

Italian Shooters & British Style Handling

The shooting season here starts formally on September's third Sunday, aka today. I, however, did not want to "open", as at the moment I am incredibly busy having to take care of too many things simultaneously (writing calms me down). Being so busy and so absent minded, I have not noticed that my shooting license had expired in July. Without such a license, which is quite troublesome to renew, I cannot carry a shotgun, hence I cannot go shooting. Furthermore, the average Italian pointing dog has no formal training, which means I cannot run Briony with him/her, or I will waste all the training I did for trials, especially for British trials. So, basically, I wanted to stay home and finish working on some articles. My friends, however, were extremely good at tracking me and "retrieving" me to the traditional lunch they offer every year.

I showed up late as my plan was to skip lunch and leave early, but, despite my very limited social skills, they nicely trapped me: offered me organic farm made salami and coppa (a ham made with the pig neck/back), stewed hare and more, I politely accepted something and planned to go home, right after lunch. I just wanted Briony to have a run on the hills, alone, on the way back home, just to make her happy, she deserves to be a happy dog. But... Unexpectedly, a friend asked me if he could shoot over Briony, as his dogs were tired. I told him it was ok for me, as far as he did not mind the fact I was going to handle her in "the British way" . I also warned him that at the moment, I've not undertaken any training related retrieves as I am focused on steadiness. Other people wanted to join us, but they wanted to bring their dogs (who are not steady!) and planned to shoot a hare. I told them that NO, I was not going to run Briony in such conditions and they looked at me disappointed, not fully understanding my

concerns.



Hello, my name is Briony and I am a happy dog :-)

To make everybody happy, me and my "client", left earlier and picked the highest, more rugged part of the hill as a shooting ground. When we left the car, it was incredibly hot and the thick vegetation (perfect for a spaniel) forced me to run her downwind. A few minutes later, however, she was already on point. She then nicely roaded and produced a female pheasant which the shooter missed (despite the fact I had placed him correctly). I then stopped the dog, she was over-heated, gave her water and forced her to rest. I l told him it was too hot, I was going to put her back in the car and end the day after that nice action. He agreed and we began circling around the wood to reach the car, which was well above us and... Briony pointed again, began to road and a pheasant flew, well ahead of her, too far to be shot, she remained steady. No... We do not have that many birds in Italy, game management of unkept grounds is extremely poor: you have birds at the beginning of the shooting season when they get released, the grounds we walked on today are unfortunately going to be desert soon.



Briony pointing three pheasants

I then located a dog spa, also known as mud puddle, and sent Briony there so that she could refresh and relax. When we moved again towards the car, I was trying to keep her “high”, as I was hearing dogs and bells below us. Keeping her “high” she ended up climbing the mountain, running on a very steep and rocky area. Up on the top she pointed; you could hardly see her, I could spot a tiny white head hidden in the bushes, my friend could not see her, but he trusted me enough to join me on my walk on the rocks. There she was, beautifully pointing something: I was right! Still she was not ready to move ahead and she was right: three female pheasants were sitting right in front of her with no intention to move. In the meantime, the bells’ sound was getting closer and I did not want any dogs to ruin my work. I yelled (this was very Italian!) to pick up their dogs, or at least to re-direct them somewhere else: no dogs came close so... I must have been very convincing. In the meantime, I was also taking care of the dog, of the birds (who kept walking in the bush changing their

direction) and of the "client". I do not know how I could manage it and I am not sure I will be successful again dealing with such a task, but me and the dog succeeded in making the birds flying separately (one flew, dog steady, man shoot, dog roaded, second flew, dog steady...) and in a suitable direction to be shoot. Shooter got one and missed two, one of which went straight to the people downhill, below us. We asked them to come over and help with the retrieve and while they were climbing up, Briony pointed again, this time it was a handsome male pheasant which she roaded beautifully in the bushes, it was a long way, flushed it nicely, remained steady and the man eventually hit it and went to retrieve it by himself. I put the lead on and began walking downhill.



Meeting the watchers on the way down

To my surprise, the four men below us, had witnessed and watched carefully her work with the first three birds. Not only they were impressed by the manner she located and pointed them, any shooters would have agreed on that, but they were seriously surprised by the production and by the effect of

steadiness and training on the action's beauty and outcome. So... Well, I hope this little happening will inspire some more Italian shooters, I would be happy to have more well trained dogs around and to stop being told that "steadiness to flush is just for circus dogs"!