

# English Summer Trials: Daily Life

People keep asking about British trials.... but they always forget to ask about daily life during these trials! A brief recap: I watched Champion Stake 2015 (this falls into “English Summer Trials”); participated in [English and Scottish summer trials in 2016](#); participated in [English partridge trials in Norfolk](#) (autumn trials) in 2017. Now I am just back from English summer trials 2018 and I am still incredibly tired: summer trials are not really a relaxing holiday, probably they are not a holiday at all!



Grouse

I have to admit that Autumn Partridge trials, in spite of being less flashy, are perfectly suitable to the average human being, whereas Grouse Summer trials are certainly more demanding in terms of physical fitness. I do not consider myself a lazy person, and I do my best to keep in shape, but I get tired quite easily, this makes me think that to survive in summer trials with elegance you need to be a bit of a superhero. For this reason, this year I did not even dare to cross the Scottish border: my 2016 experience in Scotland was pretty intense and most of my time was spent on the road, travelling from one trial to another, often trying to reach the micro supermarket (& service station) in Grantown on Spey before it was too late. Maybe it was too much just because I [was staying](#)

[in a B&B](#) I did not particularly enjoy and from which I eventually ran away. Maybe it was so bad because I did not even have a fridge, nor a freezer or... most likely, there was simply too much to do for one person travelling alone.

This is one of the reasons that made me opt for "[England only](#)" this year, as if rural England was easy to deal with. I tried to be more organized and I booked a whole cottage: um mm err... it was a cottage suitable for five people, much more than one small sized human and her dog would have needed, but it was conveniently located and reasonably priced. Most of the people participating in British trials, indeed, do not stay in hotels, or at home, as it happens with FCI trials (at least those taking place in Italy). The Brits normally live in a caravan (some Irish even dared to live in a tent!) or rent a cottage, a few opt for a bed and breakfast. Trials take place every day (one day you have the puppy or the novice stake, and on the following day you normally have the open stake) and most of the competitors have a trial each day.



Newbiggin estate

Trials start later than Italian FCI trials: the meeting is normally at 9 o'clock (and not at dawn as awfully required here), but the venue might be far from where you are staying. In my experience, since I have always skipped the first trials, those that take place near Lauder (Scottish Borders), we have about one week of trials near Blanchland and Barnard Castle, which are villages in [County of Durham](#) and Northumberland, and one second week with trials around Reeth,

in North Yorkshire. People can choose whether to move around from trial to trial, to stay one week in one place and then move somewhere else to get closer to the next trials, or decide to remain two weeks in the same place, and drive back and forth. I chose the third option to avoid packing and unpacking continuously.

Trialers do not travel light: they cannot. Most of the people drive a pick up truck full of dogs, clothes and food. You can have all sort of weathers during a trials circuit, sometimes even during a single trial: this year temperatures ranged from 8°C degrees with high winds and rain to thirty something degrees. You need to bring summer clothes, rain clothes and winter clothes, better if in two copies, as everything can get soaked with water. You also need a hat, a rain hat, some sunscreen, a walking stick, the list of the must have is long, I am just mentioning something to let you imagine how full our cars are.

While supermarkets exist in Northern England, they can be far from where you live or close earlier than you are used to. Shops also close around 5 p.m. and you are not normally back from a trial by that time. This happens because English trials can have up to 40 dogs (20 braces) and at least two rounds take place, which means a trial usually finishes late in the afternoon(\*you are expected to stay until the end of the trial and to follow the stake on foot, all day long). There is normally a lunch break, but there is no restaurant, nor do the clubs cater food for competitors: runners are expected to bring they own packed lunches and eat them on the [moor](#), or in the car if the weather is too bad. This also means you have to arrange your own meals by purchasing them or by cooking them in advance.



Lunch on the moor

As said earlier, trials start at 9 a.m. but might be located one, or even two hours away from where you are staying. To reach Masham trial in time, I woke up at 5 a.m., had breakfast and packed everything I needed to carry with me and to met with friends on the way at 6.30 a.m. We reached the venue a bit earlier than planned, but you are somehow expected to be there well before the announced meeting time. Also, travel time on country roads is not very predictable with sheep and tractors ready to sabotage the best plans.



Lunch on the moor

That trial was sadly cancelled and, as traditionally happens, this was announced on the trial's ground, not in advance by phone, or-mail. We reached home earlier on that day but trials do not usually finish before 5 p.m. so, by the time awards are

given and you leave the moor.... you are back at your temporary home at around 7 p.m., or even later if you stop on the way to get some gas, or to grab any food for the following day.

By the time you unload the car, have a shower, feed the dog, feed yourself and maybe dry your wet clothes, is almost time to go to bed and maybe answer a couple of e-mails and messages you received during the day, in the rare instances your cellphone managed to get some signal. That's daily life during English summer trials: Scottish summer trials were similar two years ago, but with competitions taking place much further from each other and with much less service stations, supermarkets and cell phone signal on the way!

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

Newbiggin (Yorkshire Gundog Club) Open Stake slideshow pictures below.

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## **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 “p

## 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 perspective 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 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>) 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.





1 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 britannica. 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 riservarsi 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 incontrarvi 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 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 (sono professionisti 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 Lound e i suoi pointer Frostad Elfin at Fleetstalk (il classificato al Champion Stake 2016) e Goddribb Judd

2 Briony del Cavaldrossa 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 disprezzo 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 consenso 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 laici 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

ha fatto meno passo in avanti, la tolleranza sugli errori di dressaggio o condizionale è nulla. Non è possibile, durante la prova, toccare il cane o urlare ordini a distanza: la 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. È 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'emissione 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 exist 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](#).

## Cani da caccia



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 battuta 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 sgarzo 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 sterrati ripidi e rocciosi, 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 battuta 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 battuta 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

### I classificati del Champion Stake 2016

- 1) FT. Ch. Ballyellen Cara, setter inglese femmina di Billy Connelly (Irlanda), condotta da Gerry Devine (Irlanda)
  - 2) Frostied Elfin at Fleetstall, pointer inglese maschio di Steve e Sharon Lound
  - 3) Hunshigo Donard, setter irlandese femmina di Mark Adams (Irlanda)
  - 4) Bonnard Cherry Cherry, setter irlandese maschio di Donna Clark, condotta da Colin Forde
- Certificati di merito: Upperwood Clover e FT Ch. Upperwood Here, 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 (generalmente che *headkeeper*, il capo guardiacaccia) e *gun ciot* (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](http://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; here 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 place 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.





del moor e dei suoi selvatici, vigilano. Si corre in riserve private generosamente messe a disposizione dei 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 farvi 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](http://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 SFTA Scottish Field Trials Association, un'importante associazione che ha nel consiglio direttivo Wilson Young coordinato sul campo da Jen 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 Lauderdale (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 cresciuti perché alcuni cani non erano ancora del tutto pronti, nonché a cuosa

di un'epidemia di tosse di canile. Tra i partecipanti molti avevano circa un anno e hanno pagato l'esperienza e, sicuramente, la scarsa abitudine alle legni 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 Connelly (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 vederli fare buone cose quando saranno più maturi.



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

2 Bownard Cherry Cherry (TV 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 Pyreleugh Estate, sempre a Lauderdale, gentilmente concessa dal duca di Roxburghe. 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, Shaun 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 grosse pedonature involontandosi a distanza, in diversi hanno commesso errori; nella seconda parte della mattinata la selvaggia 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 armonia 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 dietro) ha reso la prova un po' diversa da quelle a cui avevo assistito fino ad ora: i cani "aprivano" 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 il cuoco che io avevo fatto il nome giusto. E invece sì! Sul podio è finita la FT.Ch. Ballyellen Cara madre di Ballyellen Tango, vincitrice del Puppy Derby, che già avevo visto e apprezzato al Ch. 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 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

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# **Between Dogs and Grouse (Sentieri di Caccia November 2016)**

## **Between Dogs and Grouse – Originally Published in Sentieri di Caccia – November 2016**

*Disclaimer: This is the first 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.***

[I cannot tell when it all began](#). When I was a little child I used to refuse milk and kept begging for tea for tea to be put in my bottle, no wonder I could not sleep! At the age of four, I was given a Scottish kilt and a book on Queen Elizabeth, I still treasure both. At six, I began studying English and at 11 I asked for an English Setter. The setter came many years later, together with a master degree in British Literature. It was the Setter though, and not the books, that made me aware of the art of shooting over pointing dogs, of field trials and more. A mosaic tile, however, was still missing. I love the English Setter and I am sincerely happy that it is so popular in Italy (12.000 puppies were registered in 2015) but, at the same time, I have mixed feelings about how it is perceived, trained and bred by my fellow countrymen. The same happens when it comes to field trials. I have always felt there was something else, something hidden, something to be discovered. I was “feeling” rather than “thinking”, there was nothing rational about my perception. In July 2015, however, I had the opportunity to watch the Champion Stake and it gave me some little pieces of evidence that proved my emotional beliefs were right. I was not crazy, just a little odd, and there was a whole new world ready to be explored: British pointing dogs could be trained and used in a different way.

Once back home, I began training my dog according to what I saw. My training style was perceived by the Italians as “different” and more traditional, a very polite way to tell me it was outdated. The method I chose forced me to work hard but at a slow pace, I did not see any fruits until spring 2016. My original plan was very modest: I was going to use the British “enlightenment” to prepare Briony for Italian Field Trials, in the meantime I would have gone back to the UK to watch more trials and learn more. Things, however, took an unexpected twist which made me change my plans: in April the dog suddenly became very reliable and, one day, while I was driving back

from the training grounds a light bulb went on: why not to go back with her and compete?



Briony, setter inglese di proprietà di Rosella Di Palma, in guidata durante il suo primo censimento a Muggleswick

**È** difficile dire quando tutto abbia avuto inizio. Ricordo solo che da bambina rifiutavo il latte e che il mio biberon era invece pieno di tè, forse per questo non dormivo mai. All'età di circa quattro anni mi hanno regalato un kilt e un libro sulla Regina Elisabetta, conservo ancora entrambi, e sei ho iniziato il mio primo corso d'inglese. A 11 anni volevo un setter inglese tutto per me e qualche anno dopo lo ho avuto, insieme a una laurea in lingua e letteratura inglese. Grazie al mio primo setter ho scoperto la caccia con il cane da ferma, la cinofilia venatoria e molto altro. Per un pezzo del mosaico continuava a mancare. Adoro il setter inglese come cane da ferma e la sua popolarità in Italia mi rende felice, d'altra parte non condivido alcuni metodi di utilizzo nostrani e, alla stessa stregua, ho sentimenti misti nei confronti delle nostre manifestazioni cinofile. Da sempre avevo la sensazione che ci fosse dell'altro da scoprire. Nel luglio di 2015 ne ho avuto la conferma: sono riuscita ad assistere al Champion Stake inglese (la prova di eccellenza per setter e pointer) e mi si è aperto un mondo nuovo sull'utilizzo e sull'addestramento dei cani da ferma britannici. Una volta rientrata in Italia ho cominciato a lavorare il cane alla luce di quanto avevo visto lassù. Era, il mio, un tipo di addestramento diverso da quello che siamo abituati a vedere, più "tradizionale" probabilmente e più lento nel mostrare i suoi frutti che, tuttavia, come ogni buon raccolto, hanno iniziato a spuntare in primavera (2016). In tutta franchezza il mio obiettivo era semplicemente quello di preparare il cane per le prove italiane e, nel frattempo, tornare in Inghilterra come semplice osservatore per continuare ad apprendere, ma le cose hanno poi preso una piega diversa. Dallo scorso aprile, Briony ha fatto grandi progressi e, un giorno, mentre rientravo dalla zona C mi si è accesa una lampadina: perché, anziché andare a vedere i cani altri impegnati in prova, non partecipare alle competizioni con la mia setter?

#### La caccia con il cane da ferma: solo per pochi

Per meglio comprendere le prove di lavoro britanniche è necessario avere qualche nozione sulla situazione famistica locale e sul tipo di lavoro che è normalmente richiesto ai cani da ferma. Mi limiterò a parlare di cani da ferma britannici (i quattro setter e i pointer) e di grouse. Alcune persone mi hanno chiesto informazioni sull'utilizzo dei continentali sulle grouse e se ci siano prove di lavoro su questi selvatici anche per loro. Sì, esistono alcune prove di lavoro su grouse anche per i continentali, ma sono diverse da quelle per inglesi e vengono proposte in numero ridotto, nonché dopo il 12 agosto, giorno di apertura della caccia alla grouse. Quanto all'utilizzo dei continentali, dal vivo ho visto solo un drabhaar allenarsi su un moor, per il resto solo fotografie e video ma, perdonatemi, l'opinione molto franca e poco diplomatica: trovo i cani da ferma continentali fuori luogo in quel contesto! Non metto in dubbio le loro capacità venatorie, anzi, ma non riesco ad accettarli in quel paesaggio e con quella funzione, mi fanno lo stesso effetto che mi farebbe un setter inglese intento a riportare una volpe saltando recinzioni. In Gran Bretagna c'è un crescente interesse nei confronti dei cani da ferma continentali, che loro chiamano HPR (Hunt Point & Retrieve), ma il rischio meglio impiegarli nel fagiano o su altri selvatici. Devo poi dichiarare che la caccia con il cane da ferma, in Gran Bretagna, è praticata da pochissimi appassionati. Per gli italiani il cane da ferma è il cane da caccia per eccellenza, per noi è normale uscire di casa con cane e fucile e andare a cercare un fagiano, una beccaccia o una lepce, per un inglese questa condotta è molto insolita. I britannici chiamano il nostro modo di andare a caccia rough shooting e sono pochissimi i cacciatori che lo praticano. Forse non è tradizione o, forse, la loro legislazione venatoria non agevola tale pratica: per accedere a un terreno di caccia occorre il permesso

#### Canidacaccia

del proprietario (che è titolare della selvaggina) e i luoghi in cui si trovano generalmente i selvatici sono riserve di caccia private, a cui è solo a volte possibile accedere a pagamento, ma aprirsi "a volte" perché non tutte le riserve di caccia sono aperte al pubblico, in alcune cacciano solo i proprietari. L'accesso a una riserva, inoltre, non è legato semplicemente al denaro: la gestione e l'attività venatoria sono organizzate da ciascuna riserva in maniera piuttosto rigida, il che fa sì che possano decidere se ammettere, o meno, un certo tipo di cliente. Alcune riserve, per esempio, praticano solo lo shooting (caccia in battuta all'inglese) e non prevedono alcun tipo di caccia con il cane da ferma: ho avuto modo di allenare in Kent in una riserva dove un setter inglese non aveva mai corso, starne e fagiani li si cacciano solo in battuta. In altre riserve, soprattutto in Scozia, è prevista anche la caccia con il cane da ferma, ma i soggetti impiegati vengono procurati dalla riserva stessa, non è previsto che un cacciatore porti il suo cane. Non è impossibile in assoluto ma, fonte la mia esperienza, sono accettati solo eventuali cani conosciuti e ritenuti "sicuri". I cinofili italiani sono abituati ad andare a caccia all'estero con il proprio cane e in alcune nazioni vi sono riserve e strutture organizzate proprio per questo scopo, nel Regno Unito è diverso. Esiste il turismo venatorio, ma è mirato al cacciatore più che al cinofilo. Come deve essere un cane per poter cacciare in Gran Bretagna? Per i britannici il controllo sul cane è vitale. Il cane deve essere corretto al frullo, deve eseguire un terra (o un seduto) a comando, deve seguire le indicazioni del conduttore e deve rientrare quando chiamato. Vi sono territori in cui la densità di selvatici è tale da rendere indispensabile un cane simile. Dove si cacciano le grouse ci sono spesso moltissimi conigli (Inghilterra) e lepri (Scozia), greggi di pecore (che il cane deve ignorare) e può capitare anche dell'altro... Le grouse

stesse (più in Inghilterra che in Scozia) sono molto numerose, una covata può distribuirsi in pochi metri quadrati ed essere seguita da un'altra covata, vicinissima. Un cane non corretto al frullo e non perfettamente sotto controllo diventa ingestibile e può ostacolare il lavoro di tutela dei selvatici messo in atto dal guardacaccia. Viste le condizioni faunistiche dei territori italiani, è difficilissimo preparare un cane come pretendono dai cacciatori d'Oltramarina. Io ho dedicato quasi un anno all'obbedienza ferrea, ci sono riuscita, ma è stato estremamente impegnativo.

#### La grouse viene prima di tutto

La diffidenza nei confronti dei cani è legata al grande rispetto per i selvatici. Il guardacaccia ha il potere assoluto sul territorio e il suo primo pensiero è tutelare la selvaggina. Se parliamo di grouse, esse nascono e si riproducono in natura, non sono allevabili, il loro ciclo di vita è intimamente legato al clima e al territorio. Il lavoro del guardacaccia comincia in primavera con i censimenti dei riproduttori, censimenti che possono essere ostacolati da difficili condizioni climatiche. È proprio il clima a essere la prima minaccia per la grouse: quest'anno, per esempio, ha fatto relativamente poco freddo in inverno, ma ci sono state nevicate primaverili e poi molta pioggia, eventi che in talune zone della Scozia hanno decimato il numero dei nuovi nati. Ogni moor è curato dal guardacaccia (o meglio da uno staff di guardacaccia) come un giardino: si effettua il controllo dei predatori, si organizza la presenza del bestiame, si pianifica la bruciatura degli appezzamenti di erica, il tutto per garantire all'amata grouse le migliori condizioni ambientali. Il tutto è curato nel dettaglio e spesso sono piccolissime le differenze: una riserva che aveva avuto problemi di natiche (ander



Dennis Longworth durante un censimento a Eggleston

## Only a few: shooting over pointing dogs

To better understand British Field Trials, it is useful to know something about indigenous wildlife management and about how pointing dogs are worked. The information you are about to read relate only to grouse and British pointing breeds, things for HPRs (Hunt Point Retrieve/Continental Pointing Dogs) are slightly different. People asked me about HPRs and grouse: there are grouse trials for them as well, but they take place during the shooting season. The only HPR I saw working on a moor was a GWP (German Wirehaired Pointer): she was fine, but I cannot get used to the sight of a HPR running in the heather. I know I am not going to be politically correct here but... these dogs look out of place! I am sure they can work grouse properly, but they do not belong to this world. The sight of an English Setter jumping fences with a fox in his

mouth would trigger in me the same feelings. In Britain the interest in HPRs is increasing, and I am sure they would do very well on pheasant and other game.

Shooting over pointing dog, however, is fairly uncommon. Italian hunters are crazy about pointing dogs: the average hunter here owns one or more pointing dogs and leaves the house alone in the morning, a dog and a shotgun are his only company. They hope to bag a pheasant, a woodcock or maybe a hare: British people hunting in this manner (they call this rough shooting) are fairly scarce. Why? I do not know, maybe it does not belong to their tradition and perhaps the legislation discourages this. In the UK, the game belongs to the landowners (in Italy wild animals are considered a public good – we have private estates but 90% of hunting/shooting takes place on “common ground”) and to hunt on these grounds you need the landowner permission. Furthermore, most of the places in which you can find birds suitable to pointing dogs are private estates. Some of these estates accept paying clients, but can be selective on which customers to allow on their grounds: money is important, but proper game and land management are even more important and are therefore strictly regulated. Most of the estates offer shooting days (with beaters, pickers up and shooters), but are not organized to offer shooting days over pointing dogs. Before coming back to Italy last summer, I stopped in Kent and through a friend, I had the opportunity to run Briony on grounds belonging to a local estate. Well, she was the first English Setter who had put her paws on these grounds, they only offer formally organized shooting days with spaniels and retrievers. Scotland is slightly different, as some estates organize grouse shooting over pointing dogs, but the dogs at work are selected by the estate and professionally handled: it is uncommon to see shooters bringing their own dogs. I am not stating it cannot be done but, from what I could gather, gamekeepers allow only “safe” (well trained and obedient) dogs on their grounds. Italian shooters like to go abroad for hunting holidays with their dogs, I think British hunting tourism



focuses more on men than on dogs.

How should a pointing dog behave to please the average British gamekeeper? The Brits want their dogs to be under control. A dog MUST be steady to flush, drop on command, obey orders and come back when recalled. These skills are vital if you run a dog on grounds rich in birds, rabbit, hare, sheep and maybe something else. Grouse are abundant, a whole covey can be scattered in a few square metres, followed closely by another one: a dog unsteady to flush, who likes chasing birds, would be a nightmare. Unfortunately, due to the lack of birds Italian dog lovers have to face, is very hard to train a dog to be biddable in these conditions. I eventually succeeded, but I spent one whole year working on obedience, it was incredibly demanding.

## Canida caccia



ricinus - la stessa zecca che può trasmettere la malattia di Lyme - ha usato le pecore come raccoglitori di zecche: in pratica venivano mandate in zone infestate, in modo tale che le zecche si attaccassero agli ovini e potessero poi essere uccise con dei trattamenti sugli animali. Il controllo delle zecche è importante, perché possono trasmettere patogeni letali per le grousse. In primavera, come già detto, vengono censiti i riproduttori e in estate si rifanno i censimenti per aver chiaro il numero dei cuccioli in vista della stagione venatoria. Per censire vengono normalmente utilizzati i cani da ferma, alcune riserve analizzano anche i segni di presenza degli animali, come fatte e altro. I cani impiegati nei censimenti sono soggetti "fidati", in mano a conduttori "fidati", ovvero persone che hanno il cane sotto controllo. Alcune aziende organizzano i censimenti in maniera molto formale e a volte, a fronte di una richiesta di impegno notevole, pagano i cinofili che conducono i cani, riconoscendone la professionalità. In altre realtà, i censimenti

sono meno formali e vengono svolti su base volontaria: l'incaricato sa di dover controllare un dato territorio in un dato periodo, ma vi è più elasticità su tempi e modi. I cinofili sono molto contenti di poter censire gli animali, anche senza retribuzione, poiché i censimenti consentono di addestrare ed allenare i cani. In alcuni casi ai censimenti è presente un guardiacaccia che aiuta a contare i capi individuati e segna su apposite mappe i punti in cui sono stati trovati: in altri contesti invece, il cinofilo è solo e ha la responsabilità di annotare tutto. In entrambi i casi tuttavia, i censimenti vengono presi molto sul serio: la persona a cui è affidato il compito può, a volte, portare con sé altri conduttori e altri cani, ma sotto la sua totale responsabilità. Ho avuto il piacere e l'onore di partecipare ad alcuni censimenti. La prima giornata si è svolta a Mugliwick, sotto la responsabilità di Steve Robinson che allena, addestra e conduce setter irlandesi. In mattinata e in presenza del guardiacaccia,

1 Eggleston, Briony in ferma. Terry Harris controlla l'operato di cane e conduttrice

2 La grouse si riproduce solo in libertà e un piano di abbattimento "sbagliato" può compromettere più di una futura stagione di caccia



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Larger photo by Maria Jacques

## Grouse come first

Gamekeepers, those who rule on shooting grounds with absolute power, tend to be wary of dogs because... love their birds and

want to protect them. Grouse are wild birds, they reproduce in wilderness and cannot be artificially reared. Their life cycle is intimately linked to climate and grounds. In spring the gamekeepers are busy counting adults birds which are going to mate. Difficult weather conditions in the spring can hinder the counts and, most of all, decimate births. Winter 2015, for example, was fairly mild but spring 2016 brought snow and much rain: these conditions negatively affected the newborns. Each moor is being cared by a group of gamekeepers: they pay attention to pest management; organize sheep presence; plan heather burning and more. A newcomer might think that moors naturally look like the way they do they but, in reality, moors are not so different from gardens and their features are the results of proper care. Small details can make a difference: an estate that was infested by ticks (*Ixodes ricinus* ticks, those that carry Lyme Disease) minimized its problem through sheep. Sheep were sent grazing on the infested areas, they picked up the ticks which later died thank to the products applied on the sheep. Removing, or at least reducing tick presence, on the moor is important as these arthropods they can infect grouse with deadly diseases.

In the spring, as already mentioned, producer birds are counted and in the summer other counts are carried out to assess the number of young birds: estates need to know the number of birds to plan the shooting season. Pointing dogs are often used to count birds, some estates also take in account "presence signs" such as grouse faeces and so on. Only biddable dogs are used for counting, they are trustworthy dogs, handled by trustworthy handlers. Some counts are very formal and demanding, therefore the handlers get paid; other estates have a more laidback approach and accept volunteers: they are given specific area to work on, but the counting schedule is less tight and more flexible. Dog lovers are really happy to go counting as this allows them to train the dogs and let them gain more experience on grouse. Sometimes handlers work in team with gamekeepers who take note of the birds found, placing them on the estate map. Some other times

the dog handler has to do everything by himself but, in both cases, grouse counting is taken extremely seriously. Dog handlers can sometimes take other people with them, but they are deemed responsible for their friends (and their dogs!) behaviour. I am very happy to be able to write that Briony and I were allowed to go counting! It was an honour and a dream coming true. My first count took place at Muggleswick Estate, with Steve Robinson, who breeds and handles Irish Setters, supervising me. In the morning I followed him while he was handling his Irish Setters. Briony was kept on lead so that she could become familiar with grouse (she had never met any before) in a safe setting: as grouse always come first, we had to be sure she would not grab any young chicks. After hours of good behaviour, in the afternoon, she was allowed to work off lead cooperating with some new dogs. There were Steve Robinson Irish Setters, some Pointers owned by Terry Harris, Maria Jacques and Roy Heath; a Gordon Setter owned by Nicky Harris and, finally, a smart English Setter pup handled by John Naylor. I have to admit that these people were trusting my dog more than I was doing. It was nice feeling, they made me feel welcome and accepted. Briony did well, she was very gentle and careful with birds and thanks to this I was allowed to go counting again! On the following days, indeed, Terry Harris, a reputable Pointer and Gordon trainer, took us to Eggleston Estate and carefully monitored our work. There were his Pointers and his Gordons with us and sometimes some English Setters belonging to Dennis Longworth, Anne Maddison and John Naylor. Dennis Longworth, despite being "already" 83, is in wonderful shape and has a very sharp mind: he spent his life with pointing dogs and loves English Setters. It is a real pleasure to listen to his tales, opinions and advice. As said earlier, gamekeepers are really concerned about dogs behaviour during the counts and Terry Harris guaranteed for us: if a dog misbehaves during a count (or even during a trial) it could be banned forever from a specific ground! Things for us were going well and I was invited to go counting in Scotland too but, unfortunately, a kennel cough epidemic made this great



opportunity vanish. Nevertheless, two gamekeepers, Brian at Dorback Estate and Craigh at Tollishill Estate kindly allowed me to train on their grounds sending me to the best “places”. Brian even spent a couple of hours with me in the rain enjoying working with Briony... she seemed to like him more than me!

#### Cani da caccia



Il cane da caccia è un cane di razza che ha la funzione di aiutare il cacciatore a trovare e abbattere la preda. È un cane molto intelligente e veloce, con un olfatto molto sviluppato. Il cane da caccia è un cane di razza che ha la funzione di aiutare il cacciatore a trovare e abbattere la preda. È un cane molto intelligente e veloce, con un olfatto molto sviluppato.

If you have read the whole article, it should be now very clear that grouse come first and that its preciousness makes gamekeepers wary about “unknown” dogs. Nowadays it is easy to travel to UK with your dog, all you need is the rabies vaccines and a de-worming treatment against echinococcus, any dogs can go to Britain but only a few, perfectly trained ones, can be allowed on a moor. Someone might be tempted to

go there and work the dog on grouse in disguise, without asking permissions. I would not do that, it would be dishonest, rude and you could be – rightly so – considered a poacher. Estates need grouse count to assess the quality of game management and decide how to organize the shooting season. Whereas shooting days might be booked in great advance (years!), the final decisions on the numbers of shooting days and on the number of birds that might be shot, will be made at the end of the counts. In 2015, some estates partly cancelled their season and I am not sure about what happened in 2016, I was told that some estates in the Scottish Highlands apparently had less birds than they were supposed to have. Grouse shooting is the result of careful planning and safeguarding the species is the priority. Mismanaging grouse can compromise both the bird and the estate survival. In Scotland and Northern England grouse are very important: they play a big role in local culture and economy. All the people involved in grouse management love this bird and the grouse

plays a big role in rural economy. I think I love grouse too, and I know that what I am going to say cannot be considered “romantic” but grouse are money. Moors, as a natural environment, can exist thanks to grouse and the same can be said about estates. Look at those barren landscapes covered with heather, you cannot grow any crops there. Think about these wide open spaces located in very rural areas of the country and imagine what could happen if there were no grouse. Grouse shooting brings money to these areas and creates jobs; grouse shooting finances moor management and supports biodiversity, these would not be possible without the money earned through grouse shooting. For more information check the website <http://www.giftofgrouse.com/>

The second article of this series, about British field trials, the Puppy Derby and the Champion Stake can be read [here](#).

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

Slideshow below: