

A Gem from 1956: an Italian at British Trials

As some of you know, I inherited part of Dr. Ridella library and archive. Dr. Ridella was a veterinarian and an important English Setter breeder, his kennel name was Ticinensis. I feel really honoured to have been chosen as a custodian, but I hate to admit... I dusted and cleaned only half of the materials I have been given. Fifty years of canine magazines (1900-1950), however, are now readable and carefully stored. Knowing about this collection, a friend asked me to look for two peculiar articles written respectively in 1938 and in 1954. I could not find them but, while checking out nearby years, I found something absolutely unexpected, beautiful and fascinating. In the 1956 spring issue of the Rassegna Cinofila (the official name of the Italian Kennel Club Bulletin at the time), I found an article by judge Giulio Colombo (1886-1966). The man was a well known breeder (kennel della Baita) and judge for Setters and Pointers, he also imported some dogs from the UK and tried to keep the connection between Italy and Great Britain alive. Among his imports we shall remember **Lingfield Mystic** (who won the Derby); **Lingfield Ila**, **Lingfield Puma** and **Bratton Vanity**.



I discovered that, in 1956, he was asked to judge a partridge

trial in **Sutton Scotney** (Hampshire – UK) and wrote about his experience. I am not going to translate the full article, I am just summarizing the most important points. (Those interested can see large pictures of the article [here](#) and download the [.pdf file](#)– which can be translated with google translator).

He opens his piece mentioning Laverack, Llewellyn and Lady Auckland (with whom he was judging), and then explains how and why Setters and Pointers were created. He underlines that the game (grouse and grey partridges) and the waste, open and rough grounds forged these superlative breeds so that they could better suit the hunter. He tells us things I still see in the UK: Setters and Pointers are not expected to retrieve; Setters and Pointers must be very trainable and biddable, and that down and drop are fundamental teachings. Dogs must honour the brace mate and must quarter properly: Colombo explains the practical reasons behind all these expectations, this part occupies almost half of the article. His words make me miss what I saw, experienced and learnt during my time in the UK. As I often say, my dog would be very different if I had not seen their trials, and I would also be a much different trainer and handler. But I really like what I am now!!!

He then informs the reader about the differences (rules) between Italian and British trials: in Britain there is no “minute” (here all mistakes made during the first minute are forgiven); there is no established running time (here is 15 minutes) and good dogs are asked to run a second (and maybe a third round). He also lists the pros and cons of these choices. [You can read more about the differences between](#)



Lady Ashmore e Lady Colombo e Arthur Rank

Italian and UK trials in my older articles.

It is interesting that he points out that judges, in the UK, do not comment on the dog's work (on the contrary, they are expected to so here) and that explaining what the dog did, in public... often leads the public to believe they know more than the judges. This proved to be true in my limited experience, watchers (Italian and foreign), despite being several hundred metres away from the dog, see – and

foresee- mistakes that handlers and judges, despite being right above the dog “miss”! I thought, that people in the fifties were more considerate, but, apparently, the art of attributing nonexistent faults to other handlers' dogs has a long standing tradition.

Colombo then describes what he saw during the “Derby”. I do not know if that Derby is like the current Puppy Derby (for dogs under 2 years, running in a brace) as I cannot understand whether the dogs were running alone or in a brace. He says he saw some back castings, some dogs who needed more training and some dogs who sniffed on the ground/detailed around the quarry too much. Rabbits, hare and pheasant further complicated things. First prize went to **Lenwade Wizard**, Pointer dog owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, 15 months old described as stylish, good gallop, good at handling birds; second prize **Lenwade Whisper**, Pointer dog owned by Messrs P. P. Wayre's G. F. Jolly, aged 15 months. In the **Brace Stake** he noticed two Irish Setters **Sulhamstead Bey d'Or** and **F. T. Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** who eventually got second prize. As for the **All Aged stake** (which should be like the modern Open Stake), a Weimaraner was supposed to run with setters and pointers but was eventually withdrawn. Colombo was asked by Lady Hove to express his opinion: he seems to have had mixed feelings about what he saw. Let's not forget that he later writes that pointing dogs

are no longer common and popular in the UK, that people prefer spaniels and retrievers and Setters and Pointers are decaying. How are things now? Spaniels and retrievers still outnumber pointing dogs and this sounds a bit weird to Italians, being the average Italian hunter/shooter the owner of a pointing dog, most of often of an English Setter. [But... the two realities are very different.](#)

He writes that the “search” in the UK is no longer how it should be, and how it used to be. He states that, previously, the British wanted the dogs to run wider and faster. He says that that was the “ancient” way of interpreting the Grande Cerca. Whereas I read both Laverack and Arkwright, I do not recall anything like that and I am not familiar with other British authors advocating this working style. Also, I have not witnessed the Setter & Pointer early years, so I cannot say if what Colombo claims is true. I would like to remember, however, that Giulio Colombo, besides breeding and judging, in 1950 published the book “**Trialer! An Essay on Gundogs**” on Setters and Pointers. The book became a bestseller, it is still a bestseller indeed, and deeply influenced Italian breeders, judges and fanciers. Giulio



Colombo ideal dog was a fast and furious super dog made of speed, deep castings and excellent nose. He called him “the pure”, “the fool”, then described him with these words: ***“The Trialer is the producer, the Masterpiece, the famous Artist’s painting, the fifty carats diamond, the pure gold”.*** He is New Year’s Day, not the remaining 364 days.”

So, I really wonder whether any British authors had ever outlined such a dog, or whether Colombo just believed an hypothetical British author did or, again, whether he

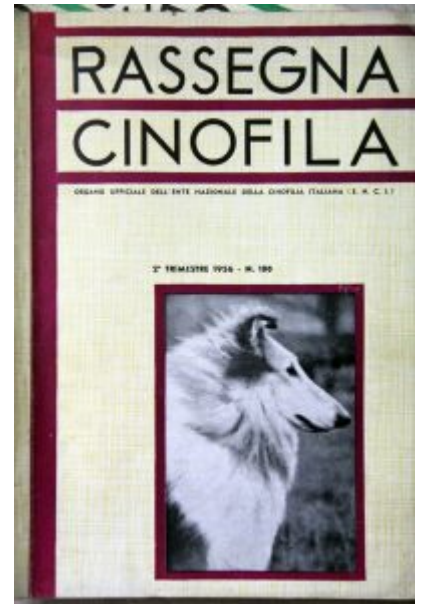
misunderstood some writings (he did not read English, as far as I know). So, basically, I think he was [expecting something different](#) and he did not entirely like what he saw. He complains about “interrupted” runs, short castings, slow runs, small parcels of ground to be explored, searches that gets “limited” by the judges and dogs forced to back on command. He writes that a British sportman defined some of the runs “*Springer Spaniel work*”. Some of these things still happens and might be even more noticeable if you come from Italy, where dogs are asked to run as much, as fast and as wide as they can (the pure, the fool...) and dogs usually back naturally but, our trials have other faults and he admits that, maybe, a British judge attending one of our trials, on a particular unlucky day, would not be impressed by what we show him. Giulio Colombo, however, was skilled enough to see recognize good things at British trials, he admits, for instance, having seen some dogs he really liked. Yes, he says some dogs were “low quality”, but equally admits others were outstanding. I share his opinion: some British dogs lack of class, style and pace to compete successfully here but others... are absolutely not inferior to some Made in Italy dogs. I really, really liked some dogs I saw in Britain, and I am sure they would make our judges smile. Colombo mentions **Seguntium Niblick**, Pointer owned Mr. J. Alun Roberts who got first prize in All Aged Stake; **Scotney Gary**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, second prize; **Scotney Solitaire**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, third prize; **Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** Irish Setter, fourth prize; **Ch. Downsmans Bracken**, English Setter, fifth prize; **Sulhamstead Nina d'Or**, Irish Setter owned by Mrs. Nagle e Miss M. Clarcks and **Flashaway Eve**, English Setter owned by Col. A. S. Dalding. I think he really liked the Flashaway Eve as he describes him as very avid, stylish and very a typical low set gallop, he thinks he has all the



features a dog needs to become a FT. Ch. He concludes with a note on **Dero 4° del Trasimeno** who was exported to the UK and is one of the ancestors of **Scotney Gary** (and of some American dogs) and **Blakfield Gide** stepsister of the Italian **Fast** and **Galf di S. Patrick**. Author thanks those who made his experience possible: **Mr. and Mrs Bank, Lady Auckland, Mr. Buckley, Mr. Binney, Mr. and Mrs. Mac Donald Daly, Mr. and Mrs. William Wiley, Mr. Lovel Clifford**

So which are the key points for contemporary readers? Giulio Colombo outlines the Setter and Pointer history and explains why these dogs should work in a given manner. It is a matter of grounds and of birds: before trials ever existed, these dogs were hunting dogs and had to work all day long for the hunter who wanted to go home with a bag filled with birds. Setters and Pointers were tested in difficult and real hunting situations and it soon became clear which behaviours and attitudes were useful and which were not. The most sought after traits and behaviours were later coded and field trials were born, not viceversa. Dogs used to be tested during real shooting days and then, the best of them, were trialed. Things were like this during the early Pointer and Setter days and, in my opinion, they should not have changed. Nowadays, there are, at least in Italy, FT.Ch. who have never been shot over and, most of all, are trained, handled or owned by people who had never hunted, and never hunted on grounds and birds suitable for these breeds. People therefore do not understand some of field trial rules, nor how the dogs should behave but they consider themselves "experts". Colombo mentions steadiness to flush and the commands **down** and **drop**, some of the most misunderstood things in my country. People think (and probably thought, already in 1956), that these commands are taught "just to show off". On the contrary they can make shooting safer (a steady dog is not likely to be shot) and the drop and the down are extremely useful on open grounds. I am not sure whether Colombo attended grouse trials and, if so, how abundant grouse were but I took me only a couple of

minutes to realize the importance of these teachings on a grouse moor. He then remembers why Setters and Pointers are supposed to work in a brace and to quarter in “good” wind while crossing their paths. Dogs should work in a brace to better explore the waste ground and, in doing so, they should work together, in harmony, like a team. Teamwork is very important, yet a dog must work independently from his brace mate and, at the same time, support his job and honour his points, these things shall be written in the genes. Dogs shall also be easy to handle so that they could be handled silently (not to disturb the quarry too much) and always be willing to cooperate with the handler. I don’t think I ever read these last two recommendations on any modern books on Setters and Pointers, have these traits lost importance?



I think you can now understand why I find Giulio Colombo's report on Sutton Scotney intriguing and fascinating, but there is more, something personal: like the author, I had the privilege to watch and to take part in British trials, [they mean a lot to me](#), I came back as a different “dog person” and they made me have a “different dog”.

[You can read more on British trials here.](#)

Incontrare o gestire la selvaggina? IT vs UK

Le persone continuano a chiedermi le differenze tra le prove

italiane e quelle britanniche. E' complicato, ne ho già parlato in un altro articolo, ma i punti da toccare sono tanti e, più partecipo alle prove italiane, più differenze riscontro. Ho scritto partecipare perché le prove ho iniziato a "guardarle" nel 2004, ma da poco gareggio e, in ogni caso, in questi 13 anni alcune cose sono cambiate. Il mio ruolo, inizialmente, era quello del giornalista/fotografo, a cui a volte i giudici davano il compito di trascrivere le loro note. Ero un osservatore neutrale e ho avuto la grande opportunità di poter seguire le cose da vicino, pur restando ad esse esterne. Il fatto che io sia scesa in campo ha stupito chi era abituato a vedermi nel mio altro ruolo ma, questa nuova pratica mi consente di comprendere le cose ancor più in profondità. Le miei opinioni, impressioni, sensazioni e preoccupazioni non sono cambiate ma posso dire di poter vedere alcune cose con maggior chiarezza, e questo è un processo ancora tutto in divenire.

Ho spesso affermato che obbedienza e controllo del cane sono fondamentali in una prova di lavoro britannica ma meno importanti alle nostre prove. Dietro a questo approccio ci sono molte ragioni, alcune probabilmente più socio-economiche che non cinofile. La presenza della selvaggina è sicuramente uno dei punti chiave. Sono arrivata alla conclusione, non che ci volesse un genio, che ad essere "colpevoli" siano la presenza, o l'assenza, di selvaggina. Chi ha familiarità con le prove italiane, sa quanta fortuna occorra per trovare un selvatico, In media, direi che circa il 25-30% dei cani, nel corso di una prova, ha la possibilità di fermare e lavorare il selvatico come si deve. Circa il 30-35% dei cani ha invece la possibilità di "vedere" un selvatico ma poi succede qualcosa (compagno di coppia, capriolo, meteorite...) che gli impedisce di completare l'azione. A volte le cose vanno anche peggio: durante una prova corsa lo scorso ottobre non si è visto un selvatico. La mia batteria, se non ricordo male, era formata da 11 coppie, quindi 22 cani e alcuni cani, tra cui la mia, sono stati portati al richiamo per offrire loro una seconda

possibilità. In totale si è visto solo UN piccione, come potete immaginare nessun cane è andato in classifica. In Gran Bretagna è tutto diverso, i cani hanno quasi sempre la possibilità di incontrare, poi qualcosa può andare storto ma, di sicuro, il mancato incontro non è in cima alle preoccupazioni dei conduttori.

Per trovare un selvatico in Italia devi avere un cane sveglio che si porti addosso uno zainetto pieno di fortuna: purtroppo è tutto vero, parlerò del perché in altri articoli. Tutto ciò è reale e tristissimo: io amo i cani da ferma e chiunque abbia la stessa passione sa quanto questa situazione possa essere frustrante. Immaginate la giornata tipo alle prove: ci si alza alle 3 del mattino (perché le prove iniziano prestissimo), si guida per 200 chilometri, il cane fa un bel turno ma non incontra. Al giudice è piaciuto e lo porta al richiamo, per dargli una seconda possibilità ma, di nuovo, non incontra e la prova si chiude così. Immaginate questo accadere regolarmente e avrete il quadro completo.

Anni fa, chiacchierando con un giudice, gli ho chiesto perché alcuni allevatori fossero ossessionati dai galoppi: esistono ancora cani senza cervello, né senso del selvatico ma che però hanno galoppi favolosi, tipicissimi per la razza. Volete leggere la risposta? Breve e incisiva: gli allevatori danno molta importanza al movimento perché per il 99% del tempo i giudici lo vedranno galoppare, data la rarità delle ferme. Quindi si ricorderanno soprattutto come cerca e come muove. La risposta ha senso, ma mi rattrista. Le prove erano nate per valutare i cani da ferma e accertarsi che fossero buoni cani da caccia? Quindi per ora abbiamo dei bei galoppi, e poi?

Credo che al cuore delle nostre prove ci sia il trovare il selvatico, meglio se fatto con bello stile e dei bei lacets ampi e profondi. È così difficile incontrare qualcosa, che quello che viene dopo è meno importante. Non sto insinuando che una bella presa di punto e una bella ferma non siano importanti, gli italiani ci tengono eccome, sto dicendo che

una volta fermato il selvatico le cose non possono che andare migliorando! Forse è per questo che una volta visto il cane in ferma i conduttori lo raggiungono in corsa trasudando entusiasmo. Cosa succede se è un po' esitante nella guidata? Se non è immobile al frullo e allo sparo? Probabilmente si chiuderà un occhio, tenendo conto di quanto sia già stato difficile incontrare.



Gerry Devine at a Scottish trial. Such actions are a common sight

In Gran Bretagna è tutto l'opposto: i cani corrono in luoghi in cui i selvatici sono presenti, a volte troppo presenti, il che rende vitale il controllo sul cane. Non è difficile trovare una *grouse*, la trovi anche senza cane, diciamo che la selvaggina è data per scontata. Ad una prova di lavoro britannica non sarà difficile vedere un cane in ferma, le ferme sono una cosa normale. Dopo tutto le prove sono nate per valutare i cani da ferma e senza ferma come si fa? Quando un cane va in ferma, da loro, il conduttore lo raggiunge tranquillamente camminando. Colpa di un eventuale regolamento?

Dell'indole meno focosa? Può darsi, ma credo che il nocciolo della questione sia la consapevolezza, sanno che la parte più difficile della prova inizia adesso. Dopo la ferma, il cane deve guidare e fare alzare correttamente il selvatico, dimostrare immobilità perfetta al frullo e allo sparo e eseguire il "*clear the ground*" (ispezionare il terreno per accertarsi che non ci siano altri selvatici), il tutto condito da una buona dose di obbedienza. Le prove britanniche non sono facili!

Quindi... durante una prova italiana l'incontro è al centro della scena (meglio se il cane ci arriva con stile), mentre in Gran Bretagna il cane è controllato a puntino su come gestisce il selvatico dopo l'incontro. Agli italiani importa, eccome, di come il cane fermi e porti il selvatico ad involarsi ma, sfortunatamente, le occasioni per verificarlo sono limitate. A fare la differenza sono l'ambiente la gestione della selvaggina. Se scavo nella mia memoria, le cose che ricordo di più di cani specifici alle prove inglesi, sono il loro lavoro dopo la ferma (soprattutto le guidate) e l'obbedienza. Certo, mi ricordo anche di alcune cerche straordinarie ma queste occupano uno spazio più piccolo della mia memoria. Se cerco di ricordare le prove italiane, le cose sono rovesciate.

Che cosa è meglio? Non ci sono vincitori. Per essere vincente ad una prova italiana il cane deve essere molto determinato, avere molto senso del selvatico (e/o una dose gigante di fortuna), muoversi con stile e essere intraprendente, a volte anche troppo indipendente. Quando si ha il tutto nelle giuste dosi, si ottiene un gran cane, ma se si sbagliano i conti si producono cani che corrono per il solo piacere di correre e che sono inaddestrabili dalla persona media. Il sistema britannico, invece, controlla con pignoleria come il cane tratta il selvatico e obbliga i conduttori a tenere d'occhio l'addestrabilità. Di converso, a volte da loro trovare un selvatico è troppo facile. Se un cane potesse essere verificato attraverso entrambi i sistemi si andrebbe vicino

alla perfezione.

Finding or Handling Game? IT vs UK

People keep asking me which are the differences between Italian and British trials. I already wrote [something](#) but, the more I compete in Italian trials, the more differences I notice, they cannot be contained in an article alone. I wrote “compete” because I am not new to Italian trials: I began watching them in 2004, but I am fairly new to competing in them, furthermore many things changed in these 13 years. My initial role was the one of the journalist/photographer, who sometimes helped judges writing down their notes. I was a neutral observer and it was a valuable experience as it allowed me to see things closely, yet from the outside. Getting into the competition surprised those used to see me in my “other” role, but allows me to understand things more deeply. My opinions, my feelings, my impressions and concerns have not changed but, I can see things more clearly and this is an ongoing process!

I often stated that obedience and control are more important in British trials and not so important in our trials. The reasons behind this approach are many, and some are probably more socio-economical than dog related, game presence, however, is certainly one of the key points. I came to the conclusion (not much smartness needed here!) that birds, or rather their abundance or absence, are the culprits. Those familiar with Italian trials know that you have to be incredibly lucky to find a bird. On average, I think about, 25-30% of the dogs competing have a chance to point and

properly work out a bird. Maybe 30-35% have a chance to “see” the bird but something prevents (a brace mate, a roebuck, a meteorite...) them to actually work it out, as required by the rules. Sometimes things are even worse: during a trial I ran in October no birds were seen, my stake was made up of 22 dogs, if I am not wrong, for a total of 11 braces. Some dogs, including mine, were also allowed to run a second round in the hope to find anything: well the only bird we saw during the whole trial was a (one) pigeon. As you can imagine no awards were given. In the UK, instead, almost all the dogs have the opportunity to at least “see” a bird”: then many things can happen, but competitors are surely not so concerned about a living feathered being on the ground.

To find a bird at Italian trials you need a smart dog carrying on his shoulders a tremendous amount of luck: this is true, I will discuss the “why” in other articles. Besides being true, this is also very sad: I love pointing dogs and this would be frustrating for any person sharing this passion. Imagine what happens: you wake up at 3 AM (because trials start very early), you drive 200 miles, your dog has a nice run with a nice brace mate, and the dogs cannot find anything. The judge maybe likes him and gives him a second chance, but again no birds show up and the trial ends. Imagine this happening for most of the trials then you get the whole picture.

Years ago, I was chatting with a judge about the tremendous emphasis some breeders were giving to their dogs galloping style. There were (and there are) brainless dogs with no bird sense who “move very nicely”. Do you want to know his reply? It was a short and smart one: breeders focus on movement because, 99% of the time, the dog is going to be seen by judges while running, being pointing a rare happening. Judges are more likely to remember how he runs and how he searches, it makes sense and, again, it makes me sad. Weren’t trials created to evaluate pointing dogs and make sure they were suitable to hunters? So we have a nice gallop here and,

anything else?

I think that what our trials are focused on is “finding” (*that damn bird*) , and it is better do it nicely with deep and wide castings. It is so hard to find a bird that everything that comes later is, somehow, less important. I am not here minimizing the importance of a proper pointing style (Italians are suckers for this) but, basically, once the dog has found and pointed the bird, everything is going to be fine. This is probably why handlers get so excited and run anxiously towards the dog on point. What if the dog is a bit sticky? What if he is not super steady to flush or to gunshot? These errors are likely to be forgiven, given the aforementioned lack of game.



Gerry Devine at a Scottish trial. Such actions are a common sight

In Britain the opposite happens, dogs run in places where birds are present, sometimes too present, and this makes control vital. It is not difficult to find a grouse, on some moors you do not even need a dog to find one so... bird presence

is taken for granted. Of course the dogs are expected to find a bird, but there are usually plenty of opportunities to find one. If you attend a British field trials you will see many dogs on point, points are not such an unusual sight. After all, field trials were created to evaluate pointing breeds and you cannot really assess a pointer without a point! When the dog is on point, the British handler paces quietly to him. I am not sure whether pacing (vs running) is required by some rules, but I think it is more a matter of culture and awareness. The handler, in fact, besides being used to "keep calm", is well aware that the toughest part of the trial has yet to come. After the point, the dog must work out the bird properly, demonstrate perfect steadiness to wing and shot, and perform equally well the "clear the ground", all seasoned with a good amount of obedience. British trials are not easy!

So... during an Italian trial the dog's ability to **FIND** a bird (hopefully in a stylish manner) is under the spotlight, whereas in Britain the dog is carefully assessed on "how he handles the birds". Italians do mind about how the dog points and works out the bird, but they unfortunately have much less chances to verify this. Environment and game management make the difference. If I go through my memories, the thing I remember most clearly about specific dogs running in British trials is, the way they roaded and worked out birds, as well as their obedience. Of course I remember a few, exceptional finds and runs but they occupy less of my memory. When thinking about Italian trials, things are reversed.

What is better? We have no winner here. To be successful at an Italian trial the dog needs an incredible amount of determination, good bird sense (and/or a tremendous amount of luck), a stylish movement, some boldness and, sometimes even too much independence. When you get everything in the proper amount you have a great dog but, unfortunately, miscalculating the ingredients might produce dogs who run for the sake of running or are just too wild to be tamed by the average human

being. The British system, instead, tests carefully how the dog handles birds and forces handlers to keep an eye on trainability, on the other hand, in Britain, finding a bird can sometimes be “too easy”. If only a dog could be assessed through both the systems we will be close to perfection.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

British Field Trials: What's Inside (Sentieri di Caccia December 2016)

British Field Trials: What's Inside – Originally Published in Sentieri di Caccia December 2016

Disclaimer: This is the second of a series of articles I wrote for the Italian press. I wrote this article for Italian readers, this means that British people are not going to learn anything new from these pages and, whereas I did my best to be accurate, they may even find some inaccuracies. If so, please notify me. The first article of the series can be found [here](#).

Italy breeds the best English Setters in the world, so presumably Italy also organizes the best field trials in the world, if so... why go to compete in Great Britain?

What you just read above is the widespread Italians opinion on the matter. Are they right? Are they wrong? This is an

“opinion”, hence I do not think it can be right or wrong, it is simply an opinion. The true, or presumed, supremacy of the Italian English Setter is rooted in our culture, our beliefs and our tradition about hunting and shooting. Is my choice to compete in the UK an expression of dissent? No, or rather not completely, as I firmly believe that experiencing different methods and traditions can enrich dogs, hunting and trials.

But why the UK? For a whole bag of reason, some [objective](#) and some [subjective](#); some widely accepted and some widely ridiculed. Some accused me of taking a shortcut, as if British trials were much easier than ours. Wrong assumption! British field trials are NOT easier than Italian ones! I first met this reality in 2015 when I had the opportunity to watch the Champions Stake for Setters and Pointers. This was an awakening, James Joyce would have called it an *epiphany*, it was one of a kind experience which opened my eyes about field trials and training. Some of my readers probably remember what I wrote at the time, underlining that despite the lack of “professional” handlers, everybody was very “professional”.



A few hints

The first problem you have to face, if you want to compete in the UK, is [entering a trial](#). Before you can even send your application, you have to get an ATC (Authorization to Compete)

number from the Kennel Club. Then you have to understand when the trials take place: in Great Britain, trials take place only in specific periods of the year. There are two weeks of grouse trials in March; one on partridge in April; four on grouse in July/August and, finally, one more week on partridge in September. This is how things are organized for British Pointing Dogs, HPRs (Continental Pointing Dogs) follow a different calendar. Being the number of trials fairly limited (at least if compared to the hundreds of trials taking place in Italy each year), it often happens that there are more prospective competitors than available places. Each trial features only one stake (in Italy many stakes can take place simultaneously, on nearby grounds) and it is judged by two judges who can evaluate up to 40 dogs. As you can imagine, waiting lists are common and so are dogs put on "reserve", ready to run if another competitor retires. To enter a trial, competitors must contact the organizing club before the deadline and send the entry form together with the money (prices can range between 10 and 30 pounds). The club secretary will take care of everything and create a list giving priority to the club's members and to dogs who had already had placement in British trials. As you may see, it is not easy for a foreign newcomer to get a run. In my limited experience, however, I learnt that usually Scottish trials are less popular and that the *Novice Class* is sometimes easier to access. When possible, moreover, is always good to show up at the trial venue because some competitors might retire their dogs right before the trial. As for becoming a member of the clubs, it can be done but it might take up to a year the formal sponsorship by two former members and meeting you face to face. Each club usually organizes two days of trials, one for the *Open Stake* and one for the *Novice* or for the *Puppy Stake*. The latter is open to dogs under 2 years of age. Dogs who had never placed 1st or 2nd but are older than 2 years can run in the *Novice Stake*. The *Open Stake*, instead, is open to any dogs (and compulsory for dogs who placed 1st or 2nd) but

dogs who had previously been graded are more likely to get a run. I managed to compete both in *Novice* and in *Open* and I watched some *Puppy Stakes*: rules are identical for any of these stakes but judges can be “kinder” towards dogs competing in *Novice* and *Puppy*.

I liked almost all the dogs competing in the *Open Stakes*: most of them were good and well trained specimen, the overall level was high. As for the *Novice Stakes*, I saw good and perfectly trained dogs but also some dogs who still needed more experience and more training, some of these dogs, nevertheless, possessed the natural qualities to do very well in a *Open Stake*. As for the *Puppy Stakes*, they were quite unpredictable but I really loved seeing people being brave enough to run young pups, some of them were not even one year old: I really enjoyed watching these stakes.

Cani da caccia



✦ volta raccolta tutte le richieste, il segretario del club stila un elenco dei partecipanti dando la priorità ai soci del club organizzatore e a cani che hanno già ottenuto qualche in prova britanniche. Come potete capire, per un novizio straniero è abbastanza difficile avere l'occasione di partecipare.

Dalla mia esperienza ho capito che:

- 1) le prove che si corrono in Scozia sono meno affollate ed è più facile trovarsi un posticino;
- 2) la classe *Novice* è meno richiesta;
- 3) se è possibile conviene sempre presentarsi sul luogo della gara anche se si è in fondo alla lista, perché le cose possono cambiare all'ultimo minuto;
- 4) essere soci del club organizzatore spinge in cima alla lista e offre iscrizioni scontate; la richiesta di associarsi, tuttavia, deve essere fatta con diversi mesi di anticipo ed essere poi approvata dal consiglio direttivo (preferiscono avere modo di incontrarsi di persona prima di approvare).

Ogni club in genere programma due giornate di prove, una riservata alla classe *Open* e una riservata alla classe *Novice* o/o alla classe *Puppy*. La classe *Open* equivale alla nostra classe *Libera* ed è aperta a tutti ma, siccome è difficile entrare, la priorità viene data a soggetti che hanno ottenuto qualche importante in *Novice* o *Puppy*. La classe *Puppy* è per cani fino a due anni - che non abbiano mai vinto una prova - mentre la *Novice* è per cani di qualsiasi età che non abbiano mai ottenuto un primo o un secondo posto. Io sono riuscito a correre sia in *Open* che in *Novice* e ho assistito anche ad alcune prove *Puppy*.

Il regolamento resta lo stesso, teoricamente i giudici possono essere più tolleranti su alcune sfumature in *Novice* e in *Puppy*, ma sta alle decisioni del singolo. Nella classe *Open* quasi tutti i soggetti sono di buon livello (come prestazioni e preparazioni) e si ha la possibilità di avere dei compagni di coppia con cui lavorare bene. La classe *Novice* e la classe *Puppy* sono un po' più imprevedibili: ci sono soggetti eccellenti e ottimamente condotti, soggetti meno esperti, soggetti ben addestrati ma a cui mancano le qualità naturali per poter eccellere in una *Open*.



1 Steve Lund e i suoi pointer Frostad Elin at Fleetstalk (il classificato al Champion Stake 2016) e Goddribb Judd

2 Briony del Cavallrossa in guidata su grouse

3 Chi ha tanti cani ha un pick up e un carrello. Nella foto il mezzo di trasporto di Allan Neill (Irlanda) e fuori dal finestrino Dunroon Ginger Boy

L'obbedienza è importantissima

Per partecipare a qualsiasi prova, anche nelle classi minori, è vitale il massimo controllo sul cane: un cane disobbediente vi attirerà il disappunto degli organizzatori, dei concorrenti e, soprattutto, del guardascaccia. Un fermo al frullo e allo sparo solido è indispensabile, idem il poter bloccare il cane a comando o l'esecuzione di un comando a comando, se richiesta dal giudice. Questo è il minimo sindacale e non è facile da ottenersi quando la densità di selvaggina è elevatissima. In tali condizioni, per sopravvivere al turno, il nostro soggetto deve sapersi controllare e gestire. Rispetto alle prove italiane vi è maggior enfasi sui dettagli legati all'obbedienza: fermo al frullo vuol dire fermo immobile, non un passo in più e non uno in meno, andare a destra vuol dire andare a destra, non iniziare mezzo lazo e saltare a sinistra. Stessa cosa per il fermo allo sparo: io sono stata eliminata perché il cane ha fatto un salto su se stesso o perché

ho fatto meno passo in avanti, la tolleranza sugli errori di dressaggio e condotta è nulla. Non è possibile, durante la prova, toccare il cane o urlare ordini a distanza: in guidata il cane non si tocca, non lo si tocca per bloccarlo e non si urla mai, casuali si usa, e moderatamente, il fischietto. Ogni vostra interazione con il cane è decisa dal giudice: non potete legare il cane senza il suo consenso, non potete farlo guidare o produrre il selvatico senza che vi sia stato ordinato di farlo. Una differenza fondamentale tra le loro prove e le nostre è la gestione del cane dopo la ferma e l'involto del selvatico. Il cane non va legato e inizia il clear che ground, ovvero la parte più difficile del lavoro. E' improbabile che ci sia una sola grouse, quindi il cane deve lavorare anche le successive, guidando senza esitazioni e senza mai perdere il controllo. La cosa è tutt'altro che banale: in Inghilterra possono esserci molte grouse in uno spazio ristretto e produrre un'emanazione talmente forte da disorientare i cani meno esperti e, secondo problema, ➔

Larger photo by Rhia Tapper

Obedience is extremely important

To compete in British trials (even in the *Novice* and *Puppy Stakes*), it is vital to have a good control on your dog. Dogs who ran away and disobey are not appreciated, they might make organizers and other competitors unhappy but, most of all, they will alarm gamekeepers. Dogs must be very steady to flush and shot and drop on command. Judges can also ask you to drop your dog while his bracemate is on point: some British dogs are not naturally backers, so the judge can ask competitors to drop dogs on command. These skills are not negotiable and it is not easy to obtain these behaviour when a dog is surrounded by grouse. Game density can be incredibly high, the dog must be under control and have quite an amount of self control. If we want to compare these trials to the Italian ones, judges pay much more attention on obedience: steadiness to flush means not moving at all, a dog cannot even attempt to step forward or jump on himself; turn left means turn left and so on. The same is true for steadiness to shot, I have been eliminated a couple of times because Briony moved or jumped on herself after the shot, excitement can lead to this, but does not make it more tolerated. During a trial you are not allowed to yell, nor you can touch the dog. You can moderately use the whistle to direct or drop the dog, but you cannot touch him unless and until the judge orders you to put the lead on. You cannot encourage your dog to road and produce the bird by touching him: this behaviour would lead to an elimination. The judge tells you how to interact with the dog: you have to wait for him to tell you that you can let your dog produce the bird; that you can pick him up or that you have to drop him. The biggest difference between our trials and British trials, however, is likely to be the behaviour judges expect after the dog has been shot over. In our trials we usually put the lead on and then maybe cast the dog again, if there is still time (our runs last 15 minutes), in Britain, after the birds have been flushed and a shot fired, the dog is supposed to "clear the ground" making sure there are no grouse left. Given the amount of game [\(you can read more about this here\)](#), it is unlikely that the dog pointed only one, or a few grouse, more

grouse, maybe part of the same covey, might still be there and the dog has to work them properly. He should road and flush them, keeping his enthusiasm at bay but, most of all, without hesitation. This is not easy, many birds sitting tight together can produce a strong scent which can confuse the less experienced dogs, at the same time they might be incredibly tempting. Clearing the ground is not always easy, it happened to me to find several grouse during a clear the ground some of which were bold enough to fly straight into the dog's face, a tough way to test for steadiness.

Each stake is judged by two judges and a dog, in order to be graded, must run twice: this, together with the clear the ground (that does not exists in our trials), increases the likelihood of mistakes being made. If you are still thinking that British trials are "easy", let me tell you that the mistakes made during the run's first minute – which are not taken in account in our trials – can lead to an elimination in the country ruled by Queen Elizabeth II. Hare and rabbit shall not be forgotten and, together with the abundance of grouse, make obedience incredibly important. The Italians main focus are the dog's natural abilities and, therefore, they might be shocked by seeing so much importance given to obedience. Some of my countrymen think that focusing so much on these kind of details you risk to forget the whole picture. It can happen, indeed, but at the same time, obedience and trainability shall never been undervalued. While discussing the Italian version of this article with a British handler told me that, whereas he understood and partly agrees with the Italian point of view, *"not selecting for a trait, in the long run, leads to a selection against this trait"*. These were his exact words and I agree on them, my ideal evaluation, indeed would be something in between the two systems.

Let's now talk about practicalities: you are expected to reach the venue ON TIME and drive a proper off road 4x4 car. Nobody has a huge van, it will not be of any use; people with many

dogs have a pick up truck and a dog trailer. You might have to cross streams or drive on rocks, a normal car cannot do that. Lunch is eaten on the moor and you have to bring your own lunch (in Italy the venue is usually a restaurant and you go to eat there after the trial). Once the stake starts, people are allowed to follow on foot with the dogs kept on lead. As you can end up walking for hours in a mutable – and often windy- weather, it is advisable to carry with you all the clothes you might need. High heather, cracks and quicksand make the grounds demanding for the dogs and for you as well. All competitors are expected to remain until the end of the trials, when the awards are given. If, for a valid reason, you need to leave the ground in advance, you have to ask permission to the organizers and let them know when you are leaving. A steward of the beat coordinates what happens on the ground supported by one or more gamekeepers and a gun (the person who shoots the produced bird – without killing it). The gamekeepers present at the trials are the same people who take care of the moor all year round, hence they want to be sure that dogs and people do not harm the wildlife they protect. Trials are run in private estates which are generously lent to the clubs, competitors must respect the grounds and the wildlife: dogs out of control are not welcome and can put you under a bad light as well as put organizers in a bad position.

More on the differences between Italian and British trials can be read [here](#).



1 tante e tante grouse sono una forte tentazione: è successo di trovare decine di grouse durante il clear the ground, alcune talmente spavalde da volare verso il muso del cane che, ovviamente, doveva rimanere immobile come una statua. Ogni batteria è giudicata da due giudici e che un cane ritenuto valido, per andare in classifica, deve fare un secondo turno di richiamo. Tra i tranelli in cui può incappare il cane vanno ricordati i conigli e le lepri e, non esiste il minuto se il cane commette un errore un istante dopo lo sgancio è eliminato. L'abbondanza di selvaggina e l'enfasi sull'obbedienza non rendono queste prove più semplici di quelle nostrane, le rendono diverse. Porre l'accento sull'obbedienza e privare i conduttori di ogni iniziativa a volte stride con il nostro voler mettere in risalto le qualità naturali del cane: si perde di vista l'insieme a favore del dettaglio ma, d'altra parte, da noi si tende a chiedere un po' troppo gli occhi sulle impressioni di dressaggio. La "mia" prova ideale sarebbe una via di mezzo. Veniamo alla logistica. E' necessario arrivare al punto di ritrovo puntuali e con un fuoristrada. Nessuno ha un furgone, non potrebbe affrontare i terreni, chi ha molti cani ha un pick up o un carrello o... entrambi! Non è raro dover attraversare torrenti o arrampicarsi lungo strati di roghi e noccioli, una normale automobile non può farcela. Per il pranzo ognuno deve provvedere da sé, si

mangia sul terreno, raggiunto il punto di partenza per la batteria si lascia l'auto e si prosegue a piedi, la camminata può durare diverse ore e il clima può cambiare da un momento all'altro e c'è quasi sempre vento. Il cane viene tenuto al guinzaglio e si segue la batteria a distanza,

1 Setter gordon affisso Warrenfell, la razza ha un buon seguito di appassionati



2 Allan Neill (Irlanda) e Gerry Devine (Irlanda), due "rari" professionisti, vanno sul terreno con tutti i loro soggetti al guinzaglio

3 Carol Calvert (Irlanda) e i suoi cani sul terreno di Tillygronzie Estate, Scozia

I classificati del Champion Stake 2016

- 1) FT. Ch. Ballyellen Cara, setter inglese femmina di Billy Connelly (Irlanda), condotta da Gerry Devine (Irlanda)
 - 2) Frosted Elfin at Fleetstall, pointer inglese maschio di Steve e Sharon Lound
 - 3) Hunshigo Donard, setter irlandese femmina di Mark Adams (Irlanda)
 - 4) Bowward Cherry Cherry, setter irlandese maschio di Donna Clark, condotta da Colin Forde
- Certificati di merito: Upperwood Clover e FT Ch. Upperwood Hiera, entrambe setter inglesi femmine di Dom Goutorbe, e Upperwood Ash Alert, setter inglese femmina di David Hall



3 i terreni possono essere impegnativi, l'erica è alta e rigida e il moor è imprevedibile, ci sono crepe nel terreno, buche e sabbie mobili. Ci si aspetta che tutti i concorrenti rimangano fino alla fine della prova: si resta, si fa il tifo per il migliore e ci si congratula al momento delle premiazioni. Per lasciare un trial in anticipo occorre chiedere il permesso all'organizzatore. Sul terreno, oltre ai giudici, è presente lo steward of the beat che coordina i movimenti di tutti, uno o più guardiacaccia ignominiosamente che headkeeper, il capo guardiacaccia e the gun cioè colui che spara al selvatico involato senza colpirla, secondo le indicazioni del giudice. I guardiacaccia, gli stessi che durante tutto l'anno si prendono cura

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The Puppy Derby and the Champion Stake 2016

In the summer of 2016 I watched and ran in many field trials that took place in Northern England (Durham County and North Yorkshire) and Scotland (Highlands & The Borders), here I am telling you about the *Puppy Derby* and about the *Champion Stake only*. Those who want to know more about dogs and grouse can follow my blog www.dogsandcountry.it, the section "[A Month on the Moor](#)" is entirely dedicated to my month among heather. In 2016, the *Puppy Derby* and the *Champion Stake* were organized by the SFTA (*Scottish Field Trials Association*), a big club whose president is Wilson Young and whose secretary is Jon Kean. Jon is a journalist as well and writes on dogs and shooting, he trusted my skills enough to let me follow both the trials closely, I am grateful for that. The *Puppy Derby* took place on 9th August at Tollishill Estate, owned by the Duke of Northumberland, and located near Lauder (a small village not too far from Edinburgh, on the Borders between Scotland and England). Whereas the catalogue listed 30 dogs, only 9

actually ran in the *Puppy Derby*. This trial is open to dogs under 2 years old: I do not know why the numbers dropped so dramatically, it might have been caused by a kennel cough epidemic or by the fact that some pups were still not ready to compete. Many of the competitors were about one year old and certainly paid a high price for their lack of experience; hare coming from every direction further complicated things. Billy Darragh and Colin Forde (Ireland), who judged the trial, could only grade one dog, Ballyellen Tango, English Setter dog aged almost two, owned by Billy Connelly (Ireland) and handled by Gerry Devine (Ireland), Gerry is one of the few professional handlers. Whereas only one dog could be graded, I saw some interesting specimen as far as natural qualities, I especially liked two English Setters and I hope to have a chance to see them at work again when they will be more experienced.

On 10th and 11th August, we moved to Byrecleugh Estate, still close to Lauder, kindly offered by the Duke of Roxeburghe. The *Champion Stake* is a special trial that takes places every year: only the dogs who had gained a 1st or a 2nd placement in previous trials (Open Stake) are allowed to run. This year something new was going to happen: the trial would have been judged by three judges, no longer by two. The chosen ones were Meryl Asbury, Shaun McCormack and Michael Houston, the latter two were from Ireland. They were going to see 37 dogs, less than expected due, again, to the kennel cough epidemics. On the morning of the 10th, many dogs made mistakes which lead to their elimination. The first braces ran in very high heather, grouse were well hidden and walking away from them, flying from a distance; later in the morning grouse density decreased and things became slightly easier. In the afternoon we had a torrential rain, but many dogs did extremely well in those conditions (Photogallery for the day [here](#)). Only 14 dogs "survived" day 1st and 7 of them, I allow myself to be partial sometimes, were English Setters! On the 11th, all the survivors exhibited outstanding performances, confirming to the judges that they had made wise choices (Photogallery for

the day [here](#)). I really appreciated how the judges directed the trial, they worked together in harmony and always sided with the dogs, never against them. They were incredibly supportive and really did their best to give the same opportunities to all the dogs and sometimes closed an eye on minor details. Having three judges (one on the left, one on the right and one in the centre) made this trial slightly different. The dogs were allowed to run further and wider and what happened was not much different from what I am used to see here in Italy. When allowed some more freedom, these dogs were still doing very well and were not inferior to most of the Italian dogs I routinely see at our trials.



«... dei moor e dei suoi selvatici, vigilano. Si corre in riserve private generalmente messe a disposizione del club, ci si aspetta dai concorrenti il massimo rispetto dei terreni e dei selvatici. Un cane fuori controllo, che butta per aria la riserva, potrebbe mettere in seria difficoltà il club organizzatore, oltre a farsi recapitare un invito a non presentarsi più».

Il Puppy Derby e il Champion Stake 2016

Questa estate ho assistito e partecipato a numerose prove corse nel nord dell'Inghilterra (Durham County e North Yorkshire) e in Scozia (Highlands & The Borders). In queste pagine mi limiterò a scrivere del Puppy Derby e del Champion Stake, ma i curiosi potranno apprendere di più visitando il mio blog www.dogsandcountry.it la cui sezione A Month on the Moor è interamente dedicata al mio mese in mezzo all'erica.

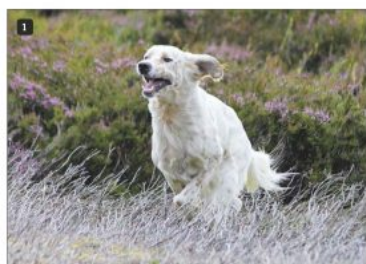
Nell'estate 2016 l'organizzazione di queste due prove è toccata alla SFPA (Scottish Field Trials Association), un'importante associazione che ha nel consiglio direttivo Wilson Young coordinato sul campo da Jon Keen, con cui sono subito andata d'accordo: si è fidato delle mie capacità di foto-giornalista e mi ha lasciato seguire entrambi i trial da vicino: gliene sono grata.

Il Puppy Derby si è corso il 9 agosto a Tollyhill Estate, riserva del duca di Northumberland, a Lauder (un paesino vicino a Edimburgo, al confine tra Scozia e Inghilterra). Nonostante a catalogo ci fossero 30 soggetti, solo nove si sono presentati: il Puppy Derby è aperto a cani sotto ai due anni, i numeri potrebbero essere crollati perché alcuni cani non erano ancora del tutto pronti, nonché a causa

di un'epidemia di tosse di canile. Tra i partecipanti molti avevano circa un anno e hanno pagato l'esperienza e, sicuramente, la scarsa altitudine alle lepri che, in quella giornata, sembravano sbucare da ogni angolo. Uno solo il cane messo in classifica dai giudici Billy Darragh e Colin Forde (Irlanda). Ballyellen Tango, maschio di setter inglese di quasi due anni di proprietà di Billy Connolly (Irlanda) e condotto da Gerry Devine (Irlanda), uno dei rari professionisti che frequentano le prove. Nonostante un solo cane sia andato a premio, ho visto soggetti interessanti dal punto di vista delle qualità naturali, due setter inglesi mi sono piaciuti in particolare, spero di vederti fare buone cose quando saranno più maturi.

1 Upperwood Alles Alles di Fiona Kirk, a poco più di un anno al Puppy Derby a Tollyhill Estate

2 Bowward Cherry Cherry (IV) classificato al Champion Stake 2016, uno dei tanti setter irlandesi di qualità presenti alle prove. Il soggetto è di proprietà di Donna Clark ma è condotto dal suo allevatore Colin Forde (Irlanda)



Il 10 e l'11 agosto ci siamo spostati a Byreclough Estate, sempre a Lauder, gentilmente concessa dal duca di Buccleugh. Il Champion Stake, la tradizionale prova di eccellenza a cui sono ammessi solo cani che hanno ottenuto un primo o un secondo posto in prove precedenti, quest'anno è stata giudicata da tre giudici. I prescelti erano Meryl Ashbury, Sharon McCormack e Michael Houston, gli ultimi due provenienti dall'Irlanda: avrebbero giudicato 37 cani, un numero leggermente inferiore alle aspettative a causa, di nuovo, della tosse dei canili. Durante la mattinata del 10, nonostante le condizioni apparissero favorevoli, molti cani si sono auto-eliminati. Le prime coppie hanno corso in erica alta e rigogliosa in cui le numerose grasse pedonature involontari a distanza, in diversi casi, hanno commesso errori, nella seconda parte della mattinata la selvaggina è andata calando e questo ha agevolato i concorrenti. Al pomeriggio la prova è proseguita sotto una pioggia torrenziale che, tuttavia, è stata testimone di ottime prestazioni. L'11 agosto i concorrenti sopravvissuti al primo turno erano 14, di cui ben sette setter inglesi. Tutti i soggetti si sono espressi ad alti livelli, confermando alla terra giudicante di aver scelto correttamente quali cani rivendere. Mi è piaciuta moltissimo la conduzione della prova da parte dei giudici, con serenità e tranquillità, hanno giudicato stando sempre "dalla parte del cane", cercando di offrire a tutti le stesse opportunità e tollerando piccole sbavature. La presenza di tre giudici (uno a destra, uno a sinistra e uno destrai) ha reso la prova un po' diversa da quelle a cui avevo assistito fino ad ora: i cani "apriranno" molto di più sul terreno di quanto non fosse loro normalmente richiesto e consentito. Ho visto aperture e velocità non inferiori a quelle delle prove nostrane e sono stata positivamente colpita da più di un soggetto. Quando siamo tornati a valle, in attesa del responso dei giudici, Allan Neill, noto addestratore e conduttore, mi si è avvicinato chiedendomi di scommettere su un vincitore, così ho fatto il mio nome. Allan concordava con me sul fatto che il vincitore sarebbe stato un setter inglese, ma non era sicuro che io avessi fatto il nome giusto. E invece sì! Sul podio è finita la PT CB, Ballyellen Cara inasud di Ballyellen Tango, vincitore del Puppy Derby, che già avevo visto e apprezzato al CB Stake 2015, quando aveva ottenuto il premio per il miglior stile.

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Once back at the venue, Allan Neill, a very reputable trainer and handler from Ireland, asked me to tell him which dog was going to win in my opinion. *You were close to the dogs*, he added, *so you should have seen everything well and have an opinion*. Without hesitation, I made a name, Allan agreed upon the fact the winner was going to be an English Setter, yet he

was not sure it was going to be the dog I named. But... I was right! FT.Ch. Ballyellen Cara (mother of Ballyellen Tango, who won the *Puppy Derby*) placed first: her run was unforgettable and she surely possesses some great qualities, I remembered (and liked) her from Champion Stake 2015, at the time she was eliminated but given awarded as the most stylish dog on the ground.

Champion Stake 2016

I° FT. Ch. Ballyellen Cara English Setter bitch owned by Billy Connelly (Ireland), handled by Gerry Devine (Ireland)

II° Frosted Elfin at Fleetstalk English Pointer dog, owned by Steve e Sharon Lound and handled by Steve Lound

III° Hunshigo Donard Irish Setter bitch owned and handled by Mark Adams (Ireland)

IV° Bownard Cherry Cherry Irish Setter dog owned by Donna Clark and handled Colin Forde (Ireland)

Certificates of Merit: Upperwood Clover and **FT Ch. Upperwood Hera** English Setter bitches owned and handled by Dom Goutorbe and **Upperwood Ash Alert** English Setter bitch owned and handled by David Hall

The organizers would like to thank the sponsor Red Mills.

Slideshow below

Dalle pulci francesi ai

cavalli inglesi

Una volta uscita dall'[Eurotunnel](#) sono rimasta un po' male: non c'era nulla di speciale. Sì, finalmente ero in Inghilterra, a Folkestone per l'esattezza, ma non c'era nulla di particolare a darci il benvenuto, ci avevano mandato via dal treno ed era finita lì, nessun edificio peculiare solo una strada anonima che confluiva in un'altra altrettanto anonima, ma più trafficata. Ho già raccontato del viaggio verso il "Nord" e potete [leggerne qui](#), tra parentesi adoro quella scritta! Oggi vi racconterò cosa è successo nei pressi dell'aeroporto di Stanstead, mi pare fosse proprio lì meglio più o meglio meno, ricordo gli aerei volare bassi sulla mia testa.



Mentre mi preparavo per prendere l'Eurotunnel, mi sono accorta di alcuni puntini marroni tra il pelo di Briony. Sfortunatamente, ho trascorso il mio semestre "specialistico" (modulo professionalizzante) a Malattie Parassitarie il che significa che so più di quanto vorrei su insetti e altre creature che infestano gli animali domestici. La combinazione puntini neri + cane + pelo era pertanto piuttosto allarmante, tuttavia ho cercato di fare del mio meglio per restare positiva. Del resto, prima di partire, avevo fatto il bagno a Briony, l'avevo pulita e toelettata perché volevo proprio evitare questo tipo di problemi. Durante tutta la sua

vita, ha avuto raramente parassiti, sono pignola per queste cose, non avevo motive per temere il peggio. Ciononostante, volevo certezze! Era già pomeriggio quando ho iniziato a cercare una stazione di servizio. Il mio navigatore, e anche i cartelli stradali, ne indicavano una, ho seguito i loro consigli e mi sono persa. Può suonare stupido, ma abituata alle autostrade italiane, da cui non si esce per nessun motivo, salvo l'essere arrivati a destinazione, mi è sembrato molto strano dover uscire per poter fare il pieno. Da noi l'autostrada si paga, in Gran Bretagna no, ma è strutturata per dare al suo interno tutto quello che può servire a un automobilista, per me era tutto strano. Seguendo le indicazioni, sono finita in un paesino, per l'esattezza nel Country Club di quel paesino: molto gradevole, ma non quello che serviva a me. Così, mi sono fermata in un angolo, ho respirato, mi sono ricomposta e non mi sono data per vinta, ho riprovato e raggiunto per tentativi il gigantesco parcheggio di un centro commerciale. Mi serviva il bagno, in estate bevo moltissima acqua, mi serviva qualcosa di fresco da bere e del cibo per cena, ma faceva troppo caldo per lasciare a lungo il cane in auto. Ho risolto lasciando la macchina mezza aperta e facendo tanti micro viaggi avanti e indietro.



Dopo il primo viaggio – verso il bagno – sono tornata all'auto, ho fatto uscire Briony e ho iniziato a scavare tra borse e valige. Obiettivo “la borsa delle spazzole” e il sacchetto delle medicine. Il primo ad entrare in azione è stato il pettinino antipulci, che ha confermato i miei timori: il cane aveva addosso decine, forse centinaia, di pulci. Eravamo partiti da casa senza pulci ed ora ne eravamo invasi,

bella sorpresa! Non amo ricorrere a farmaci e sostanze tossiche e so benissimo che gli insetticidi meno potenti hanno efficacia relativa, ma qualcosa andava fatto. Ho così deciso di adottare una strategia strutturata su più fasi: il primo passo consisteva nel cercare le pulci, una per una, e spiaccicarle per essere sicura del loro decesso. Questo passaggio ha richiesto più di un'ora, dopodiché ho sprayato tutto il cane con Frontline, Rp03 (neem) e le ho messo un collare Scalibor (sono tutte molecole compatibili tra loro), capite ora perché quando viaggio mi porto di tutto? Tocco finale sprayata alla gabbia e alla macchina. Non mi piacciono gli insetticidi, sono un veterinario olistico in divenire, ma mi trovavo di fronte ad un disastro e andava fatto ricorso all'artiglieria pesante.

Sistemato il tutto, siamo ripartire con la speranza di raggiungere Woodland, nella contea di Durham e mia destinazione finale, ad un orario decente. Credo di aver raggiunto il mio B&B attorno alle nove di sera. Sotto la luce dorata del sole tutto sembrava accogliente e pacifico, i proprietari mi hanno dato la stessa impressione. Una piccola fattoria con muri di pietra, circondata da pascoli e da cavalli, un bellissimo posto da chiamare "casa", anche se solo per un po'. (Slideshow sotto).

Ps. Se siete curiosi di conoscere la provenienza delle pulci, credo fossero francesi, omaggio dei gatti che gironzolavano attorno all'[hotel](#)...

From French Fleas to English

Horses

When eventually came out from the [Eurotunnel](#) I was disappointed: there was nothing special. Of course I was in Folkestone, England, but there was nothing welcoming us: we were simply sent away our train and met no special buildings, nothing but for an anonymous road leading us to more trafficked one. I already wrote about driving in England, to The North, and you can read my impressions [here](#), I love that sign by the way! Today, I will concentrate on what happened in around Stanstead Airport, I think it was there, mile more or mile less, I remember planes flying low over my head.



While waiting for my train, at the Eurotunnel, I noticed some dark brown dots among Briony hair. “Unfortunately”, I have been a parasitology intern for a whole semester, which means I know more than I wish to know about all sort of nasty bugs infesting pets. The combination black dots + dog + hair, therefore, elicited quite an alarming reaction, but I

desperately tried to be positive. Briony had been bathed, cleaned and groomed before I left, to make sure she was not going to travel around Europe carrying any clandestine bugs. She hardly had any parasites during all her life and I am quite picky in these things, I really had no reason to fear the worst. My inquisitive mind, however, was looking for detailed answers. It was afternoon when I decided to stop at a service station: my sat nav told me that there was one (and road signs said the same) so I followed their advice and I got lost. I know it might sound stupid, but in Italy motorway’ service stations are ON the motorway, not elsewhere. Since you pay to access the motorway here, you are not supposed to leave

it until your trip is over: they basically lock you inside, together with everything you might need. You do not need to leave the motorway to buy some food, or some gas. So, as naïve as I can sometimes be, I could not believe my sat nav was taking me away from the motorway. I ended up in a small village, at a small village Country Club to be more precise, very pretty but no service stations. I stopped the car in a corner, recollected myself and persisted, eventually landing in a giant parking lot surrounded by supermarkets of all sorts. I badly needed a toilet (I drank so much water on the way!), something fresh to drink and a dinner for the night but... it was incredibly hot, too hot to leave the dog in the car for a prolonged time. I ended up leaving the car semi-open and having multiple- short- trips the shops.

After the first trip – toilet -I went back to the car, took Briony out, walked her and then dug among bags and suitcases to find the “grooming bag” and the medicines case. Flea comb came out first confirming my fears:



the dog was carrying hundreds of bugs. I could not believe it: she was bug free when we left from home and now she was covered with fleas! I do not like chemicals and I know the less toxic products against fleas are not 100% effective but, I had to do something! I decided to adopt a multi-step strategy: part first consisted in looking for any single bug and smashing it, to be sure of its death. It took more than an hour... I then took Frontline spray, Neem spray and Scalibor collar (I travel heavy for a reason!) and placed all of them (these molecules can be safely used together) on Briony... I am an holistic vet in progress, I try to avoid medicines and chemicals at all costs, but I was so shocked by all those fleas that I opted for heavy artillery! I did not want to carry all those fleas around much longer.

As soon as she looked cleaner, I sprayed Frontline inside the crate and inside the car and left, in the hope to reach

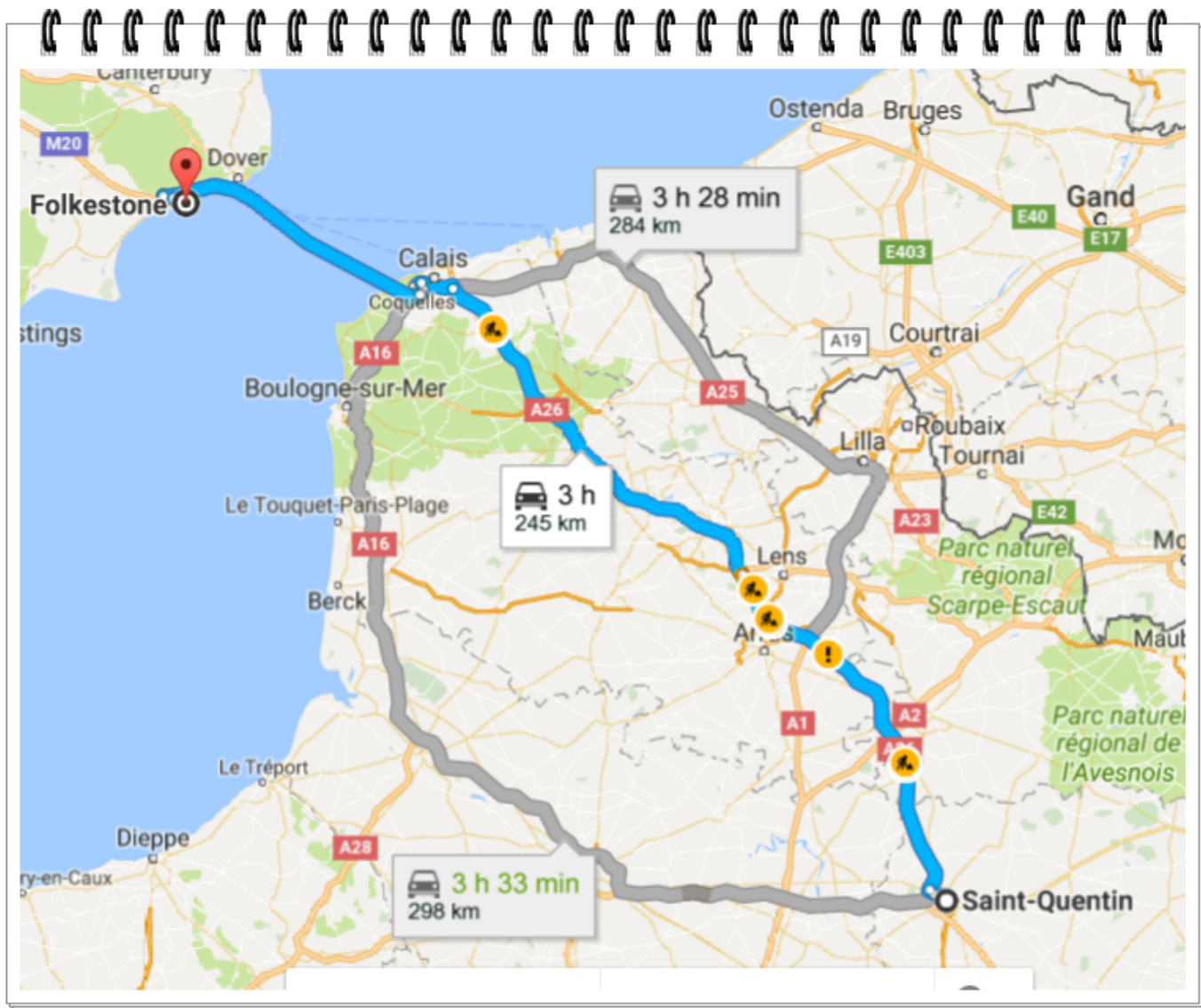
Woodland, in County Durham, my final destination, before the sunset. I think I parked in my B&B yard at around 9 PM, it was the golden hour and the place looked peaceful and welcoming. The owners were as well, I immediately loved that small "farm" with stone walls, surrounded by horses and paddocks, an ideal temporary home! (Slideshow with pictures below).

Ps. If you wonder where did the fleas came from... I think they were a gift from some French cats roaming around the [French](#) hotel...

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

In fondo al mar: l'Eurotunnel

La mattina seguente, appena alzata, ho scoperto di avere un nuovo compagno di stanza: uno scarafaggio stava cercando di entrare nella ciotola di Briony! Non mi andava di mettermi a battaglia con l'insetto, dico solo che la sua presenza non mi ha colpito positivamente. In ogni caso l'ho lasciato con Briony e sono andata a fare colazione nell'edificio principale. Era sabato mattina, troppo presto per i miei parametri, la sala era piuttosto vuota, solo gruppetti di motociclisti inglesi. ["Hagrid"](#) non c'era, ma c'era diversi suoi colleghi sparsi tra i tavoli, ero l'unica donna e, soprattutto l'unica donna che viaggiava da sola!



Ho re-impacchettato tutto, scarafaggio escluso, e sono partita verso Les Coquelles, dove si trova il lato francese dell'Eurotunnel. Ero in anticipo ma temevo di essere in ritardo, mi era stato detto che serviva un po' di tempo per passare i controlli alla Pet Reception Area. L'autostrada era pressoché vuota e il sole lanciava dei raggi grigiastri e insignificanti. Perché il tunnel? Avevo sempre raggiunto l'Inghilterra via aria, quindi avrei voluto vedere le "bianche scogliere di Dover", il traghetto era pertanto un'opzione appetibile. Lo è stato fino a che ho scoperto che i cani dovevano restare in auto, nella stiva. Chi ha viaggiato sui traghetti italiani sa che da noi è vero il contrario. NON si possono lasciare i cani in stiva: è considerato pericoloso e, di fatto, chi ha lasciato il cane "illegalmente" a volte l'ha

trovato morto, forse ucciso da gas di scarico. Sui nostri traghetti ci sono delle gabbie e, comunque, i cani si possono portare sul ponte. La politica dei traghetti inglesi è opposta, il cane resta in stiva, nessuna eccezione. Purtroppo, i fatti di cronaca raccontano di cani morti in stiva: è vero, il viaggio è breve ma, se le temperature sono alte, il rischio del colpo di calore è dietro l'angolo. Così ho fatto la mia scelta.



La Pet Reception Area era quasi vuota, c'era all'esterno un van per cavalli che pensavo avrebbe rallentato tutto, ma le cose invece si sono svolte velocemente, un controllo al chip e al passaporto ed eravamo a posto. All'esterno c'era un area cani cintata, ci ho portato Briony, sorpresa: l'erba era di plastica! Il tutto era un po' assurdo ma mi ricordava la mia infanzia: ho passato i miei primi anni di vita in città, all'ombra della cattedrale. Le strade erano coperte con pietre, lastroni e acciottolato, io volevo l'erba e credevo di poter creare un prato usando l'erba di plastica! Briony ha presto fatto amicizia con un grande bovaro svizzero appartenente a degli inglesi che si erano trasferiti in Francia. Andavano in Inghilterra per le vacanze ma, stando a loro, erano felicissimi di essersi trasferiti e di avere aperto un Bed and Breakfast. Mentre parlavamo, ho trovato dei puntini neri nel mantello di Briony ma, volendo escludere l'ipotesi peggiore, mi sono limitata a metterla in gabbia e a

ripartire verso il treno.



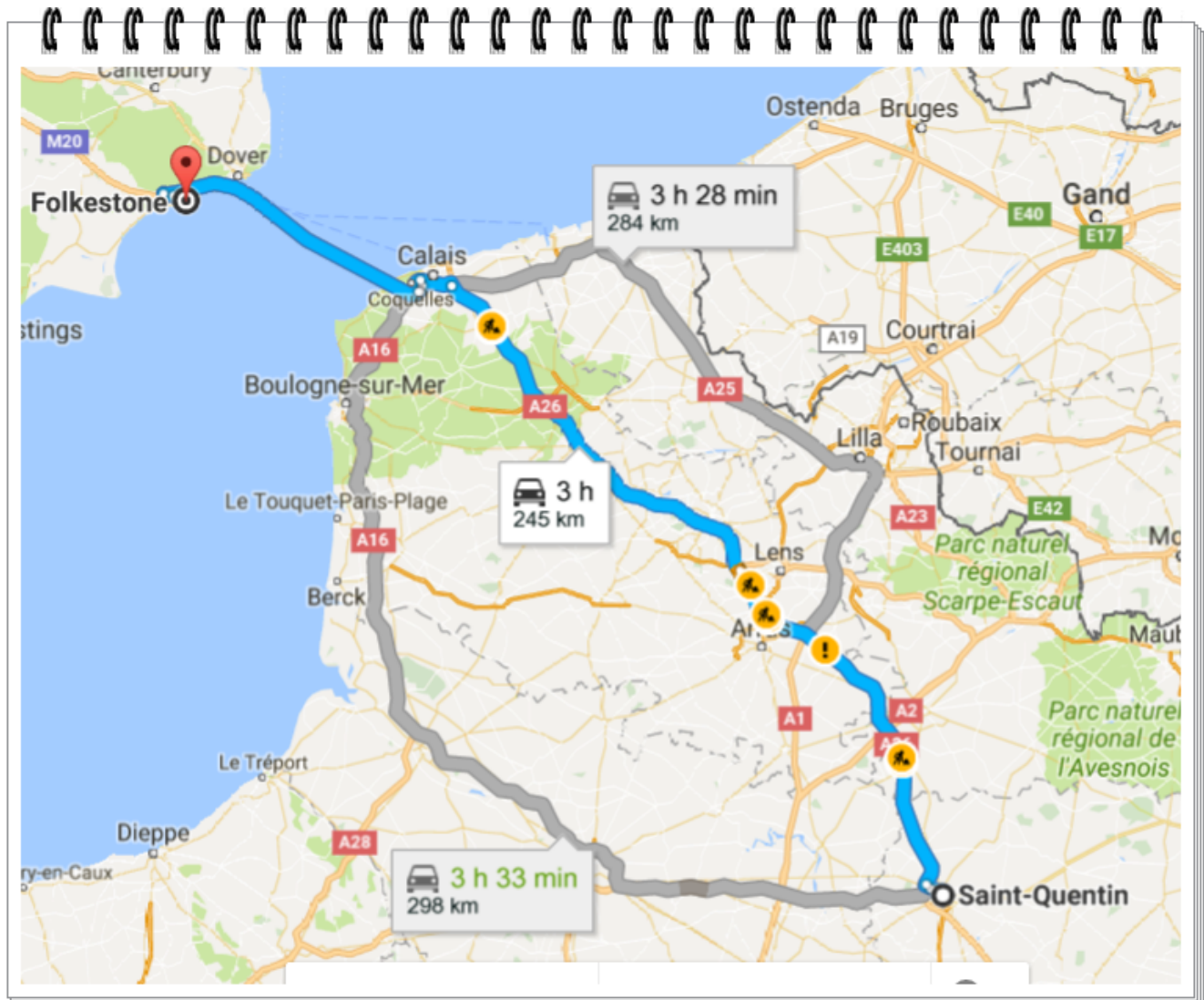
"Come è il tunnel?", di tutta l'avventura inglese questa è la domanda più frequente. Tutti sono incuriositi dal tunnel e credo li immaginino molto diverso. *"Si vedono i pesci?"* *"No, solo i mostri marini!"*. Non sono una cattiva persona, quindi non ho mai risposto così, ma la domanda sui pesci è vera e frequente. Le persone rimangono molto male quando racconto che il tunnel non è affatto diverso dalla metropolitana di una qualsiasi città europea, l'unica differenza sono gli spazi per parcheggiare l'auto al posto dei sedili. Quando si entra nel tunnel poi, non si vedono altro che muri grigi. Il viaggio è molto rapido, ho impiegato meno di quanto normalmente mi serva per attraversare Milano, certo il tunnel non ha il fascino delle bianche scogliere di Dover ma, se si viaggia con un cane, è estremamente pratico!

Per saperne di più sul nostro arrivo in Inghilterra [cliccate qui](#).

Under the Sea: The Eurotunnel

On the following morning, right after waking up, I realized I had a new roommate: a cockroach was trying to get into Briony's bowl! I did not want to get into a fight with the bug, but I was not so positively impressed by its presence. Anyway, I left it and Briony alone and went to the main building to have breakfast. It was Saturday morning, early for

my standards, and the only people there were male British bikers travelling in small groups. “[Hagrid](#)” was not there, but his colleagues were scattered in different tables: I was the only woman, and most of all the only woman travelling alone!



Barbed wire...

I quickly re-packed everything, but for the bug, and left, heading towards Les Coquelles, where the French side of the Eurotunnel is located. It was early, but I was afraid of being late: I was told it takes time to go through the Pet Reception Area. The motorway was, again, virtually empty and the sun was casting dull grey rays. Why the tunnel? As I have always reached England by air, I wanted to reach it by sea to see the "White Cliffs of Dover" (school memories) hence the ferry was an interesting option until I found out that pets must remain in the car. Here in Italy, the opposite happens: you CAN'T leave a dog in a vehicle on a ferry. You are not supposed to do so because it is deemed too dangerous, and rightly so: I know of dogs, illegally left there, who were found dead, probably killed by gas exhalations. Our ferries provide kennels for dogs but you are also allowed to keep the dog with you. British Ferries, instead, follow another policy and dogs must be left in the car: whereas it is true that the trip is quite short, during the summer months temperatures could be too high. Indeed, I investigated and it came out that some pets had died, while crossing from France to England in the summer, cause of death was heatstroke. This is how I made my decision.



Inside the tunnel

The Pet Reception Area was almost empty, outside there was a van full of horses and I thought it was going to slower things but, everything was very quick: they checked the dog's microchip and passport and gave me a badge. Outside of the

building there was a fenced dog park and I brought Briony there: its ground was made of plastic grass! A bit odd but reminded me of my childhood: I spent my first 8 years of life living in the city centre, right in the cathedral shadow. Roads were paved with stones and granite and I suffered that, I wanted grass and I thought I could have had lawn made with plastic grass... But anyway, she quickly made friends with a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. Her owners were British and going back to England on vacation: they told me they now lived in France where they were running a B&B, apparently they were much happier in France. While they were talking I noticed some tiny black dots between Briony's hair but I did not want to think about the "worst case scenario", put her back in her crate and drove towards the train.

"How was the tunnel?" is the most frequent question I get asked. People are really curious and, most likely, imagine something else. *"Can you see fishes?" "No, just sea monsters!"*. Seriously, I have never answered like that but... I had the fishes question asked several times. When I describe the tunnel like an underground, people get disappointed! But, in reality, it is not much different than Milan, London or Paris underground! It looks the same, but instead of featuring seats, these trains feature parking spaces for cars. That's it, once you get inside the tunnel you see nothing but grey walls. The journey is very short: to go from France to England it took less than to go from one side of Milan to another on the underground. Not as beautiful as the White Cliffs of Dover, but very convenient if you are travelling with a pet!

[You can read about our arrival in England here.](#)

Una Francia scioccata

Da Basilea a Saint Quentin: una Francia scioccata

Come è stata questa parte di viaggio? Strana, molto strana. Come ho già [detto](#) non volevo trovarmi in Francia il 14 di luglio perché mi sentivo che sarebbe successo qualcosa. Avevo avuto ragione, ma essere lì il 15 non è stato meglio. Dopo aver passato il confine, si sono inserite nella radio le stazioni francesi, terribile. La Francia era scioccata e lo lasciava vedere. Non c'erano auto, non c'erano camion, non c'era musica, solo infinite discussioni sul terrorismo e sulla morte. Era tutto surreale: la luce accecante del sole, le strade vuote e i paesaggi terribilmente italiani. Alsazia e Champagne potevano essere casa, stessa luce, stesso calore, stessi campi e stesse colline. Mi sono fermata in alcune occasioni ma ho dimenticato quasi tutto, ricordo solo il caldo, la luce dura del sole e lo sporadico contadino sul suo trattore all'orizzonte. La Francia cercava di anestetizzarsi ma non ci riusciva.



Sono arrivata al mio albergo poco prima di cena, ricordava uno

di quei motel americani dei film ed era pieno di motociclisti britannici. Ammiro i motociclisti perché sano viaggiare leggeri. Mi è stata assegnata al piano terra e sono riuscita a parcheggiare proprio di fronte. Una gigantesca moto occupava lo spazio accanto. La receptionist mi ha dato una tessera magnetica al posto della chiavi tradizionali. Gli alberghi lo fanno spesso e di solito è comodo a meno che tu non abbia un cane, ci siano gatti ovunque e la porta si blocchi da sola. Così, come potete immaginare, la porta ha continuato a chiudersi mentre io portavo roba dentro e io sono rimasta chiusa fuori in alcuna occasione. La receptionist credo abbia iniziato ad odiarmi: ammetto di avere un rapporto difficile con le chiavi, ma questa volta non era tutta colpa mia. Nel frattempo ho scoperto a chi apparteneva la maxi moto: era un gigante inglese, grigio, capelluto e barbuto, molto simile ad Hagrid. E' presto diventato un volto familiare perché ha trascorso ore a cavalcioni della sua moto spenta (di fronte alla mia finestra) a chiacchierare a telefono con diverse donne. Finiva con una e attaccava con un'altra. Non che mi interessasse ascoltarlo, ma dovevo fare avanti e indietro e lui non era esattamente una creatura silenziosa.



A proposito di avanti e indietro, dal momento che c'era pieno

di gatti, ho deciso di portare Briony un po' più in là: pessima idea, era pieno di conigli così mi sono spinta ancora più in là e ho beccato un cimitero di guerra giusto per aggiungere un altro pizzico di grottesco. Quando sono tornata in camera per dormire la TV mostrava ancora immagini di una Francia scioccata e il motociclista britannico era ancora al telefono.

Poi è arrivato lo [scarafaggio](#)...

A Shocked France

A Shocked France: From Basel to Saint Quentin

How was that? Creepy, one of the weirdest trips I ever had. As said [earlier](#), I did not want to be in France on the 14th of July feeling something was going to happen. Well, I was right but being there on the 15th was even worse. As soon as I crossed the border, French radio stations went on and it was awful. France was shocked about what just happened and did not try to hide it. There were almost no cars, nor trucks on the road and radio stations had no music, only endless talks about terrorism and death. It was surreal: harsh sunlight, empty roads and Italian like sceneries. Alsace and Champagne could be home: same light, same heat, same fields and hills surrounding the motorway. I stopped a couple of times but I do not remember much, just the heat, the harsh sunlight and the occasional farmer driving his tractor on the horizon. France was trying to anesthetize itself, unsuccessfully. I reached my "hotel" right before dinner time: it looked like one of those American motels you see in movies and it was full of British bikers. I highly respect bikers because... they know how to



I was given a room on the ground floor and I managed to park the car right in front of it. A giant motorbike was parked in the nearby spot. The hotel receptionist gave me a keycard lock, instead of a plain key, this is fairly common now and usually convenient unless, you have a dog, there are cats everywhere and the door locks by itself. So... It kept happening that the door locked itself while I was bringing stuff inside. I ended up being locked outside a couple of times and the receptionist lady developed a "magnetic" dislike for me. I am not the smartest person when it comes to keys, I know, but, this time, it was not completely my fault. In the meantime, I discovered who the owner of the large motorbike was: a giant grey haired, bearded man who looked like Hagrid. I got quite familiar with him as he spent hours on his parked motorbike (placed right in front of my window) chatting over the phone with several women. Once he had finished with one, he would start with another one. I was not trying to listen him, but he was not exactly a silent critter and I had to walk in front of

hi



Speaking of back and forth, since the parking lot was filled with cats, I decided to walk Briony in the neighbourhood: bad idea, it was full of rabbits so I moved even further and ended up in front of a war cemetery, just to put some more creepiness to the table. When I went back to sleep, the images on TV were still showing and shocked France and the British biker was still chatting with a woman.

[And then the cockroach came...](#)