

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 brace mate 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](#)



Lady Ashmore e Lady Colombo e Arthur Rank

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 nonexistent 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

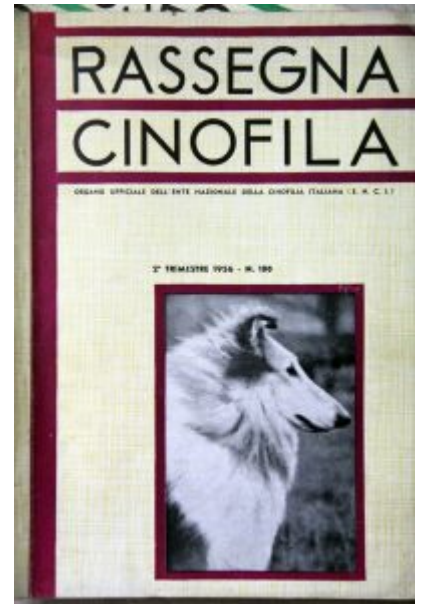
misunderstood some writings (he did not read English, as far as I know). So, basically, I think he was [expecting something different](#) and he did not entirely like what he saw. He complains about “interrupted” runs, short castings, slow runs, small parcels of ground to be explored, searches that gets “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 one 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 thanks 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.](#)

Why and how to benefit from the Gundog Research Project

[The Gundog Research Project](#) has carefully been designed with

dogs, hunters and trialers in mind. Understanding how the dogs are managed is a preliminary, yet a fundamental step to discover which practices are the best and which ones could be implemented. Hunters and all the activities related to hunting and shooting are often misunderstood and criticized by public opinion: a change is needed and hunters, as well as gundog trainers and handlers, can give an important contribution. Gundogs need you and your answers matter!

As animal welfare has been increasingly becoming an area of public concern, we think that hunters, gundog lovers and gundog related organizations would benefit from being “proactive” (showing a positive image of fieldsports) rather than reactive (trying to defend themselves from accusations). Your participation to this project can help outsiders to understand that you care about your dog’s welfare (I am sure you do!) and also help them understand the gundogs’ true nature and deepest needs. At the same time, your answers will help us to identify the weaknesses that might exist in gundogs management and see if and how they could be implemented. Previous studies on working and shelter dogs, in fact, tell us that very minor changes in management can reduce the dogs stress levels, improve their health and... also enhance their performance in the field!

Ps. We are working on getting a few [prizes](#) which will be drawn among those filling the survey.

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

[How to fill out the questionnaire \(click here\)](#)

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Finding or Handling Game? IT vs UK

People keep asking me which are the differences between Italian and British trials. I already wrote [something](#) but, the more I compete in Italian trials, the more differences I notice, they cannot be contained in an article alone. I wrote “compete” because I am not new to Italian trials: I began watching them in 2004, but I am fairly new to competing in them, furthermore many things changed in these 13 years. My initial role was the one of the journalist/photographer, who sometimes helped judges writing down their notes. I was a neutral observer and it was a valuable experience as it allowed me to see things closely, yet from the outside. Getting into the competition surprised those used to see me in my “other” role, but allows me to understand things more deeply. My opinions, my feelings, my impressions and concerns have not changed but, I can see things more clearly and this is an ongoing process!

I often stated that obedience and control are more important in British trials and not so important in our trials. The reasons behind this approach are many, and some are probably more socio-economical than dog related, game presence, however, is certainly one of the key points. I came to the conclusion (not much smartness needed here!) that birds, or rather their abundance or absence, are the culprits. Those familiar with Italian trials know that you have to be incredibly lucky to find a bird. On average, I think about, 25-30% of the dogs competing have a chance to point and properly work out a bird. Maybe 30-35% have a chance to “see” the bird but something prevents (a bracemate, a roebuck, a meteorite...) them to actually work it out, as required by the

rules. Sometimes things are even worse: during a trial I ran in October no birds were seen, my stake was made up of 22 dogs, if I am not wrong, for a total of 11 braces. Some dogs, including mine, were also allowed to run a second round in the hope to find anything: well the only bird we saw during the whole trial was a (one) pigeon. As you can imagine no awards were given. In the UK, instead, almost all the dogs have the opportunity to at least "see" a bird": then many things can happen, but competitors are surely not so concerned about a living feathered being on the ground.

To find a bird at Italian trials you need a smart dog carrying on his shoulders a tremendous amount of luck: this is true, I will discuss the "why" in other articles. Besides being true, this is also very sad: I love pointing dogs and this would be frustrating for any person sharing this passion. Imagine what happens: you wake up at 3 AM (because trials start very early), you drive 200 miles, your dog has a nice run with a nice bracemate, and the dogs cannot find anything. The judge maybe likes him and gives him a second chance, but again no birds show up and the trial ends. Imagine this happening for most of the trials then you get the whole picture.

Years ago, I was chatting with a judge about the tremendous emphasis some breeders were giving to their dogs galloping style. There were (and there are) brainless dogs with no bird sense who "move very nicely". Do you want to know his reply? It was a short and smart one: breeders focus on movement because, 99% of the time, the dog is going to be seen by judges while running, being pointing a rare happening. Judges are more likely to remember how he runs and how he searches, it makes sense and, again, it makes me sad. Weren't trials created to evaluate pointing dogs and make sure they were suitable to hunters? So we have a nice gallop here and, anything else?

I think that what our trials are focused on is "finding" (*that damn bird*) , and it is better do it nicely with deep and wide

castings. It is so hard to find a bird that everything that comes later is, somehow, less important. I am not here minimizing the importance of a proper pointing style (Italians are suckers for this) but, basically, once the dog has found and pointed the bird, everything is going to be fine. This is probably why handlers get so excited and run anxiously towards the dog on point. What if the dog is a bit sticky? What if he is not super steady to flush or to gunshot? These errors are likely to be forgiven, given the aforementioned lack of game.



Gerry Devine at a Scottish trial. Such actions are a common sight

In Britain the opposite happens, dogs run in places where birds are present, sometimes too present, and this makes control vital. It is not difficult to find a grouse, on some moors you do not even need a dog to find one so... bird presence is taken for granted. Of course the dogs are expected to find a bird, but there are usually plenty of opportunities to find one. If you attend a British field trials you will see

many dogs on point, points are not such an unusual sight. After all, field trials were created to evaluate pointing breeds and you cannot really assess a pointer without a point! When the dog is on point, the British handler paces quietly to him. I am not sure whether pacing (vs running) is required by some rules, but I think it is more a matter of culture and awareness. The handler, in fact, besides being used to “keep calm”, is well aware that the toughest part of the trial has yet to come. After the point, the dog must work out the bird properly, demonstrate perfect steadiness to wing and shot, and perform equally well the “clear the ground”, all seasoned with a good amount of obedience. British trials are not easy!

So... during an Italian trial the dog's ability to **FIND** a bird (hopefully in a stylish manner) is under the spotlight, whereas in Britain the dog is carefully assessed on “how he handles the birds”. Italians do mind about how the dog points and works out the bird, but they unfortunately have much less chances to verify this. Environment and game management make the difference. If I go through my memories, the thing I remember most clearly about specific dogs running in British trials is, the way they roaded and worked out birds, as well as their obedience. Of course I remember a few, exceptional finds and runs but they occupy less of my memory. When thinking about Italian trials, things are reversed.

What is better? We have no winner here. To be successful at an Italian trial the dog needs an incredible amount of determination, good bird sense (and/or a tremendous amount of luck), a stylish movement, some boldness and, sometimes even too much independence. When you get everything in the proper amount you have a great dog but, unfortunately, miscalculating the ingredients might produce dogs who run for the sake of running or are just too wild to be tamed by the average human being. The British system, instead, tests carefully how the dog handles birds and forces handlers to keep an eye on trainability, on the other hand, in Britain, finding a bird

can sometimes be “too easy”. If only a dog could be assessed through both the systems we will be close to perfection.

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

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 3) – By T. Mostert

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

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 3) – By T. Mostert

Planting Birds (... & backing)

In hindsight, I should have been able to read Flake better when she was younger. I was so focused on getting her to do what I wanted that I neglected to see the little signs she gave of her natural ability to find birds. I took many photos of her as a pup and now, when I go through them, I find several photos that show she was pointing, or was interested in a bird. Never be so focused on what you want your dog to do, that you forget what the dog can already do. If I had just made the effort to get some help she would be much, much further than she is today, not that I am not happy with where she is today, she is a incredible little dog.

Feather training is one of those things you either believe in or you don't. It is no replacement for birds, but to teach a young dog to be steady and sit to the flush it does have its

place. As said before, I made a mistake in teaching Flake to run a pattern simply for the sake of running, instead of giving her a reason to run a pattern. The very first field test I went to was a complete disaster, two days of running on fields and no one bird pointed and believe me she had the opportunity several times. I was basically stuck with a dog that would cut a field to shreds but did not know why she was doing it, running and hunting are not the same thing.



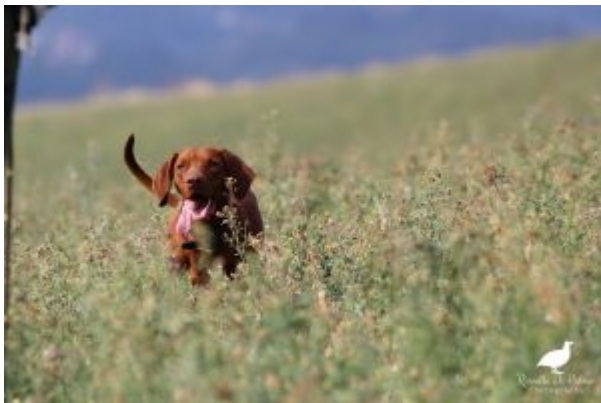
Tok & Flake

This is when I realized I needed some expert help and like we all should do, I looked for the best possible person to help me, a Legend. I also realized I needed my own birds and we built an enclosure and stocked it with some partridge. The first time I met Sten Rönnerling, he was out on a field, he was busy placing out partridge to train his dogs. I had heard of placing out birds, but I had never seen anyone do it. He was a friendly man and by his firm handshake I knew those were not the hands of a talker, he was a doer. Right off the bat he told me to tag along with Flake on a leash while his pointers were running in the field on placed birds. Sure enough his dog went into a solid point and Sten instructed me to bring Flake in, slowly behind the pointer so she could pick up the scent of the bird. I did not notice it, I could not read her yet, but Sten immediately said she has the scent when I was six meters from the pointer, he can read a dog! The pointer flushed on command and they made quick work of dropping the bird from the sky, I gave Flake the sit instruction the moment the bird lifted.

This is how we carried on for several more birds, at one stage

we even leashed the pointer while on point to try and slip Flake into his place, the bird flushed by itself and made our plan unsuccessful.

We did this on several occasions, I started using a longer leash so we could slip her in tight to the pointer, it did not take more than 5-10 of these placed birds before Flake understood what was happening. This was the point where Sten decided that she had had enough and that we would or could turn her into a point stealer if we would have continued slipping her on the pointer, that is experience. What we did now was to follow at a good distance and once the pointer took a solid point we would move on from maybe 150 meters and get Flake to see the side profile of the pointer while on point, the moment she would display backing or mirroring we would stop, some days this would be at even a 100 meters out from the pointer. I need to back-up a little here and make it clear, Flake had already pointed pheasants and grouse before I started with Sten, but this was infrequently and on some days she would simply run right over birds.



Back to Sten. It was the third time I went out to Sten when he decided it was time to place birds for Flake. We placed three partridge out on the field, they were spread pretty far apart, and we let her go. Sure enough, it did not take very long for her to go into a solid point on one of the birds. Here is where placed birds are extremely valuable. I walked up to her slowly and told her to be steady when I was a few meters away, I kept saying steady, steady until I could lay my hand on her and say good girl, girl. Now is the time to heap praise on

them, right there and then is the best opportunity to reinforce that what they are doing is what you want them to do! I then took a few steps back and to the side, called her name once and gave her the flush command, while doing this I also moved briskly forward. The bird took to the air and I whistled the sit command. It all fell into place perfectly. She managed to do the same on the other two birds we had placed out.

Two weeks later Sten had a couple of clients from the north of Sweden who came down to work their dogs on birds. He had placed out several birds and there some wild birds in the area too. I was just going to tag along with Flake on a leash to gain more experience. After about a hour the guests' dogs had not found one bird and Sten told me to let Flake off leash and let her run. It took no more than two minutes before she just stopped and went into a solid point. I waited for the guests to get into a suitable shooting formation and once they were in place, I gave Flake the flush command. Up went the bird, whistle, down sat Flake and boom, bird dropped from the sky. Flake had marked the bird and I sent her to retrieve it, good retrieve delivered into my hand. That right there was one of the proudest moments of my entire life! She was finally on her way to becoming a bird dog!

[Continues here...](#)

**We are Losing Legendary
Methods (Obedience and**

Discipline) – By T. Mostert

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We are Losing Legendary Methods (Obedience and Discipline) – By T. Mostert

This is purely my opinion, what I believe and have experienced, there are many other opinions and beliefs when it comes to training obedience. Clickers, treats, positive conditioning, e-collars, positive – negative training, in the end there are as many methods as there are dog breeds. Everyone sells their method as the gospel, as the only way to train a dog. Then you have the other side of the coin where trainers believe the dog should be as raw as possible, sticking close to his instinct and breeding as possible, with little human interference.

Now I can tell you that the best bird finding dog I have ever seen is a English Pointer that had non existing obedience, the only time the dog would stand still was when pointing, he was wild!

Blood trackers do not care if the dog pulls or pushes, as long as he is tracking and finding game, no recall or stop signals are needed because the dog is restrained all the time.

Unfortunately, if you have a HPR dog and you will use it in all the disciplines he was bred for, you cannot afford to have little, or no obedience. You may get away with it competing in young dog classes, but you will never, I repeat, never make it to the top 10% of elite dogs without proper obedience. To be at the top of every discipline consistently, you need a dog to listen and obey commands. To have a dog hunt in areas with main roads and rail tracks, you need obedience; to ensure your dog does not go after game you may not hunt, you need obedience and discipline. In short if nothing else to keep

your dog from getting hurt or killed you need ob



As said before, I spent many, many, hours with Jeppe Stridh and I believe in his methods. My own conclusions run parallel to his training and the 95% – 5% rule (praise- correction ratio) is what I stick to, in all my training, not just obedience. As Jeppe clearly states, dogs see a red or green light, there is no amber warning light for them, it is yes or no, keep it simple. A leash is a restraint, when you start training a leash is a great tool but, unless the dog learns that you are a mental and physical leash right out to beyond where the dog can see, you will never have full control. Your " presence" needs to extend to the limit of where you are willing to let the dog go, this is also the limit at where you should work the dog! If you cannot control the dog at 20 meters off leash why, why try and control it at 300 meters? You are simply allowing the dog to say fuck you!

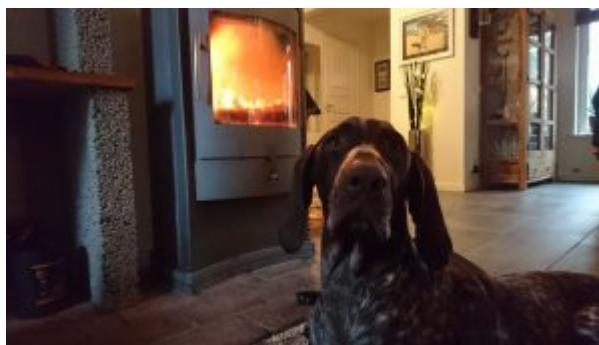
Mistakes, or inappropriate behaviour, shall be corrected immediately and swiftly, is everything. Do not hang over the dog or extend the corrections, it places more pressure on them and has more negative effect than correction attributes. Also once the correction is done, give the dog space, take a step sideways away from the dog. He will close that gap up by himself, which is exactly what you want! Always, always be friendly with the dog right after any corrections, always!

I have a problem and I have had it for a while, I am working

on it and I try to keep it in mind everyday. I want to keep touching Flake to reassure her and calm her down, it is wrong. Your voice ,attitude and general body language should be enough to do all of these things, save the touching and stroking for when you are not training (you are always training, I know).

Flake was a unsure puppy and needed more encouragement than most other dogs. Lucky we got over that quickly, but the touching habit has not been broken by me. A dog is low, or insecure, when his tail is tucked, ears and whole demeanor are low, won't look you in the eyes, keeps exposing his stomach to you and follows behind you. Then you need to be extremely careful and give him all the support you can. Opposed to that, is the strong bullhead dog that needs progressively harder correction until they toe the line.

It is all a balance, fine adjustments in voice, movements and commands both positive and negative should be made all the time, until you find what is best for you and your dog. Repeated useless corrections are only going to make things harder for both you and the dog. When the dog does something right, praise him immediately and excessively, once he understands, tone the praise down bit by bit until a simple click of the your tongue is all the praise the dog needs, I don't even do that anymore a simple nod, and silent good dog is all she needs to acknowledge me and know that she did well.



I get asked how often I train discipline and obedience My answer is always the same ,I don not train it I live it, it never stops. Feed the dog, sit, stay, okay you can eat now.

Door open dog still waits for a command to indicate it's okay to go out, finished outside door still open, dog sits and waits for my command to say she can come in. Open her crate in the back of the car, she waits for a command to get in, same for when she gets out. It is a never ending process. Why? The dog keeps evolving, new experiences, new places, new faces and hormones as they age, but they need to understand the same rules always apply.

Now for a crucial part that relates directly to field work and obedience. It is a contradiction, but a vital part of turning a well trained HPR into a bird machine! You cannot have a good field dog if you have too much discipline! The two do not go hand in hand! It is no use having a remote operated dog that will only do what you tell it to do on a field, for a dog to find birds it has to rely on its senses and experience, not on the handler. Here and only here do you need to back off on the obedience! Your dog needs freedom to make the correct choices and gain experience.

Example 1:

Trainer and dog arrive at a field test. Dog has no leash from the moment he gets let out of the vehicle. Trainer and dog follow after the pairs being released, dog is never more than a arm length away from the trainer, never. Time comes for the pair to run their beat on the field. Dog is released/sent out to work the field, runs left 50 meters, switches, runs right 50 meters switches, goes out 30 meters, cuts back to pass a meter from the trainer. This continues for 5 minutes, until the dog is maybe 70 meters deep and 50 meters wide, dog stops looks back at the trainer and waits for a command. Same scenario plays out the whole 15 minute beat, often accompanied by the trainer blowing on the whistle every minute. This dog is focused on getting it right, it is getting it all wrong!

Example 2:

Trainer arrives at a field test, gets out of the vehicle with a leash, is forcing the door open, but also blocking it at the same time until he can slip the leash on the dog. From there he is a weight being dragged after the dog until he and his dog have a beat to run. Leash off dog runs up down, left right finds a hare and 4 hours later the retainer still has not managed to get hold of the dog. This despite blowing himself blue in the face for at least 2 hours on a whistle that has never worked on the dog.

They may be two extreme examples, but they are real examples of both too much and too little obedience and both end the same way, no birds no score.

There is so much more I want to write on this topic, but it is better to find a Legend and train with him.

While testing dogs may be hard, hunting with them is going to multiply any lack of or excess of obedience. No matter how much of a simulation you do while training, it is nothing compared to the real thing. I have picked up more mistakes under high pressure hunting situations than I ever will simply training, if your HPR is just going to do the circuit of trails you have it easy. If however you are going to use the true potential of the dog and take yourself and your HPR to the limit of your and their abilities, make sure you have a solid foundation in obedience and discipline. *You cannot let go something you never had, you can only let something go if you have it, simple rule for obedience and discipline.*

[More on fieldwork here.](#)

Iscriversi a una prova Italia vs UK, parte II: UK

Dopo aver raccontato l'Italia ([qui](#)), come funzionano le cose in [UK](#)? Come ci iscrive ad una prova? Per prima cosa, se non abitata là e se il vostro cane non è registrato presso il Kennel Club occorre che andiate sul sito di questo ente cinofilo e facciate richiesta di un numero ATC (Autorizzazione a Competere). Potete scegliere tra due opzioni, acquistare solo il numero, o registrare contestualmente il microchip del vostro cane presso il database [Petlog](#). La seconda opzione è più costosa ma migliore, in caso il cane dovesse smarrirsi sarà più facile ritrovarlo. Una volta ricevuto il numero ATC (possono volerci anche tre settimane), potrete iniziare a iscrivere il cane alle prove.

Non so dirvi come funzionino le cose per i cani da ferma continentali, essi hanno un calendario diverso, per le razze da ferma inglesi, invece, le prove si svolgono solo in alcuni periodi dell'anno. Ci sono due settimane su grouse alla fine di marzo; una su starne ad aprile; circa un mese su grouse in estate (metà luglio/metà agosto) e, infine, una settimana su starne a settembre. Il numero delle prove è pertanto estremamente limitato rispetto alle centinaia di prove che si corrono ogni anno in Italia. Il numero ridotto di trials rende più difficile prendervi parte. Una volta presa visione del calendario (stilato con moltissimi mesi di anticipo), occorre capire chi sono i club che organizzano e interagire con loro. Contattando il segretario si riceverà un modulo da compilare e ritornare insieme al pagamento entro la data di scadenza... Eh... dall'estero può essere difficile pagare: i club accettano gli assegni ma dall'Italia è impossibile produrre un assegno in sterline, ma alcuni (non tutti i club), accettano di essere pagati in contanti alla prova o attraverso un bonifico. Sul modulo da compilare dovete inserire il nome del cane, dei

genitori, l'allevatore, il proprietario, il conduttore, la razza eccetera. È importante precisare se il cane ha mai ottenuto qualifiche in prove di lavoro britanniche, questo gli consentirà di accedere con più facilità alla Classe Open (Libera). Le prove inglesi prevedono tre categorie: Puppy, Novice e Open. La Puppy (Cuccioli) è riservata ai cani che non hanno ancora compiuto due anni che non si siano mai qualificati; la Novice (Novizi) per cani di qualsiasi età che non si sono mai classificati al primo o al secondo posto in una Novice; la Open... è obbligatoria per chi invece ci è riuscito! I regolamenti applicati sono gli stessi per tutte le classi, ma i giudici possono essere un po' più "gentili" nei confronti dei cani che corrono in Novice e in Puppy.



Quindi, è difficile per un cane estero partecipare a una prova e, più nello specifico, accedere a una Open Stake? Dipende dalla prova e dal periodo dell'anno: le prove nel Nord della Scozia e quelle corse a Marzo sono in genere meno affollate. E' più facile entrare in una Puppy o in una Novice? Sebbene la Open sia aperta a tutti, questa è l'unica classe a cui i cani già premiati possono accedere, pertanto essi hanno la priorità. Dobbiamo ricordare che ogni batteria comprende al massimo 40 cani e che ogni prova è composta da SOLO una batteria. I cani in eccesso vengono considerati "riserve" e finiscono in lista d'attesa, se non riescono a correre verranno loro resi i soldi dell'iscrizione. Avere delle qualifiche alle spalle e essere membri del club organizzatore offre più possibilità di partecipare, i membri del club hanno la priorità.

Entering a trial Italy vs UK

part II: UK

After discussing Italy [here](#), what about the [United Kingdom](#)? How do you enter a trial? First of all, if you do not live in the UK and your dog is not registered with their Kennel Club, you have to go through the Kennel Club website and fill out an application form to get an ATC (Authorization to Compete) number. You can choose between two options: getting an ATC number alone; getting an ATC number and register your dog microchip number at [Petlog](#). This second option is more expensive, but worth: if your dog get lost, having his microchip been registered in the Petlog database, would make a reunion easier. Once you have an ATC number, you can formally enter the dog in trials. Warning: the whole procedure might take up to three weeks.

I do not know how things work for HPRs (Continental Pointing Dogs, but trials for British Pointing Breeds take place only during specific times of the year. There are two weeks on grouse in March; one week on partridge in April; almost a month on grouse (mid July/mid August) and, finally one more week on partridge in September. The total number of trials is therefore extremely limited, if compared to the number of trials taking place in Italy during a year (hundreds!) and makes getting a run quite complicated. With the calendar at hand, you have to find the contacts of the club organizing each trial, get a specific entry form, fill it out and return it to the club secretary before the deadline, together with the entry fees. The most complicated thing, for those abroad, is paying the fees in advance. All the clubs accept cheques but it is impossible to send a cheque in sterling from abroad, which makes things complicated for a foreigner. Some clubs

accept foreigners to wire money through a bank, others are ok with you paying at the venue...



In the form you have to fill out you have to write the dog's name and date of birth; his/her parents names; the breeder, the owner and the handler names and so on. You should not forget the breed and whether he has already gained any awards in British trials as this would allow him to enter the Open stake more easily. British trials have three option when it comes to stakes: Puppy; Novice and Open. Puppy Stakes are for dogs younger than 2 years who had never qualified; Novice Stake is for dogs of every age who have never won a 1st or 2nd place in a Novice Stake (or Puppy Stake) and Open Stakes are for those who did! To become a Field Trial Champion, a dog must win two Open Stakes. Field trial rules remain the same regardless of the stake, but judges can be "kinder" towards dogs who run in Puppy and Novice Stakes. Is it difficult for a foreign dog to enter a trial and, more specifically, run in an Open Stake? I think it depends on the trial and on the time of the year: whilst Open Stakes are Open to all dogs, the dogs who had qualified 1st or 2nd in Novice and Puppy Stakes are allowed to run only in Open, hence are given priority. Trials run in Northern Scotland are usually less crowded that those run in England and, I was told, March Trials are less popular. Are Puppy and Novice Stakes easier to get in? My experience is extremely limited, but I think they are. What we shall remember is that stakes usually accommodate a maximum of 40 dogs (and each trial has ONLY one stake, not three, four or more like in Italy), and the extra dogs become "reserves" (= they are placed on a waiting list). Reserves that cannot get a

run will get their money back. Being member of the club organizing the trial and having had placements in the past proved more chances to get a run.

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

Finding Diamonds in the Marsh: Snipe Field Trials

I have a thing for snipe and I cannot help it. Yes, I do love grouse probably more, but snipe is not too bad and help me to cope with absence of the first one. Snipe and I are very old and very good friends: we met, by chance, in 2004, the same year I got my first shooting license. To make the long story short, books and hunters' tales made me aware of snipe existence, but I had never spotted any of these tiny waders until Spina, an English Setter, pointed one. I was so fascinated by her work that I decided I liked snipe. Not all dogs point snipe, not all dogs like them: snipe live in uncomfortable places, such as rice paddies and marshes. More specifically, local snipe live in rice paddies inundated by water, the muddier the better. It is not easy to run on these grounds and weather conditions tend to be equally unfriendly to dogs. Autumn and winter here are notorious for fog, rain, dampness and absence of wind. A dog must really like snipe to go looking for them and he also needs to possess great stamina and prey drive: snipe are scarce and the dog is likely to end up running for hours on "empty" and unfriendly grounds. Furthermore, if the dog is lucky enough to find one, the bird might still be able to outsmart the mammal and fly away before the four legged creature has a chance to point.



Cuore

Snipe are nervous, fast, light and incredibly tricky creatures but, needless to say, a few brave handlers dare to enter their dogs in snipe field trials. Trials that, given the bird itself, are different to from any other trials. They are believed to be for “specialists” only. Rules and judging standards make them special, British Pointing dogs, for instance, run “solo”, without a bracemate, something which is not normally allowed. Why do they run alone? Because, otherwise, it will be even more unlikely to work a bird properly. Judges want the dogs to be fast and run wide while exactly the where the birds are. They speak of “snipe sense”: the dog is supposed to quarter nicely in the wind and find a bird effortlessly during his 15 minutes run. This is not easy: dogs who trot around acting suspicious and proving unable to discern between scent and snipe, hence exhibiting many false points, are not appreciated. The dog must look decisive, run, locate and point, there is not usually any roading, due to snipe being extremely eager to fly, sometimes too much. You can't have two dogs running at full speed in the same rice paddy, snipe, if present, would explode like landmines! Also, you can't whistle much, you can't talk, you have to be extremely careful when closing your car's door, make too much noise and you will end up running on snipe ghosts.... Oh... I was forgetting jack snipe, a critter meant to further complicate things.

What I just wrote is clearly enough to re-direct handlers somewhere else, provided they are wise. I have always

considered snipe trials to be the Olympus and dreamt about them like normal women dream about holidays on a tropical island. I like snipe, Briony likes snipe, we live in (ghost) snipe land, yet my autumn trial plans were about ordinary birds, such as pheasant and partridge. My smart planning, however, lasted until my stake at "normal" trial was suddenly cancelled, two days before it was supposed to take place.

Disappointed, I went online to check for other nearby trials taking place during that weekend, snipe were the only option. I picked up the phone and spoke directly to the [Snipe Club](#) (yes we have a snipe club!) president who referred me to the secretary. Surprise! I knew the secretary well: he entered me in his trial right away.



Blus

On the morning of the trial, when I reached the venue, I felt quite intimidated. Everybody looked tremendously professional: there were snipe stickers and snipe patches everywhere. People were wearing waders and everybody was, or at least professionally pretended to be, professional. Once on the ground things continued to be the same: people blew talcum powder in every directions to assess the wind (there was no wind indeed & I had no talcum powder); people were being picky about the grounds and so on. The Snipe Club asked me to take pictures for them, which allowed me to follow the stake closely. What I saw during that trial did not impress me: some dogs (including mine) had to be casted on empty and dry grounds, others had more luck and got a run on wet paddies

with plenty of snipe but could not handle them properly. We had blank points, dogs bumping into birds, dogs chasing and so on. But, while dogwork did not fascinate me, people did: everybody was kind, supportive and friendly. Well, they became like this after they had studied me for a couple of hours: they initially thought I was there “just” to take pictures and they could not match me with the dog. Those men thought the dog was there “just” to watch and that she was too pretty and too white to compete. When they finally accepted the fact that she was going to run... they expected someone else (male) to handle her. I do not know where the supposed male could have been located, as my car contained no human beings besides me, it might be they thought he was going to arrive just in time for her run. Seeing me walking straight into the trialing ground with the dog on lead, thus signalling I was the handler, generated quite a silence and put us under unwanted spotlights. We had an awful ground: stream on the left, railway in front, tractor on the right and no water under the stubble. Briony worked nicely in the wind and explored the ground with method, but unfortunately there were no snipe waiting for her. Her good behaviour, nevertheless, erased suspicions: in the beholders’ eyes I suddenly became a good handler, silence ceased and people stepped towards me to congratulate and ask questions. It was fun! Someone asked if I trained her by myself; which was her bloodline; whether I intended to continue trialing her and so on: good feelings.



Us

At the end of the day, I was confused and unsure whether to continue trialling on snipe or not but, by the end of the week, I had made my mind up and Mauro, the secretary, as promised, had saved a place for me. This time, at the venue, I had several new “friends” who happily welcomed me and made me feel part of the pack or, rather, more like their family pet. The snipe club itself self decided to adopt me as their “photographer” and it became a routine, for the handlers, trying to look good in pictures. I ended up taking 5 of the 10 (?) field trials that compose the autumn snipe trial circuit, and this is what happened. Out of five trials Briony had the occasion to properly work snipe only twice: on the first occasion, she scented it and started roading along the scent but, in the same instant she was about to stop and point, the snipe flew by itself so we were out. The second time, instead, she made a mistake and she missed the bird. We did not meet any other snipe until the last trial, which was run in a monsoon like setting that forced snipe to be light and fly by themselves miles ahead of dogs. I was forgetting about trial number four in which she pointed a pheasant: it was the only bird she could find, yet it was not a valid point. The dog who ran after her was equally unlucky, finding the only hare every spotted in that county! Me & Briony did not have a chance to be graded during those five trials, but all the judges encouraged us to keep trialling (or I would have saved my money!) and she was once mentioned – a little achievement for us – during the award giving ceremony: judges here are allowed to talk about that nice dog who was doing so well but could not be graded due to bad luck, or to minor mistakes.



Him!!! (Oldrado)

On the average, during a trial, only 20% of the dogs had a chance to meet snipe, this might not sound fair but snipe cannot be “planted” and you have to deal with the scarce birds you have. Or, maybe, you can try to purchase a huge amount of luck in advance. In my case, it never seemed to fit in the shopping cart but, I have to admit, that my fellow competitors have often behaved like gentlemen, trying to provide me with promising grounds and some little extra hints. It is usually easier to find snipe if you know the grounds, yet they can still surprise you!

So, are snipe trials as difficult as they are rumored to be? I think so: birds are scarce, wary (& wiry) and deeply influenced by weather conditions. Snipe are diamonds and, like diamonds, are little and not easy to find, but they are shining, so if you are careful enough you might find one! We ran the first trial on a damp, windless warm day; the subsequent ones were all run in misty and windless cold mornings, all but for the last one during which we finally had some wind... accompanied by a torrential rain! Pointing snipe without wind is not easy, and these conditions also hardened the judge's job as dark skies and mist made more difficult to see everything and correctly discern between mistakes made on snipe (which lead to an elimination) and on jack snipe (the dog can miss them). What about the handlers? As it happens in other trials, you get all sort of handlers: some had perfectly trained dogs and some dogs had wilder specimen who liked to chase, bump into birds and run away, tendencies that sometimes

prevented them to be graded but, did I see any good dogs? Yes, I think so, and I must admit that, even if English Setters were the most represented breed, I also saw good dogs who were not English Setters! Among them I have to mention a couple of Irish Setters (they were not graded), a flashy pointer (he was not graded either) and a wonderful Gordon Setter: I am hardly enthusiastic about Gordons but this one was truly impressive! So... am I going to be back in spring? Maybe...

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!

Quindi vai davvero?

Perché non dovrei? Vedete delle alternative? Ho invitato il [moor](#) a traslocare vicino a me ma si è rifiutato. Se volevo il moor, dovevo saltare in macchina e guidare verso nord, ricordate la storia di Maometto e della montagna? Non c'erano altri metodi: volare con un cane – e relativi bagagli – non sarebbe stato pratico e, comunque, una volta atterrate avremmo dovuto noleggiare un'auto, mossa decisamente poco economica. Le persone, nel frattempo, si davano da fare per farmi cambiare idea: è un viaggio lungo, può succedere di tutto eccetera eccetera. È divertente vedere gli italiani (con mio padre a capo della truppa) pensare che tutti i serial killer, tutti i terroristi e tutti i disastri naturali siano localizzati al di là delle Alpi.

Io però ero tranquilla, non sarebbe accaduto nulla di brutto: mia nonna materna si chiamava Inglesina e mi ha sempre volute bene, l'Inghilterra sarebbe stata altrettanto gentile. Nella peggiore delle ipotesi mi sarei risparmiata una buona dose di italica calura estiva.

Ok ma da sola? E perché vai da sola? L'idea di viaggiare con qualcuno può essere allettante ma, conoscevo qualcuno idoneo?

Temevo di trovarmi alle prese con il “fardello della donna pallida”, citando Rudyard Kipling, ovvero dover sopportare qualche imbranato pronto a lamentarsi di tutto. Non sapevo nemmeno a cosa stavo andando incontro, e non mi sentivo affatto certa che i miei piani fossero adatti all’individuo medio. Mettiamo caso che alla persona non fossero piaciuti i moor, il tempo e le prove? Partire per un mese di prove in UK era un salto nel buio, fatto con la speranza di non cascare, non sarebbe stato corretto chiedere a qualcuno di saltare con me da una scogliera verso l’ignoto.

La cosa più inquietante era la lunghezza del viaggio, in chilometri, l’appuntamento al buio con i field trials mi preoccupava decisamente meno. Tutta la mia carriera accademica era stato un susseguirsi di appuntamenti al buio: quando frequentavo le elementari, a causa di un trasloco, sono stata deportata da una scuola ad un’altra – in cui non conoscevo nessuno. Alle medie, stessa cosa: potevo scegliere se andare alla scuola locale o in un’altra, ritenuta migliore. Nell’altra scuola sarei andata sola, senza conoscere nessuno, ma i miei genitori mi dissero che *dovevo scegliere ciò che era meglio per me, non seguire la massa, anche a costo di andare da sola*. Le superiori? Uguale! Liceo scientifico sperimentale, sfido che nessuno volesse venirci! E l’università? I superstiti sono andati quasi tutti ad ingegneria, io a lingue, ripiego per non poter andare a veterinaria. Detta così potrebbe sembrare semplice ma non lo è stata, ogni volta però, affrontare l’ignoto era un po’ meno preoccupante e mi ha rafforzato al punto da accettare una borsa di studio in Massachusetts, dove sarei andata da sola.

Un mese a spasso tra Inghilterra e Scozia non poteva certo spaventarmi, le prove aspettavano e... nessuna buona opportunità deve essere lasciata scappare!

[Il viaggio continua qui](#)