

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](#)!

Un veloce aggiornamento sulla taurina

Qualche settimana fa, ho postato un pezzo sulla taurina. Nello specifico ho parlato del fatto che alcune razze sono meno efficienti nel metabolizzarla ([potete leggere tutto qui](#)).

Un deficit di taurina può causare cardiomiopatia dilatativa e quindi tutti coloro che possiedono esemplari di una razza a rischio dovrebbero testare il proprio cane. Ho testato Briony e i suoi valori sono risultati normali. Lei si alimenta con cibo casalingo cucinato.

Come appena detto, i suoi valori sono nella norma ma ho chiesto a Lucia Casini, Professore di nutrizione veterinaria all' [Università di Pisa](#), se fosse il caso di integrare durante i periodi di caccia e addestramento intenso. Lucia consiglia di integrare con **500 mg al giorno** in quei periodi (cane atleta di circa 20 kg).

Tra i laboratori a cui potete rivolgervi ci sono: Idexx, Laboklin e San Marco.

Inoltre, siccome la maggior parte dei miei lettori si occupa di cani da lavoro (date un'occhiata al [Gundog Research Project](#)!), lasciate che aggiunga che gli atleti possono avere un fabbisogno di taurina più elevato. Se desiderate approfondire, il web è ricchissimo di articoli dedicati alla taurina e alla cardiomiopatia dilatativa nel cane, lo scopo del mio articolo è semplicemente quello di far conoscere questo problema.

A Quick Update on Taurine

A few weeks ago, I posted about taurine and, more specifically, about some breeds which might be less efficient in producing it ([you can read everything here](#)).

As taurine deficiency can lead to DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy) I think all those owning a breed at risk should assess their dogs. I eventually tested Briony and her results fell in the normal range: she eats an homemade diet and, apparently, despite my poor cooking skills, she is getting enough methionine and cysteine that she can convert into taurine.

As said above, her results are within the normal range, but I

showed them to a nutritionist (Lucia Casini, Professor of Veterinary Nutrition at the University of Pisa, [School of Veterinary Medicine](#)) asking her whether Briony should benefit, like other athletes, from any taurine supplements during the hunting/shooting season and she said yes, to supplement with **500 mg a day** (she weighs around 20 kgs) in these periods.

Some of the laboratories testing for taurine in Europe are: Idexx, Laboklin and San Marco.

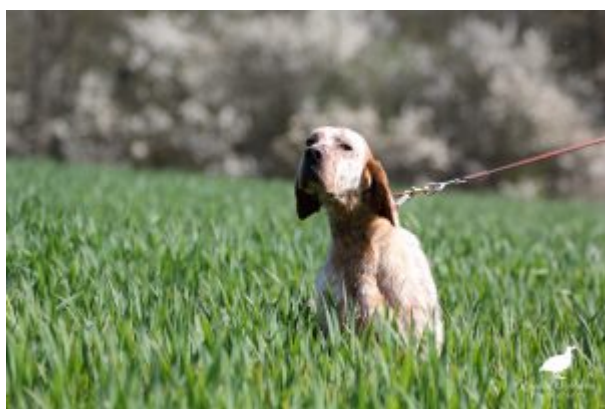
Considering that most of my readers own working dogs ([read about the Gundog Research Project!](#)), let me also add that these athletes might need more taurine than the average dog. The web is full of articles on taurine and DCM in dogs, go and read them if you want to know more, I am just here to spread the word and raise some awareness.

La taurina, il setter inglese e le altre razze

La scorsa settimana il server si è crashato dopo la pubblicazione di un articolo sulla [tirosina](#) e per dieci giorni non ho osato pubblicare nulla, ma oggi è venuto il momento di considerare un altro amminoacido. Un'allevatrice di setter americana, infatti, ha di recente pubblicato su Facebook la storia del suo cane a cui è stata diagnosticata un'insufficienza cardiaca congestizia. A questa situazione si era arrivati a causa di una [DCM \(cardiomiopatia dilatativa\)](#) e il cardiologo ha consigliato di controllare i livelli ematici di taurina. Lei ha controllato il cane e tutti gli altri setter di sua proprietà e, sorpresa, i livelli di taurina erano bassi in tutti quelli che alimentava con un mangime

grain free ritenuto ottimo, mentre erano normali in quelli che mangiavano crocchette che potremmo definire “normali”.

La taurina ha moltissime funzioni e le potete leggere [qui](#) ma, può davvero una carenza di taurina provocare una cardiomiopatia dilatativa? Sappiamo che questo succede nel gatto che non può sintetizzarla (amminoacido essenziale) e che quindi deve assumerla con la dieta. Per i cani, al contrario, la taurina non è considerata essenziale e si ritiene la producano da sé sintetizzandola dagli amminoacidi solforati metionina e cisteina.



Così, per fugare ogni dubbio, ho contattato di nuovo Lucia Casini, Professoressa di Nutrizione Veterinaria all'[Università di Pisa](#), e mi ha confermato quanto appena scritto, sottolineando che, comunque, bassi livelli di cisteina e metionina nella dieta potrebbero causare una deficienza di taurina. Quindi, questo significa che i mangimi contengono livelli inadeguati di tali amminoacidi? Può darsi, ma va ricordato che alcune razze sono meno efficienti nel trasformarli in taurina. Quali sono le razze? Cocker (americano e inglese), setter inglese, retrievers (golden e labrador), terranova e San Bernardo ma, onestamente, non mi sento di escludere che il problema possa essere presente in altre razze ad esse affini, o in razze in cui sono presenti casi di DCM. Per questi animali, l'integrazione di taurina potrebbe avere un ruolo preventivo e non [curativo](#).

Cosa fare quindi? Credo servano ulteriori ricerche per poterlo

affermare con esattezza ma, in quanto proprietaria di un setter inglese, mi sto informando su quali laboratori effettuano questo esame e su quali siano i costi. In attesa di nuove scoperte, sento di consigliare la stessa cosa a chi possiede esemplari delle razze menzionate, di razze affini e di razze ritenute a rischio DCM.

Aggiornamento, ho trovato almeno tre laboratori che testano: Idexx, Laboklin e San Marco. I prezzi sono attorno ai 60-70 euro. ([Aggiornamento qui](#))

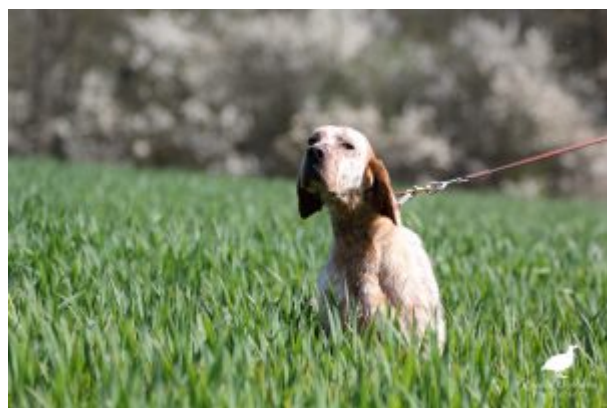
Inoltre, siccome la maggior parte dei miei lettori si occupa di cani da lavoro (date un'occhiata al [Gundog Research Project](#)!), lasciate che aggiunga che gli atleti possono avere un fabbisogno di taurina più elevato. Se desiderate approfondire, il web è ricchissimo di articoli dedicati alla taurina e alla cardiomiopatia dilatativa nel cane, lo scopo del mio articolo è semplicemente quello di far conoscere questo problema.

Taurine, English Setters & other breeds

Last week the server crashed after I published an article on [tyrosine](#) and dark coats. I stayed away from the admin panel for ten days because I was afraid I could crash it again, but now I am back discussing another amino acid. A couple of days ago, an English Setter owner living in the USA posted on FB about her dog's being diagnosed with congestive heart failure. The dog had developed [DCM](#) (dilated cardiomyopathy) and the cardiologist suggested testing his taurine blood levels. She tested him and her other dogs and the tests confirmed that

some of them had indeed very low levels of taurine. Curiously, those with lower levels were fed a grain free, high protein, trendy dog food while the other ones, eating what would be considered an “average” dog food, were doing better.

Taurine has multiple functions, as you can read [here](#), but can taurine deficiency in the diet lead to DCM? We know this can happen in cats: taurine is, for cats, an essential amino acid which means they cannot synthesize it and that it must be introduced with the diet. When it comes to dogs, instead, taurine is not considered essential as they can produce it by themselves. But... to do so, they need to convert dietary sulfur amino acids (SAA, methionine and cysteine) to taurine.



I decided to speak again with Lucia Casini, Veterinary Nutrition Professor at the [University of Pisa](#), and she confirmed what I just wrote above, adding that a lack of methionine and cysteine could, however, cause taurine deficiency. So, are some dog foods lacking of methionine and cysteine? Maybe, or it could also be that some animals are less efficient when it comes to transforming them into taurine. There are several breeds of dogs that have a lower than normal ability to convert SAA: American Cocker Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, St Bernard, English Setters and Newfoundlands (and probably more we still do not know about). In their cases, taurine supplementation could have a preventive, rather than [curative](#) role.

So... What should we do? I think further research is needed but,

personally, owning an English Setter, I am investigating on laboratories which can assess taurine levels and trying to collect information about the cost of this service. Would I advise you to do the same? Probably, and I am also wondering if other breeds, especially those related to the aforementioned breeds and those prone to DCM, should be tested: more research is certainly needed!

Update: in Europe at least 3 labs test for taurine in dogs: Idexx, Laboklin and San Marco. Prices are around 40-50 euros. [Update on my test here.](#)

Considering that most of my readers own working dogs ([read about the Gundog Research Project!](#)), let me also add that these athletes might need more taurine than the average dog. The web is full of articles on taurine and DCM in dogs, go and read them if you want to know more, I am just here to spread the word and raise some awareness.

Chi è sbagliato?

Oggi parliamo di ~~cani~~-unicorni. Ho scelto gli unicorni perché posso dire le stesse cose che direi sui cani senza che la gente si metta sulla difensiva. Perché... Quando tiri in ballo argomenti caldi, ci sono un sacco di persone diventano ~~aggressive~~-assertive. È cominciato tutto qualche giorno fa, in un segretissimo gruppo Facebook, fatto da persone che si conoscono da più di vent'anni. Ci sono allevatori, giudici, addestratori, ciascuno portabandiera della sua razza. Ci sono anche un sacco di veterinari, e chiunque si renda conto di cosa sia la facoltà di medicina veterinaria sa quanto queste persone debbano essere determinate per laurearsi. Quindi, mettine un po' insieme e avrai i fuochi d'artificio.

La miccia l'ha accesa un appassionato di genetica canina (che nella vita vera lavora nel marketing). Ha iniziato a pubblicare una serie di fotografie volte a dimostrare come le razze siano cambiate nel tempo. Prende una razza, quasi ogni giorno, e poi ne pubblica i cambiamenti affinché li si possano discutere. È filato tutto liscio fino alla pubblicazione dell'Unicorn Spaniel, quando io me ne sono uscita a chiedere come mai gli esemplari da lavoro di una razza assomiglino di più ai loro antenati di quanto non accada ai soggetti da show. Ho detto questo per l'Unicorn Spaniel, ma le mie perplessità riguardavano tutte le razze da lavoro che erano andate dividendosi in due ceppi. Avrei potuto dirlo per l'Unicorn Setter, per l'Unicorn Collie, per il Siberian Unicorn, per il Pastore di Unicornlandia... Prendete una razza a scelta, tra quelle da lavoro, meglio se una di quelle che lavorano ancora, controllate vecchie stampe e vecchie fotografie e traete le vostre conclusioni.



Unicorn Setter durante una prova di lavoro

Tornando al singolo episodio, è successo che uno dei vet (amico e gran prava persona!), appassionato di Unicorn Spaniel da bellezza, si è messo sulla difensiva accusandomi di essermi impuntata e voler avere ragione a tutti i costi. Ok, ogni tanto mi capita, ma non in questo caso. Gli ho mostrato alcune fotografie di Unicorn Spaniel da lavoro ne è rimasto sconvolto: erano tutti sbagliati, le orecchie non andavano inserite, lì le teste non parliamone, le zampe erano sbagliate eccetera. Nel frattempo, un'altra vet ed amica, allevatrice di Unicorn Retriever è passata di lì e ha commentato: *"Oh, ma è*

la stessa diatriba che c'è per gli Unicorn Retriever". Io capisco entrambi, davvero, e a modo mio simpatizzo con il loro punto di vista, ammetto persino che gli Unicorn Spaniel da show siano animali esteticamente molto gradevoli ma... allo stesso tempo, ritengo che si siano allontanati dal modello originale, altrimenti detto "giurassico". Non sto dicendo che siano peggiori, solo che siano diversi!



Unicorn Retriever da expo',
notare la struttura
massiccia e i crini profusi

Ammetto candidamente di essere appassionata unicorni da lavoro, ma non intendevo affatto dare torto a nessuno, né riattivare la solita, per quanto sempre saggia, discussione su linee da lavoro e linee da expo'. Intendevo, e intendo, capire PERCHE' gli unicorni da lavoro sono ritenuti "sbagliati" dalla maggior parte delle persone, in special modo da chi frequenta le expo'. Sono la prima ad affermare che ci siano soggetti da lavoro ORRENDI, che non sembrano nemmeno più unicorni, ma sono anche pronta a ribadire che ce ne sono alcuni molto bellini. Il mio unicorno ideale è un bell'unicorno da lavoro. Non sarei felice con un unicorno brutto, ma allo stesso tempo, il mio unicorno, deve essere bravo in campo. Siffatti animali, sono la più pura espressione della bellezza: armonici e sobri, sono un piacere a vedersi, sia al guinzaglio che mentre lavorano. E, guarda caso, assomigliano anche ai loro antenati, soggetti creati per

funzionare.

Durante la mia prima lezione di istologia (lo studio dei tessuti del corpo) all'università, il professore, introducendo la cellula, ha messo in chiaro che la forma è conseguenza della funzione e che questo era vero per una cellula, per un tessuto e per un organismo. Credo debba essere vero anche per gli unicorni, allora. Quindi, perché gli animali funzionali sembrano sbagliati? E perché lo sembrano anche se riflettono quanto scritto nello standard? Se leggete gli standard di razza con cura, noterete che molti di loro non promuovono, né tutelano, la maggior parte delle esagerazioni morfologiche che oggi fanno vincere un cane in ring.

Quindi, perché oggi vengono ricercate esagerazioni come mantelli super lunghi, orecchie esagerate, pelo da pecora, gambe extra corte e adipe in abbondante eccesso? Perché queste caratteristiche sono ritenute piacevoli? Dove è andato il buongusto? Il nostro senso estetico è stato contaminato dalla modernità (TV spazzatura, fast food, cineserie...)? Se è così, forse dovrei tornare nel passato mentre la questione, piuttosto filosofica, resta senza risposta

[Forse ne scriverò ancora.](#)

Which one is wrong?

Today we are going to talk about ~~dogs~~ unicorns. I choose unicorns because I can say the same things I would write about dogs and, at the same time, avoid people getting defensive. Because... When you discuss some hot topics, plenty of people can turn ~~aggressive~~ assertive.

It all started a few days ago, in a super secret Facebook

group, made of people who have been knowing each other for about 20 years. There are plenty of breeders, judges, trainers, scholars, involved with different breeds. In such a diversity, there are also plenty of vets and... anyone familiar with Italian Vet Schools knows how strong willed these people need to be, in order to graduate! So, put some of them together and you will get fireworks!

The fire point's of origin was caused by a scholar of canine genetics (who in real life is a marketing specialist) who started to publish pictures showing how some breeds have changed through years. He picks a breed, almost daily, and publishes the changes for us to discuss. It all went quiet until we came to the Unicorn Spaniel: at this point, I came out questioning why the current working specimen of a breed are much closer to their ancestors than their show counterparts. I said this in the Unicorn Spaniel discussion but I deemed it valid for most of the "working" breeds that have gone through a split. It could have been the Unicorn Setter, the Unicorn Collie, the Siberian Unicorn, the Unicorn Shepherd... Pick any breeds created for a specific purpose, better If it is performing its job, go through old prints and pictures and draw your own conclusion.



A working Unicorn Setter
during a FT

What happened is that a vet (and very good friend) involved in the show type Unicorn Spaniel, got defensive and accused me of being strongly opinionated, which I can sometimes be, but not in this case. I showed him some Working Unicorn Spaniel pictures and he was literally horrified by them stating that

those dogs had wrongly set ears, wrong heads, wrong paws, they were all wrong. At the same time, another vet (and good friend as well) who breeds Show Unicorn Retrieves stopped by and commented that *"Oh well, it is the same story with Unicorn Retrievers"*. While I can understand their viewpoints, and agree upon the fact that the show type Unicorn Spaniel is still a nicely built animal, I am also firmly convinced that it diverged from the original model and became something else. Not better, not worse, just different.



A show Unicorn Retriever (notice the extra long fluffy hair and the sturdy build)

I admit being a supporter of the working unicorns cause, but I was not trying to prove anybody wrong, nor to end up in the same old (yet always important) discussion on show unicorns vs working unicorns. I was, and I am, trying to understand WHY working type unicorns are perceived as being "wrong" by the majority of people, and especially by show people. Whereas I am ready to declare that some working type unicorns are incredibly UGLY and do not resemble unicorns at all, I am also ready to point out that there are also some very pretty (or handsome, depending on the sex) ones. My ideal unicorn is a good looking, nicely built, working unicorn: I won't be happy to own a ugly unicorn, but at the same time, my unicorn should perform well in the field. These animals are the purest

expression of beauty: harmonic and sober, they are a pleasure to look at either when they are on lead or when they are performing their job. Needless to say, they resemble their ancestors, models of unicorns which were created for function.

During my first histology (the study of body tissues) lesson at the university, while introducing the cell, the professor pointed out that form follows function, and that this was true for a cell, for a tissue, for an organism. I guess it should be true for unicorns as well. So why do functional specimen look wrong? And why do they look wrong if they still incarnate what is written in their breed standard? If you go through breed standards carefully, you will notice that most of them are not promoting, nor advocating, most of the exaggerated features we now see winning in the show ring. I was almost forgetting... that they still do the job they were created for!

So why do people perceive exaggerations such as extra long coats, extra long ears, super fluffy coats, super short legs and extra pounds as correct and aesthetically pleasant? Let's forget functionality – for a moment, where has good taste gone? Has our aesthetic sense being contaminated by modernity (rubbish on tv, fast food, short lived made in China goods...)? If so, I think I should have born in another century, but the question, a pretty philosophical one, remains unanswered.

[More later, maybe.](#)