

# About me

## About me

I have a degree in Veterinary Medicine, to graduate I wrote an experimental dissertation on gundogs welfare. As you might guess, I am interested in behavioural medicine and in everything that falls within “preventive medicine” such as nutrition, complementary medicine (I studied veterinary acupuncture) and anything related to working and sport dogs.



I got my first English Setter in 1999 and my hunting licence in 2003 when I also started to follow dogs during hunting days and fieldt trials.

I have a regular column in a few Italian hunting/shooting magazines and I also collaborated with some foreign ones. In 2004 I was asked by an Italian publisher to write a book on

Setters.



I trained my dog personally and I handle her a trials by myself.

[Click here to learn how the pups will be reared and to get contact information.](#)

[Click here to know why I choose Gregor.](#)

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## Why Gregor?

### Why Gregor?

Clicca here to see [Gregor at work.](#)

I chose Gregor for many reasons. First of all, Gregor is a real hunting (rough shooting) dog who hunts regularly in a difficult environment (Italian Alps). Hunting (rough shooting) is essential to verify throughly the qualities of a pointing dog. Things like endurance and natural connection with the

handler cannot be evaluated during a trial.



Furthermore, dogs who hunt in difficult conditions, such as public grounds, need an extremely high drive to continue searching for birds without seeing one for ours. Gregor awards in mountain trials certify his qualities. Gregor has been trained and is handled by his owner, which is fairly unusual for an Italian top winning English Setter: most of them are given to professional handlers.

I also like his conformation (I think he has an excellent topline) and his temperament.

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[Click here to learn how the puppies will be reared and get contact information.](#)







VAL DI CHIANA

MAPCA





BOULDERBARKER

LE1110279

Allevatore

SCIPIONE ACCIARI

Proprietaria


PENNA DOMENICO

Microchip

8825404843808

VAL DI CHIANA

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# Puppies.... Briony x Gregor

## The puppies

I chose this dam and this stud to obtain excellent hunters with a good conformation and size. I think English Setters should be beautiful and smart hunting dog with a sound conformation. I want the puppies to be strong hunters, healthy and have a nice temperament. Hopefully they would also have enough qualities to be trialed and/or showed. A female puppy will be kept by me. I carefully planned this litter and the pups will be reared inside the house (not in a kennel) to be properly socialized and housetrained. Pups will be fed Carnilove puppy first and Carnilove large breed puppies later.

My ideal owner is someone who can understand and appreciate the care I put in this litter. These pups should become family members, not hunting tools.

**To contact me:** englishsetterATgmailDOTcom

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## Puppies... coming soon

It. Ch./R.S. Briony del Cavaldrossa x  
It.FT.Ch./Int.FT.Ch./Eu.Ch./ R.S. Gregor di Val di Chiana\*

**R.S = Selected Producer \* (all Gregor awards were gained in mountail field trials)**

**Selected Production Puppies (pink pedigree) [\\*\\*\\*In italiano qui\\*\\*\\*](#)**



**It.Ch./ R.S. Briony del Cavaldrossa [Click here to see the Pedigree](#)**

*(Pr.Ch/S.R. Gion di Crocedomini x Ansa del Simano)*

**HD A ED 0 PRA (rcd4) Clear NCL Clear 58 Cm.**

Briony is out of Producer Champion and Selected Producer Gion di Crocedomini (HD/A ED 0) x Ansa del Simano (HD/B), a bitch belonging to a Swiss hunter who hunts with her on the Alps.



Briony was purchased as a personal hunting (rough shooting)



dog. Thanks her correct conformation, which is very special considering she is out of working bloodlines, she later became **Italian Full Champion** (owner handled), gaining also **2 BOB** and **3 BOS**. She is an **Italian KC selected Producer** and she is 58 cms tall and she has a full and correct dentition (certified).

I later started to train her for field trials where I always handled her competing in Italian trials and in British trials (grouse and partridge). In 2017, she won Novice Stake at Pointer Club Field Trial on partridge held in Sandrigham (England). Thanks to this award she was admitted to the Kennel Club Stud book and was granted perpetual access to Crufts (Field Trial Class). Briony is the first Italian (and Continental) dog to win a Partridge trial in the UK.

She is a versatile hunting dog who normally hunts on the hills and in the plains where she can handle snipe nicely. She was used for grouse counting in Northern England, grey partridge counting in Italy and to push pheasant back into an estate in Kent.

[Click here to see Briony during a trial \(around min.4\).](#)



She is smart, well connected to the handler and gifted with an exceptional endurance.

In spring/summer she enjoys practicing basic and advanced

obedience. She is a pleasurable dog to live with: she lives indoors and loves coming everywhere with me.

[Click here to read how puppies will be raised and get contact information.](#)

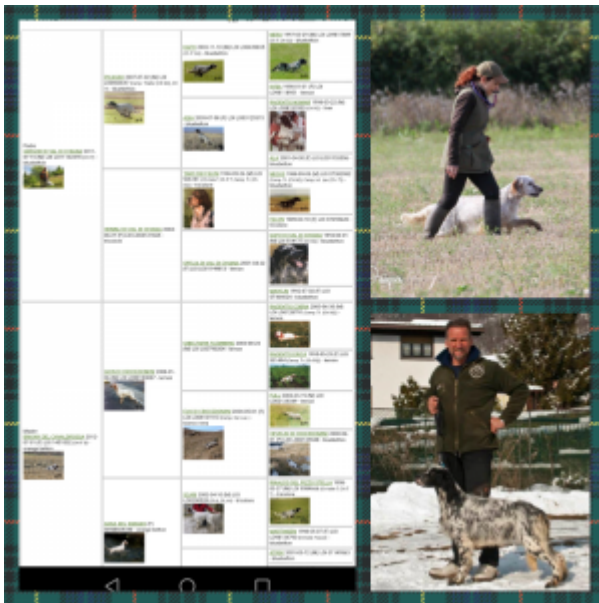
[Who I am?](#)

[Click here to see more pics of Briony & Gregor](#)

**Ft.Ch.It.L./Int. Ft.Ch/ Eu. Ch. / R.S. Gregor di Val Di Chiana**

(Multi Ch. Picasso x Hemnj di Val di Chiana) [Click here to see the pedigree.](#)

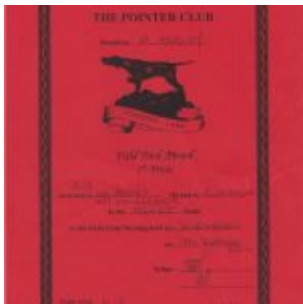
**HD A**, height 58 cms [Click here to see Gregor in action](#)



Gregor was breed by Ademaro Scipioni and is now owned by Domenico Pensa, who hunts with him on the Alps. He also trained him and handles him in mountain trials. Thanks to these trials, Gregor became **Italian FT Ch.**, International **FT. Ch.** and **European FT.Ch. 2014** (mountain trials). Beside this, Gregor has a very nice conformation and has already gained **2CC** and **2 RCC** at shows. Gregor is an **Italian KC Selected Producer**.

[Click here to discover why I chose Gregor.](#)

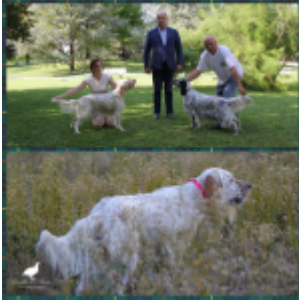




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# Miracles happen at Sandrigham: Norfolk Trials

Almost three months later, I am finally here to write down what happened. On Sept 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, in fact, Briony won Novice Stake on Partridge at Sandrigham, organized by the Pointer Club of UK. Some might argue that, well, it's "just" a Novice

Stake, but for me it is a great achievement. Briony is not my first English Setter, I got the first one, "Socks" (Slai di Riccagioia), in 1999, but he was a rescue and he came to me after having been discarded by a "pro" trainer and with a bag full of behavioural problems. In his own way, he was a smart dog, we managed to go hunting alone together (he did not want men with shotguns around him), but there was no way I could rehab completely and train him for trials. I had not enough skills, nor experience, and he would not have dealt well with formal training sessions. He, however, opened me new doors as we started training for rough shooting and I got a firearms and hunting license. I met people, got new friends and spent many years rough shooting over English Setters and other pointing breeds up and down the hills of the Northern Apennines. I, somehow, had the chance to watch- and shoot over- hundreds of dogs during those years, and it was an incredible experience. I also began attending trials and to work for canine and shooting magazines which led me to meet breeders, judges and handlers...



Socks (Slai di Riccagioia)  
my first ES

After his death, when I started looking for another setter, I had very clear ideas about what I wanted in my next dog, but not so clear ideas about where to find her! It took months, but I finally located my litter and my puppy, on a farm on the Swiss Alps, not too far from Sankt Moritz (posh dog!). I knew

what I needed to know about Briony's dad, but mum was quite a surprise: she was beautiful, gentle and smart. She came with us heeling off lead to the small village's café and then sat quietly under the table. I loved that, as well the whole bloodline registered in the pedigree and the parents' health clearances. When I brought Briony home, people thought she was cute, but too expensive, and that I was going to "ruin" her, training her in my own way and socializing her too much. I just thought she was a terrible pup who did not like me at all. It took quite a while to become friends, probably she was just testing me to be sure she was in good hands!



Ansa del Simano, Briony's mum



First day of 2017 hunting season

She was naughty, but smart, and she quickly developed in a good hunting companion. Sometimes she had a mind of her own and sometimes she was not the easiest dog to handle, but she surely did not lack of determination and bird sense. She was,

and she still is, strong willed and sensitive at the same time. Thanks to friends, we had access to some private estates where she could meet much more birds that she could have met on more affordable – by me – public grounds. Other people introduced her to woodcock and, I still remember the day, with my surprise, she pointed her first snipe. During these hunting seasons, she learnt to work with other dogs and we worked a lot on backing and on remaining steady on point. I must admit I had good teachers, and that skilled hunters helped us to locate birds, but steadiness to wing was not required. Hunters here want the dogs to be steady on point, but after the bird flies, all they wish is to hit it, none cares anymore about the dog.

In the meantime, as she also grew prettier, I entered her at a dog show that took place nearby and, to my surprise, she was awarded a RCAC (RCC), so I decided to continue on this road. Briony, however, had other plans and after a stressful indoor show, she decided she wanted to end her career as a show dog. She had already a CAC in her pockets and I did not want her journey to end. I am not a show person, and I consider dog shows boring, but I wanted to prove that a good looking working dog, from working (mountain hunting and mountain trials) bloodlines, could make it. So, we went together to take handling lessons with [Richard Hellman](#), a great handler and a great person. Briony seemed to enjoy the lessons and, in August 2015, she became a Show (full) Champion. I also think that having learnt to face the ring she somehow increased her self esteem.





## Briony first dog show... RCAC

Field trials were next on my list, but there was a HUGE problem: I did not want to send her away for training, nor to hire a professional trainer as people normally do here. I wanted to train and handle Briony by myself, easier said than done in Italy where field trials are dominated by male professional handlers. But, thanks to an unexpected series of coincidences, in the summer of 2015 I ended up watching the Champion Stake for Pointers and Setters in Northern England and... [I had an awakening!](#) I saw some “ordinary people” handling their dogs to a very high standard and I saw very obedient setters! I was used to see very obedient Drahthaars (GWPs), but the average Italian Setter is usually quite a wild critter! I could not believe setters could be that obedient and, as naïve as it might sound, I was impressed.



Dorback Estate, Scotland,  
training with gamekeeper  
Brian

Briony herself was pretty wild at the time and her nickname was “Tigress” but, again, unexpectedly, a good mentor came to us. You can read more about Briony’s taming for field trials and about “White Feather” [clicking here](#) but, in a few words, I would describe her [training](#) a demanding task, it was equally rewarding though! It took a while to tame “Tigress”, but as soon as she decided to cooperate, she became impressively reliable and well behaved. This is how we ended up on the moor in the summer of 2016, and this is how my passion for British trials developed even further [\(you can](#)

[read more here](#)). [Our first experience with grouse](#) was not that bad: she always behaved and she kept improving but paid her inexperience with grouse during the English Trials and she paid my inexperience with trials in during the [Scottish – and the English- trials](#). She still needed some fine tunings but, overall, I could not complain. At the end of the circuit, I went home with no awards but determined to save money and to go back in 2017.



Haughton Hall, roading a hare :-)

But, when the time to go again on the moors was close to come, I had to withdraw all my entries as Briony anticipated her season. I wasn't happy, I was quite disappointed, no... honestly... I was quite upset, but there was not much else I could do. Some friends, however, tried to cheer me up advertising September trials on partridge. It is easier to get a run, they said, the atmosphere is very relaxed, they added and... we are going to run at Sandrigham Estate, on Queen Elizabeth II's grounds, they concluded. I must admit the last thing they mentioned was very tempting: it was thanks to such a good advertisement that I decided to bet on partridge trials in Norfolk. That was a brave bet, I shall admit, as I was perfectly aware they were going to be more difficult than grouse trials. While gathering information, I learn that: 1) during the first round, usually on stubble, dogs were going to be evaluated mainly for pace, style and ground treatment and that 2) "a few" hares were going to be present. Uh, I was

forgetting the sugar beet! So well, while I was going to do my best to show up with a well behaved dog, going there to win was not surely written down in my agenda. I just wanted to be there, see people, get to know things better, learn more and feel part of a world I like.

Briony started the circuit well (we went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> round in 4 trials out of 9) and, even if, we could not find any birds on our paths, she was behaving well and respecting hare nicely (I do not have hare here, just rabbits and cats to train on). I was happy, we were learning more and enjoying the social side of September trials : I do not drink, but I was always at the pub! It was nice to see friends doing well and, especially after IGL Snettisham trials , when no awards were given, I was super happy to see Rhia (Tapper) and Sara (Chichester) receiving the Gun's Choice rosette. Trials proved to be as difficult as I expected: while there were plenty of hare, feathered wildlife was scarce or, should I say, very smart and very professional at hiding. On Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> of September, (Pointer Club trial at Sandrigham) I was number 13 AND the bye dog (quite a scary combination), but she did well in the first round, and well again in the second, so I knew I was going to get "something", but I did not know what.

When the secretary announced that I had won First Prize, I could not believe it and indeed, the Vaux Silver Tankard, fell from my hands a couple of times! It was like living in a Disney movie and this article should have explained you why. She is the first dog I have ever trained for trials, and I trained her all by myself. Yes, many wonderful people helped me through the journey (in Italy and in the UK, and I am grateful to them all), but I have always been the one in charge. I am just a normal person with limited training opportunities coupled with a high degree of stubbornness and self discipline which surely helped. This is why everything that could sound normal to someone else, is so special to me, and yes, winning an award at Sandrigham confirms that Briony

is a posh dog!



Me, Alan Goodship (Queen Elizabeth's dog trainer) and the fallen trophy

Ps. I promise I will also write on other dogs – and not just on mine – as there will be more articles on September trials, (all [partridge trials](#) results can be downloaded here) in the meantime, if you have a chance, take a look at the [research project](#) I am working on for my Veterinary Medicine dissertation.

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

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## On Italians training, hunting and trialing abroad

Italy won the European Cup for British Pointing Breeds (Grande Quete), the European Championship for English Setters and the European Championship for English Pointers (other results are still pending at the moment). Everybody is happy, but many rumours started and the social media went crazy. I read every sort of rumors, polemics, attacks and accuses, which I do not

want to spread further, but two topics deserve a deeper analysis, especially the second one. People complain about dogs whose nationality changes to make them able to enter the competition. Right? Wrong? I think this is a grey area. Italy has a huge number of dogs whose natural qualities make them suitable to these high level competitions. There are dozens, or more likely hundreds, of Italian English Setters and English Pointers that, potentially, could do very well. No other country can claim the same but... Some dogs have been seen and campaigned more than others because there are big fishes and small fishes. If you are a sardine, forced to swim among tuna, you will soon realize you cannot afford the trendiest trainer, nor the amazingly expensive travels all over Europe to stay on the top the circuit. Your dog will not have the same opportunities of a "richer" dog, you are perfectly aware he is unlikely to be asked to represent Italy. Maybe it is a good dog but, to compete at certain levels, being good is only part of the package.

So, let's imagine you gave up any hope to compete in the European Cup but, let's say, Transilvania proposes you a place in its team, would you accept? And if you, Mr. Sardine, accept, are we entitled to persecute you? I don't think so and, let's be honest, what would any of us do, if offered such an opportunity? What would I do? I do not know, but I might say yes to a country I feel connected to ( I am not very patriotic, I know...), whereas I would probably decline the offer if it were coming from a country I don't know anything about, nor I speak the language. This said, I do not think I have any rights to be judgmental about other people choices.

The second, more important, topic I am going to discuss still relates to foreign countries, but in another way. When I published the article on [training problems in Italy](#) and on the [scarcity of game at Italian trials](#), someone suggested me writing something on Italians going abroad for hunting, training and trialing. Well, the truth is that, as far as



small game, Italy is in a bad place. These animals are poorly, if ever, managed, and if you want to hunt or train your dog, going abroad can be a good choice. Can you train a dog in Italy? Of course you can, but it is going to be way harder, and your risk to pay in fines the same amount you will spend for a nice training holiday abroad. There is nothing wrong in going abroad to offer a dog more opportunity. If you have the time and you can afford it, why not? Serbia, nowadays is very popular, but before Serbia, Italian hunters and trainers had colonized other countries. I am not concerned about going abroad, I am perplexed about being dependent on "abroad".

Many important Italian field trias (with CAC valid for the Italian Championship) are now run in Serbia. If you ask why, you hear different answers and some, the most convincing ones, pertains grounds, game and laws/local realities. Let's start from grounds. Giacomo Lugari (an Italian famous hunter and video maker) , answering a post on Facebook remembered the European Cup run in 1999 in Tollara, Piedmont, Northern Italy. So the grounds... we have some suitable ones! I think so, but what about the game? The answer, this time , sadly is a no. I have never been to Serbia, but many, many Italians routinely go there and come back with happy tales about grey partridge. You cannot imagine how many partridges are there! You cannot believe! This is what they tell me and, yes I can believe them. I know what happens with grouse in the UK and I know that good wildlife management can produce tremendous results. Proper wildlife management is demanding, time consuming, costly and forces farmers, hunters, wildlife experts, gamekeepers and politicians to work together. Something must be sacrificed and people must learn to negotiate good meeting



points, this is difficult but not impos

Someone justify Italy stating that Serbian agricultural techniques are 50 years older than ours and that this is a good thing for greys. Probably but... If we truly are 50 years ahead, we should be able to use our more advanced knowledge to recreate an habitat that might suit greys. I refuse to believe this cannot be done: do you remember Renaissance? Italy gave birth to Leonardo da Vinci and other geniuses and now, their descendents, cannot successfully manage four birds?

And what about the money? In Serbia up to 500 dogs run in a day. Each entry costs 30 euros, multiply them for 500 and subtract something for "expenses". Accessing training grounds costs about 100 euros a day (regardless of the number of dogs you have with you), so remember about these money as well. I am a terrible accountant, but I came to the conclusion that Serbian grey partridge are producing quite an income. The Serbians have been smart in recognizing this and I think that grey partridge are improving the lives of those living there. There are the training grounds money, the field trials entries, people staying in hotels, people dining in restaurants... The Serbians are doing the right thing, and the Italians? What shall we do, besides thanking them for the opportunities they provide us? I think that maybe we shall get inspired and consider the grey partridge an excellent business partner: some more determined people would resuscitate dinosaurs for similar amounts of money!

The laws, adds someone else, we have more bureaucracy and more

rules than Serbia. We have animal right activist and an outdated law on wildlife management and hunting. This law must be changed , says someone else, but in Italy is hard to be proactive, each time you try, obstacles get thrown in the way. This is true, but is this enough to give up the hope in a better countryside, for better fieldsports? I truly don't know.

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## 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 bracemate, 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 bracemate, 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](#).

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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 believes 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 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 fiocchetto. 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) Frosted 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 River, 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 club* (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 fotogiornalista 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 pedane involontariamente 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 corso che io avevo fatto il nome giusto. E invece sì! Sul podio è finita la FT. Ch. Ballyellen Cara madre di Ballyellen Tango, vincitore 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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## Trusting a Free Spirit

*This article stems from this morning walk. My walks in the countryside are always a good source of inspiration.*

Today I realized that, when you are “walking” an English Setter, all your senses have to be well alert in order to locate the dog who, as the breed demands, appears and disappears from your sight. You can hear him when is behind the trees, or coming out from a bush; you can see him when he is running free on a open ground. You can sometimes even smell him when he rolls into “something” and, no, you cannot taste nor touch him but, along the years, you have surely developed a sixth sense which tells you where the dog is, what is he doing and from which direction he is going to return.

While keeping all my antennae alert, I met a man with a golden retriever. She was meekly trotting by him carrying a huge log in her mouth. I am wondering whether I would be happy with such a dog or, if, on the contrary, I will be bored. As Briony was running at a full speed in a rice paddy, we met a runner trying to "Canicross" with a Cane Corso (a huge molosser) and another primitive dog, something bigger than a Shiba and smaller than an Akita. He was impressed with the recall, but most of all, he was astonished by her speed and deep castings. British pointing dogs, with the exception of Gordon Setters – sometimes, are the most extreme of the pointing dogs: they can hardly be understood by the average pet dog owner. They often look puzzled when the setter (or pointer) owner refuses to let their dog free on a tiny patch of ground surrounded by roads, explaining it is too small, it would not be safe.

They cannot understand how small those places are: an unleashed German Shepherd or a Border Collie would always be alert, ready to obey an order; a Dobermann or a Rottweiler would always keep an eye on their owner, because they feel the need to protect them. With an English Setter, things are different: the best gift you can give to a working English Setter is freedom. Yes, they enjoy snoring on soft surfaces, they like good food but, if you want your Setter to be truly happy... Let him free! His cute face will become a cute happy face and he will start exploring. A free English Setter would not worry much about his owner. They perfectly know we can take care of ourselves when they are busy exploring the world, finding birds and so on... These guys watch Discovery Channel! The countryside has so much to offer! Giving freedom to an English Setter is like taking a pig to an "all you can eat" restaurant, or gifting a woman with somebody else credit card! So much excitement clashes with control!

A free ranging setter may pay more attention to you if you are carrying a shotgun: dogs actively used for rough shooting understand teamwork, and most of them are very happy to pick

up and retrieve a fallen bird. This is how most of the Italian hunters “control” their setters. Things get more complicated when you do not carry any weapons: the setter (or the pointer) does not get any benefits from your presence and... This is the part I love the most! Because here relationship, training and MUTUAL trust enter the picture.

**Relationship:** well... Relationship, you need to have a relationship with your dog! No amount of training can make a dog can back to you if he does not want to. He shall trust you (mutual trust, see below) because he knows you are not going to affect his freedom, at least not that much. He will return to you, of follow your directions, and then he will be free again.

**Training:** the importance of training shall never be underestimated. Teaching a free spirited dog a reliable recall is not easy! But I am the living proof that the plain, basic, human being can do this.

**Trust:** it is the key. It what allows you to let your dog free, being certain he will come back to you. You really have to trust your Setter: some people panic when they see how far and how fast these dogs can go. But you really love “something”, especially something /somebody that thrives on freedom... let him free!

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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 Rossella 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. Però 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 è 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 altrui 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 fenetica locale e sul tipo di lavoro che è normalmente richiesto ai cani da ferma. Mi limiterò a parlare di cani da ferma britannici (il quattro setter e il 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 del continentale, dal vivo ho visto solo un drabhaar allenarsi su un moor, per il resto solo fotografie e video ma, pardonatemi, l'opinione molto franca e poco diplomatica: trovo i cani da ferma continentali fuori luogo in quei contesti. 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 KFR (Kontinental Field Retriever), ma li ritengo meglio impiegabili nel fagiano e 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 facile e andare a cercare un fagiano, una beccaccia o una lepre, 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 e, forse, la loro legislazione venatoria non agevolava tale prassi: per accedere a un terreno di caccia occorre il permesso

del proprietario (che è titolare della selvaggina) e i luoghi in cui si trovano generalmente i selvatici sono riserve di caccia private, a cui a volte è possibile accedere a pagamento. Ho scritto “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, starlo e faglieli lì 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 omaggi (Inghilterra e Isole Scote), grigi 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 dai guardiacaccia. Viste le condizioni fenetiche dei territori italiani, è difficilissimo preparare un cane come pretendono i cacciatori d'Oltre Manica, 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 guardiacaccia 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 guardiacaccia comincia in primavera con i censimenti dei riproduttori, consistenti in 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. Oggi non è raro dal guardiacaccia lo meglio da uno staff di guardiacaccia) 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. Tutto è curato nel dettaglio e spesso sono piccole azioni a fare la differenza: una riserva che aveva avuto problemi di zecche haader



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.

## Cani da caccia



✦ **ricovero** - la stessa recca che può trasmettere la malattia di Lyme - ha usato le pecore come raccogliatrici di recche: in pratica venivano mandate in zone infestate, in modo tale che le recche si attaccassero agli ovini e potessero poi essere uccise con dei trattamenti sugli animali. Il controllo delle recche è importante, perché possono trasmettere patogeni letali per le grouse.

In primavera, come già detto, vengono censiti i riproduttori e in estate si rifanno censimenti per aver chiaro il numero dei capi 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 altre. 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, riconoscendo 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 si presenta un guardiacaccia che aiuta a contare i capi individuati e segna su appositi 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 Magallowick, sotto la responsabilità di Steve Robinson che allena, addestra e conduce setter irlandesi. In mattinata e in presenza del guardiacaccia,

1 Eggleston, Briony in forma. 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!



**Un cane da caccia in un campo di grano. In alto a sinistra: un cane da caccia in un campo di grano. In alto a destra: un cane da caccia in un campo di grano.**

Un cane da caccia in un campo di grano. In alto a sinistra: un cane da caccia in un campo di grano. In alto a destra: un cane da caccia in un campo di grano.

If you have read the whole article, it should be 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: