

# The Pointer by Arthur Croxton-Smith

From the book *The Power of the Dog* (1910)

## The Pointer

*"His nostril wide into the murky air,  
Sagacious of his quarry from so far."*

*Milton—Paradise Lost*

*tiff by the tainted gale with open nose,  
Outstretch'd and finely sensible, draws full,  
Fearful, and cautious, on the latent prey;  
As in the sun the circling covey bask  
Their varied plumes, and, watchful every way,  
Through the rough stubble turn the secret eye.*

Thomson

The respective virtues of the Pointer and Setter have been discussed without stint for many years, the advocates of each retaining their opinions uninfluenced by the arguments on the other side. It may not be known that no less a person than Sir Walter Scott once had a mild hand in the game. In "St. Ronan's Well," if you turn to the account of the dinner party which led to much ill-humour, you will find these remarks: "*The company were talking of shooting, the most animating topic of conversation among Scottish country gentlemen of the younger class, and Tyrrel had mentioned something of a favourite setter, an uncommonly handsome dog, from which he had been for some time separated, but which he expected would rejoin him in the course of next week. 'A setter,' retorted Sir Bingo with a sneer; 'a pointer, I suppose you mean?' 'No, sir,' said Tyrrel; 'I am perfectly aware of the difference betwixt a setter and a pointer, and I know the old-fashioned setter is become unfashionable among modern sportsmen. But I love my dog*

*as a companion, as well as for his merits in the field; and a setter is more sagacious, more attached, and fitter for his place on the hearth-rug, than a pointer—not,' he added, 'from any deficiency of intellects on the pointer's part, but he is generally so abused while in the management of brutal breakers and grooms that he loses all excepting his professional accomplishments, of finding and standing steady to game.'*"

Sir Bingo could not understand why one should wish for anything more. He never before heard that a setter was fit to follow any man's heels but a poacher's. Tyrrel's point was that "many people have been of opinion, that both dogs and men may follow sport indifferently well, though they do happen, at the same time, to be fit for mixing in friendly intercourse in society." A sentiment which we cordially approve. Whether the shooting man should select a Pointer or Setter to aid him in the field or on the moor resolves itself very largely into a question of individual taste. Either, when well broken, is capable of carrying out his highly specialized duties with great skill, and no prettier sight can be imagined than a brace of these clever animals quartering the ground and coming to a statuesque point when the game is winded. Of course, in externals the two breeds present many striking differences. Some admire the beautiful coat and gentle expression of the Setter, while others there are who declare that:

Loveliness

Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,  
But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.



"Flax" Owned by William Arkwright, Esq. Painted by Maud Earl (1910)

In other words, form appeals more to them than coat. They dwell upon the handsome outline of the Pointer, his symmetrical, powerfully knit body, his straight legs and muscular quarters. The modern dog is not without his critics, however, who contend that a foxhound cross has been used in modern times as well as many years ago, and that the hound qualities introduced are detrimental rather than otherwise. It is urged that the duties demanded of the Pointer are even more exacting than those of the foxhound, as regards stamina, and that if the old dogs could perform them creditably there was no occasion to resort to outside blood, which developed a headstrong disposition that renders breaking more difficult, and tends to unsteadiness. In justice to the other disputants, it should be explained that they deny the alien cross, and contend that, as the foxhound is a perfect piece of mechanism, Pointer breeders are justified in attempting to work up to such a worthy model. Although one does not ask for a potterer it is questionable if great pace in a gundog is either necessary or desirable, for the fast animal is liable to pass birds that a slower one would find. After all, the truest test of excellence is finding birds for the guns, a feat in which

the flashy worker is not always proficient.

In the innumerable letters which have appeared upon the subject I have never seen reference to the remarks of General Hutchinson. Possibly they have been quoted and escaped my observation. This gentleman, who is very rightly regarded as a sound authority, laid stress upon a sporting dog having small, round, hard feet, which he held [to be a more certain test of endurance than any other point.](#) *“Rest assured, that the worst loined dogs with good feet are capable of more fatigue in stubble or heather than the most muscular and best loined, with fleshy ‘understandings.’ The most enduring pointers I have ever seen hunted had more or less of the strain of the foxhound; but doubtless they were proportionately hard to break.”*

A variety of Pointer not much seen now-a-days is the black, or Scottish, which, of course, is free from any imputations as to the purity of his lineage. He is said to be all that one could wish.

**From the same book:** [click here to read about the English Springer.](#)

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project!](#)

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## A few more words on gun shyness

The [previous article](#) on gun shyness triggered many reactions.

This had pretty much been forecasted, but I hoped to find a larger number of open minded people. In the end, however, I must admit hearing that you, owner, can be deemed responsible

for your own dog gun shyness is not pleasant. Modern ethology is not being kind here, and it is much easier to blame the genes, the bitch, the stud or the breeder. Acknowledging the role of environment, upbringing and training is tough, it can make us feel guilty.

What did the readers say? I was told stuff like *"I never introduced the pup to noises, but when the first day of the shooting season came, I brought him with me and shot a whole covey of partridge on his head and nothing happened! The dog is fine! Socialization and all that stuff, bullshit."* If these people had carefully read the first article, they would have realized I wrote that sometimes people are very lucky, and a dog can survive such intense experience, without any prior training. Is luck often that blind? Not really, what most likely happens is that the dog has been exposed to noise and other stimuli, the owner is simply not aware of this. Maybe the pups grew up by the house, or on a farm, where he learnt to recognize the tractor, the lawn mower and other sounds, maybe they were born during a stormy summer and learnt not to fear thunders. Dogs living near humans are generally exposed to noise and this could prevent gun shyness.

It is now time to discuss the second objection *"In the past dogs were not socialized, nor exposed to noise, yet, they were normal"*. This is a false myth. Let's thing about the past: about one century ago, almost all the hunting dogs used to belong to rich people. These people had professional staff taking care of the dogs, it is highly unlikely that these dogs were poorly socialized. What about ordinary people? At a certain moment in history, people with lower incomes started to become interested in hunting dogs. These people were mainly farmers and, usually, had some mixed breed dogs who could work like a hound, a spaniel or a terrier (their contemporary equivalent would be the lurcher). These dogs used to live on the farm, close to their owner, to other humans and to human made noises.

In Italy, lower and middle class hunters began being involved with purebred hunting dogs after WWII, more vigorously from the sixties. At the time, the idea of breeding dogs as a business had not yet been developed and most of the litters were homemade and raised by amateurs. It could be the rich man with his staff or the plain hunter, sharing the burden of raising a litter with his wife and children: dogs and humans, whatever the wealth, used to live close to each other.

Things changed later, as soon as people realized that breeding and selling dogs could become a profitable business. Dogs began to be seen as “livestock” and raised as you would raise a farm animal. Separate living quarters with kennels were built and sometimes multiple litters were raised simultaneously. Pups are nowadays sometimes raised at a distance from human made noises and sometimes experience less interactions with humans. Commercial kennels, however, are not the only ones to blame, hunters have changed as well. Some hunters now live in the city, they do not want to share their apartment with muddy dogs and send them to live “in the countryside” (locked in kennels) paying someone local human being to go feed and clean them. Some hunters have a detached house in the suburbs, but pups destroy gardens so they end up in a kennel far from the house. Hunters return home late from work, they are tired and they do not feel like interacting with their new pup, even if he has a great pedigree and was paid a lot of money.

If the pup would not be such a thoroughbred but just a farm mutt, things could maybe be easier for him. Some modern purebreds are not that different from thoroughbred horses and are equally nervous and sensitive. We selected these dogs taking speed and reactivity in great account, well... they can now be highly reactive even when we would prefer them not to be. Times and contexts have changed, why people refuse to acknowledge this? I think we should pay more attention to the dogs' needs and remember that the dog is “man best friend”. We

should put the pup first and do our best to make him grow into a happy and fearless adult. We should no longer bring a gun shy pup back to the breeder asking for a replacement or a refund, we should, in a few words, be responsible of our actions.

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project](#)!

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## Does a gun-shyness gene exist?

I wrote about this on several occasions and, usually, I do not like re-writing about things I already wrote about but, last week, reading an online forum, I realized that gun-shyness is still a mystery.

People buy dogs, mate dogs, collect dogs but never “waste” time trying to educate themselves about dogs or, more simply, trying to switch their brains on. I am not sure whether you are familiar with Patrick Pageat, he is a French veterinarian and animal behaviourist who wrote the book “L’homme et le Chien” (The Man and the Dog), he writes: *“How can a gun-shyness gene exists? How could nature have foreseen gun powder and shotguns?”*

## Le mythe du gène de la peur du fusil

On trouve dans de nombreux ouvrages la description du gène de la peur du coup de fusil ou encore du gène de la peur du bâton, etc. Le gène de la peur du fusil pose cependant un énorme problème théorique qui est celui de l'extrême prévoyance de la nature qui a bien sûr imaginé qu'un jour l'homme inventerait la poudre et le fusil ! On imagine assez difficilement l'ADN préfigurant l'existence des armes à feu... ou alors on entre dans le domaine de la théologie et non plus de la biologie. Ce qui est moins drôle, c'est que des chiens ont été euthanasiés parce que considérés comme porteurs d'un gène qui les rendrait inaptes et donc impropres à la reproduction.

Aujourd'hui, il existe, dans le cadre des épreuves de qualification pour les chiens de défense, ce qu'on appelle le TAN, le test d'aptitude naturelle – notons qu'« aptitude naturelle » sous-entend que c'est inné. Lors de ce TAN, les chiens subissent une épreuve de réaction au tir du pistolet à amorce. Si le chien a peur, c'est *gravissime*, et le chien est considéré comme très mauvais. Or il faut savoir que le TAN a été créé par des gens qui sont eux-mêmes éleveurs et qui vous expliquent froidement que, si un chien a une mauvaise note, c'est qu'il a été mal préparé pour son test. Ce qui est pour le moins étonnant car soit il s'agit effectivement d'aptitudes naturelles et le chien est comme il

est, soit c'est un examen qu'on fait passer au chien après apprentissage et il s'agit donc d'un acquis, ce qui signifie purement et simplement que le gène de la peur du coup de fusil ne peut pas exister.



Obviously, nature could not have predicted shotguns, but some dogs are indeed gun-shy, why? Are they faulty? I hate seeing dogs labelled as "faulty", their behaviour can be explained through a more refined explanation. These dogs are not "faulty": did you know, for instance, that some dogs are more sensitive than others? This has been demonstrated in humans as well, some people are more sensitive to noise, light and so on and this has been proved scientifically. So, yes, some dogs might be more sensitive than others. Is this genetic? I think so and, in my experience, I found gun-shy dogs in some breeds more than in others. These dogs, and more generalizing these breeds, were also more difficult to rehabilitate. Generally speaking, again, these dogs were quite reactive, fast and somehow nervous and... sensitive! It is selection, it is how we want dogs to be: let's try to compare an English Setter (or a Border Collie) and a Neapolitan Mastiff: they are not exactly the same thing.

We should not, however, talk about fear, analyzing sensitivity would be much more appropriate. Are there dogs who are more sensitive to noise? Yes, but being sensitive to something, does not mean being fearful of something. Yet, some dogs are afraid of gunshots, but fear came after sensitivity and was triggered by something external to them. What do most of the fearful dogs have in common? Could environmental factors play a role? Most of the gun-shy dogs I met (in about 20 years spent around gundogs), had indeed something in common: they all had been poorly socialized.

I am not going to write about puppy socialization in this article, but I am going to point that, sometimes, hunters, as well as dog breeders, do not pay enough attention to this fundamental process. The "average" hunting dog is born in the countryside and grows up in a kennel, an environment which tends to be rather silent and lacks of natural stimuli. These quiet, rural settings do not fully prepare the pup for his future life.

Furthermore, once adopted by the new owner, the pup continues living in a similar environment and tends to be left there until he turns 7 or 8 months old. Only a few hunters start training pups early, as they fear they would get “ruined”. Once deemed old enough, the pups are put in the car (so far they had generally been in the car only to go to a veterinarian) and are taken somewhere to be tested on a bird (that is going to be shot), generally on a quail, or, even worse, to a shooting party.



Having had no exposure to gunshots, two things might happen: 1) the dog has a very strong temperament (and his owner is very lucky!) and he does not mind the noise or 2) we witness a disaster and the dog becomes gun-shy. Unfortunately, these things happen and... frequently! I did not invent anything and, sadly, I have seen this happen more than once and I can tell you about people who keep repeating these same mistakes. There are people who end up owning only gun-shy dogs: each pup they purchase will turn in a gun-shy adult. Some of them realized this and now only purchase adult dogs. Some other people, on the other hand, had never owned a gun-shy dog despite having purchased all their dogs as puppies, from different sources..

Let me tell a short story: M. Smith purchased a high quality puppy and raised her in the kennel. Once she turned 7 months old, he introduced her to birds and gunshots with the fore mentioned techniques and she became gun-shy. During the

following YEARS she overcame, more or less, her gun-shyness but her breeder donated a second pup, a sister to the previous one, to Mr. Smith, as a replacement. Mr. Smith, after committing the same mistakes for many years, had the chance to meet some properly socialized puppies and decides raise her differently. The new pup grows up experiencing noises and living different experiences: she is not gun-shy and she is much much bolder than her older sister.

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project](#)!

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## **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](#)

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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](#)

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## 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.](#)*

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## Mind the Wind by Tok Mostert

So... you think running a good field dog is all about the dog, maybe, but a good handler will be able to interpret the conditions and “assist” the dog to have the best possible chance of finding birds.

Temperature, moisture content, humidity and wind all play a part in the scenting conditions and that is something all dog handlers should keep in mind, if they want to consistently hit birds on the field. Often handlers will say, the wind just did not work for us or the birds were holding tight and the dog could not find them. Even a great dog will have days in which the wind plays havoc with their scenting ability, often it leads to flushes.

**Learn to read the wind and maybe you and your dog will be hitting birds when others do not.**

I was running Flake on a huge field with a stone edge, or wall, forming the left border of the field. The wind was also blowing from left to right that day and it was pumping. We were about 20 minutes into her run when I sent her right onto the wall, as in tight against it. Sure enough within 30 meters she locked up solid on point. She could scent the bird (pheasant) but could not locate it exactly. All the signs were



there for a solid point, front foot up, tail dead steady and swollen the first 10cm, head at the right height for the terrain, but there was a very , very slight left to right movement of the head. I gave her the advance command and sure enough she put the bird onto its wings. The bird was no more than a meter ahead of her, yet it was hard to place. This set my mind to thinking of how the airflow over the stone wall affected her scenting ability. Not only that ,but how does the wind affect bird scent in general with obstacles, trees and other obstructions in the way?



Any wind?

On the internet, you can find diagrams (google wind flow and select images as search option – we can't reproduce them for copyright reasons) that show airflow around/over obstacles, this clears up a few things I wanted to know. Turbulent air behind the obstacles will make it hard for a dog to place a bird 100%. The air that compresses around or over a obstacle creates a narrower band of scent that is also faster than the ambient wind. Certain obstacles will create pockets of no airflow behind them at certain wind speeds, imagine a bird holding tight behind a tree and there is virtually no air to carry its scent to the dog, even though there is a good breeze going.

**Good retriever trainers will tell you that sometimes the hardest retrieve for a dog is in a depression of a field, it is almost airless in those pockets. Now... just imagine how close your dog needs to be to find scent in such a situation!**

Maybe a great dog will have this figured out by itself in time, I am going to help my dog by paying more attention to this.

*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.](#)*

Next article [here](#).

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## 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 DOC did not work. All trialing grounds now are Zone DOC and more and more grounds became DOC, 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**

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# **UNCAA – ST. Hubert Academy Field Trial**

## **UNCAA – Accademia di S. Uberto Pointing Dogs Trial**

Last June I was invited to a trial organized by the [UNCAA](#) (National Union of Appennines and Alps Hunters) – ST. Hubert Academy, but the trial was later cancelled and re-scheduled for September. The grounds and the birds changed as well, the trial was going to be held at the Ruino Estate, on the highest hills of Oltrepo' Pavese , and the dogs were going to be assessed on grey partridges, no longer on quails Those who know me, are well aware of how much I love Ruino as I spent about eight years regularly shooting and handling English



Setters there. Ruino's grounds are perfect for pointing dogs, and they are wide and open enough to make any dogs belonging to a British pointing breed happy.



Ruino – Villa Alta

In the e-mail I received, there were only a few details on the trial. It was created specifically for those associated to the UNCAA-St. Hubert Academy, nevertheless it was open to everyone. As I did not know what was going to happen exactly, I forwarded the invitation only to a few people, next time I will be more generous!

By choosing to be there, I gathered more details. The trial was open to all the pointing dogs, and most of the competitors were HPRs, you will soon understand why. Dogs were requested to behave like in a ENCI/FCI official trial but, big difference, eliminating any dogs was not on the menu. Major or eliminating faults were going to be written down but, in some cases, especially if the dog was a young one, the judge could decide to let him continue his run, in order to assess his

natural qualities. The trial's aim, indeed, was not to nominate a winner but to see, assess and describe each dog natural qualities. At the end of the trial, each dog was going to receive a written evaluation (like it is done in any FCI trials) and a score. Scoring had German hunting trials as a model, this explains why we had so many German HPRs competing, some of which had already been tested at VJP, HZP. VGP, German Puppy Derby and Solms). As you might see looking at the evaluation form, natural qualities were considered very important( Ferma = Point; Cerca, impegno, passione, avidità, movimento e stile = Quartering, dedication, passion, avidity, movement and style; Correttezza del cane e collegamento con il conduttore = Obedience/training and connection/cooperation with the handler).



*Perdix perdix* (Grey Partridge)

Organizers were expecting 10-15 dogs to compete but 25 showed up: The dogs had different ages (many were around one year old) and very different backgrounds and training. There were

some experienced dogs who regularly attend trials and dogs, without formal training, which are used for rough shooting exclusively. According to the judge Ivan Torchio (whose mentor had been Giacomo Griziotti), all the dogs, including the best one, need to explore the ground with more "logic". He explained the difference between exploring the ground during a "quail" trial (dog should quarter very regularly (left/right), in a very geometric pattern and not miss any ground) and during a "wild bird" trial (the dog has more freedom but still...) and concluded saying that all the dogs he saw need to be refined under this aspect. Some dogs proved to be highly skilled and perfectly trained, they waited for the handler on point, roaded on command without being touched, remained steady, dropped and came back when asked to and so on...) others were wilder, some of them were very young and some others paid for their handler's lack of skills. Several humans, indeed, made awful mistakes: a man roaded and produced in behalf of his dog (then he-the man – literally ran after the bird...); another one insisted on making the bird fly by beating the ground; some kept yelling at the dog... A few handlers asked if they could keep a collar and a check cord on the dog for safety purposes, or if they could pick up the dog before the bird flushed: they were given permission to do so but, of course, this was taken into account in the final evaluation. Silent and "professional" handling, instead, though not compulsory, was appreciated. Two pups wanted to enter the trial as well and they were asked to find a planted quail while on a check cord. They both found it and the GWP was so careful and concentrated that she remained steady to wing, without having ever been trained for that.





## ATTESTATO DI PARTECIPAZIONE

Prova su selvaggina liberata senza sparo

Data: 11/9/016 Partecipante Sig. DIPALMA ROSSILLA

Nome del cane: BRIONY Razza: SETTER Età: \_\_\_\_\_

Turno: \_\_\_\_\_ Ora: \_\_\_\_\_

Punteggio:

Ferma (da 1 a 10) 10

Cerca, impegno, passione, avidità, movimento, stile (da 1 a 8): 8

Correttezza del cane e collegamento con il conduttore (da 1 a 5): 5

TOTALE PUNTEGGIO: 23

Relazione:

PRESTAZIONE AL MASSIMO LIVELLO COME PRESA D'INTERNO E UTILIZZO RAGIONATO DEL VENTO INTELLIGENZA NELLA CERCA MA NON SOSTENUTA DA UTILIZZO LOGICO DEL TERRAENO BASE DELLA PREPARAZIONE MA NON UBBIDIENZA AUTOMATICA NECESSARIA NELLA PREPARAZIONE PIU' URGENTE - QUALITA' GUSTISSIMA

Briony

The grounds were those typical of the High Appennines, alfalfa

fields, furrow fields, bushes and so on. It was very hot, late in the morning we reached temperatures above 30 degrees, wind was weak and kept changing its direction making the dogs' job very difficult. Each dog was given ample opportunities to find birds, but a few failed and some, given the difficult conditions, eventually bumped into birds. The organizers plan to have this trial again next summer as it is a very nice way to keep an eye on the most experienced dogs, and to introduce shooters and pet owners to trials.

Briony did very well. She found a grey partridge and a quail. Produced nicely and remained steady. She got the highest possible score and the judge wrote that her run was at the highest levels for quartering, speed and use of the ground/wind... He would have liked more refined castings (left and right) and that obedience could be more automatic (indeed it was me telling him that she dropped the second time I whistled, not the first!). He concluded saying that she is an extremely high quality dog.

### **Handlers Opinions:**

**Sara Orlandi (GSP):** This was the second trial organized by the Accademia di St. Uberto that I attended. The previous one was the 24 hours deer tracking trial (FCI recognized) organized in Cecima, this time we are in Ruino... another wonderful place! It was great to see my dog working with such a determination and then receive such a positive written critique by "The Professor" Ivan Torchio! We later had a very tasty lunch with much game and we share opinions on dogs while eating all together. I am likely to show up again at the next trial!

**Daniele Malacalza (Spinone Italiano):** I felt at ease, people were nice, friendly and funny. Ivan proved to be extremely skilled, more than I expected. Dogs were evaluated differently than they use to be during ordinary trials.

Note: St.Hubert Academy does not take its name after ST.Hubert

type trials (as some misunderstood). It is school (hence the name academy) which organizes classes on shooting (including woodcock counting), stalking, deer tracking, hound handling, wildlife management and game keeping through Italy. Classes are open to everybody wishing to gain expertise in these fields, some of the classes offer certification which are officially recognized by the Italian government and by several EU countries.

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

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

The videos uploaded slowly but, minutes after they became visible to the public, I began receiving several private messages. Those messages, in the weeks and months ahead, became questions asked face to face. People wanted to know if I used an e-collar, or if I shoot her in the butt, a very popular method suggested by many (in)famous trainers. My answer was that steadiness derived from obedience, an answer puzzled most of the listeners. They could not believe that the

tools I used were a lead, a check cord and a whistle, and the few humans who did believe me asked me to make miracles: a woman sort of wanted me to make is HPR steady overnight using the internet!



I do not have superpowers, but maybe my mentor does, as a matter of fact he is widely known as the “Shaman”, or as “White Feather”. White Feather (from here on WF) has been knowing me for a very long time: I was one of his students at the three months class (!!!) to become a certificate stalker (deer, roe buck, fallow deer, boar...) and he taught me during the course I attended to become a certified biometric data collector (we measure and establish the age of stalked and hunted game). He saw me and interacted with me several times during trials, gatherings, conferences and so... yet, before accepting to “train” me, he wanted to meet me again and look at me under a different light. Our first formal meeting happened over a cup of espresso, we were seated at table by the street, Briony was on lead and a cat passed by: I prevented any possible reactions and he appreciated that, a



training session was scheduled for the following day.

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



After another espresso (we both like coffee), we moved to the

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



But then it came the day. Not only Briony was dropping to whistle, she was also steady to game and she had become an obedient and reliable dog (and I passed my fish inspection exam as well). Trials came next and all the hard and boring work brought to fruition, but this is another story. At the

moment I am still incredulous and proud to be part to such a long standing gundog training tradition.