La prestazione del cane da lavoro e il rapporto con il conduttore

Lefebvre et al. (2007) hanno studiato gli effetti della relazione tra cane e conduttore sulle prestazioni e sul benessere del soggetto. Per fare ciò hanno analizzato 303 questionari compilati da conduttori di cani dell'esercito belga, i cani erano in maggioranza pastori belgi malinois. Lo scopo principale del lavoro era determinare quanti conduttori dedicassero più tempo ed energia al proprio cane, portandoselo a casa (anziché lasciarlo nel canile della caserma) e/o praticando con sport ed attività cinofile indipendenti dalla vita militare (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Lo scopo secondario era individuare una relazione tra il maggior investimento sul cane (relazione e tempo trascorso insieme) e l'obbedienza, l'aggressività e il benessere (Lefebvre et al., 2007). I cani che vivevano in caserma, nelle pause tra i turni di lavoro, venivano alloggiati singolarmente in canile; i cani portati a casa a fine turno facevano vita libera con la famiglia del conduttore (Lefebvre et al., 2007). I questionari consegnati ai conduttori erano composti da 34 semplici domande che riguardavano la relazione tra il cane e il conduttore e la percezione che i conduttori avevano del comportamento e della personalità dei loro cani (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Tra le domande venivano chieste l'anzianità di servizio del conduttore, il sesso del cane, il sospetto se il cane fosse stato maltrattato o meno prima di essere arruolato nell'esercito e il tipo di relazione che si aveva con il cane (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Veniva poi chiesto che attività si praticavano con il cane nel tempo libero e dove viveva il cane che era portato a casa (in casa, in giardino, in un box ,eccetera). Molto importanti erano infine le domande sul comportamento del cane. Veniva chiesto se era socievole, se

mostrava comportamenti aggressivi, se era obbediente e se aveva una personalità “equilibrata”, “aggressiva” o “timorosa” (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Infine, veniva indagata la presenza di anomalie comportamentali come il leccarsi le zampe, il distruggere oggetti, la presenza di diarrea, l’ululare, il camminare incessantemente, l’abbaiare o dare la caccia alla propria coda. Questi comportamenti dovevano essere osservati quando il cane stava nel box (Lefebvre et al., 2007).

143 conduttori (47.19%) portavano a casa il cane , o praticavano sport con lui; 49 conduttori (16.17%) lo portavano a casa e praticavano a sport con lui; 121 (39.93%) portavano a casa il cane. Queste scelte avevano più motivazioni: il 95.87% dei 121 conduttori che portava a casa il cane lo faceva per il suo benessere, mentre l’89.26% lo faceva per il rapporto che aveva con il cane (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Pochi conduttori lo facevano “perché era facile” (15.7%) e ancora meno al fine di ricevere l’indennità mensile di 75 euro (5.79%) (Lefebvre et al., 2007). 71 conduttori (23.43%) praticavano sport con il cane: il 54.93% attacco e difesa e il 43.66% ubbidienza. Altre discipline praticate erano jogging (22.54%), biathlon (16.90%), mondioring (11.27%), agility (8.45%) e/o R.C.I. (5.63%) (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Le motivazioni, nonché le successive scelte effettuate da chi portava a casa il cane, sembrano indicare un legame più profondo con l’animale. Già Podberscek e Serpell (1997) che avevano notato che coloro che passavano molto tempo in compagnia del cane, prendendosene cura, stabilivano con lui un legame più profondo.

Per quanto riguarda il comportamento del cane, è stata valutata l’obbedienza tramite la prontezza di esecuzione del comando “lascia”: 178 cani, ovvero il 58.75%, richiedevano al massimo tre ripetizioni del comando prima di lasciare, mentre 116 cani, ovvero il 38.28%, lasciavano dopo tre ripetizioni del comando o, addirittura, andavano separati fisicamente dal figurante. La percentuale dei cani ubbidienti era più alta

tra quelli che venivano portati a casa (il 72.73% dei cani portati a casa ubbidiva entro tre ripetizioni del comando rispetto al 49.45% dei cani che vivevano in caserma) e tra quelli che praticavano sport (il 73.24% di quelli che praticavano sport contro il 54.11% di quelli che non lo praticavano) (Lefebvre et al., 2007).

Gli autori non hanno trovato alcuna correlazione tra l'anzianità di servizio del conduttore (e quindi la presunta esperienza cinofila) e l'ubbidienza, né legami tra presunti maltrattamenti subiti dai cani prima dell'arruolamento e livello di ubbidienza (Lefebvre et al., 2007).

Non è dato sapere con certezza se i cani più ubbidienti fossero stati portati a casa in virtù di questa caratteristica, o se l'ubbidienza sia stata migliorata dal maggior tempo trascorso insieme e dal praticare sport (Lefebvre et al.2007). La seconda ipotesi, tuttavia, sembra più probabile: Clark e Boyer (1993), infatti, hanno rilevato che l'ubbidienza aumentava se cane e proprietario passano più tempo insieme e se la relazione tra i due migliora. Anche Podberscek e Serpell (1997) e Kobelt et al. (2003) sono giunti a conclusioni simili, riscontrando un miglioramento dell'obbedienza e una riduzione dell'aggressività nei cani molto legati ai proprietari.

Il nesso tra aggressività e disobbedienza non è stato stabilito in maniera netta, ma Lefebvre et al. (2007) ipotizzano che, a monte, ci possano essere stati dei maltrattamenti. Essi, pur ritenendo necessari ulteriori approfondimenti, partono dal presupposto che una situazione di disagio vissuta dal cane possa trasformarsi in paura o aggressività. I maltrattamenti potrebbero quindi, per lo meno, nel caso di cani aggressivi, ridurre l'obbedienza del cane (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Del resto, altri studi hanno dimostrato che un addestramento basato su punizioni può compromettere il benessere del cane senza migliorarne l'ubbidienza (Hiby et al.2004; Schilder e Van der Borg, 2004).

Il 25.74% dei conduttori ha ammesso che il proprio cane ha morso almeno una persona. Il 19.83% dei cani portati a casa ha morso qualcuno, contro il 29.67% dei cani lasciati in canile Tra i cani che praticavano sport, il 19.72% ha morso e tra i cani che non praticavano sport il 27.71% (Lefebvre et al.,2007).

I conduttori potevano descrivere il cane come “equilibrato”, “timoroso” o “aggressivo”, scegliendo anche più di una di queste definizioni. La maggior parte dei conduttori (84.49%) ha definito il proprio cane “equilibrato”; l’11.22% “aggressivo” e l’8.58% “timoroso”. Non sono emerse correlazioni tra presunti maltrattamenti, equilibrio e aggressività, ma si è sospettato che il 58.82% dei “timorosi” fosse stato maltrattato. Per quanto riguarda l’obbedienza, il 59.55% degli equilibrati e il 42.31% dei paurosi erano ubbidienti, mentre il 79.41% degli aggressivi non lo era. La personalità del cane non è parsa avere alcun legame con il tipo di alloggio (casa del conduttore o caserma) né con la pratica di sport (Lefebvre et al., 2007).

Per quanto riguarda la socievolezza, il 67.99% dei cani era ritenuta essere socievole, il 24.2% poco socievole. Il 2.31% dei cani venivano invece descritti come più o meno socievoli a seconda del contesto. Il 77.69% dei cani portati a casa era ritenuto socievole, mentre tra quelli che rimanevano in caserma la percentuale scendeva al 61.54%. I cani socievoli erano anche più ubbidienti : il 63.59% dei cani socievoli era ubbidiente mentre lo era solo il 51.35% di quelli considerati poco socievoli. Il 63.64% dei cani portati a casa accettava di essere accarezzato da estranei, per i cani lasciati in canile la percentuale scendeva al 49.45%. I cani che accettavano di essere accarezzati da estranei erano anche più ubbidienti rispetto ai restanti soggetti: 61.68% contro 52.04%. La percentuale di conduttori che poteva avvicinarsi al cane, toccare il cane, o portare via la ciotola mentre il cane mangiava era più alta tra coloro che portavano il cane a casa:

il 96.69% si poteva avvicinare; il 92.56% poteva toccare il cane e l' 80.17% rimuovere la ciotola (le percentuali per i cani lasciati in canile diventavano rispettivamente 89.56% , 84.07% e 62.09%) (Levebre et al., 2007). In definitiva, i cani che vivevano a casa erano più socievoli, ma non si sa se siano stati portati a casa in virtù di questa caratteristica o se è stato lo stile di vita, caratterizzato da una maggiore interazione con gli esseri umani, a migliorare questa caratteristica, i ricercatori sembrano credere maggiormente in questa seconda ipotesi (Levebre et al., 2007). Non è emersa invece alcuna correlazione tra la pratica di uno sport e la socievolezza, ma gli autori sottolineano che questo potrebbe dipendere dal tipo di disciplina praticata, nella più parte dei casi si trattava di discipline di attacco e difesa (Lefebvre et al., 2007).

Tra i comportamenti inappropriati in canile, ritenuti indicatori di scarso benessere, i più frequenti sono stati: camminare avanti e indietro (22.11%), abbaiare (14.19%) e distruggere (11.55%). La percentuale dei comportamenti inappropriati cambiava a seconda dello stile di vita interessando il 7.14% dei cani che vivevano con i conduttori e l' 11.07% di quelli che rimanevano in caserma. Il praticare sport si è rivelato molto importante: solo l'1.98% dei conduttori di cani che praticavano sport aveva notato questi comportamenti (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Vivere a casa con il conduttore e praticare sport hanno ridotto la presenza di questi comportamenti, studi simili, che vedevano protagonisti cani da compagnia, hanno individuato dei fattori che potrebbero aver portato a questi risultati. Kobelt et al. (2003) hanno scoperto, per esempio, che il tempo trascorso con il proprietario si correlava negativamente con anomalie comportamentali e Jagoe e Serpell (1996) hanno dimostrato che l'interazione con il cane e l'esercizio fisico riducevano l'aggressività.

Vi è piaciuto questo articolo? Se volete saperne di più date

un’occhiata al PS. Non dimenticatevi di dare un’occhiata al Gundog Research Project!

Bibliografia:

Clark G.I e Boyer W.N. (1993). The effects of dog obedience training and behavioural counselling upon the human–canine relationship. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 37: 147–159.

Hiby E.F., Rooney N.J., Bradshaw J.W.S. (2004). Dog training methods: their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. Animal Welfare, 13: 63-69.

Jagoe A., Serpell J. (1996). Owner characteristics and interactions and the prevalence of canine behaviour problems. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 47: 31–42.

Kobelt A.J., Hemsworth P.H., Barnett J.L., Coleman G.J. (2003). A survey of dog ownership in suburban Australia – conditions and behaviour problems. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 82: 137–148.

Lefebvre D., Diederich C., Delcourta M., Giffroy J.M. (2007). The quality of the relation between handler and military dogs influences efficiency and welfare of dogs. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 104 (1–2): 49–60.

Podberscek A.L., Serpell J.A. (1997). Environmental influences on the expression of aggressive behaviour in English Cocker Spaniels. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 52: 215–227.

Schilder M.B.H. e Van der Borg J.A.M. (2004). Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 85: 319–334.

Dalla parte del cane

Eccomi, finalmente dopo alcuni mesi molto intensi. Ho terminato gli esami necessari alla laurea in medicina veterinaria e ora, tirocini a parte, dovrò occuparmi della tesi che riguarderà i cani da caccia. Se volete saperne di più sul Gundog Research Project cliccate sul link. Prima di affrontare la letteratura scientifica dura e pura, ho deciso di dare un'occhiata ai libri che avevo in casa e… ho alcuni suggerimenti. Se non la conoscete, iniziate a guardarvi i lavori di Temple Grandin, questa donna ha molto da dire. (Alcuni dei sui libri sono pubblicati in italiano).

Poi, andando più nel dettaglio, vi consiglio uno dei miei libri preferiti. Il titolo originale inglese è In Defence of Dogs di John Bradshaw orrendamente tradotto in "La naturale superiorità del cane sull'uomo" e… pare fuori stampa. Un vero peccato: è un libro gradevolissimo da leggersi e di grande rigore scientifico, ogni cinofilo dovrebbe leggerlo. Il secondo libro si intitola The Domestic Dog. Its Evolution, Behavior and Interactions with People. Si tratta di un'antologia curata da James Serpell che racchiude parti di differenti studiosi tra cui Raymond Coppinger, M.B. Willis, Benjamin and Lynette Hart e Valerie O' Farrel. Non mi risulta tradotto in italiano ma c'è anche un articolo curato da Boitani e altri collaboratori. Io possiedo l'edizione del 1995, prima edizione, ma ho intenzione di controllare anche la nuova edizione, 2016 sicuramente più aggiornata.

Un'altra risorsa interessante è il corso online Animal Behavior and Welfare a cura della University of Edinburgh disponibile online attraverso la piattaforma Coursera.org il corso è gratuito e sono disponibili i sottotitoli delle lezion in italiano.

Cercherò di scrivere altro molto presto!

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, ***b*ut 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. A**t 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!

Vinci un servizio fotografico – Win a free photo session

FOR ENGLISH SCROLL DOWN

Per tenere vivo interesse e partecipazione al Gundog Research Project, abbiamo aggiunto un nuovo premio: un servizio fotografico gratuito.

Dettagli: servizio fotografico all’aperto con possibilità di includere cani, bambini e selvaggina, se presente. Possiamo programmarlo durante una sessione di addestramento, durante una giornata di caccia o altro.

Riceverete un numero illimitato di immagini sotto forma di files digitali ad alta risoluzione e quindi stampabili e i files saranno anche raccolti in una galleria online.

L’unico limite è legato alla località, il servizio fotografico dovrà aver luogo dalle mie parti, altrimenti ci sarebbero delle spese di viaggio.

Per vincere il servizio dovete solo compilare il questionario online, più cani inserirete, maggiori saranno! le possibilità di vincere!

Cliccate qui per saperne di più

***

To keep the interest around the Gundog Research Project alive, I decided to offer one more “prize”: a free photographic session with me.

The photo session will take place outside and can include people (adults and children), dogs and, if present, wildlife. It can take place during a training session, during a shooting

day or in a similar context.

You will receive an unlimited number of images as a high resolution (printable) digital files. The images will also be featured in a dedicated online photo gallery.

There is only one limitation: we should organize the shooting session not too far from where I live (Northern Italy): I would be very happy to travel to another continent but it might be expensive.

Fill out our survey to win and remember, the more dogs you tell us about, the more chances you have!

Click here to know more

Un veloce aggiornamento sulla

taurina

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

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

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

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

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

A Quick Update on Taurine

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

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

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

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

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

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.**

SUTTON SCOTNEY 26 - 27 aprile

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, Llewellin 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

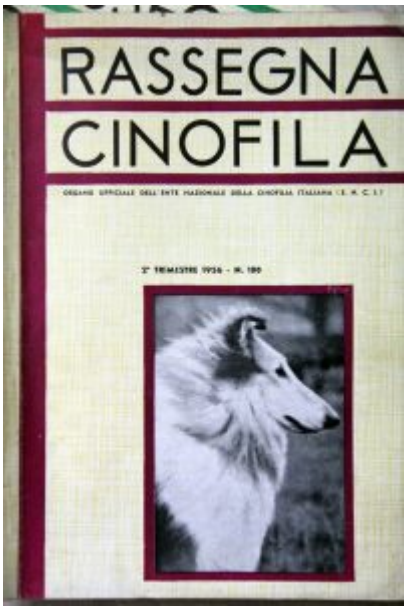
misunderstood some writings (he did not read English, as far as I know). So, basically, I think he was expecting something different and he did not entirely like what he saw. He complains about "interrupted" runs, short castings, slow runs, small parcels of ground to be explored, searches that gets "limited"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

PROSPETTO DELLE ISCRIZIONI DEI CANI NEL L.O.I. E NEL L.I.R. 1955

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.

Break it Down- by Tok Mostert

There is no doubt that seeing a well trained dog doing everything right is a pure delight to owner/handler or observer, not to mention a judge. The seamless way they cut up

a field missing no ground, the sudden stop and lock up on point, the flush on command, the stop, the marking of the fallen bird, the glance for permission to retrieve, the retrieve and the delivery all flowing like a gentle mountain stream over smooth rock. Pure dog poetry in motion!

What few understand is how exactly you get a dog to that level. Many fail due to their lack of experience, the experienced fail due to their lack of adapting. There is nothing more heartbreaking to watch than a handler train one dog after another in the same way, and making the same mistakes, dog after dog. For the novice it is a minefield of advice and methods, some good some totally disastrous!! Some novices will seek advice from the old dog hands, other will shun all help.
I have my own way of training a dog, most of it is old school, some of it is purely my way of doing things, I still do things wrong, but I learn from that pretty quickly when I fail my dog. Yes, I fail my dog, not the dog fails me. If I have not trained or exposed my dog to certain things, I am failing my dog, but that is another topic.

Getting back to watching a dog do everything right. To get to that level a good handler/trainer would have broken down every single step in the opening scenario and then he would have also compartmentalized the individual steps into single separate training sessions. Don’t get it?

The retrieve can be broken down as follows:

1. Dog sitting steady by your side

2. Dog looks at you when you whisper his name or click your tongue
3. Dog takes dummy, or bird, from your hand on command, does not chew or play
4. Dog stays sitting as you walk away, does not drop the bird or dummy
5. Dog comes straight in when called, still holding the dummy
5.1 Dog does not keep circling you with dummy or bird
5.2 Dog does not drop the bird/dummy at your feet
5.3 Dog sits calmly with dummy in his mouth until you give him the deliver command
6. Dog holds steady on a cast, waits for command
7. Dog does not lift on the cast
8. Dog marks cast
9. Dog does not move when you walk and pick up dummy or bird
10. Dog does not move when you place multiple dummies out
11. Dog does not switch dummies/birds when they are placed together

This gives you a general outline of how small the different steps can be broken down into. It is the same for every single thing you train. The point, the flush, the way the dog works a field, everything. I have said times before, sit down and decide what signals you will use, whistle, hand or verbal, train them into yourself long before you try and teach them to the dog, this is crucial!

Do not be in a hurry to weave this all together into your invisible leash. Once the dog can 100% of the time complete these micro exercises you can start putting 2 together, then 3 and so on. This is the only way to forge a unbreakable invisible leash. Few dogs fall apart during trials, most of them fall apart under high volume high pressure shoots and hunts, this is exactly the time you can least afford it or

correct it.

Many people wait for the season to open so they can let their dogs run on field and find birds, this is foolish when you can train so many other aspects before the field season opens.

Keep it fun, keep it focused!

Are you interested in gundogs? Check out the Gundog Research Project!

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.

La taurina, il setter inglese e le altre razze

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

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

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

Cosa fare quindi? Credo servano ulteriori ricerche per poterlo affermare con esattezza ma, in quanto proprietaria di un setter inglese, mi sto informando su quali laboratori effettuano questo esame e su quali siano i costi. In attesa di

nuove scoperte, sento di consigliare la stessa cosa a chi possiede esemplari delle razze menzionate, di razze affini e di razze ritenute a rischio DCM.

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

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

Taurine, English Setters & other breeds

Last week the server crashed after I published an article on tyrosine and dark coats. I stayed away from the admin panel for ten days because I was afraid I could crash it again, but now I am back discussing another amino acid. A couple of days ago, an English Setter owner living in the USA posted on FB about her dog's being diagnosed with congestive heart failure. The dog had developed DCM (dilated cardiomiopathy) and the cardiologist suggested testing his taurine blood levels. She tested him and her other dogs and the tests confirmed that some of them had indeed very low levels of taurine. Curiously, those with lower levels were fed a grain free, high protein, trendy dog food while the other ones, eating what would be

considered an “average” dog food, were doing better.

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

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

So… What should we do? I think further research is needed but, personally, owning an English Setter, I am investigating on laboratories which can assess taurine levels and trying to collect information about the cost of this service. Would I

advise you to do the same? Probably, and I am also wondering if other breeds, especially those related to the aforementioned breeds and those prone to DCM, should be tested: more research is certainly needed!

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

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