon Setter: I am hardly enthusiastic about Gordons but this one was truly impressive! So... am I going to be back in spring? Maybe...

Try something different

(unrelated to dogs...) !

Every now and then I feel the need to try something new. The new thing has to be interesting, funny and totally different from what I am used to, so different that I never know what it shall be. There is only one thing I am always certain of: my experience must feature an idyllic quality/price ratio. When I found an incredible bargain, however, I ruminated on it for two days before going for it, last minute. After booking my "session", I rushed to the station, took a train (quite an act of bravery, if you are familiar with Italian trains) and in less than an hour I reached Milan's Dome. I am not a city person, but I do sometimes appreciate being surrounded by beauty and art, and there I was. I had plenty of time to stroll around, drink a coffee pretending to be a tourist, and find my destination, right in the Duomo's shadow. According to my booking, I had to be at Kryolan shop by 2.00 Pm, a make up artist was going to take care of me. The shop was small, but tidy and full of mysterious things. I have no idea of how a kabuki brush works, neither I can tell the difference between two lipstick families, but, as always, I am hungry for knowledge.

There was a customer, a lady, who was enthusiastically purchasing dozens of items, she was so passionate about them that she paid the huge bill they had generated with a big smile on her face. As soon as she left, a girl came in: she graduated from Brera's Fine Arts Academy and she was looking single false eyelashes extensions, I admit I did not even know they existed! It came out she was a sculptor and the store manager likewise: interesting people were gathering there!



I prodotti omaggio

I am pretty basic when it comes to make up, in fact I had never had a professional make up session in my life. I did not know what to expect, still I was more curious than worried. Stefania, a warm and welcoming girl, announced she was going to work on my face. She asked me if I had any concerns, or preferences, and she laughed out loud when I replied that no, due to my limited knowledge, I had nothing to say. I later added, however, that I wanted to learn more, as I am fascinated by anything artistic, including make up. Stefania explained me that she is a make up artist working mainly with theatres, thus introducing me to an unknown world. She first told me that I have "something" that reminds her of the Roaring Twenties & of the Great Gatsby (well people were classy in that era!), but later, while, placing something on my face, she declared that I am also very "renaissance" and I that I should take part in Game of Thrones! It was funny! She seemed to be at ease working with me, I told her about dogs and countryside, adding make up artists would find many clients in the dog show world; she gave me a lot of information including websites and books to look for. She explained that Kryolan is a German company producing cosmetics

for theater, cinema and it is well known among professional make up artists. Ordinary people, like me, do not know it despite the fact it was founded in 1945. This is the reason they are offering very affordable make up sessions & complimentary products.

The make up she used on me was very subtle, the face in the mirror was still mine, just slightly better. As she had no appointments right after mine, she took her time, hand picked the best complimentary products for me, and gave me tons of advice and encouragement. I promised her I was going to read some books she mentioned and try some of the techniques she suggested.



As you know, I usually blog about dogs & country matters, and I know nothing about the quality of make up products. They looked good on me, I love their lip stain and, most of all, they seemed stable (not leaving ugly stains on clothes, cell phones...), but I am not here to review products, just to share a nice experience. I really enjoy meeting people who are smart and skilled but yet, remain humble and this happened at Kryolan Milan. It was fun and I want to encourage other women to try something like that, I am sure you can find a reputable make up artist near you: go there, be different for one day and have fun!

Ps. A make up artist advice is often a decluttering advice: as I got home I selected the colours unsuitable to me, donated them to someone else and threw away the expired ones making room for something better!

Prova qualcosa di nuovo... anche se non è cinofilo

Ogni tanto sento la necessità di provare qualcosa di nuovo. La nuova cosa deve essere interessante, divertente e assolutamente diversa da ciò a cui sono abituata, talmente diversa che non so mai che cosa potrebbe essere. L'unica, costante, certezza è che debba possedere un ottimo rapporto qualità/prezzo. Nonostante ciò, dopo aver trovato un'offerta straordinaria ci ho ruminato sopra per due giorni salvo poi buttarmi all'ultimo minuto. Dopo aver prenotato la mia "sessione", sono corsa alla stazione e salita su un treno. In poco meno di un'ora ho raggiunto il Duomo di Milano. Non sono una persona da città, ms sono estremamente sensibile ai contesti artistici: ero in orario e mi sono presa tutto il tempo per girellare tra le vie del centro, bere un caffè fingendomi una turista e raggiungere la mia destinazione, proprio all'ombra del Duomo. Dovevo raggiungere [Kryolan](#) entro le 2, una make up artist mi stava aspettando. Il negozio non era molto grande, ma piacevole, ordinato e zeppo di oggetti misteriosi. Non ho idea di come si usi un pennello kabuki, o di cosa differenzi un tipo di rossetto dall'altro ma sono, come al solito, maledettamente curiosa. C'era una cliente, una donna, intenta a comprare con molto zelo, al momento di pagare ha sorriso soddisfatta: decisamente un buon inizio! Uscita lei, è entrata una ragazza, si è scoperto che si era diplomata all'Accademia delle Belle Arti di Brera, insieme allo store manager, un sacco di gente interessante era attratta da quel negozio. Ah dimenticavo, cercava delle ciglia finte singole, non sapevo neanche che esistessero.



I prodotti omaggio

Sono molto sobria quando si tratta di trucco e non avevo mai conosciuto una make up artist, ciò nonostante ero più curiosa che preoccupata. Stefania mi ha accolto con calore ed entusiasmo annunciandomi che si sarebbe occupata lei della mia faccia. Mi ha chiesto se avessi preferenze, o particolari esigenze ed è scoppiata a ridere quando le ho detto che no, ero talmente ignorante in materia da non averne diritto! Però ho anche ammesso di voler imparare e così mi ha raccontato del suo lavoro con le produzioni teatrali facendomi conoscere un mondo a me ignoto. Per prima cosa mi ha detto che ho "qualcosa" degli anni '20, un periodo storico che in effetti mi affascina: la gente all'epoca aveva classe da vendere! Poi, però, mentre mi spennellava qualcosa in faccia ha aggiunto che ero anche rinascimentale, perfetta per fare la comparsa in Trono di Spade! Sembrava perfettamente a suo agio con me: io le ho trasmesso alcune informazioni sui cani e la campagna, aggiungendo che i make up artist avrebbero un mercato immenso nel mondo delle esposizioni canine, lei mi ha dato un sacco di informazioni su siti e libri da consultare. Mi ha spiegato che [Kryolan](#) è una ditta tedesca che produce articoli professionali, molto usati nel teatro, nel cinema e nello

spettacolo. Si tratta di prodotti ben noti ai professionisti ma sconosciuti alle persone comuni, come me, nonostante l'azienda sia nata nel 1945. È proprio questo il motivo che li spinge ad offrire sedute di trucco a prezzi irrisori, accompagnate da prodotti omaggio.

Il trucco che mi ha fatto era molto naturale e discreto, il volto nello specchio era il mio, solo leggermente migliorato. Dal momento che non aveva altri appuntamenti, Stefania si è presa tutto il tempo necessario per rispondere alle mie domande e per incoraggiarmi a provare. A poi scelto uno per uno, a seconda dei miei "colori" quali prodotti includere nel pacchetto. Io le ho promesso che avrei guardato i siti e i libri che mi aveva suggerito e che avrei provato alcune delle tecniche consigliate.



Come già sapete scrivo di cani e non ho pertanto la pretesa di capire qualcosa di cosmetici. Le mie impressioni potrebbero essere le vostre, cioè quelle delle persone comuni. Non voglio addentrarmi nella lettura degli INCI (non sono in grado), né fare disquisizioni tecniche. Semplicemente il trucco stava bene, la pelle era in ordine una volta che l'ho tolto e, mentre lo indossavo mi ha dato una l'impressione di essere "molto stabile", ovvero di non lasciare macchie sugli abiti o sul cellulare. Non ho ancora avuto modo di provare tutti i prodotti omaggio, tranne un rossetto, o meglio un lip stain (Kryolan Lip Stain Dance Ch-w2130) che mi piace un sacco. Quello che più mi premeva condividere, in modo di metterlo a disposizione anche ad altri, è stata la bella esperienza. Mi piace incontrare persone professionali, capaci di svolgere il

loro lavoro ricordandosi di essere anche umili e gentili: Kryolan Milano mi ha offerto questa opportunità ma... è possibile che anche altri make up artist, nella vostra città, vi aiutino a passare un pomeriggio diverso (o a regalarlo a un'amica). Ora torno a scrivere di cani.

Ps. I consigli di un make up artist sono anche utili per fare spazio: arrivata a casa ho buttato tutti i colori inadatti a me facendo spazio per qualcosa di meglio!