

Miracles happen at Sandrigham: Norfolk Trials

Almost three months later, I am finally here to write down what happened. On Sept 7th 2017, in fact, Briony won Novice Stake on Partridge at Sandrigham, organized by the Pointer Club of UK. Some might argue that, well, it's "just" a Novice Stake, but for me it is a great achievement. Briony is not my first English Setter, I got the first one, "Socks" (Slai di Riccagioia), in 1999, but he was a rescue and he came to me after having be discarded by a "pro" trainer and with a bag full of behavioural problems. In his own way, he was a smart dog, we managed to go hunting alone together (he did not want men with shotguns around him), but there was no way I could rehab completely and train him for trials. I had not enough skills, nor experience, and he would not have dealt well with formal training sessions. He, however, opened me new doors as we started training for rough shooting and I got a firearms and hunting license. I met people, got new friends and spent many years rough shooting over English Setters and other pointing breeds up and down the hills of the Northern Apennines. I, somehow, had the chance to watch- and shoot over- hundreds of dogs during those years, and it was an incredible experience. I also began attending trials and to work for canine and shooting magazines which lead me to meet breeders, judges and handlers...



Socks (Slai di Riccagioia)
my first ES

After his death, when I started looking for another setter, I had very clear ideas about what I wanted in my next dog, but not so clear ideas about where to find her! It took months, but I finally located my litter and my puppy, on a farm on the Swiss Alps, not too far from Sankt Moritz (posh dog!). I knew what I needed to know about Briony's dad, but mum was quite a surprise: she was beautiful, gentle and smart. She came with us heeling off lead to the small village's café and then sat quietly under the table. I loved that, as well the whole bloodline registered in the pedigree and the parents' health clearances. When I brought Briony home, people thought she was cute, but too expensive, and that I was going to "ruin" her, training her in my own way and socializing her too much. I just thought she was a terrible pup who did not like me at all. It took quite a while to become friends, probably she was just testing me to be sure she was in good hands!



Ansa del Simano, Briony's

mum



First day of 2017 hunting season

She was naughty, but smart, and she quickly developed in a good hunting companion. Sometimes she had a mind of her own and sometimes she was not the easiest dog to handle, but she surely did not lack of determination and bird sense. She was, and she still is, strong willed and sensitive at the same time. Thanks to friends, we had access to some private estates where she could meet much more birds that she could have met on more affordable – by me – public grounds. Other people introduced her to woodcock and, I still remember the day, with my surprise, she pointed her first snipe. During these hunting seasons, she learnt to work with other dogs and we worked a lot on backing and on remaining steady on point. I must admit I had good teachers, and that skilled hunters helped us to locate birds, but steadiness to wing was not required. Hunters here want the dogs to be steady on point, but after the bird flies, all they wish is to hit it, none cares anymore about the dog.

In the meantime, as she also grew prettier, I entered her at a dog show that took place nearby and, to my surprise, she was awarded a RCAC (RCC), so I decided to continue on this road. Briony, however, had other plans and after a stressful indoor show, she decided she wanted to end her career as a show dog. She had already a CAC in her pockets and I did not want her journey to end. I am not a show person, and I consider dog

shows boring, but I wanted to prove that a good looking working dog, from working (mountain hunting and mountain trials) bloodlines, could make it. So, we went together to take handling lessons with [Richard Hellman](#), a great handler and a great person. Briony seemed to enjoy the lessons and, in August 2015, she became a Show (full) Champion. I also think that having learnt to face the ring she somehow increased her self esteem.



Briony first dog show... RCAC

Field trials were next on my list, but there was a HUGE problem: I did not want to send her away for training, nor to hire a professional trainer as people normally do here. I wanted to train and handle Briony by myself, easier said than done in Italy where field trials are dominated by male professional handlers. But, thanks to an unexpected series of coincidences, in the summer of 2015 I ended up watching the Champion Stake for Pointers and Setters in Northern England and... [I had an awakening!](#) I saw some “ordinary people” handling their dogs to a very high standard and I saw very obedient setters! I was used to see very obedient Drahthaars (GWPs), but the average Italian Setter is usually quite a wild critter! I could not believe setters could be that obedient and, as naïve as it might sound, I was impressed.



Dorback Estate, Scotland,
training with gamekeeper
Brian

Briony herself was pretty wild at the time and her nickname was “Tigress” but, again, unexpectedly, a good mentor came to us. You can read more about Briony’s taming for field trials and about “White Feather” [clicking here](#) but, in a few words, I would describe her [training](#) a demanding task, it was equally rewarding though! It took a while to tame “Tigress”, but as soon as she decided to cooperate, she became impressively reliable and well behaved. This is how we ended up on the moor in the summer of 2016, and this is how my passion for British trials developed even further ([you can read more here](#)). [Our first experience with grouse](#) was not that bad: she always behaved and she kept improving but paid her inexperience with grouse during the English Trials and she paid my inexperience with trials in during the [Scottish – and the English- trials](#). She still needed some fine tunings but, overall, I could not complain. At the end of the circuit, I went home with no awards but determined to save money and to go back in 2017.



Haughton Hall, roading a hare :-)

But, when the time to go again on the moors was close to come, I had to withdraw all my entries as Briony anticipated her season. I wasn't happy, I was quite disappointed, no... honestly... I was quite upset, but there was not much else I could do. Some friends, however, tried to cheer me up advertising September trials on partridge. It is easier to get a run, they said, the atmosphere is very relaxed, they added and... we are going to run at Sandrigham Estate, on Queen Elizabeth II's grounds, they concluded. I must admit the last thing they mentioned was very tempting: it was thanks to such a good advertisement that I decided to bet on partridge trials in Norfolk. That was a brave bet, I shall admit, as I was perfectly aware they were going to be more difficult than grouse trials. While gathering information, I learn that: 1) during the first round, usually on stubble, dogs were going to be evaluated mainly for pace, style and ground treatment and that 2) "a few" hares were going to be present. Uh, I was forgetting the sugar beet! So well, while I was going to do my best to show up with a well behaved dog, going there to win was not surely written down in my agenda. I just wanted to be there, see people, get to know things better, learn more and feel part of a world I like.

Briony started the circuit well (we went to the 2nd round in 4 trials out of 9) and, even if, we could not find any birds on our paths, she was behaving well and respecting hare nicely (I do not have hare here, just rabbits and cats to train on). I was happy, we were learning more and enjoying the social side of September trials : I do not drink, but I was always at the pub! It was nice to see friends doing well and, especially after IGL Snettisham trials , when no awards were given, I was super happy to see Rhia (Tapper) and Sara (Chichester) receiving the Gun's Choice rosette. Trials proved to be as difficult as I expected: while there were plenty of hare,

feathered wildlife was scarce or, should I say, very smart and very professional at hiding. On Thursday, 7th of September, (Pointer Club trial at Sandrigham) I was number 13 AND the bye dog (quite a scary combination), but she did well in the first round, and well again in the second, so I knew I was going to get “something”, but I did not know what.

When the secretary announced that I had won First Prize, I could not believe it and indeed, the Vaux Silver Tankard, fell from my hands a couple of times! It was like living in a Disney movie and this article should have explained you why. She is the first dog I have ever trained for trials, and I trained her all by myself. Yes, many wonderful people helped me through the journey (in Italy and in the UK, and I am grateful to them all), but I have always been the one in charge. I am just a normal person with limited training opportunities coupled with a high degree of stubbornness and self discipline which surely helped. This is why everything that could sound normal to someone else, is so special to me, and yes, winning an award at Sandrigham confirms that Briony is a posh dog!



Me, Alan Goodship (Queen Elizabeth's dog trainer) and the fallen trophy

Ps. I promise I will also write on other dogs – and not just on mine – as there will be more articles on September trials, (all [partridge trials](#) results can be downloaded here) in the

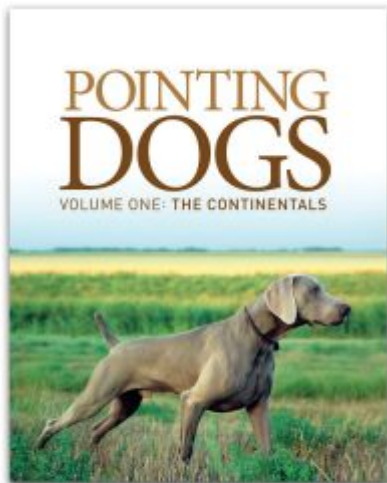
meantime, if you have a chance, take a look at the [research project](#) I am working on for my Veterinary Medicine dissertation.

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

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On Italians training, hunting and trialing abroad

Italy won the European Cup for British Pointing Breeds (Grande Quete), the European Championship for English Setters and the European Championship for English Pointers (other results are still pending at the moment). Everybody is happy, but many rumours started and the social media went crazy. I read every sort of rumors, polemics, attacks and accuses, which I do not want to spread further, but two topics deserve a deeper analysis, especially the second one. People complain about dogs whose nationality changes to make them able to enter the competition. Right? Wrong? I think this is a grey area. Italy has a huge number of dogs whose natural qualities make them suitable to these high level competitions. There are dozens, or more likely hundreds, of Italian English Setters and English Pointers that, potentially, could do very well. No other country can claim the same but... Some dogs have been seen and campaigned more than others because there are big fishes and small fishes. If you are a sardine, forced to swim among tuna, you will soon realize you cannot afford the trendiest trainer, nor the amazingly expensive travels all over Europe to stay on the top the circuit. Your dog will not have the

same opportunities of a “richer” dog, you are perfectly aware he is unlikely to be asked to represent Italy. Maybe it is a good dog but, to compete at certain levels, being good is only part of the package.

So, let's imagine you gave up any hope to compete in the European Cup but, let's say, Transilvania proposes you a place in its team, would you accept? And if you, Mr. Sardine, accept, are we entitled to persecute you? I don't think so and, let's be honest, what would any of us do, if offered such an opportunity? What would I do? I do not know, but I might say yes to a country I feel connected to (I am not very patriotic, I know...), whereas I would probably decline the offer if it were coming from a country I don't know anything about, nor I speak the language. This said, I do not think I have any rights to be judgmental about other people choices.

The second, more important, topic I am going to discuss still relates to foreign countries, but in another way. When I published the article on [training problems in Italy](#) and on the [scarcity of game at Italian trials](#), someone suggested me writing something on Italians going abroad for hunting, training and trialing. Well, the truth is that, as far as small game, Italy is in a bad place. These animals are poorly, if ever, managed, and if you want to hunt or train your dog, going abroad can be a good choice. Can you train a dog in Italy? Of course you can, but it is going to be way harder, and your risk to pay in fines the same amount you will spend for a nice training holiday abroad. There is nothing wrong in going abroad to offer a dog more opportunity. If you have the time and you can afford it, why not? Serbia, nowadays is very popular, but before Serbia, Italian hunters and trainers had colonized other countries. I am not concerned about going abroad, I am perplexed about being dependent on “abroad”.

Many important Italian field trias (with CAC valid for the Italian Championship) are now run in Serbia. If you ask why, you hear different answers and some, the most convincing ones,

pertains grounds, game and laws/local realities. Let's start from grounds. Giacomo Lugari (an Italian famous hunter and video maker) , answering a post on Facebook remembered the European Cup run in 1999 in Tollara, Piedmont, Northern Italy. So the grounds... we have some suitable ones! I think so, but what about the game? The answer, this time , sadly is a no. I have never been to Serbia, but many, many Italians routinely go there and come back with happy tales about grey partridge. You cannot imagine how many partridges are there! You cannot believe! This is what they tell me and, yes I can believe them. I know what happens with grouse in the UK and I know that good wildlife management can produce tremendous results. Proper wildlife management is demanding, time consuming, costly and forces farmers, hunters, wildlife experts, gamekeepers and politicians to work together. Something must be sacrificed and people must learn to negotiate good meeting points, this is difficult but not impossible.



Someone justify Italy stating that Serbian agricultural techniques are 50 years older than ours and that this is a good thing for greys. Probably but... If we truly are 50 years ahead, we should be able to use our more advanced knowledge to recreate an habitat that might suit greys. I refuse to believe this cannot be done: do you remember Renaissance? Italy gave birth to Leonardo da Vinci and other geniuses and now, their descendents, cannot successfully manage four birds?

And what about the money? In Serbia up to 500 dogs run in a day. Each entry costs 30 euros, multiply them for 500 and

subtract something for “expenses”. Accessing training grounds costs about 100 euros a day (regardless of the number of dogs you have with you), so remember about these money as well. I am a terrible accountant, but I came to the conclusion that Serbian grey partridge are producing quite an income. The Serbians have been smart in recognizing this and I think that grey partridge are improving the lives of those living there. There are the training grounds money, the field trials entries, people staying in hotels, people dining in restaurants... The Serbians are doing the right thing, and the Italians? What shall we do, besides thanking them for the opportunities they provide us? I think that maybe we shall get inspired and consider the grey partridge an excellent business partner: some more determined people would resuscitate dinosaurs for similar amounts of money!

The laws, adds someone else, we have more bureaucracy and more rules than Serbia. We have animal right activist and an outdated law on wildlife management and hunting. This law must be changed , says someone else, but in Italy is hard to be proactive, each time you try, obstacles get thrown in the way. This is true, but is this enough to give up the hope in a better countryside, for better fieldsports? I truly don't know.

Do you click with your dog? – by Tok Mostert

Just in case folks think I have forgotten about training dogs☐

Do you click with your dog?

It normally took years for trends to reach African shores,

that was until Africa discovered the worldwide web. Information and training techniques spread like wildfires over a sun-dried African savannah, for good or for bad these techniques were spread like the gospel and seen as the miraculous training method. This, unfortunately, does not only apply to Africa, but to many parts of the world. To break it down, you need to have a comprehensive understanding of how a dog's mind works.

A dog understands his name by repetitive training and positive reinforcements. A dog understands commands several ways, you can force it like with force fetch training (negative – positive response training) working on a leash is something I consider force training too, although a more positive less negative form of training. You can also use condition training like with a clicker and treats. Then there is the method I believe in, as taught by Jeppe Stridh, the 95% positive reinforcements /praise and 5% correction method, using the red light- green light principles. Although during the initial training phase it would be more correct to say it is a combination of the order of the principles. Right at the start of the training, the very beginning, treats may be used to teach a sit command to a puppy, but it is also the only phase they may get used in. This initial treat is more a bonding exercise, than a treat training exercises as you are replacing the bitch in the feeding cycle.

I could have titled this article *How to confuse your dog and frustrate yourself* because this is exactly what we are doing blending training methods and techniques. The secret, that is no secret at all when training a dog, is and always will be consistency. Besides the verbal and whistle commands a dog responds to tone and body language (as well as hand signals) of the handler too. Keeping everything consistent is what turns a good dog into a better one. Why do I not use the clicker method? Read for yourself and decide.

It is my belief and opinion that a dog that works for respect

and affection (praise) within a pack type environment will in the end outclass and outlast any dog trained by clicker and or treats. If you use a clicker and treats, the only reward your dog receives is the treat and limited freedom. My preferred method rewards the dog with unlimited freedom, praise and a understanding of where it fits into the pack, it also teaches the dog respect. Besides all of the above, it builds confidence and trust in both the dog and the handler while forging a stronger bond between them. Contrary to what people believe my hunting dog is not kept in a kennel and then cut loose every now and again. My dog lives with me, on the couch, on the bed, in the car, but I can at anytime give my dog a command when I no longer wish for him to be on the bed or couch and he will comply!

You do not need skills to train with a clicker, neither do you need confidence or ability. You are solely relying on the clicker and treats to train the dog. With limited skill and ability, you are no leader to your dog, you are a treat dispenser! When a dog lives in the wild, there are no treats to teach him, there is a pecking order within the pack environment to which every dog adheres or gets rebuked by one of the pack members. It is a simple and common language that dogs have developed over hundreds of years, why change what the dog understands?

It is common knowledge that the level of control/discipline during trial competitions have decreased over the past 40 plus years, the reason has nothing to do with the ability of the dogs but rests solely with the trainers who either train using "new" methods or prescribes to the philosophy that wilder dogs hunt better. A multidiscipline hunting dog needs a multidimensional training method using consistent commands and corrections executed at exactly the right moment.

A good trainer, or handler, will plan every single detail of his training sessions down to the finest details. He will know exactly which commands to use, when to apply more correction

or when to give more encouragement. He will have a confident body posture and language, he will anticipate an error by the dog and correct it at exactly the right time. His tone will be steady and simple without repeating commands or physically touching the dog. There will be no confusing, or contradictory, commands given. The dog will clearly understand what is expected from him during these sessions. If you lack the confidence and ability seek help, training in front of the mirror by yourself is a good start, so is writing down your commands and memorizing them.



Flake

Many clicker trainers find themselves frustrated and confused once they have to work a dog in a uncontrolled environment. Dogs that run after rabbits and chase cats are common. Dogs that do not socialize well with other dogs and people are not uncommon either. Once the dog reaches a distance away from its handler where the clicker is no longer effective, it is pure chaos. Making it even worse is that now the handler tries to “speak” to the dog using other methods with disastrous results. You cannot speak Afrikaans to a Chinese dog and expect it to understand you! Why start training with the clicker if you know it will not be effective once the dog reaches a certain distance from you, why go and teach a whole new language to the dog if you could have used one language

right from the start?

Working a dog out to 300-400 meters takes more than skill. The invisible lead that runs between dog and handler is woven from skill, ability, respect, praise, trust and glued together by the bond of interaction forged by hours and years of work. I have unfortunately seen more dogs getting trained with e-collars after clicker training. I will be humble and say this, if a dog is happy and you can control his three basic instincts (to hunt, to mate, to fight) when the dog is off leash then no matter what method you have used, you have succeeded.

Next article [here](#).

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.](#)

Trusting a Free Spirit

This article stems from this morning walk. My walks in the countryside are always a good source of inspiration.

Today I realized that, when you are “walking” an English Setter, all your senses have to be well alert in order to locate the dog who, as the breed demands, appears and disappears from your sight. You can hear him when is behind the trees, or coming out from a bush; you can see him when he is running free on a open ground. You can sometimes even smell him when he rolls into “something” and, no, you cannot taste nor touch him but, along the years, you have surely developed a sixth sense which tells you where the dog is, what is he doing and from which direction he is going to return.

While keeping all my antennae alert, I met a man with a golden retriever. She was meekly trotting by him carrying a huge log in her mouth. I am wondering whether I would be happy with such a dog or, if, on the contrary, I will be bored. As Briony was running at a full speed in a rice paddy, we met a runner trying to "Canicross" with a Cane Corso (a huge molosser) and another primitive dog, something bigger than a Shiba and smaller than an Akita. He was impressed with the recall, but most of all, he was astonished by her speed and deep castings. British pointing dogs, with the exception of Gordon Setters – sometimes, are the most extreme of the pointing dogs: they can hardly be understood by the average pet dog owner. They often look puzzled when the setter (or pointer) owner refuses to let their dog free on a tiny patch of ground surrounded by roads, explaining it is too small, it would not be safe.

They cannot understand how small those places are: an unleashed German Shepherd or a Border Collie would always be alert, ready to obey an order; a Dobermann or a Rottweiler would always keep an eye on their owner, because they feel the need to protect them. With an English Setter, things are different: the best gift you can give to a working English Setter is freedom. Yes, they enjoy snoring on soft surfaces, they like good food but, if you want your Setter to be truly happy... Let him free! His cute face will become a cute happy face and he will start exploring. A free English Setter would not worry much about his owner. They perfectly know we can take care of ourselves when they are busy exploring the world, finding birds and so on... These guys watch Discovery Channel! The countryside has so much to offer! Giving freedom to an English Setter is like taking a pig to an "all you can eat" restaurant, or gifting a woman with somebody else credit card! So much excitement clashes with control!

A free ranging setter may pay more attention to you if you are carrying a shotgun: dogs actively used for rough shooting understand teamwork, and most of them are very happy to pick

up and retrieve a fallen bird. This is how most of the Italian hunters “control” their setters. Things get more complicated when you do not carry any weapons: the setter (or the pointer) does not get any benefits from your presence and... This is the part I love the most! Because here relationship, training and MUTUAL trust enter the picture.

Relationship: well... Relationship, you need to have a relationship with your dog! No amount of training can make a dog can back to you if he does not want to. He shall trust you (mutual trust, see below) because he knows you are not going to affect his freedom, at least not that much. He will return to you, of follow your directions, and then he will be free again.

Training: the importance of training shall never be underestimated. Teaching a free spirited dog a reliable recall is not easy! But I am the living proof that the plain, basic, human being can do this.

Trust: it is the key. It what allows you to let your dog free, being certain he will come back to you. You really have to trust your Setter: some people panic when they see how far and how fast these dogs can go. But you really love “something”, especially something /somebody that thrives on freedom... let him free!

Ten years ago, a nice dinner by Angelo Cammi

English abstract

[To read full article in Italian click here.](#)

Angelo Cammi is a well respected British Pointing dogs judge and an English Setter lover. He is president of the Piacenza Chapter of the Italian Setter Society (SIS Piacenza).

This article was given to all those who were present at the Piacenza English Setter Specialty trial on wild birds (selvaggina natural), last summer. It is a very important article as it points out what happened, and what did not happen, during the last 10 years. Cammi wrote the article in Italian and intended it to be read by Italians but, we have to remember that people from all over Europe are interested in Italian English Setters. It is therefore important that they could receive valuable information as well. I am not going to translate the whole article (you can use google translate), but I (Rossella) am going to summarize the first part and then translate the last paragraphs.

The first part of the article is about a dinner. Some setter people are eating a pizza and discussing relevant topics for the breed, it was the year 2006. The issues discussed were: 1) Zone Doc; 2) Derby (and a Derby for females); 3) Grey Partridge; 4) Training Grounds. Note for foreigners:

- The Zone Doc were/are ENCI approved field trial grounds. The plan was to have special trialing grounds on which birds were absolutely wild and natural. Among the first selected areas there were natural preserves, parks and so...
- The Derby is a trial mimicking grand quete and reserved to dogs who: 1) are under 3 years old,; 2) were born in Italy and 3) had never been trialed before. The Derby is run solo.
- Grey Partridge... well... these birds seemed/seem to be sort of extinct in nature but, being valuable birds for dog trialing, Italians dream/wish/hope to have them back.
- Training grounds: they do not exists but for some B and C selected areas, which are extremely small and limited. To train a dog you basically have to act like a poacher

for most part of the year. Why? We do not know and the question was/is... how can this change?

These were the topics discussed over dinner by Cammi and his fellow settermen... what happened 10 years later? This is the second part of the article:

- The plan to set up Zone D0C did not work. All trialing grounds now are Zone D0C and more and more grounds became D0C, including private estates (in which birds are not always wild and natural). Why?
- Derby for females? We currently do not have any.
- Training grounds? Nothing has changed.



Hammer owned by Del Borghi

CAMMI'S THOUGHTS (full translation)

Anything else to consider? Yes, many things. At the Derby 2016 we had 170 entries and 4 awards (about 2%). Yes, what matters is genetic selection, breeding... but year after year we have less and less awards. Of course we have many working

champions, many famous trailers but? Something is obviously not working even when we celebrate dogs winning “important” (so defined) competitions, competitions that are, indeed, spectacular but concreteness is a different thing and working standards and trial rules are focused on it. Basically the technically acclaimed “selective breeding” is giving birth to specimen that are getting more and more different to a real pointing dog. The judge’s evaluations we read say: ***“Performance suitable to the kind of trial, typical gallop, does not meet birds. Excellent gallop, asked to run a second round bumps into birds”***. An endless number of evaluations look like this one so? What are we selecting for?

CAMMI’S COMMENTS (full translation)

Some ideas and some declaration are born randomly (and with some self-reference) especially when they are apt to find populist consensus but nothing comes after, at least not yet.

I do not want to be polemic, polemics do not bring anything and do not help. I want to understand and the thirst for knowledge is always young and strong.

CAMMI’S CONCLUSION (full translation)

I thank those who chose to go hunting/shooting with an English Setter. They preserve the pointing breeds’s authenticity. Congratulation and please always remember avidity, intelligence and conformation, this will preserve the English Setter!

Angelo Cammi, Piacenza (Italy), April 2016