

HOUNDS — The relationship between work and good looks (i.e., hunting & showing)

By Nigel Peel, MFH North Cotswold



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I have been asked to talk to you about the relationship between work and good looks (i.e., hunting and showing). Why do we want hounds to do anything other than hunt? Does it really matter what they look like? People can have a tremendous amount of fun with a bobbery pack so why not just

leave it at that? The reasons I would suggest are these.

Firstly, a pack of hounds is exactly what it says it is, a pack not a collection, therefore they must be similar in height and speed, enabling them to run up together during the hard, fast hunt. This I am sure that those of you who hunt the coyote will feel to be of prime importance. Hounds strung out across the countryside is not a proper use of the whipper-in's time. To enable a pack to run up together they must be similarly made, that is that their pace-points-shoulders-hind quarters – must be similar, as must their stamina. Deep chested hounds as opposed to broad chested hounds are, in my opinion, preferable. The shoulder lies flat and swings straight as opposed to a broad chested hound whose shoulders will not

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move as well, thus not allowing the animal to move as freely.

The breeding of a pack of hounds takes a long time and I would like to tell you how my wife and I did this at the North Cotswold. When we took the hounds in 1988 they were a collection rather than a pack. They hunted, but not together. We have a very good hunt in our second season, a five mile point, nine miles as they ran, in 50 minutes. They caught the fox at my feet and the bitch that caught it was the aunt of my first Peterborough champion. I blew 18 and a half couple away from the covert where the fox was found and there were 12 couple present when the fox was caught. As they were breaking the fox up I could see the rest of the hounds, who had got very strung out

because of lack of pace, running on to where we were. Not a satisfactory state of affairs. Pace and stamina are supremely important and

while some of the hounds had pace and most had stamina, it was not a state that existed in equal measures. Hounds must also have nose, drive and cry. These last three points are also hereditary but may not be tested in the show ring.

There are very few bad hounds bred. I am talking now of a hunting hound. On the whole, poor temperament and performance is caused by bad handling. The enable a pack to be properly assessed they must be handled consistently well, preferably by the

same person for several seasons. This enables the hounds to develop what the late 10th Duke of Beaufort was wont to refer to as fox sense. Some hounds develop this sooner than others but it is vital, especially during a poor scenting time, that hounds have the ability to hunt the fox or at least to indicate the direction the fox has gone, in whatever circumstances they find themselves. This is fox sense and, like the hound's ability to hunt up a road or track, takes time to develop. If the huntsman is inclined to gallop his hounds about, this instinct will never be developed and all the hound's hereditary ability will thus be wasted.

Showing demonstrates to use the standard of hound we should be aiming for. This is, in horse terms, a middleweight hunter.

Although most packs of hounds no longer hack to meet, hunt all day and then have to hack home, they should be able to do so and it is only by testing them hard that you will know which hounds are lacking in this vital element.



North Cotswold showing hounds

When we started to develop the North Cotswold hounds, we were extremely fortunate in that Tim Unwin's Cotswold hounds, the Duke of Beaufort's hounds, bred by Ian Farquhar, and Captain Wallace's Exmoor hounds were then at their highest. Richard Summer had not yet got the Heythrop to the pitch of excellence that he achieved in the 90s, and VWH, bred by Martin Scott was also in the ascent. Thus we used Beaufort, Cotswold, VWH

and Heythrop sires on our bitches. Because we only hunted three days a week, we could not keep the number out hounds necessary to have two packs so we drafted the dog hounds and just had a bitch pack. This enabled me to put more bitches to as I would only require the bitch whelps. The dog whelps we gave away. Doing this allowed me to have our present number of 10 tail female lines in the kennel, which allows for space to ring the changes with sires and bitches. Mrs. Gregson, who was for many years Master of the Crawley and Horsham, a wise and clever breeder of hounds, once told me it would take 10 years to breed a brood bitch. I would not disagree with this. Our first success in the show ring came in 1994 and our hounds have found favor with the judges since. In recent years we have kept our dog hounds,

a source of great pleasure to me. On average we keep seven couple of those we feel have the potential to be stallion hounds. We have an average of 30 visiting bitches every year and sometimes more. We have won several prizes with our dog hounds – unentered

champions at Peterborough, two-couple classes and last year we won the stallion hound class with our Caliph.

What has all this produced in the hunting field? The North Cotswold country is not a good scenting country. The Cotswold hills are all brash, very little depth of soil and while they allow for wonderful hunts at times extremely fast, the hounds have to be low-scenting to cope with the conditions. It is very easy to have the strung out on the

hills and in the valleys and coombes, so cry is of supreme importance, as is athleticism, for the country is festooned with sheep wire and two strands of barbed wire which hounds must negotiate every day they go out. Drive must be linked to all of this for what goes on in the hound's head gives it the courage to run hard to stay with the rest of the pack from the start to the finish of the day. Courage is also required to catch the quarry.

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The pack that wins most of the prizes at hound shows I have noticed are the ones that show the best sport. There are reasons for this. The principal one is that they are bred and hunted by people who have been there a long time. Continuity is a great key.

For example, in America, the Live Oak and the Midland, with whom I have hunted, and the Blue Ridge, with whom I have not, have beautiful packs of hounds that show very good sport. This is the same in England. The outcrosses that we have to our American blood came originally from the great Bill Braynard at Old Dominion, and have subsequently come from the Midland and from Like Oak with great success. Continuity in breeding and handling the hounds produces great success in the field and good fortune in the show ring. That, I believe, is the great connection between the two. Showing enables new Masters to see the best and to make up their minds as to what type they wish to go for. When I first took a pack of hounds I was enormously encouraged and helped by the great Masters of that time. Captain Wallace's door was always open and while he did not suffer fools gladly, he

would spend a considerable amount of time helping Masters to understand what they were meant to be doing with their packs of hounds. He believed that a bad scenting day was no excuse for a bad day's hunting and that proper organization of the country and the hounds properly handled was the way to show good sport.

The lake Duke of Beaufort, whose hounds have won, I believe, a staggering 50 championships at Peterborough Royal

Foxhound Show, was of the

same mind. These two, in my opinion, great men, were the Colossei at whose feet we young Masters learned.

Things of course were much easier in those days and we were able to spend the summer months looking at other people's hounds in kennels and at puppy shows as well as the major hound shows. We were able to assess the value of outcrosses. Martin Letts, who I believe to be of the same stamp as Captain Wallace and the lake Duke, was one of the leading lights of the hill hound outcross that has proved so successful and popular. The West Country harrier, who I admire enormously, is also worthy of consideration and I value my outcrosses to that blood hugely. Outcrossing should be handled with care and, in my opinion, those knowledgeable enough to see the outcross through its various vicissitudes successfully.

At the beginning of the last century the English foxhound was going through what was affectionately known as the Shorthorn Era. A number of far-sighted people felt that the hound could be enormously improved. The move to the Welsh cross was started by such knowledgeable men

who owned their own packs of hounds as Sir Edward Curre, who I hasten to add was also a Member of Parliament, Captain Jack Evans, Master of the Brecon, the 10th Earl of Coventry and later, Sir Peter Farquhar, your great countryman Ikey Bell, Major Scott and the 1th Duke of Beaufort. These

were responsible for breeding the great Brecon Paragon, Carmarthenshire, Nimrod, Croome Clansman, South and West Wilts Godfrey, Mr. Curre's Danger among others. They met with stern

resistance from the traditional wing of the foxhunting camp. However, they had on their side the 10th Duke of Beaufort who was encouraged by Ikey Bell to accept a bitch from the Brecon kennel, bred by Captain Evans, called Petrel. The 10th Duke, or Masters as he was known, became the champion of the enlightenment and thus the modern foxhound developed. Not all outcrosses are so hugely dramatic but it is important to know where you are going and not just think that it is a good idea, for that way lies disaster.

Showing hounds successfully is a lengthy business. We have all seen hounds badly shown that, if perhaps shown by somebody who knew how to do it properly, would do better in the show ring. The Duke of Beaufort's then huntsman, Brian Gupwell, was a fine exponent. He was a great character. His father had hunted the Fernie for as many seasons and during the War and had been kennel huntsman to the Ramle Vale in Palestine. Ronnie Longford, who some of you may have come across, was serving with the veterinary corps at

Sarafand Camp, where the Ramle Vale hounds were kenneled, told me that the camels caused havoc with the horses and one evening, Walter Gupwell, strong drink having been taken, rode a camel around the camp, blowing his hunting horn! Considerable consternation ensued which

resulted in Walter appearing on squadron orders the following morning, where he was given 14 days CB, excused on hunting days.

I had a young, rather good, kennel huntsman many years ago who was in need

of help. I got Brian Gupwell, to come and show him how to do it. To prove the point, Brian took over the biscuits and showed our hounds as if they had been his forever. After Brian had instructed Guy, he would come to supper, where he was very amusing about his time hunting the Badminton hounds during Master's reign. He said Master always rang on a Sunday evening to talk over the arrangements for the coming week. On one occasion, Brian had been out and had a rather good lunch with the senior Badminton tenant, Jack Windle. I rather suspect that Brian's reply to the Duke's questions may have been slurred for in the twinkling of an eye the Duke had the doctor at his huntsman's house. My huntsman's had a stroke, said Master, I am very worried. After a cursory examination, the doctor pronounced that Brian would be perfectly fit to hunt the hounds in the morning and was just a little bit tired! Thank heavens for that, came the ducal reply.

Showing hounds is a great art that to do successfully takes time and practice. We



North Cotswold hounds

take the hounds we wish to show to farms, to practice in barns and to walk them about in the towns and villages, to get them used to people. You should look at it this way. When you first went to school, you were completely over-awed; it took you time to get used to it. It is the same with the hounds. If you take them straight to a show without proper preparation, they will be enormously shy and give the impression that the end of the world is about to come. However, once the time and effort has been put into it, they will bounce into the show ring and give it their best. It is the same when you take the hounds hunting. If you put no work into their exercise and fitness regime and kennel discipline is lax then the changes of good short are, to say the least, marginal.

When I first took a pack of hounds, I would come home from the shows and from visiting people's kennels and I would work out the pedigree of hounds that I liked and I would ask people why certain hounds, for example, Heythrop Craftsman, the Duke of Beaufort's Palmer and Portman Playfair were so relevant, and they would tell me about these hounds. I have tried to persuade Martin Scott to update Daphne Moore's chapter on famous sires in her great book of the foxhound. It is so important to know when you are looking at a pedigree what it is you are looking at and what the important hounds are in the pedigree and where they go back to. Understanding the pedigrees is vital for the hound breeder.

When I took the North Cotswold, some had very bad feet. I looked through the

pedigrees and discovered that all the hounds with bad feet had a link to a hound called Atherstone Tackler, of whom I had never heard. Our senior hound trustee, now sadly dead, was a wonderful man called Charlie Warren. One of his claims to fame was that he drove the first tank through the mine field on the morning of Alamein. He and his wife also walked the Grapefruit, our first Peterborough champion. Who, I asked, was Atherstone Tackler? Charlie, who never wasted words, told me that he was a bloody awful dog, slack in his work, had very bad feet and should never have been used. We expunged the blood of Atherstone Tackler! Knowledge of this sort is invaluable and I urge you all to make notes against the hounds that you use, so that future generations may be enlightened.

What should a hound's foot be? It is the rock upon which the hound is built. Feet come in various different shapes and sizes and are susceptible to fashion. I prefer a foot that is not too tight and could be described as cat-like in appearance, but that is just my preference. Martin Letts believes that good feet are the feet with which the hound was born and with which it dies. That is to say that they do not alter during that hound's lifetime and prove to be serviceable.

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So, to sum up, hounds, to form packs, must be the same size and shape if they are to run up together. They must be handled sympathetically so as to draw out every ounce of ability. You should use the best stallion hounds available, paying close attention to the pedigree, trying hard to line breed, but not inbreed unless for a specific reason, and in time you should have a pack of hounds that will show good sport and will win you prizes.



Nigel Peel, MFH North Cotswold Hunt