

Miracles happen at Sandrigham: Norfolk Trials

Almost three months later, I am finally here to write down what happened. On Sept 7th 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 be 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 lead 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 2nd 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, 7th 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](#).

The English Springer by Arthur Croxton-Smith

From the book The Power of the Dog (1910)

THE ENGLISH SPRINGER

"O, how full of briers is this working-day world!"
Shakespeare—*As You Like It*.

"The chief requisite in all kinds of spaniels is, that they be good finders, and have noses so true that they will never overrun a scent. . . . They should be high-mettled, as regardless of the severest weather as of the most punishing cover, and ever ready to spring into the closest thicket the moment a pointed finger gives the command."

General Hutchinson

The transition from the toy varieties to a spaniel is somewhat violent. The one is intended to please the eye, to gratify the æsthetic sense, and charm by his manners in the house; the other is designed primarily, by serving the sportsman in the held, to accomplish useful duties, **but at the same time his docility of disposition, sagacity of expression and beauty of**

coat make him also a welcome companion when the day's labours are ended. In estimating the worth of a gundog I should lay much stress upon his fitness for associating with mankind, for there is no doubt that if we win the confidence and friendship of our four-footed servitors the pleasure in their possession is much increased, and we have them under far better command when at work. Of all the foolish things written the hackneyed couplet so much quoted has precedence:

"A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them, the better they be."

The ladies are quite capable of looking after themselves, and need no champion. I daresay a walnut tree may be all the better for a good "splashing," as we used to say in the Midlands, **but I am certain the less a whip is used on a dog of any sort the more likely are we to be successful in our efforts to exact prompt and ready obedience to our commands.** The man who uses physical correction too freely is in want of a practical application of the monition contained in the Book of Proverbs: "A rod for the back of fools."

Of the many handsome sub-varieties of spaniels with which we are familiar to-day the English Springer, perhaps, enjoys the least popularity, although his merits as a worker entitle him to a high place in our regard. As a show dog he has never assumed much prominence, but at held trials and on private shootings he is constantly demonstrating his utility. **No other spaniel has been bred less for "points" or more consistently for work.** Less excitable than the volatile Cocker, his longer legs and sturdier frame adapt him to purposes which the smaller is unable to perform. **On the other hand, unless well broken, he, by ranging too far afield, may put up the game out of gunshot. It therefore follows that in his early days he must be made absolutely steady. Whether he becomes so or not is not so much attributable to the inherent wickedness of the dog as to the lack of patience in his breaker.** One is almost inclined to say that the good breaker is born not made. At any

rate, supposing you have the leisure, this is a task better undertaken by yourself than entrusted to a gamekeeper, who may have neither the time nor disposition to act as a wise schoolmaster.

A Springer is large enough to retrieve both far and feather, but whether or no he should be encouraged to do this depends upon circumstances. General Hutchinson says: *"When a regular retriever can be constantly employed with spaniels, of course it will be unnecessary to make any of them fetch game (certainly never to lift anything which falls out of bounds), though all the team should be taught to 'seek dead.'* This is the plan pursued by the Duke of Newcastle's keepers, and obviously it is the soundest and easiest practice, for it must be always more or less difficult to make a spaniel keep within his usual hunting limits, who is occasionally encouraged to pursue wounded game, at his best pace, to a considerable distance."



"Tissington Flush"
Owned by Sir Hugo
Fitzherbert, Bart
and Painted by Maud
Earl

The word Springer is applied to all medium-legged spaniels, as apart from the short-legged ones, that are neither Clumbers

nor Sussex. It is of good old English derivation, denoting the object for which the dog was employed--to spring birds to the net or gun. The form of the dog has not undergone any marked change since a Dictionary of Sport, published shortly before Queen Victoria came to the throne, spoke of him as differing but little from the Setter, except in size, being nearly two-fifths less in height and strength. He is of symmetrical formation, varying a good deal in size from thirty pounds to sixty pounds, with unbounded energy. He may be a self-coloured liver, black, or yellow, or pied or mottled with white, tan, or both. Miss Earl's picture brings out beautifully the correct shape of his body, and the handsome intelligent-looking head. Older pictures suggest that a hundred years ago or less the skull was broader between the ears, and the head shorter, but the refining process has not been carried far enough to jeopardise the brain power. In many breeds I have noticed that a broad skull indicates self-will and stubbornness, and therefore it seems to me that the slight change is all for the better.

The other variety of Springer indigenous to Wales is quite distinct from our own. He is smaller in size, and in colour he is red or orange and white, preference being given to the former.

From the same book: [click here to read about the English Pointer.](#)

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project](#)!

The Pointer by Arthur

Croxton-Smith

From the book *The Power of the Dog* (1910)

The Pointer

*"His nostril wide into the murky air,
Sagacious of his quarry from so far."
Milton—Paradise Lost*

*tiff by the tainted gale with open nose,
Outstretch'd and finely sensible, draws full,
Fearful, and cautious, on the latent prey;
As in the sun the circling covey bask
Their varied plumes, and, watchful every way,
Through the rough stubble turn the secret eye.*

Thomson

The respective virtues of the Pointer and Setter have been discussed without stint for many years, the advocates of each retaining their opinions uninfluenced by the arguments on the other side. It may not be known that no less a person than Sir Walter Scott once had a mild hand in the game. In "St. Ronan's Well," if you turn to the account of the dinner party which led to much ill-humour, you will find these remarks: "*The company were talking of shooting, the most animating topic of conversation among Scottish country gentlemen of the younger class, and Tyrrel had mentioned something of a favourite setter, an uncommonly handsome dog, from which he had been for some time separated, but which he expected would rejoin him in the course of next week. 'A setter,' retorted Sir Bingo with a sneer; 'a pointer, I suppose you mean?' 'No, sir,' said Tyrrel; 'I am perfectly aware of the difference betwixt a setter and a pointer, and I know the old-fashioned setter is become unfashionable among modern sportsmen. But I love my dog as a companion, as well as for his merits in the field; and a setter is more sagacious, more attached, and fitter for his*

place on the hearth-rug, than a pointer-not,' he added, 'from any deficiency of intellects on the pointer's part, but he is generally so abused while in the management of brutal breakers and grooms that he loses all excepting his professional accomplishments, of finding and standing steady to game.'"

Sir Bingo could not understand why one should wish for anything more. He never before heard that a setter was fit to follow any man's heels but a poacher's. Tyrrel's point was that "many people have been of opinion, that both dogs and men may follow sport indifferently well, though they do happen, at the same time, to be fit for mixing in friendly intercourse in society." A sentiment which we cordially approve. Whether the shooting man should select a Pointer or Setter to aid him in the field or on the moor resolves itself very largely into a question of individual taste. Either, when well broken, is capable of carrying out his highly specialized duties with great skill, and no prettier sight can be imagined than a brace of these clever animals quartering the ground and coming to a statuesque point when the game is winded. Of course, in externals the two breeds present many striking differences. Some admire the beautiful coat and gentle expression of the Setter, while others there are who declare that:

Loveliness

Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,
But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.



"Flax" Owned by William Arkwright, Esq. Painted by Maud Earl (1910)

In other words, form appeals more to them than coat. They dwell upon the handsome outline of the Pointer, his symmetrical, powerfully knit body, his straight legs and muscular quarters. The modern dog is not without his critics, however, who contend that a foxhound cross has been used in modern times as well as many years ago, and that the hound qualities introduced are detrimental rather than otherwise. It is urged that the duties demanded of the Pointer are even more exacting than those of the foxhound, as regards stamina, and that if the old dogs could perform them creditably there was no occasion to resort to outside blood, which developed a headstrong disposition that renders breaking more difficult, and tends to unsteadiness. In justice to the other disputants, it should be explained that they deny the alien cross, and contend that, as the foxhound is a perfect piece of mechanism, Pointer breeders are justified in attempting to work up to such a worthy model. Although one does not ask for a potterer it is questionable if great pace in a gundog is either necessary or desirable, for the fast animal is liable to pass birds that a slower one would find. After all, the truest test of excellence is finding birds for the guns, a feat in which

the flashy worker is not always proficient.

In the innumerable letters which have appeared upon the subject I have never seen reference to the remarks of General Hutchinson. Possibly they have been quoted and escaped my observation. This gentleman, who is very rightly regarded as a sound authority, laid stress upon a sporting dog having small, round, hard feet, which he held [to be a more certain test of endurance than any other point.](#) *“Rest assured, that the worst loined dogs with good feet are capable of more fatigue in stubble or heather than the most muscular and best loined, with fleshy ‘understandings.’ The most enduring pointers I have ever seen hunted had more or less of the strain of the foxhound; but doubtless they were proportionately hard to break.”*

A variety of Pointer not much seen now-a-days is the black, or Scottish, which, of course, is free from any imputations as to the purity of his lineage. He is said to be all that one could wish.

From the same book: [click here to read about the English Springer.](#)

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project!](#)

Warmness: I love my Harkila Kana

The time for a final review has come. I received my [Kana](#) suit right before Christmas and I decided to give the jacket some rest right before Easter but, the weather changed and we hung around until the beginning of May. My impressions? If you want

to know more about the Kana technical features, and get a detailed description of the suit (jacket and trousers), [click here](#) to read the first part of my review. Today I am going to tell you what I think of them after having field tested them for several months.



In spring

First of all, I must tell you that we had a very cold and foggy winter, but it hardly rained/snowed, so I cannot say exactly how waterproof the suit is. I think it is, but the maximum time I spent under a heavy rain (without umbrella) was one hour, one hour and a half. Was I dry? Yes, I was and, once at home, the jacket dried reasonably quickly which is a very good point. Do I think the Kana to be best garment you can wear during a heavy rain? Probably not, but this suit has still much to offer.

Let's start from the bottom: the trousers. The [Kana trousers](#) are incredibly warm: too warm to be worn together with the jacket if the temperature is above 0°C, or if you plan to be very active. Nevertheless, they become lovely if you have to stay still, or when temperatures fall below zero. The same could be said about the jacket but, wearing it with a plain pair of trousers, you can make it more adaptable to warmer days. It really depends on what you decide to wear underneath: a proper sweater in winter, or a shirt in spring. The [Kana jacket](#) kept me very warm all winter. We had a very cold winter, with much much fog which can affect the way you perceive the real temperature: 0°C in a thick fog is much worse than -5° on a dry sunny day. I remember spending hours in the fog waiting for a field trial to start: it never started as the fog never dissipated but, whereas all the other people were freezing, I was perfectly fine and happy. I like to underline the adjective "happy" because I am very sensitive to extreme temperatures, therefore the opportunity to be fine whatever the weather, is greatly appreciated! I think, on that day, that happiness was painted on my face, people noticed it and quickly connected it to the technical suit I was wearing and asked me about the brand. They thought it was Italian and when I explained it was made by [Harkila](#) and it was Scandinavian and more questions came...



Testing...

After the cold foggy winter we had an unpredictable spring, filled with cold windy days: the Kana jacket, on paper, was too warm, but I had nothing to lose by testing it in these conditions and, surprise... it passed the test. The trick was wearing only a shirt underneath: this combination was perfect for windy days. Again, it was not cold "on paper" , but strong northern winds blowing from the Alps modified the temperature's perception. I tested the Kana during two wind storms: the first one happened in a wonderful sunset, the wind had cleared the sky and I was trying to take pictures standing still by a river with my camera. I was warm but for the hands as I forgot to bring gloves; the second storm involved rain and we did extremely well, finally certifying the Kana as "windproof".

You can see how it looks once worn in the slideshow at the bottom of the article ([for static gallery click here](#)), this is a size 36 (I wear an IT 40/42 –UK 8). Remember that I am... err... fairly short hence the jacket, which is indeed long, might look it even longer. The extra length was meant to keep you warmer and it does the job. Any notes about the trousers? I think I'd say that, despite being padded, they do not make me look like *Bibendum* (the Michelin Man), which I appreciate! *Disclaimer:* in the photo you'll see a girl wearing only a fleece while I was all wrapped up in the Kana: it was -5°C and

we were by a frozen lake, but she was wearing multiple layers underneath the fleece and... She is often referred as “the Russian” being absolutely unaffected by cold weather. [The [Lilja Cardigan](#) will be reviewed separately, I am back to wearing the [Jerva](#) now].



Could the Kana be improved? It could benefit from two minor changes that would make it more versatile. The jacket lacks of hand warmer pockets and you sometimes would like to have them when it is very cold outside. It features, indeed, two large front pockets which are deep and large, perfect for storing shots shells and other items, but not padded. Is this relevant? Yes and no: padded pockets would keep your hands and your cell phone warmer. There is also a chest pocket in which the cell phone can be placed, but it is not really handy if you want to check the phone often, the hand warmer pockets would solve all these issues. The second point we could consider is the hood: it is a lovely and warm hood, which can be of great help when it is cold and windy, but not always

convenient when it rains. Let me explain better: the hood, as mentioned in the first article, has a bear-like fur lining. I love it as it keeps me warm but, in case of rain, it forces me to wear the hood: if I do not, the fur gets soaked and will not dry fast. But wearing a hood in the rain is not always the best choice, especially if you are shooting, you need to mount a shotgun/rifle on your shoulder and you need a wider field of view: a detachable hood would bring the Kana jacket closer to perfection.

Summarizing, the Kana suit can help you during freezing and windy days ***and it is great for:*** stalking, wildfowling, driven shooting and any not so intense activity in cold weather, ***but*** the Kana jacket is versatile enough to be worn for rough shooting and in slightly warmer weather.

How to fill out the questionnaire

Unfortunately we need you to fill out a [questionnaire](#) for each dog and, unfortunately, we are also very interested in those of you who own and handle many dogs. The questionnaire was created ONLY for dogs used for shooting or competing in field trials (pointing dogs, spaniels and retrievers). These dogs must be purebred and have a pedigree. If your gundog is a pet, or a show dog, I am sorry but he cannot be included in our sample. The questionnaire might seem long at a first sight, but you can fill it out in a few minutes. We decided to have only a few compulsory questions, to make you feel at ease: you can skip the questions that do not apply to your situation, or that you do not feel comfortable about. Remember, however,

that the questionnaire can be as anonymous as you like, and all your answers will be stored respecting the laws on personal privacy and will not be passed on to other people. The more details you will be giving us, though, the more you will help this research and my dissertation, I will therefore appreciate detailed and honest answers. Please specify the units of measure in open questions (year, months, hours...). An e-mail address, whereas not compulsory, is equally appreciated in case we need any clarifications concerning your answers. We also need an e-mail if you wish to be included in the drawn for the [prizes](#) we are giving away. For those who prefer working on a printed version of the questionnaire, a [pdf file](#) can be downloaded, printed, given to those who do not have any internet access and then [emailed](#) back to us.

If you wish to receive a feedback about the outcomes of this survey, please let us know: we will send you a report at the end of the project!

We will also be grateful if you could give visibility to the project by sharing or forwarding these pages, or the questionnaire link, to anyone who could be interested or otherwise able to help us in this research.

[Why and how to benefit from the Gundog Research Project \(click here\)](#)

[The team behind the project \(click here to discover more\)](#)

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Mind the Wind by Tok Mostert

So... you think running a good field dog is all about the dog, maybe, but a good handler will be able to interpret the conditions and “assist” the dog to have the best possible chance of finding birds.

Temperature, moisture content, humidity and wind all play a part in the scenting conditions and that is something all dog handlers should keep in mind, if they want to consistently hit birds on the field. Often handlers will say, the wind just did not work for us or the birds were holding tight and the dog could not find them. Even a great dog will have days in which the wind plays havoc with their scenting ability, often it leads to flushes.

Learn to read the wind and maybe you and your dog will be hitting birds when others do not.

I was running Flake on a huge field with a stone edge, or wall, forming the left border of the field. The wind was also blowing from left to right that day and it was pumping. We were about 20 minutes into her run when I sent her right onto the wall, as in tight against it. Sure enough within 30 meters she locked up solid on point. She could scent the bird (pheasant) but could not locate it exactly. All the signs were there for a solid point, front foot up, tail dead steady and swollen the first 10cm, head at the right height for the terrain, but there was a very , very slight left to right movement of the head. I gave her the advance command and sure enough she put the bird onto its wings. The bird was no more than a meter ahead of her, yet it was hard to place. This set my mind to thinking of how the airflow over the stone wall affected her scenting ability. Not only that ,but how does the wind affect bird scent in general with obstacles, trees and

other obstructions in the way?



Any wind?

On the internet, you can find diagrams (google wind flow and select images as search option – we can't reproduce them for copyright reasons) that show airflow around/over obstacles, this clears up a few things I wanted to know. Turbulent air behind the obstacles will make it hard for a dog to place a bird 100%. The air that compresses around or over a obstacle creates a narrower band of scent that is also faster than the ambient wind. Certain obstacles will create pockets of no airflow behind them at certain wind speeds, imagine a bird holding tight behind a tree and there is virtually no air to carry its scent to the dog, even tough there is a good breeze going.

Good retriever trainers will tell you that sometimes the hardest retrieve for a dog is in a depression of a field, it is almost airless in those pockets. Now... just imagine how close your dog needs to be to find scent in such a situation!

Maybe a great dog will have this figured out by itself in time, I am going to help my dog by paying more attention to this.

Tok Mostert, a Professional Hunter from South Africa, now living in Sweden, is sharing his writings on dog training with us. [You can start reading them from Part 1 here.](#)

Next article [here](#).

We are Losing Legendary Methods 1 – by T. Mostert

Brief intro: here at Dogs & Country we are often looking to publish good articles, articles dog people can benefit from. I (Rossella) was therefore very happy when Tok Mostert, from Sweden, accepted to share his writings with us and our readers. At the moment, unfortunately, I do not have time to translate them in Italian, but if anyone wants to help out with the translation, I'd be happy to share that as well ☐

Part 1: We are losing legendary methods

Two years ago I came into the hunting dogs world, I knew nothing, I could not make a dog sit or stay, much less retrieve, track or hunt birds. Sure I tried and watched videos and read as much as I could, but it is not the same. I saw a man handle a dog in the field one day, and I understood that I needed help. Needed may be the wrong word, craved is more in line with what I felt.



Flake in Sweden...

You ask opinions on trainers and you get maybe 10 different opinions on every trainer, good, bad, asshole you name it, for everyone that had a good thing to say, there was 10 others with bad things to say. Screw it, I thought, I will find the

right help by simply looking at whose dog I see doing what I want my dog to do and ask who help to train him or her. I did not ask for opinions anymore, I set a goal and found a trainer that suited this goal. When I wanted my dog to have discipline, I went to a man called Jeppe Stridh. Almost two years later, I still go to him, because a dog is never finished, you evolve, the dog evolves, you want to test the limits and see how far the dog will go, and most of the time it is the handler that holds the dog back by not challenging him more. This and reinforcing the old commands again and again is a never ending journey, get use to it and enjoy it.

A few things I remember, sure I forgot many:

1. *Train the owner to train the dog, much harder than it sounds.*
2. *Learn how to read your dog.*
3. *95% Praise, 5% Correction, always time the correction perfectly.*
4. *Make sure you understand the commands before you try teaching the dog, otherwise keep your mouth shut.*
5. *A collar and a leash are restraints, they can only control a dog by your side. Respect and trust are what makes an invisible leash that stretches as far as your voice, or whistle, carries.*
6. *Do not train with a attitude, dogs do not respond well to assholes (yeah, I heard that a lot).*
7. *If your dog keeps making the same mistake you are doing something wrong, not the dog.*
8. *If you are always doing something wrong, get help.*
9. *Different dogs need different touches while training.*
10. *No matter how good is the trainer you are working with, if you do not put in the effort yourself, you are wasting your time and a good dog!*

I can write a hundred more points to ponder, but that's not the point.



Flake goes to school

Men like Jeppe are few and far in between and we are not taking the opportunities to listen and learn from them. They are the here and now Legends of the dog world that we need to learn from, so all that knowledge will not disappear one day. Not to make us better, but to keep future generations at the top of the game. Yes, dog training evolves and people keep reinventing the wheel, but in the end its results that count and he is one of the Legends who's methodology always works if applied right.

Books, DvD's and video clips are great, but they lack the essential personal touch that a true Legend brings to training a dog. One Legend's method may not fit you or your dog, but there is always one who's method will.

The most common comments I hear from judges these days is that dogs lack discipline. This is where I started with Flake and thus Part 1, Part 2 will cover retrieving and [tracking](#) with a Legend that flies under the radar.

Santa Claus is Coming to Town!

A couple of days ago, I received a USB key from my Pilates teacher and a Snowwhite mug (long story...). I thought these were my first Christmas gifts. I realized later that I was terribly wrong: a giant package had arrived earlier in December, via reindeer from Scandinavia. When the courier rang my bell, I rushed to the door forgetting about the painters who were taking care of my house. I jumped each obstacle between me and the door, and I ran even faster to the gate as soon as I recognized the package!

After finishing testing the [Jerva suit](#), I sent my review to M.B., aka “the [Harkila](#) Man”. He enjoyed my piece of writing and proposed me to try something else, I accepted right away telling him to choose the new item. After a couple of days, he announced I had been selected to test the Kana suit and added he was going to send a mysterious item along with the suit. When the package arrived, besides being curious to meet my new Kana suit, I was super-curious to find out what the mystery gift was. I went back into the house carrying a huge box, walked over the paint cans again, and reached the kitchen where I was finally able to see what was inside.



Actiwool

The box contained a [Kana jacket](#), a pair of [Kana trousers](#) and the mystery gift was... a [Lilja cardigan](#) in shadow brown mélange, well done M.B. you have good taste! I plan to test the suit for the whole winter before writing a full review and I will start testing the cardigan as soon as the weather allows. In the meantime, I am going to describe the clothes, and briefly express my first impressions. I will start from the [Lilja cardigan](#) which I have not worn it yet. Mine is a size S and it is true to size: an XS would have been good for me, but the S allows me to put a sweater underneath and use the cardigan as an outdoor jacket. Its color is dark brown, with some tiny grey tones: it reminds me of winter plough fields. Label says it is made in Lithuania, but an Italian Company ([Lanificio Becagli](#)) was involved in its making. The cardigan material, in fact, is named Actiwool and has something to do with a technical fabric called [Calamai](#) which has been patented by this company. Together with the Harkila label there is a Actiwool label which describes wool's natural benefits such as keeping you warm and dry, and being resistant and easy to care. Wool composes 64% of the fabric (polyester 20% and polyamide 16%), a brave and interesting choice which brings uniqueness to the texture and makes this cardigan stand out between all its fellow specimen. Choosing wool as a main "ingredient", while mixing it with synthetic materials, is a bold move and tells me that Harkila wants to keep tradition alive, while accepting the benefits of modernity. The cardigan has a modern fitted tailoring and closes through a zipper. Pockets, sleeves hem and pockets are reinforced using a different fabric which is a mixture of cotton and polyester. The cardigan has two mesh lined pockets of medium size ,which can be closed with a zipper: this is not a stupid detail, walking and running on rough grounds can make things, such as car keys and cell phones, spill out of your pockets. A third, small pocket, with the name Harkila embossed on, is located on the left arm. The Lilja has a nice smell and it is very agreeable at the touch, being soft and rough at the same time. I was forgetting, it also comes in a very nice heather-like

colour that Harkila calls beetroot mélange.



Kana jacket

Let's now move to the lower part of the suit, the [Kana trousers](#). Emotional review: they are WARM and SOFT!!! Ok, let's be serious and tell my readers something more technical. The trousers are green, Harkila labels this green "elm green": I call it hunter green, as all the hunters/shooters I know walk around dressed in this colour from head to toe. The trousers are extremely soft at the touch: the main fabric is made of polyester and nylon and has a Goretex membrane. At a first look (and touch) you would think it's cotton, it is very soft and pleasant, somehow silky. The trousers are padded and lined with polyester: I received a size 36 (the smallest size available), but being waist elasticated it suits smaller people, like me. The trousers' length is interesting: they are not super long and the snow lock at the bottom allows me to make them shorter and perfect for my height. The trousers have two zipped front pockets of reasonable depth and a knife pocket on the left thigh. Did I wear them? Yes but only once because, unfortunately, heavy fog forced local people to cancel all their outdoor related activities for about three weeks. I wore them on a very cold and foggy morning. I was supposed to compete in a field trial for pointing dogs and I reached the venue in the hope fog would dissipate: it did not.

I do not want to sound extreme, but I think I probably was the warmest person there. People were freezing (temperatures were below zero and humidity was extremely high) while standing there waiting for the fog to go, I was perfectly fine instead. Once worn they looked nice, the padding makes me look a bit plump but it was surely a fair price to pay in order to stay warm!



Kana trousers

It is now time to introduce the [Kana jacket](#), which I am in love with! It is cute, warm and light! When I wear it, I feel as if I were walking around in the cold surrounded by a fireplace. The fabric and the colour are the same of the trousers hence I am not going to describe them again. My jacket is a size 36 (the smallest size available) and it suits me well, I am a UK8-IT40. It is quite long, probably longer for me as I am shorter than the average human, but Harkila explains the extra length was chosen to keep you warm. It has a two ways zip, press buttons and rib knit storm cuffs. It features two large and deep front pocket that may be closed with a button, a deep internal pocket and a chest (radio) pocket on the left, the two latter pockets close with a zip. The look is very feminine and the adjustment cords at the waist, together with the bottom hem finishing, make it adaptable to any body shape. There is also a super warm integrated hood lined with brown synthetic bear-like fur which makes me smile. Jacket and trousers belong to the Harkila Endurance Collection and are Fitted with a Gore-Tex® membrane

that is waterproof and breathable, keeping you dry and comfortable in all conditions. The outer fabric is DWR treated giving you a robust outer fabric that is supposed to shed water preventing the jacket becoming heavy when wet.



It's a bear!

My final review will come at the end of the winter, after a suitable amount of testing but, for now I can tell you that it is incredibly and comfortable and looks good on me. While references to the brand are very subtle (two H on the front pockets buttons and Harkila/Goretex writing on the left sleeve) its being high quality has been promptly spotted by a couple of curious hunters who asked me more information about it. So... stay tuned while I will "work" for my final review, and hopefully produce more pictures of me wearing it: fog and short dark days prevented me from taking more!

Slideshow below:

Harkila Jerva: Field Test

A Siberian wind is blowing. Well I am not that sure it is Siberian but, it is blowing from East and it is very cold. Foreigners imagine Italy to enjoy a wonderful warm and sunny weather all year round. It is a hoax! I bet those involved in tourism spread this rumour, I can assure you that here in Northern Italy we often have very cold winters! What the cold wind is trying to tell me, however, is that the time has come to stop testing my Jerva suit. Those who follow the blog, already know that I was given an outdoor shooting/hunting suit made by [Harkila](#) to test it. I already described the suit's technical features and aesthetic details, you can read about them [here](#), I will now tell you how I tested it and what I think. The suit came in mid October, and I wore it for one month, almost daily. As I work (and study) from home, I do not have to follow a specific dress code and, therefore, in autumn and winter, I go around dressed like... a gamekeeper. Living in the suburbs, I have easy access to the countryside and my dog gets daily walks and training sessions in the fields, this means I have to wear clothes suitable to mud, wind, rain and fog. Once I return home I forget to get changed and I continue the day with the same clothes. This means I might go to the supermarket or to the post office wearing green and brown country attire, and this also mean I have to look pretty in those clothes. Looking like a gamekeeper is ok, looking like a Canadian lumberjack is not, and the line separating these two is really thin. While wearing my Jerva suit around none seemed to notice me too much which means the clothes were looking nice on me. A friend owning a small boutique saw the jacket, wanted to try it on and asked me about it, about its brand and so on: this clearly defines the Jerva Jacket as stylish!



Well tailored

But let's go on with the actual test in the field, starting from the [jacket](#). The jacket is very comfortable and the stretch panels allow hunters and shooters to move freely. You can mount your shotgun quickly, without feeling restrained by the sleeves, and you can also sit, lie down and stretch as much as you need to climb in and out of ditches. These same features are enjoyable during dog training: let's say you have to grab the dog quickly... well, you can! I wore the suit during country walks, training, shooting and field trials, in different weathers. When the sun was really high, the jacket proved to be too warm but, on ordinary days (temperatures ranging from 8°C to 15°C) it proved to be perfect for active hunters. What about wind and rain? I will give it A+ for wind and B for rain. The Jerva and its zips kept the wind at bay and proved capable of dealing with light rain. It was fine for short walks in the rain, or for light rain and fog, but I do not think it can cope with heavy rains and/or hours spent under the rain. Burrs and briars? The jacket does not pick up burrs, which is a very good thing, but I would not use it to go into very thick bushes. I entered some to follow the dog working on pheasants but, I would not recommend it for heavy duty tasks, like handling hounds during boar hunting.

Woodcock hunting? It might do, and I would surely recommend it for deer/boar stalking, being the cloth extremely silent. I love its pockets, while not making you look bulky, they are

capable of containing many many things, I swear!



Pockets

Overall opinion? Would I suggest purchasing the Jerva jacket and, if so, why and for which purposes? The Jerva jacket is comfortable and practical, yet stylish and feminine: women who go hunting and shooting know that it is hard to find all these features fused together in one garment. So, if you mind the look and the quality, you should consider the Jerva. You can wear it in Spring/Autumn, when temperatures are agreeable, but weather can change quickly, ignoring what the forecast said. This jacket is perfect for dog training, field trials, country walks looking for mushrooms and unicorns and for shooting/hunting/stalking, provided you do not practice these activities in extreme environments and weathers. If you want to be outside in cold weather, [Harkila Kana](#) will be perfect for you.

Let's now talk about the [trousers](#): I have already [described](#) them and, people reacted to them in the same way they reacted to the jacket so, as far as the look, they are Italian approved. Right before receiving them, I purchased a pair of trekking trousers at LIDL. I admit the only reason I bought them was the colour, as they are the same colour as heather but, anyway, my emotional purchase allowed me to compare them with something of far better quality. Harkila's Jerva, in

fact, costs about 10 times the LIDL trousers and there is a reason for it. While LIDL trousers have a great price-quality ratio, the Harkila's cost more, but offer more. Which are the main differences? Material, shape (the way they fit) and, again, noise. Most synthetic waterproof and water resistant fabrics are, indeed, noisy: you move, they swish alerting any preys. Jerva trousers, instead, do not swish and, while being light, offer a reasonable amount of protection: I could feel the nettles wearing the LIDL ones while it did not happen with the Harkila's. As for being waterproof, I think they are both water resistant but, as said about the jacket, I would not recommend these garments in heavy rain. While not waterproof, however, the Jerva dry extremely quickly: I had to face some tall and wet grass during a trial. I was wearing wellies but, being short, the trousers came in contact with grass and could not handle that much water but, despite we had no wind and had only a mild sun, they dried in less than half an hour.



Stretch panels

Last but not least... how do the trousers look once worn? I am posting a couple of pictures for you to see by yourself, they are a little big for me but, nevertheless they look fine. Like the jacket, they have some stretch panels which allow you to move freely and jump from one place to another. You can walk in them, run in them and climb on steep hills. They are comfortable, but they do not make you look like an housewife in pyjamas, smart ladies know this is definitely a good point! It is easy to keep the Jerva suit clean by letting the mud dry and then brush it away. For now, I machine washed the trousers without detergent, not to spoil their water resistance, but looking forward to wearing the suit again in the spring, I plan to buy a specific detergent for Goretex and other

te



Save room for dessert

I like not-so-sweet desserts, and I always save room for them but, in this case, Briony, who came last, was the dessert.

This shooting season, for me, this year is quite quiet... With the exception of today, I had only one proper shooting day,

the opening of the shooting season. Then nothing but for two micro-walks in the countryside carrying a shotgun, alone, no boar hunting yet. I really enjoy shooting, but this year it seems to be impossible to keep up with everything. I continue training Briony, attend some trials, work and prepare demanding university exams, sadly is really hard to find any free time to go shooting. Furthermore, nobody wants to come shooting with me, I must be an awful person! No, let's put jokes aside, the problem is that Briony is steady to flush and fairly obedient, while the average Italian pointing dog is not steady and is usually... well... WILD! It would not be fair to pretend her to be obedient and steady when other dogs are encouraged to misbehave .

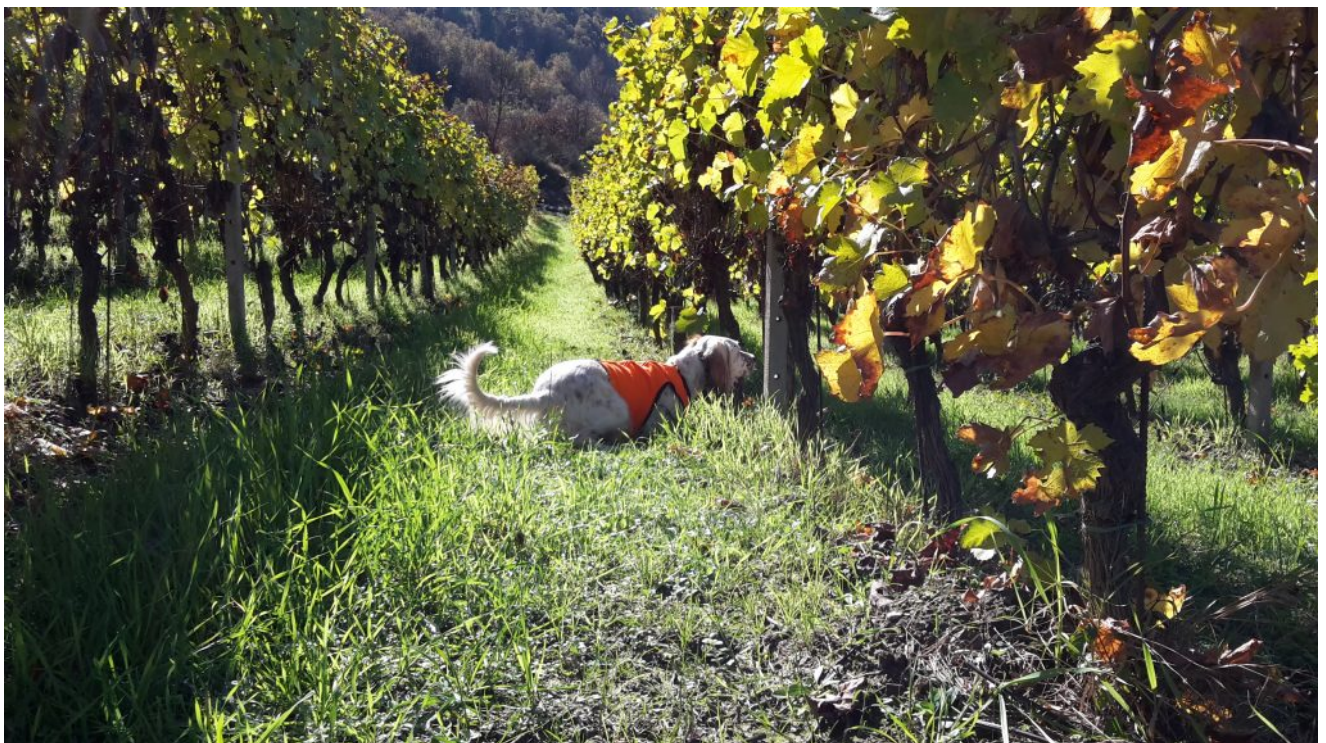


Biting the dessert!

Yesterday night I was commenting a Facebook post by my friend Andrea Vaccari (he has a [nice blog](#) on the Bracco Italiano, if you are interested in the breed). Andrea is a good hunter and a reasonably good trainer: he was complaining because almost all of the Italian hunters, who shoot over pointing dogs, feel the need to have a GPS tracking collar and/or a beeper to locate their furry friend. I agree with Andrea, this is nonsense and often equals to a lack of sportsmanship. People throw dogs out cars, let them run like wild horses and then go looking for them using some high tech device. Some people are really proud of having dogs who hunt (obviously for themselves) one mile ahead of their handler. I found this rather stupid and sometimes even annoying as beepers are extremely loud and can be heard from afar. Also, how can you test important qualities such as trainability, cooperation and connection to the handler? I am not attacking GPS and beepers because I do not like them: technology can be useful but it should not be used as an excuse to avoid training a dog.

When you say something against beepers and GPS collars, people get quite defensive and claim that they have purchased these devices for "safety". Yes, it is true, a GPS collar can be useful if a dog gets lost or something happens, but we are talking about pointing dogs, not about hounds. A pointing dog should hunt close and visible enough to be useful to the gun, which means you have to train the dog to hunt at a reasonable distance from you. If you keep the dog at the proper distance, you can see him and see what happens around him, you do not need a GPS tracking collar. Furthermore, a GPS tracking collar cannot save the dog if the dog is too far: last spring a young setter drowned in a river. He was wearing a GPS collar and the owner witnessed the whole tragedy through the device, he was one mile away from the dog. I think GPS collars give you a false illusion of safety: people think that knowing the dog's location they can save him in case of need, what they do not

consider is that they can be too far. This false illusion, in my opinion, indirectly encourages owners to give more and more freedom to dogs, in the false hope to bag one more bird, and yes birds are scarce here. I was also told that a GPS tracking collar is almost compulsory if you have a German pointing dog because they like chasing deer, people cannot not believe that you can drop a properly trained Deutsch Drahthaar when a deer is present. If you hunt woodcock, however, the beeper is even better – they claim- as you can locate the dog without checking the GPS screen constantly and... Brown dogs cannot be seen in the wood! What about a high visibility orange vest? It is cheaper and it does not make noise.



When I first got involved with pointing dogs, I used to train with Deutsch Drahthaars (German Wirehaired Pointers), these dogs were trained for German Hunting Tests and obedience was incredibly important. I used to admire these dogs (I have a soft spot for these rugged hunters) and their people, I never thought any English Setters could learn the same things. In 2015, instead, I went to England and I saw some English Setters behaving like the Germans I knew, what an awakening! I can candidly admit that for me there is a BE (Before England)

and a AE (After England) era, as my views on dog handling and training radically changed. I eventually came to the conclusion that there are two pointing dog training methods:

- ***The Italian Method: aka let the dog run and do whatever he likes and... chase him;***
- ***The German (but also British, Scandinavian...) Method: aka the dog has to do what you ask him to do, no matter what.***



As a consequence, I now feel a “**little**” out of place and none of my friends has a dog who can go shooting with Briony. The last time she went shooting with other dogs was last year, I was invited to a nice estate and I brought her: huge mistake. Dogs were running all over the place, no obedience, no steadiness nothing AND... guess what, a group of incredibly disappointed dog owners. They could not get close to the birds in time to shoot, birds were flying out of the estate and taking the dogs away with them. It was terrible, Briony was doing well but, being the only dog still around she became an easy target, all that was happening was our fault! Exhausted, I took her back the car and began picking blackthorns, shooters then calmed down, came to me and sincerely apologized. I went back to the grounds, but left Briony in the car, it was the wisest thing to do. This year... I got invited

to the same place again, by some of the same people. They are good friends, I like them and I did not want to disappoint them in any way: we have been shooting together for years and, when Briony was younger, it was thanks to the birds they paid for that she gained experience. I really owe them much, but I did not want to find myself in unpleasant situation again. I kindly accepted the invitation, but I told them I was not going to run Briony. They offered to give me ground for myself, but I refused, I told them I was happy to be their guest and I would have enjoyed their dogs. Briony was going have a run at the end of the shooting day, alone.



When I reached the lunch hut at 9 AM, they had already left so the gamekeeper told me where to go. A pack of SIX English Setters was running all over the hill: I could quickly locate everybody. Two men were on this side of the hill, and two more on the other side. Two shooters were following two (randomly chosen) dogs and the other two were following the remaining three. The sixth dog had disappeared. I joined the first two shooters that passed by me, their setters were wearing a GPS collar because, I was told, they tended to roam. The men disappeared as soon as they came, the two white dogs told them

it was time to move to a different place. The gamekeeper gave up and remained with me for a while: the missing white dog was running wild in a different part of the estate. An "important" client was shooting there, and other keepers were busy trying to catch the white wild dog, I bet he was having a lot of fun. The other friends eventually passed by with their three setters, I followed them for about three hours. The dogs were nice but they worked like a pack. Vento is the leader and the other ones, humans included, follow. These dogs could find birds, point them, honour each other's points and retrieve killed birds, but this game had no rules. Dogs were not steady and did not make a good use of the ground, I could see no logic behind their running but, most of all, they did not mind the owner. Yes, they waited for him as they wanted to retrieve the birds and they knew the birds had to be shot first but, after the bird had fallen and being grabbed in their mouths, they would quickly forget any humans.



Keeping an eye...

By the end of the morning, 18 birds (pheasants and grey partridges) were bagged but, we had gone up and down the hill and in and out of woods and briars walking at least twice on the same ground. Some grey partridge mini-coveys were also flying back and forth, teasing us. When my friends announced they were going back to the car, I went to mine and let Briony have a well deserved run, this is what happened. As soon as we left the car she pointed, she waited for me and then roaded towards the bird, a grey flew from afar, she did not see her but I stopped her. I then told her to go ahead with the action and she did it again, another grey which flew into the bushes. Briony was steady and we could perform the same action again, on a third bird. I then let her "play" again with the greys (now more hidden by briars) until bushes began to thicken to let me keep an eye on her. In less than 20 minutes, I could have bagged about three or four birds, without running back and forth like a comet, without a GPS and without a beeper. I then moved to a more open ground and let her run left and right, practicing some obedience. More greys, undisturbed by my non-chasing dog – were in a wood below us but she had already done what she was supposed to do, and confirmed me that my sacrifices had been definitely worth! I was very happy!!!



When, over lunch, I told people what happened and why I handled the dog in the way I did, they were happy for me and impressed at the same time. Some asked how I trained her, I simply told everybody that it was just hard work and that everybody could do the same. They vaguely agreed, but underlined they had no time to undertake such an intensive training program, Fishing ad hare then became the main topic until...they saw Briony again in the parking lot. She was on lead and she did not do anything special but for behaving nicely and remaining seated if told to do so. There were other unknown shooters around and many of them came to see the "trained" dog: according to some I am very "lucky" to own such a dog. Of course I have been lucky to find her when she was a plumpy puppy but, what came later was not just luck. Luck played an important role because I had a chance to have my British eye opening experience; had a chance to ask questions and get answers; had a chance to have wonderful mentors, but I was also open enough to discard an old system of beliefs and start working hard following a new scheme.

Ps. If I could make it, you can do it! Peace, love and happy training! I am in a happy/hippie mood tonight!

