

# English Summer Trials: Daily Life

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



Grouse

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

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

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



Newbiggin estate

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

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

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

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



Lunch on the moor

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



Lunch on the moor

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

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

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

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

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

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# 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!](#)

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## Una gemma dal 1956: un italiano ai trials inglesi

Come alcuni di voi già sanno, ho ereditato l'archivio del Dr. Ridella, veterinario e allevatore di setter con l'affisso Ticinensis. Mi sento onorata di essere stata scelta come custode di questi materiali, ma mi rincresce ammettere che ne ho ripulito e ordinato solo metà delle riviste. Tuttavia, circa 50 anni di editoria cino-venatoria, sono oggi ben archiviati e leggibili. Sapendo ciò, un amico mi ha chiesto di trovargli due articoli di Solaro del 1938 e del 1954 che, ovviamente, non sono riuscita ad individuare. Non dandomi per vinta, ho controllato anche gli anni limitrofi, niente da fare, ma ho trovato qualcosa di estremamente affascinante ed inatteso. Nel numero del secondo trimestre di Rassegna Cinofila (è l'antenato dei Nostri Cani) del 1956, c'è un bell'articolo di Giulio Colombo (1886-1966). Per chi non lo conoscesse, Colombo era allevatore con affisso della Baita, nonché un noto giudice. Aveva sempre cercato di tenere vivi i legami tra Italia e Gran Bretagna e l'Italia importando, tra gli altri i setter: **Lingfield Mystic** (vincitore del Derby



inglese); **LingfieldIla, LingfieldPumaeBrattonVanity**. Grazie all'articolo, ho scoperto che nel 1956, Colombo è andato a giudicare a **Sutton Scotney** (Hampshire – UK) e ha raccontato la esperienza. L'articolo è leggibile per intero nel [PDF che potete scaricare qui](#) o nella photogallery [qui linkata](#). Ne riporterò però qui alcuni pezzi salienti.

Colombo comincia pensando a Laverack, Llewellyn e Lady Auckland (che giudicava con lui) e con un excursus storico che spiega come mai setter e pointer siano stati selezionati in questa maniera. *“Credo aver, inteso i due Grandi sussurrare a un dipresso così: Competizioni di giganti le nostre, quando ancora si credeva alla necessità del cane da ferma sul terreno della caccia, quando pointers e setters rispondevano al gusti venatori del cacciatore, quando non si codificava un bel niente a priori, teoricamente, per estetismi o postulati da tavolino senza aver vissuta o sofferta mai la, passione incontenibile dello sport codaiolo, fra le più strenue ed inebrianti passioni, quando pointers e setters, cani da Grande Cerca, si imposero selezionati perfezionati, secondo suggeriva la pratica diuturna di lunghe stagioni venatorie con l'esperienza del terreno e dei selvatico, a servizio del fucile vagante, e si stabilì la macchina animale perfetta, collaudata con formula aderente alla realtà per quel terreno e quel selvatico, e conquistò il mondo intero quella macchina intelligente, tanto che nati Inghilterra pointers e setters furon poi cittadini di ogni Paese.”*

Non credo ci sia molto da aggiungere, poi continua con la descrizione dettagliata del lavoro che essi sono chiamati a fare: *“II cacciatore ragionò così: di fronte a me la pianura sconfinata, ondeggiante di mammelloni di grani, di stoppie, di*

prati, di eriche, faticosa, lenta da per correre tutta scarpinando da coltivo a coltivo, da spiaggia a spiaggia in traccia delle compagnie di starne e grouses discoste le une dalle altre in famiglia ciascuna col proprio pascolo, e le lunghe pause senza incontri e senza sparare scoraggiano anche il cacciatore più caparbio: a me occorre un ausiliare speciale anzi una pariglia di tali, dall'olfatto possente, cerca indefessa. dalla ferma statica, dalla guidata corta, che a galoppo spinto per accorciare le distanze, nel tempo breve per la nostra passione da crepuscolo a crepuscolo, risparmiando a me ciechi e fortunosi passi, concludano spicci su grouses e su starne e magari su lepre sorniona; e perché io possa sparare a visuale libera senza tema, giù, a terra proni a frullo e schizzo. Drake e Dash, ed é il più bel momento della vita di cacciatore; e perché quel selvatico che non possono raggiungere né se vola né se galoppa, non induca in tentazione, proni testa fra gli arti ari in segno di rinuncia, voi cavalieri dei moors e praterie, per riporto e recupero i ho apparecchiato io stesso un valletto che non falla. il retriever, vi risparmi di strusciare il tartufo pistando, voi Signori », Torto o ragione, ragionavano così e così fu sempre categoricamente a quei tempi. Proscritti falsi allarmi di ferme senza presenza di selvatico, non si tolleravano inganni ed indugi oziosi, se Drake e Dash fermano ci sta il selvatico e non lo mollano più, e si raziocinava così: « Perché noi si possa usufruire del lavoro di due cani, ed uno non costituisca il doppione dell'altro galoppandogli al fianco appaiato, li sguinzaglio nel bel mezzo dell'area da esplorare e partano essi uno verso destra e l'altro verso sinistra in senso opposto, e giunti a un centinaio di metri, anche di più a seconda del terreno vasto e sgombro, virino essi e ritornino in direzione l'uno dell'altro, sempre nella scia dei vento, ma più oltre verso la meta lontana, in maniera da esplorare il terreno anche nel senso della direttiva di marcia, e si incontrino a metà cammino scambiandosi il lato come nella quadriglia dama e cavaliere, a ritmo cadenzato, con astuta sincronia e... nacque la cerca incrociata, non eleganza, ma



*scampoli di grano."*

Qui viene espresso in dettaglio il lavoro "ideale" dei cani inglesi e le motivazioni pratiche che stanno dietro a queste pretese. Leggendo questi paragrafi sento ancora più la mancanza delle mie esperienze britanniche, perché da loro le cose sono rimaste all'incirca come descritte qui. Se non avessi prima visto, e poi partecipato ai loro trials, sarei un cinofilo diverso, avrei un cane diverso ma... devo ammettere che sono contenta di quello che sono! Segue qualche notizia sulle regole del gioco, con riflessioni sui pro e sui contro delle diverse regole: *"In Inghilterra non si redige relazione alcuna, non si concede qualifica, si comunica l'ordine di classifica dal primo al quarto con una riserva, e stop, i concorrenti tanto intelligenti da valutare da sé gli errori dei propri allievi senza sentirseli ricordare per iscritto postumo dal Giudice e talmente sportivi da comprendere che se il Giudice ha creduto di disporre i cani in un dato ordine progressivo è ozioso recriminare e voler sostituire tante altre classifiche quanti concorrenti e spettatori, ognuna diversa dall'altra, ma tutte quante più oculate, più cognite, più probanti, più sapute, più pettegole di quella ufficiale!"*

*Non ci sta minuto di tolleranza, assurda nostrana indulgenza che consente al cane di dimostrare le proprie attitudini a far frullare, a rifiutare il consenso, a rincorrere, a beffare il conduttore, senza che il Giudice possa prenderne atto, coll'eventualità magari di non aver mai più durante il turno il cane occasione di ripetere quanto è suo costume perpetrare di norma, e frodare magari un premio con relativa qualifica bugiarda.*

*Nemmeno si tiene conto di un lasso di tempo prestabilito per la prova: allorché il Giudice opina di essersi fatto un concetto probante del lavoro dei cani taglia corto, e su questo si potrebbe discutere, perché un minimo di percorso è più equo a garanzia delle probabilità comuni, eccetto per gli errori da squalifica. Vige il sistema dei richiami protratti*

*con confronti ripetuti, con pericolo di dover sul finire della gara modificare da capo una classifica già plausibile”*

Se volete saperne di più sulle differenze tra le prove italiane e quelle britanniche, potete andare a [leggerle qui](#). Faccio una breve riflessione sull'abitudine inglese di non avere relazioni a fine prova: Colombo dice che il pubblico spesso tende a saperne di più del giudice. Persone che, pur stando a centinaia di metri dal cane, vedono e prevedono errori che sfuggono (secondo loro) ai giudici! Credevo che negli anni '50 il pubblico fosse più , come dire, sobrio ma apparentemente l'arte di attribuire errori inesistenti ai cani degli altri ha radici antiche. Colombo poi racconta del **Derby** (non so se fosse identico all'attuale Puppy Derby, per soggetti sotto ai 2 anni) e non ho capito se i cani correvano a singolo o in coppia, siccome menziona poi le Brace Stakes (in coppia). “Nel complesso del lavoro nel **Derby** constatai qualche fase di dettaglio, insistenze su orme, qualche consenso stentato a comando, senza partecipazione né formale né conscia all'azione; Nota del Concorso presente in alcuni esemplari, ma frenata da frequenti incontri di fagiano, lepri e conigli, scarse le starne, e deplorabile il coniglio soprattutto, che conta é la starna, per fagiani basta il cocker. Punte in profondità. ritorni all'interno come in Coppa Europa, qualche intemperanza di richiami come da noi. Soggetti a corto di preparazione per il maltempo, alcuni veramente di classe, ma non superiore nel complesso alla nostra attuale. Primo **Lenwade Wizard**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, di 15 mesi, stilista, corretto, galoppo sciolto, risolutivo sull'incontro. Secondo **Lenwade Whisper**, pointer di Messrs P. P. Wayre's e G. F. Jolly's, di 15 mesi, con buon percorso, benché lacets troppo compatti e qualche incertezza nell'indicazione.”

Seguono accenni alla Brace Stake: “Le **Brace Stakes** videro presenti due Setters, irlandesi, **Sulhamstead Bey d'Or** e **F. T. Sulhamstead Basil d'Or**. Basil soggetto rimarchevole, con reazioni pronte e buon olfatto, impegno e buon galoppo,

*qualche incertezza e ritorni all'interno, ferma e guida con espressione, consente, bene in mano, ben condotto, surclassa il compagno Bey e si aggiudica per proprio esclusivo merito il secondo premio, trattenuto il primo, della pariglia."*

Alla **All Aged Stake** era stato iscritto anche un weimaraner che poi non si è presentato. Colombo disquisisce sul far correre un continentale insieme a degli inglesi: *"non avendo visto il Weimaraner sul lavoro non posso affermare se fosse o no nera Nota del Concorso dl Setters e Pointers, superflua qualsiasi meraviglia dal momento che corrono da noi diversi Kurzhaar ed Epagneuls perfettamente nella Nota della Grande Cerca assai più di qualche esponente di razza inglese; gli inglesi, con meno ipocrisia e più raziocinio, dal momento che alcuni continentali filano all'inglese, li fanno correre con gli inglesi; la Grande Cerca non è questione di coda lunga o corta, ma di garretti, olfatto reagendo, e non è escluso che un giorno i Continentali, italiani compresi, corrano a Grande Cerca, e pointers e setters a Cerca ristretta."*

Dopodiché tira le somme su quanto visto nel corso delle prove: *"in Inghilterra la Grande Cerca non è più professata e sentita come un tempo, in un ambiente dove il cane da ferma è in crisi gravissima di impiego eccetto che alcuni pochi attivissimi Sportsmen fedeli alla formula antica; che è la prassi impiegata per correre la Grande Cerca che si allontana oggi in Inghilterra, o quantomeno a Sutton Scotney, non dal modello continentale ma da quello stesso descritto e commentato dagli Autori inglesi, praticato per il passato e introdotto poi sul continente: turni a singhiozzo, interruzioni di percorso per battere porzioni limitate, della pur vasta area, sfruttamento di appezzamenti, di scampoli di terreno percorribili in qualche minuto, assolutamente inidonei allo sviluppo della cerca in grande e anzi in contrasto con la cerca dinamica e veloce pertanto che nota personalità inglese ebbe a definire alcuni: turni da Springers; si tollerano dai conduttori troppe fasi di dettaglio e si ammettono lunghe guidate inespressive*



*con schizzo finale di lepre e coniglio considerate valide, e niente sta ad attestare la possibilità di pistaggio che il Trialler naso al vento deve trascurare non essendo suo compito preoccuparsene; si dimentica spesso che il consenso è attivo, partecipante, solidale con il cane in ferma e non rinunciatario e passivo per obbedienza; non si reprimono sempre i ritorni all'interno e si tarpa talora l'azione del cane di lato costringendolo a percorso inadeguato allo scopo stesso della velocità."*



Il cane da ferma era in decadenza in Gran Bretagna nel 1956? Non lo so, non c'ero, quello che posso intuire da letture passate ed esperienze presenti è che la realtà venatoria britannica era (ed è) completamente diversa dalla nostra [come potete leggere cliccando qui](#). La loro gestione faunistica-venatoria ha indubbiamente favorito spaniels e retrievers, a scapito dei cani da ferma. Probabilmente, nel 1956, i cani da ferma erano comunque cani di nicchia e in stagnazione, mentre da noi si assisteva ad una sorta di ascesa della caccia con il cane da ferma, gli inglesi in particolare. Innanzitutto la Grande Cerca intesa da Colombo nel 1956 era molto diversa dalla Grande Cerca attuale ma... gli inglesi hanno mai avuto una vera e propria Grande Cerca? Non ricordo nulla di specifico ad opera di autori inglesi. Non dico che non sia mai stata descritta, dico che non ne ho mai letto e mi piacerebbe leggerne su uno dei testi a cui fa riferimento Colombo, senza però indicarne i nomi. Mi piacerebbe poter conversare con lui e capire, capire cosa intendessero gli inglesi – secondo lui-



per Grande Cerca e capire la sua visione. La sua visione, in fondo la conosciamo, non possiamo certo dimenticare che il cane ideale per Colombo era velocissimo, dalla cerca estrema, dal naso superlativo. Lo chiamava *"il puro"*, il *"folle"* e in **"Trialer! Saggio di Cinofilia Venatoria" (1950)** lo definiva: ***"Il Riproduttore, Il Capolavoro, il quadro d'Autore, il brillante di cinquanta grani, l'oro zecchino. E' il Capodanno, non gli altri 364 giorni."*** La cinofilia italiana è stata profondamente influenzata dalla visione di Colombo, ma non quella britannica e, come dicevo sopra, non sono nemmeno certa che inizialmente fosse indirizzata in quella direzione. [In ogni caso mi sono rimessa a leggere Arkwright a piccoli passi].

Turni da spaniel. Interruzioni di percorsi, terreni questionabili, lunghe fasi di dettaglio, lunghe guidate eccetera, le ho viste? Ni. Ho seguito e partecipato ad almeno 20 trials, forse di più, e ho visto alcune delle cose di cui racconta Colombo ma andava sempre così. Molto andava a discrezione dei giudici e dei guardiacaccia (è il guardiacaccia che ti dice dove puoi fare il turno!) e il livello dei cani era variegato. Non so come fosse la situazione a Sutton Stockney ma, in certi trials a grouse si corrono in mezzo a densità di selvatici impressionanti. Non è che si possano fare chissà quali percorsi. I consensi a comando? Li chiedono ancora anche se un consenso naturale è molto apprezzato e si sta lavorando in questo senso. Tirando le somme, comunque, credo che Giulio Colombo [si aspettasse di assistere a qualcosa di diverso](#) e sia rimasto un po' spiazzato. Ciò nonostante, Colombo non era uno stupido e ammette egli stesso che anche un giudice britannico potrebbe non essere colpito sempre in positivo dai trials italiani: *"Benchè una sola prova controllata da me non possa fornirmi indice probante del complesso di un materiale setter e pointer, esiguo come numero nei confronti dell'italiano e francese, da quella sola gara di Sutton Scotney (dovrei dedurne una netta decadenza rispetto alla nostra; mi guardo*

*dal farlo: probabilmente un Giudice inglese avrebbe la stessa impressione da alcuni turni nostrani alla Cattanea, a Borgo d'Ale ed Alice Castello."*

Il nostro inviato ammette altresì di aver visto, oltre a cani meno buoni, anche cani buoni: "Se alcuni concorrenti si palesarono tassativamente negativi al compito del Trialler, altri al limite quattro pointers almeno, due setters inglesi e un irlandese furono in tal classe da doverli rammaricare dal non poterli rivedere mai più. Fra i premiati **Seguntium Niblick**, pointer di Mr. J. Alun Roberts, di due anni, primo, velocissimo, sicuro sull'incontro, senso del selvatico. **Scotney Gary**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, due anni, velocissimo, stilista, senso del selvatico, olfatto, secondo; **Scotney Solitaire**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, di non ancora due anni, tutto nella Nota, testa alta, corretto, olfatto, reazioni, terzo; **Sulhamstead Basil d'Or**, irlandese, impegno, testa alta, corretto, quarto; **Ch. Downsmans Bracken**, setter inglese, dalle reazioni rapide, le ferme schiacciate slittando, lunghe e significative, infortunato su starne durante un rispetto di lepre, quinto. E lo indiavolato **Sulhamstead Nina d'Or**, setter irlandese di Mrs. Nagle's e Miss M. Clarcks's, di non ancora l'anno, partito su lepre, e quello inglesino blu belton dalla cerca ampia, avida, **Flashaway Eve**, del Col. A. S. Dalding's, di non ancora due anni, che tende al fuori mano sul fianco, ma possiede tanta avidità e stile setter e galoppo radente da presagirne un Campione, se ben condotto." Condivido appieno, la mia esperienza è identica alla sua: accanto a cani poco stilisti e lenti, ci sono soggetti che non sfigurerebbero anche alle nostre prove: in 60



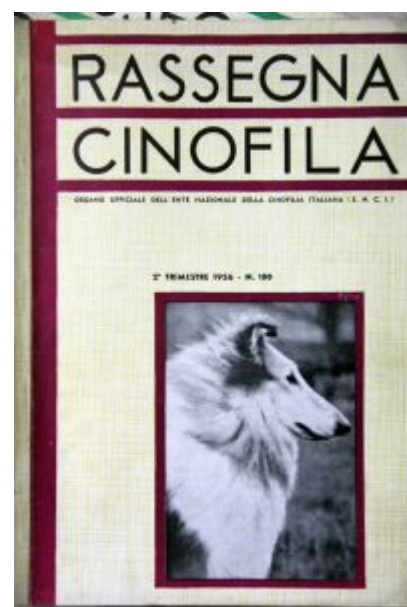
anni è cambiato poco.

L'articolo di Colombo si chiude così: *"Ma da Oltre Manica si importarono pointers e setters eccelsi, ma oltre Manica vige ancora sangue di **Dero 4° del Trasimeno** di Vignoli, sangue ricordato, vantato, e scorre nelle vene del secondo classificato, **Scotney Gary**, sangue che emigrò anche in America per ritornare in Inghilterra; e **Blakfield Gide** di Waldemar Marr, sorellastra di **Fast**, e **Galf di S. Patrick** di Nasturzio, sono citati in Inghilterra, paese per niente sciovinista, fra i migliori e più validi riproduttori, ed esponenti dei Pointer in quegli allevamenti: ricordiamolo anche noi.*

Da "Rassegna " ringrazio **Mr. e Mrs Bank, Lady Auckland**, il Segretario Generale del Kennel Club Inglese **Mr. Buckley, Mr. Binney, Mr. e Mrs. Mac Donald Daly, Mr. e Mrs. William Wiley, Mr. Lovel Clifford** mio valido interprete, che mi furon prodighi di ospitalità ed attenzioni durante il breve, ma denso soggiorno in- Inghilterra. Formulo il voto che la passione del Trialler non venga mai meno nella Patria Augusta del Signore l'Aria!" [Chi volesse leggerlo per intero [può scaricarlo qui](#)].

Ho deciso di parlare di questo articolo perché ritengo contenga dei punti chiave utili anche al lettore contemporaneo. Quali sono? Mi piace innanzitutto che apra con un excursus storico che spiega come si siano evolute le razze

da ferma inglesi. Sono il frutto di particolari selvatici e di particolari terreni. Sono il frutto della caccia in quelle circostanze, circostanze che ne hanno plasmato il temperamento e codificato il metodo di lavoro. Prima che esistessero le prove, esisteva la caccia, esisteva il cacciatore che, a fronte di situazioni di caccia complesse, volevano tornare a casa con qualcosa nella cacciatora. Le circostanze hanno subito reso chiari quali fossero i tratti da selezionare e i comportamenti graditi, nonché tutto ciò che doveva essere considerato difetto. I cani andavano a caccia e poi, se bravi, venivano presentati anche alle prove. Un tempo era così anche in Italia e... vorrei fosse rimasto tale. Oggi abbiamo Campioni di Lavoro che non sono mai stati a caccia, che sono di proprietà (o persino condotti ed addestrati) da gente che non pratica attivamente la caccia con il cane da ferma, o che la pratica in contesti e su selvatici che si discostano da condizioni ideali e probanti. Questo porta anche a non comprendere alcuni regolamenti nati tanti anni fa, e a fare confusione su quali siano i comportamenti corretti da parte del cane, eppure costoro spesso si ritengono "esperti". Se rileggete le parole di Colombo vedrete quanto stima il fermo al frullo, il **down** e il **drop**, definendoli **"non accademia da recinto, ma freno in terreno libero"**, beh nella nostra penisola sono ancora abbastanza fraintesi. Non so se Colombo sia stato anche a trials su grouse ma la sottoscritta ha impiegato pochi minuti sul moor a capire che lì, questi insegnamenti sono indispensabili. Colombo ricorda anche l'importanza del percorso, del saper stare sul vento e del lavoro in coppia. Lavoro in coppia che deve essere armonico, di squadra facendo capo a caratteristiche che devono essere nella genetica del cane. I cani devono anche essere facili da condurre, collegati e disponibili a collaborare con la minima necessità di ordini sonori, o i selvatici sarebbero disturbati troppo. Questi



*appunti mancano in tanti libri di cinofilia venatoria moderna, hanno forse questi tratti perso importanza?*

*Credo ora abbiate capito perché io ritenga il resoconto di Colombo su Sutton Scotney affascinante ed intrigante. Poi si aggiunge qualcosa di personale: proprio come lui, ho avuto modo di assistere (e prendere parte) ai British Trial e [essi significano molto per me](#). Mi hanno trasformato in un cinofilo “diverso” e mi hanno consentito di avere un cane “diverso”.*

[Per saperne di più sulla cinofilia britannica cliccate qui.](#)

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## **A Gem from 1956: an Italian at British Trials**

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

Among his imports we shall remember **Lingfield Mystic** (who won the Derby); **Lingfield Ila**, **Lingfield Puma** and **Bratton Vanity**.



I discovered that, in 1956, he was asked to judge a partridge trial in **Sutton Scotney** (Hampshire – UK) and wrote about his experience. I am not going to translate the full article, I am just summarizing the most important points. (Those interested can see large pictures of the article [here](#) and download the [.pdf file](#)– which can be translated with google translator).

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



now!!!

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



that he points out that judges, in the UK, do not comment on the dog's work (on the contrary, they are expected to so here) and that explaining what the dog did, in public... often leads the public to believe they know more than the judges.

This proved to be true in my limited experience, watchers (Italian and foreign), despite being several hundred metres away from the dog, see – and foresee – mistakes that handlers and judges, despite being right above the dog

“miss”! I thought, that people in the fifties were more considerate, but, apparently, the art of attributing inexistent faults to other handlers' dogs has a long standing tradition.

Colombo then describes what he saw during the “Derby”. I do not know if that Derby is like the current Puppy Derby (for dogs under 2 years, running in a brace) as I cannot understand whether the dogs were running alone or in a brace. He says he saw some back castings, some dogs who needed more training and some dogs who sniffed on the ground/detailed around the quarry too much. Rabbits, hare and pheasant further complicated things. First prize went to **Lenwade Wizard**, Pointer dog owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, 15 months old described as stylish, good gallop, good at handling birds; second prize **Lenwade Whisper**,

Pointer dog owned by Messrs P. P. Wayre's G. F. Jolly, aged 15 months. In the **Brace Stake** he noticed two Irish Setters **Sulhamstead Bey d'Or** and **F. T. Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** who eventually got second prize. As for the **All Aged stake** (which should be like the modern Open Stake), a Weimaraner was supposed to run with setters and pointers but was eventually withdrawn. Colombo was asked by Lady Hove to express his opinion: he seems to have had mixed feelings about what he saw. Let's not forget that he later writes that pointing dogs are no longer common and popular in the UK, that people prefer spaniels and retrievers and Setters and Pointers are decaying. How are things now? Spaniels and retrievers still outnumber pointing dogs and this sounds a bit weird to Italians, being the average Italian hunter/shooter the owner of a pointing dog, most of often of an English Setter. [But... the two realities are very different.](#)

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





speed, deep castings and excellent nose. He called him *"the pure"*, *"the fool"*, then described him with these words: ***"The Trialer is the producer, the Masterpiece, the famous Artist's painting, the fifty carats diamond, the pure gold"***. ***He is New Year's Day, not the remaining 364 days."***

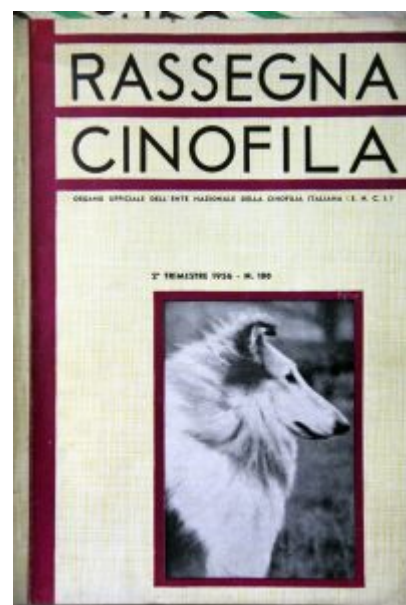
So, I really wonder whether any British authors had ever outlined such a dog, or whether Colombo just believed an hypothetical British author did or, again, whether he misunderstood some writings (he did not read English, as far as I know). So, basically, I think he was [expecting something different](#) and he did not entirely like what he saw. He complains about "interrupted" runs, short castings, slow runs, small parcels of ground to be explored, searches that gets "limited" by the judges and dogs forced to back on command. He writes that a British sportman defined some of the runs *"Springer Spaniel work"*. Some of these things still happens and might be even more noticeable if you come from Italy, where dogs are asked to run as much, as fast and as wide as they can (the pure, the fool...) and dogs usually back naturally but, our trials have other faults and he admits that, maybe, a British judge attending one of our trials, on a particular unlucky day, would not be impressed by what we show him. Giulio Colombo, however, was skilled enough to see recognize good things at British trials, he admits, for instance, having seen some dogs he really liked. Yes, he says some dogs were "low quality", but equally admits others were outstanding. I share his opinion: some British dogs lack of class, style and pace to compete successfully here but others... are absolutely not inferior to some Made in Italy dogs. I really, really liked some dogs I saw in Britain, and I am sure they would make our judges smile. Colombo mentions **Seguntium Niblick**, Pointer owned Mr. J. Alun Roberts who got



first prize in All Aged Stake; **Scotney Gary**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, second prize; **Scotney Solitaire**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, third prize; **Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** Irish Setter, fourth prize; **Ch. Downsmans Bracken**, English Setter, fifth prize; **Sulhamstead Nina d'Or**, Irish Setter owned by Mrs. Nagle e Miss M. Clarcks and **Flashaway Eve**, English Setter owned by Col. A. S. Dalding. I think he really liked the Flashaway Eve as he describes him as very avid, stylish and very a typical low set gallop, he thinks he has all the features a dog needs to become a FT. Ch. He concludes with a note on **Dero 4° del Trasimeno** who was exported to the UK and is ones of the ancestors of **Scotney Gary** (and of some American dogs) and **Blakfield Gide** stepsister of the Italian **Fast** and **Galf di S. Patrick**. Author tanks those who made his experience possible: **Mr. and Mrs Bank, Lady Auckland, Mr. Buckley, Mr. Binney, Mr. and Mrs. Mac Donald Daly, Mr. and Mrs. William Wiley, Mr. Lovel Clifford**

So which are the key points for contemporary readers? Giulio Colombo outlines the Setter and Pointer history and explains why these dogs should work in a given manner. It is a matter of grounds and of birds: before trials ever existed, these dogs were hunting dogs and had to work all day long for the hunter who wanted to go home with a bag filled with birds. Setters and Pointers were tested in difficult and real hunting situations and it soon became clear which behaviours and attitudes were useful and which were not. The most sought after traits and behaviours were later coded and field trials were born, not viceversa. Dogs used to be tested during real shooting days and then, the best of them, were trialed. Things were like this during the early Pointer and Setter days and, in my opinion, they should not have changed. Nowadays, there are, at least in Italy, FT.Ch. who have never been shot over and, most of all, are trained, handled or owned by people who had never hunted, and never hunted on grounds and birds suitable for these breeds. People therefore do not understand some of field trial rules, nor how the dogs should behave but

they consider themselves “experts”. Colombo mentions steadiness to flush and the commands **down** and **drop**, some of the most misunderstood things in my country. People think (and probably thought, already in 1956), that these commands are taught “just to show off”. On the contrary they can make shooting safer (a steady dog is not likely to be shot) and the drop and the down are extremely useful on open grounds. I am not sure whether Colombo attended grouse trials and, if so, how abundant grouse were but I took me only a couple of minutes to realize the importance of these teachings on a grouse moor. He then remembers why Setters and Pointers are supposed to work in a brace and to quarter in “good” wind while crossing their paths. Dogs should work in a brace to better explore the waste ground and, in doing so, they should work together, in harmony, like a team. Teamwork is very important, yet a dog must work independently from his brace mate and, at the same time, support his job and honour his points, these things shall be written in the genes. Dogs shall also be easy to handle so that they could be handled silently (not to disturb the quarry too much) and always be willing to cooperate with the handler. I don’t think I ever read these last two recommendations on any modern books on Setters and Pointers, have these traits lost importance?



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

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

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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 a 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.

## Cani da caccia



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 prova britannica. Come potete capire, per un neofita 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 ricambiare 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 approvarvi).

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

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



1 Steve Lound e i suoi pointer Frostad Elin 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 attira il disappunto degli organizzatori, dei concorrenti e, soprattutto, del guardiacaccia. Un fermo al frullo e allo sparo solido è indispensabile, idem il poter bloccare il cane a comando e l'esecuzione di un consenso a comando, se richiesta dal giudice. Questo è il minimo sindacale e non è facile da ottenere 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 lauto 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 e condotta è nulla. Non è possibile, durante la prova, toccare il cane o urlare ordini a distanza: in guidata il cane non si tocca, non lo si tocca per bloccarlo e non si urla mai, casomai si usa, e moderatamente, il fischietto. Ogni vostra interazione con il cane è decisa dal giudice: non potete legare il cane senza il suo consenso, non potete farlo guidare e 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 drop che ground, ovvero la parte più difficile del lavoro. E' improbabile che ci sia una sola grouse, quindi il cane deve lavorare anche le successive, guidando senza saltazioni e senza mai perdere il controllo. La cosa è tutt'altro che banale: in Inghilterra possono esserci molte grouse in uno spazio ristretto e produrre un'emanazione talmente forte da disorientare i cani meno esperti e, secondo problema, ➔

Larger photo by Rhia Tapper

## Obedience is extremely important

To compete in British trials (even in the *Novice* and *Puppy Stakes*), it is vital to have a good control on your dog. Dogs who ran away and disobey are not appreciated, they might make organizers and other competitors unhappy but, most of all, they will alarm gamekeepers. Dogs must be very steady to flush and shot and drop on command. Judges can also ask you to drop your dog while his bracemate is on point: some British dogs are not naturally backers, so the judge can ask competitors to drop dogs on command. These skills are not negotiable and it

is not easy to obtain these behaviour when a dog is surrounded by grouse. Game density can be incredibly high, the dog must be under control and have quite an amount of self control. If we want to compare these trials to the Italian ones, judges pay much more attention on obedience: steadiness to flush means not moving at all, a dog cannot even attempt to step forward or jump on himself; turn left means turn left and so on. The same is true for steadiness to shot, I have been eliminated a couple of times because Briony moved or jumped on herself after the shot, excitement can lead to this, but does not make it more tolerated. During a trial you are not allowed to yell, nor you can touch the dog. You can moderately use the whistle to direct or drop the dog, but you cannot touch him unless and until the judge orders you to put the lead on. You cannot encourage your dog to road and produce the bird by touching him: this behaviour would lead to an elimination. The judge tells you how to interact with the dog: you have to wait for him to tell you that you can let your dog produce the bird; that you can pick him up or that you have to drop him. The biggest difference between our trials and British trials, however, is likely to be the behaviour judges expect after the dog has been shot over. In our trials we usually put the lead on and then maybe cast the dog again, if there is still time (our runs last 15 minutes), in Britain, after the birds have been flushed and a shot fired, the dog is supposed to "clear the ground" making sure there are no grouse left. Given the amount of game [\(you can read more about this here\)](#), it is unlikely that the dog pointed only one, or a few grouse, more grouse, maybe part of the same covey, might still be there and the dog has to work them properly. He should road and flush them, keeping his enthusiasm at bay but, most of all, without hesitation. This is not easy, many birds sitting tight together can produce a strong scent which can confuse the less experienced dogs, at the same time they might be incredibly tempting. Clearing the ground is not always easy, it happened to me to find several grouse during a clear the ground some of which were bold enough to fly straight into the dog's face, a



tough way to test for steadiness.

Each stake is judged by two judges and a dog, in order to be graded, must run twice: this, together with the clear the ground (that does not 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 4×4 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 grasse sono una forte tentazione: è successo di trovare decine di grasse durante il clear the ground, alcune talmente spavalde da volare verso il muso del cane che, ovviamente, doveva rimanere immobile come una statua. Ogni batteria è giudicata da due giudici e che un cane ritenuto valido, per andare in classifica, deve fare un secondo turno di richiamo. Tra i tranelli in cui può incappare il cane vanno ricordati i conigli e le lepri e, non esiste il minuto: se il cane commette un errore un istante dopo lo sgancio è eliminato. L'abbondanza di selvaggina e l'enfasi sull'obbedienza non rendono queste prove più semplici di quelle nostrane, le rendono diverse. Per 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 chiudere un po' troppo gli occhi sulle imprecisioni 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 sentieri 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 batteria si lascia l'auto e si prosegue a piedi, la camminata può durare diverse ore e il clima può cambiare da un momento all'altro e c'è quasi sempre vento. Il cane viene tenuto al guinzaglio e si segue la batteria a distanza,

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



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

### I classificati del Champion Stake 2016

- 1) FT. Ch. Ballyellen Cara, setter inglese femmina di Billy Connelly (Irlanda), condotta da Gerry Devine (Irlanda)
  - 2) Footed Eliza at Ffestatall, pointer inglese maschio di Steve e Sharon Lound
  - 3) Hushigo Donard, setter irlandese femmina di Mark Adams (Irlanda)
  - 4) Bowward Cherry Cherry, setter irlandese maschio di Donna Clark, condotto da Colin Forde
- Certificati di merito: Upperwood Clover e FT Ch. Upperwood Hera, entrambe setter inglesi femmine di Dom Gostorbe, 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 the headkeeper, il capo guardiacaccia) e the gun club colui che spara al salvatico (involato senza colpi), secondo le indicazioni del giudice. I guardiacaccia, gli stessi che durante tutto l'anno si prendono cura

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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; hare coming from every direction further complicated things. Billy Darragh and Colin Forde (Ireland), who judged the trial, could only grade one dog, Ballyellen Tango, English Setter dog aged almost two, owned by Billy Connelly (Ireland) and handled by Gerry Devine (Ireland), Gerry is one of the few professional handlers. Whereas only one dog could be graded, I saw some interesting specimen as far as natural qualities, I especially liked two English Setters and I hope to have a chance to see them at work again when they will be more experienced.

On 10th and 11th August, we moved to Byrecleugh Estate, still close to Lauder, kindly offered by the Duke of Roxeburghe. The *Champion Stake* is a special trial that takes places every year: only the dogs who had gained a 1st or a 2nd placement in

previous trials (Open Stake) are allowed to run. This year something new was going to happen: the trial would have been judged by three judges, no longer by two. The chosen ones were Meryl Asbury, Shaun McCormack and Michael Houston, the latter two were from Ireland. They were going to see 37 dogs, less than expected due, again, to the kennel cough epidemics. On the morning of the 10th, many dogs made mistakes which lead to their elimination. The first braces ran in very high heather, grouse were well hidden and walking away from them, flying from a distance; later in the morning grouse density decreased and things became slightly easier. In the afternoon we had a torrential rain, but many dogs did extremely well in those conditions (Photogallery for the day [here](#)). Only 14 dogs "survived" day 1st and 7 of them, I allow myself to be partial sometimes, were English Setters! On the 11th, all the survivors exhibited outstanding performances, confirming to the judges that they had made wise choices (Photogallery for the day [here](#)). I really appreciated how the judges directed the trial, they worked together in harmony and always sided with the dogs, never against them. They were incredibly supportive and really did their best to give the same opportunities to all the dogs and sometimes closed an eye on minor details. Having three judges (one on the left, one on the right and one in the centre) made this trial slightly different. The dogs were allowed to run further and wider and what happened was not much different from what I am used to see here in Italy. When allowed some more freedom, these dogs were still doing very well and were not inferior to most of the Italian dogs I routinely see at our trials.





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 causa

di un'epidemia di tosse di canile. Tra i partecipanti molti avevano circa un anno e hanno pagato l'insperienza 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 Pyreclough 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 pedanature involontandosi a distanza, in diversi hanno commesso errori; nella seconda parte della mattinata la selvaggia è andata calando e questo ha agevolato i concorrenti. Al pomeriggio la prova è proseguita sotto una pioggia torrenziale che, tuttavia, è stata testimone di ottime prestazioni. L'11 agosto i concorrenti sopravvissuti al primo turno erano 14, di cui ben sette setter inglesi. Tutti i soggetti si sono espressi ad alti livelli, confermando alla terra giudicante di aver scelto correttamente quali cani rivendere. Mi è piaciuta moltissimo la conduzione della prova da parte dei giudici, con armonia e tranquillità, hanno giudicato stando sempre "dalla parte del cane", cercando di offrire a tutti le stesse opportunità e tollerando piccole sbavature. La presenza di tre giudici (uno a destra, uno a sinistra e uno dietro) ha reso la prova un po' diversa da quelle a cui avevo assistito fino ad ora: i cani "aprivano" molto di più sul terreno di quanto non fosse loro normalmente richiesto e consentito. Ho visto aperture e velocità non inferiori a quelle delle prove nostrane e sono stata positivamente colpita da più di un soggetto. Quando siamo tornati a valle, in attesa del responso dei giudici, Allan Neill, noto addestratore e conduttore, mi si è avvicinato chiedendomi di scommettere su un vincitore, così ho fatto il mio nome. Allan concordava con me sul fatto che il vincitore sarebbe stato un setter inglese, ma non era il curo che io avessi fatto il nome giusto. E invece sì! Sul podio è finita la FT.Ch. Ballyellen Cara madre di Ballyellen Tango, vincitrice del Puppy Derby, che già avevo visto e apprezzato al Ch. Stake 2015, quando aveva ottenuto il premio per il miglior stile.

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Once back at the venue, Allan Neill, a very reputable trainer and handler from Ireland, asked me to tell him which dog was going to win in my opinion. *You were close to the dogs*, he added, *so you should have seen everything well and have an opinion.* Without hesitation, I made a name, Allan agreed upon the fact the winner was going to be the dog I named. But... I was right! FT.Ch. Ballyellen Cara (mother of Ballyellen Tango, who won the *Puppy Derby*) placed first: her run was unforgettable and she surely possesses some great qualities, I remembered (and liked) her from Champion Stake 2015, at the time she was eliminated but given awarded as the most stylish dog on the ground.

## Champion Stake 2016

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

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

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

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

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

*The organizers would like to thank the sponsor Red Mills.*

Slideshow below

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## Field trials and... the (half) naked woman

When I write that Italian field trials, and Italy itself, are a world apart and that they are unpredictable... I mean it! Yesterday I reached the venue with quite a delay after wandering in the fog for about an hour. What happened? Nothing unusual: the local government decided to close a bridge because it was going to collapse, a very good thing but... drivers would have enjoyed a “slightly” less vague description of the alternate route. Last summer a dog (MY dog) made my fall into a farm ditch fully provided with livestock waste. I a professional dog trainer, whose truck was equipped with a water hose for dogs, later washed me, covered the car seat with a black garbage bag, kept calm and carried on. Yes, all

the men present had a good laugh but my fall cannot surely be compared to what they experienced during last Friday' snipe trial.

As the British Pointing Dogs Stake ended fairly early, some of us stopped to watch the few HPR's (Continental Pointing dogs) who dared to face snipe. We parked by a house and focused our attention on a small Brittany running at full speed: it did not last long. As a female voice behind us called "Fabio" and everybody's heads turned in the same direction: there was a woman at the window. Well, not just a woman: she was half naked and wearing some sort of black lingerie. She was a crossbreed between Sofia Loren in [\*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow\*](#) (google her, this one had the same hair and the same underwear) and Anita Ekberg [\*calling Marcello\*](#) (Mastroianni who, guess what, managed to act in both films!) from the Trevi's Fountain in [\*La Dolce Vita\*](#).



Marcello, come here!

All the men were on point and, as it was cold and foggy, someone stated: *"Ohhh poor thing! She must be cold!"*.

As the woman disappeared, the hormonal flare vanished and they remembered I was there: several "sorry" followed, with me laughing being I am quite used to be "forgotten". My naughty side, however, made me ask "Is there any Fabio among you?" A chorus of no, accompanied by eyes focused again on the

Brittany, followed.

The lady, however, seemed to be extremely determined to find her Fabio and she came out again yelling that name. Needless to say the Brittany was forgotten for the second time. Once back at the venue, other judges and competitors asked if we had seen anything nice and, despite being the question obviously dog related, my fellow spectators informed everybody that they had seen a (half) naked woman, gave out her full address accompanied with very detailed description. I bet that from now on, people – especially guys named Fabio- would be very pleased to run on that ground and I am 99% sure that none would complain about the lack of snipe by that house.

**Ps. The so sought after Fabio never replied and never showed up so I elaborated my very own secret theory on his identity: I think he is a pet, most likely a cat, but please, don't tell around!**

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## **Are you REALLY doing that?**

Why not? Do you see any alternatives? I invited the moor to move nearby, but it refused. If I wanted the [moor](#), I had to drag myself into a car and drive northwards, exactly like Mohammed did with the mountain. I had no choices: flying with a dog- and her, well our, baggage- was not convenient, furthermore, once there I would have had to rent a car which was not going to be cheap. People tried all sort of tactics to make me change my mind. *It is going to be a long journey, there will be dangers on the way,* and so and so. It is funny when Italians (with my father leading the troop) start thinking that all serial killers, all terrorists and all natural disasters are located past the Alps!



I was surprisingly relaxed about driving all the way there, and confident that nothing bad was going to happen: my grandmother's name was England (Inglesina) she used to love me, England (the nation) was going to be equally kind. In the worst case scenario, I would have escaped from the awful Italian summer heat.

Yes but, alone? And why alone? The idea of having someone to share the journey with was tempting, but could I find anybody suitable? I did not want to deal with the "pale woman burden" (quoting Rudyard Kipling), aka some wimp complaining about everything. and I was not sure my travel plan would have suited the average person. What if the average person would not have enjoyed the moors, the weather, the [trials](#)? Going trialing in the UK for a month was the equivalent of taking a leap of faith, it was not fair to ask anyone to jump from a cliff into the unknown with me.

The scariest thing was probably the length of the journey, in kilometers (or miles, if you prefer). I knew I was going to have a blind date with British trials, but my whole "academic" career had been like that, having been always sent – and for years, not months! – from a very unknown school to another. When I was eight, as we moved to a different house and I was forced to move to a different school, I did not know anybody there, and I never managed to like it but, in the end, I survived. When high school (junior high) time came, I could choose whether to attend the local one, where everybody else was going, or pick an unknown, more difficult and more prestigious one. The local school had a bad reputation and my demanding parents simply told me that, I should not make my choices following the mainstream, but learn choose what was best for me and stick to it, even if I had to do it alone... The same happened with senior high school (raise the hand who wants to go to a difficult one!), and with the university later: most of my friends were going to engineering, computer

science and economics whilst I, unable to pick my first choice (veterinary medicine), was going to major in British Literature. It might sound easy, but it was not: each time, however, it became a little easier and it strengthen me enough to accept and scholarship and fly to Massachusetts all alone.

***A [month](#) alone in England (and Scotland) could not scare me, trials were waiting and no good opportunity is meant to be missed!***

[The journey continues here.](#)

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## L'anello mancante: il moor

***Attenzione, questo è un articolo criceto.***

Che diavolo è un articolo criceto? È uno di quegli articoli che inizia a correre nella testa dell'autore come fanno i criceti sulle loro ruote. Gli articoli criceto vogliono essere raccontati e diventano impazienti quando gli tocca aspettare. Il mio criceto corre da un mese, è giunto il momento di accontentarlo. La creaturina vuole che scriva sull'anello mancante, e cioè sul *moor*. Quelli che mi conoscono personalmente, o che sono da tempo in contatto con me, sanno che sono un po' strana e che convivo tranquillamente con le mie peculiarità. Però, a volte, mi sento fuori posto, come se mancasse qualcosa.

Parlando di setter inglesi, razza nei confronti della quale provo una grande devozione, mancava un pezzo del puzzle e ci sono voluti 16 anni dal mio primo setter per trovarlo. Gli adulti strani, in maggioranza, sono stati bambini strani, non faccio eccezione. Quando ancora gattonavo, non ne volevo

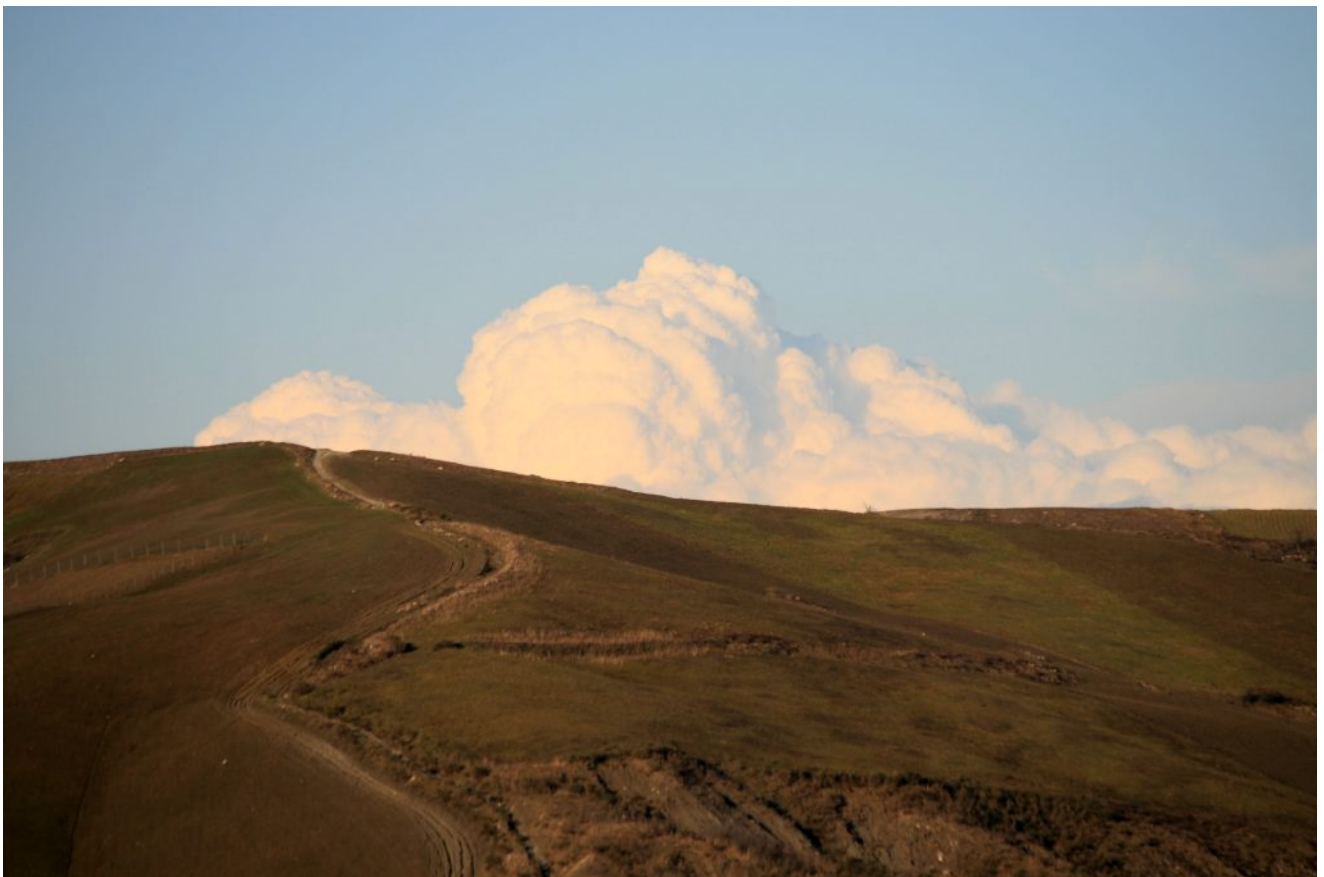
sapere di bere latte, il mio biberon era pieno di té, per forza che poi non dormivo. A quattro anni, le maestre d'asilo hanno chiamato a colloquio i miei genitori. Erano preoccupate perché usavo troppo viola nei disegni. I miei genitori non seppero fornire una spiegazione e nemmeno io so darla, del resto sono nota al colorificio locale per essere quella che ordina un violetto erica/malva da mettere sulle pareti! A cinque anni, a colazione, mangiavo pancakes e tè, i bambini normali caffè latte con biscotti. Nello stesso periodo mi fu regalato un libro sui 25 anni di regno della Regina Elisabetta, ce l'ho ancora, gelosamente conservato nella mia biblioteca. L'anno successivo ho chiesto di essere iscritta a un corso extra di lingua inglese e, grazie al mio libro di testo, ho appreso che le case britanniche messe in vendita avevano ragni giganti nelle vasche da bagno. E, infine, a dieci anni, ero assolutamente convinta di aver "bisogno" di un setter inglese da lavoro. I miei genitori la pensavano diversamente.



Pareti... e altro!

Anni dopo ne ho finalmente avuto uno, ho iniziato a portarlo a caccia e a partecipare come spettatrice alle prove di lavoro.

Qualcosa, tuttavia, mancava. Mi divertivo in campagna e continuavo a cercare di informarmi, leggevo, chiedevo, seguivo giudici e cacciatore più esperti ma qualcosa che non riuscivo a definire continuava a mancare. L'unica cosa che riuscivo a capire è che amavo alcuni terreni più di altri. Potrei menzionare Villa Alta a Ruino; Costa del Vento o Costa Pelata a Montalto – tutte in Appennino e tutte, ironicamente, – l'avrei scoperto dopo – abbastanza somiglianti ad un *moor*. Altri posti mi suonavano insignificanti. Gli italiani dicono che le razze inglesi hanno bisogno di spazio e giustificano gli estremi della Grande Cerca asserendo che queste razze sono nate per cacciare sui *moors*. I miei connazionali trovano perfettamente normale che un setter salti da una valle all'altra (e sia monitorato nell'impresa con un GPS) perché, dopotutto, è nato per il *moor*. I pointer possono spaziare anche di più, due o tre valli sono il numero ideale. Non ho mai creduto del tutto a questa teoria, ma ho tenuto questa convinzione per me. Forse avevano ragione ma mi sembrava si cercasse di infilare un piede nella scarpa sbagliata.



## Costa del Vento in febbraio

Dopo tutto i setter lanciati in ampie distese pianeggianti, nei boschi o tra i roveti se la cavano piuttosto bene, la razza è sicuramente versatile e adattabile. Il mio istinto, tuttavia, continuava a dirmi che qualcosa era fuori posto. Nei miei libri e sulle mie pareti c'erano vecchie fotografie di cani sul moor ma erano in bianco e nero, non riuscivo a comprendere i colori. Nel 2008 ho acquistato alcune britanniche: il *moor* risplendeva in violetto! Non era solo l'erica, il cielo e la luce erano in differenti gradazioni del viola, tutta l'atmosfera era violetto! Era magico, incredibile, credevo avessero ritoccato i colori con Photoshop, a volte riesco ad essere abbastanza ingenua!

Nel 2015 sono andata su un moor per la prima volta, e tutto era incredibilmente familiare e "normale". I cani in corsa sul moor si inserivano perfettamente nel contesto: grouse, erica e cieli color lavanda sembravano fatti su misura per loro. Non appena ho lasciato il moor, ho iniziato a sentirne la mancanza. Sentivo di dover tornare, viverlo, capirlo. Un anno dopo, gli stessi cieli color lavanda mi guardavano dall'alto, io rispondevo con un sorriso. Ho passato un mese tra l'erica, tra le grouse, tra i cani da ferma e tutto è andato a posto: il setter apparteneva al moor, o viceversa; le grouse gli si addicevano perfettamente e l'erica li aiutava nel lavoro, anche il tempo era splendido! Beh, il tempo sui moors è di rado splendido se lo si valuta con parametri da umani ma... se immaginate di essere un cane, il tempo è perfetto! È freddo abbastanza, ventoso abbastanza, umido abbastanza. Ero talmente abituata ad essere spazzata via dal vento da sentirne la mancanza. Ero (e resto) talmente innamorata del moor che ho condiviso subito con entusiasmo le fotografie con amici italiani. Alcune loro reazioni mi hanno sorpreso. Un amico, in particolare, si è accorto che mancavano gli alberi, li trovava luoghi molto spogli. In effetti non mi ero mai accorta che mancassero gli alberi e questo,



probabilmente, è accaduto perché non li considero affatto spogli. Al contrario, sono pieni di doni, bisogna solo essere sensibili abbastanza per accorgersene. Non mi servono i boschi per dare la caccia alla beccaccia, non mi strega. So che è il selvatico preferito dai setteristi italiani e la trovo un animale affascinante ma non posso affermare di amarla. La grouse è diversa ed è una grande maestra, severa e paziente allo stesso tempo, probabilmente uno dei migliori selvatici su cui preparare i cani da ferma. Inoltre non considero i boschi un terreno ideale per il setter inglese: alberi e foglie nascondono il lavoro del cane, l'erica invece, nasconde le grouse ma lascia il cane sul palcoscenico.



Cani, erica viola e cieli lavanda

Il moor è uno spazio sacro in cui solo i cani ben educati sono ammessi: sul moor si addestra, si compete in prove di lavoro, si va a caccia. Per ora ho vissuto solo le prime due attività e continuerò a [scrivervi su](#), quello che posso dire, in breve è che i field trials sono differenti dalle nostre



prove di lavoro. Non sono qui per affermare che siano migliori o peggiori, non riesco nemmeno a spiegare bene come le consideri, riesco solo a dire che, nella loro diversità, le trovo normalissime e... mi hanno persino dato ragione! Moor, grouse & trials insegnano ai cani di allargare, ma mi allargare “il giusto”, che è diverso dall’ “allargare follemente”. I terreni aperti sono tentatori, ma un cane intelligente e addestrato all’inglese aprirà quanto gli potrebbe essere consentito in una tradizionale – GPS free – giornata di caccia. Essendo stata la caccia la prima attività intrapresa con il cane da ferma, non posso che concordare. Forse un giorno parteciperò a una giornata di caccia alla grouse e così saranno messi i tocchi finali al quadro: setter inglesi, erica viola, profumo di polvere da sparo e cieli color lavanda.

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## **On steadiness (... and obedience!)**

As soon as Briony became steady to flush I, full of pride, posted some videos on Facebook. The road that brought us to steadiness was a long one, I was extremely happy to have reached what, months early, seemed to be unattainable. Briony was originally purchased to be my personal shooting dog and indeed she became a good one. She knew how to locate birds, point, be steady on point and retrieve the killed ones but, like all the Italian shooters, I did not even think to make her steady to wing and shot. I simply did not care and she spent years “chasing” after the bird was produced, until I realized she was good enough to run in field trials.

The videos uploaded slowly but, minutes after they became

visible to the public, I began receiving several private messages. Those messages, in the weeks and months ahead, became questions asked face to face. People wanted to know if I used an e-collar, or if I shoot her in the butt, a very popular method suggested by many (in)famous trainers. My answer was that steadiness derived from obedience, an answer puzzled most of the listeners. They could not believe that the tools I used were a lead, a check cord and a whistle, and the few humans who did believe me asked me to make miracles: a woman sort of wanted me to make is HPR steady overnight using the internet!



I do not have superpowers, but maybe my mentor does, as a matter of fact he is widely known as the “Shaman”, or as “White Feather”. White Feather (from here on WF) has been knowing me for a very long time: I was one of his students at the three months class (!!!) to become a certificate stalker (deer, roe buck, fallow deer, boar...) and he taught me during the course I attended to become a certified biometric data collector (we measure and establish the age of stalked and

hunted game). He saw me and interacted with me several times during trials, gatherings, conferences and so... yet, before accepting to "train" me, he wanted to meet me again and look at me under a different light. Our first formal meeting happened over a cup of espresso, we were seated at table by the street, Briony was on lead and a cat passed by: I prevented any possible reactions and he appreciated that, a training session was scheduled for the following day.

I have to admit I was a little worried, the man was Elena Villa's (that woman won all she could win with GSPs, in Italy and abroad) mentor, he was a well known retired gamekeeper and he had owned, trained, judged and handled hundreds of dogs and shoot over them, in Italy, Germany, Austria and several Eastern European countries. But, most of all, he, himself, probably had the most amazing mentor Italy gave birth to. Born at the end of 1800, Giacomo Griziotti (in my city there are a street and a college dorm in his name) is still deemed to be one of the best judges, handlers, trainers and writers involved with pointing breeds. His first and only book, despite being expensive and hard to find, is still regarded as the Bible, no wonder I was both excited and worried! WF wanted to test me and Briony, if we had passed the test he would have trained us for free, but we had to be perceived to be a good cause.



After another espresso (we both like coffee), we moved to the training ground and I had my first shocking lesson on the meaning of “obedience”. I opened the car and Briony’s cage to let her out. WF quickly made us clear that she could not leave the cage, nor the car without his permission. During the following months, his permission became “my permission”; she had to learn to sit and stay if I had to cross a ditch and then come later, if and when called. While all my friends were enjoying their shooting season, me and Briony were practicing sit/stay/come/drop to whistle daily, whatever the weather and the place. We trained in the countryside, in the city, in the shops, with or without stimuli. It was hard and even depressing: I spent months studying fish inspection for my veterinary degree and practicing sit/stay/drop!



But then it came the day. Not only Briony was dropping to whistle, she was also steady to game and she had become an obedient and reliable dog (and I passed my fish inspection exam as well). Trials came next and all the hard and boring work brought to fruition, but this is another story. At the moment I am still incredulous and proud to be part to such a long standing gundog training tradition.

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## **On Italian humans in the Uk**



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s, of course she is. I wrote a lot about Briony in the last article, so let's say a little about things seen through my eyes.

It took two days to reach Northern England. I drove through Switzerland (beautiful scenery but slow drivers and much traffic) and France, none around and very boring landscape. I drove to France the day after Nice's terrorist attack, all was very sad and silent. My hotel was fine at the first sight: extra large comfy bed but... we had a visitor in the room, it was a cockroach and, on the following day Briony was loaded with fleas! There were cats around the hotel so, let's blame them but it was not so nice, I to had to stop several times along the way to de-flea her and the car... I also locked myself out of the room for at least three times: not my fault, these doors were locking themselves by themselves and, if you forgot the little card inside the room (easy if you are unloading the car and have to be careful about the dog) you were out. I think the hotel employees did not like me much at that point.



I just mentioned the car: it sort of broke down the evening before I left: lucky the Suzuki mechanics fixed it past their working hours, but I came home at half past nine and I had to load the car in the darkness... Therefore I brought too many things with me, as I always do. But... well... last year I did not spot any supermarkets in the area so I sort of prepared myself as If I were going to spend a month in the wilderness, now I know there are supermarkets here... Anyway, I reached my destination pretty easily and I am driving around well, despite the fact these people drive on the wrong side of the road. I even managed to learn and recognize routes and places which sounds pretty good to me. I found a couple of grocery shops and I especially like Morrison's supermarket, they have a good choice of real foods. At the moment I am staying at a Bed & Breakfast in Woodland, Co. Durham, on a farm and I like it. People are friendly and helpful and Briony can roam freely around the house, interacting nicely with their dogs. I spent a night at the Black Bull Inn in Reeth which was fine but I did not like Reeth and I do better on bed and breakfast placed on farms.



I had a couple of problems with the car, but one was solved and the other one has been solved partially. The first one was quite peculiar: a dog trailer ahead of me moved a giant stone which went right underneath my car. Me and Maddy Raynor dug like moles underneath the car but we eventually had to find some other people to push it forward. The other problem is a broken left mirror, I think I might have to get a new one....(not my fault this time!).

What else, I am really enjoying the trials and the training sessions I had. It is really nice to be surrounded by helpful people and I was especially pleased to be allowed to go grouse counting three times. On a more mundane side I discovered charity shops. They are simply great if you are a bargain hunter! My wristwatch broke, but I got a stylish new (second hand) one for a ridiculous price and a wonderful pair of heather coloured trousers in size 6 (which means I lost weight!).

Last, but not least, the scenery is great and I like the

weather too (it keeps changing and it is always windy, but I like it). I also like to be surrounded by sheep, cattle, grouse and other wildlife. I hope the people living here realize how precious these things are. I shall grab some food now but I will try to keep you updated. Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).