

FC/AFC/CFC Rytex Redundant

Tina was another young Springer from the UK. Fellow field trailer, Mike Gilpin, delivered her to me during the 2003 Cocker National Championship in Hastings, Nebraska. Tina was positively unhinged by the experience of switching continents and homes. It's unnatural for a dog to switch homes and inevitably leaders. Most will acquiesce to their new surroundings for purely survival reasons and fairly quickly at that. I find their adaptability fascinating; their ability to live in the now. It's safe to say rarely do domestic dogs switch alliances voluntarily.

I can only think of one, purely voluntary switch of allegiance which happened to my friend Jim Marks, Gamekeeper on the Osberton Estate in North Nottinghamshire. He lived on one side of a canal that intersected the estate and on the opposite side resided the lock keeper, a distinguished older gentleman named Mr. Roberts. Mr. & Mrs. Roberts had a Jack Russell bitch, Flossy, that they positively doted on. Flossy developed the habit of crossing the lock spanning the canal from the Robert's home to Jim and Rosemary Mark's cottage on the other side. She began to stay, in increasingly extended periods, at the Mark's home. Eventually, needing to be taken back to the Roberts, she progressively became more difficult to keep at the Roberts and would return over the lock to Jim and Rosemary's as soon as the Roberts turned their back. The time came when both party's realized, that for some reason, the little dog had made a choice. She had left a loving home for another where apparently she felt her needs were better met. The Roberts, with a heavy heart, allowed Flossy to follow her instincts. This in my experiences is far from the norm.

Tina was exasperating, to say the least, during that Cocker National. I was concentrating on running multiple dogs and I trying to care for this stranger in their midst. At one juncture, Tina slipped from her leash and crawled under a truck needing to be unceremoniously removed. The drive home from Nebraska to North Dakota, although a pleasant one having won the National, was navigated during a raging blizzard. During breaks, we kept a strenuous grasp on her leash. The idea of losing grip of this nervous bitch during a blizzard in rural South Dakota was too horrible to contemplate. But, during this white knuckled drive home, I saw my first snowy owl loafing along side of the road in the snow. After backing up I got a good view of the quite tame, extraordinarily beautiful bird which I took as a good omen.

Finally, getting Tina ensconced at the farm in North Dakota, I expected her to settle. She just was so tense. She would catch a tennis ball flipped up to her, but was not going to be tricked into believing any of this was a good idea. Eventually she became comfortable with her immediate surroundings, but was easily thrown off.

Mike had an idea and signed himself and Tina up for an obedience class in Bismarck during winter. In retrospect it was a fine idea. The hustle and bustle of strangers and strange dogs did her no harm and she started coming out of her shell. She also began to show the strangest proclivities that would endear us for years to come. We created a lead with a swivel in the centre especially for her. The more she took to training she would demonstrate her pleasure by spinning on her lead. The happier she was the more she'd spin. When she was deliriously happy it was as if a centrifugal force was propelling her in ever increasing circles of joy.

While she developed into an affectionate animal, she was still slightly reserved. I like to be affectionate with the dogs sitting on the ground, at their level, which normally evokes a frenzy of affection, but not Tina. No rough housing for her. She would sit just within arm's reach and favorably react to gentle caressing. Anything she would consider less than appealing, she'd scoot back just out of reach, never

once taking her eyes off me. I found her such an interesting, compelling bitch, full of quirks but also oozing with character.

I eventually began planting wing clipped pigeons in low grass into the wind for Tina. It took a while to get her moving on them but with a little patience she began to relish these exercises. I repeated them every evening for three weeks. I had heard her mother, Roughburn Lark, described as the "Pamela Anderson" of spaniels. She had won the U.K.'s CLA Game Fair event one year. The Game Fair is a summer spectacle run over three days and attracts over 250,000 visitors. The gundog event is run solely on dummies so it obviously benefits a dog that is not limited to exuding style solely on live game, as many dogs are inclined to do.

Tina, a very feminine small bitch is fast and extremely eye catching. For all her inhibitions, I have yet to see a dog run so reckless when hunting. A shrinking violet at home, she was positively a lion in cover. She didn't navigate sharp sticks well and often came off second best with barbed wire, but never elicited the slightest discomfort as we would make another trip to the vets, for yet more stitches.

Late in her midlife, she developed a retro bulbous eye abscess. The first vet recommended the removed of the eye and I sought a second opinion finding a young female vet in town. She, in turn, sought the advice from her old professor, who was a renowned eye expert. She worked day and night on saving Tina's eye, which she did, to my infinite gratitude.

Tina had finished her Open US and Canadian field trial titles pretty timely. She had been US West Coast Open High Point winner in 2008, however at over nine years of age and time running out, she still needed one point, "a fourth place", to complete her amateur title. This is not the end of the world if she didn't complete this title and running against the generally much younger high quality west coast dogs, it seemed increasingly unlikely. The 2011 Green Valley spring trial saw a good entry with thirty some entries. I suggested to Vicky that she leave the other dogs at home and just take old Tina to the trial. In my mind, the best case scenario was the old bitch may get lucky and catch a fourth place.

The girls set off across the grapevine towards Santa Nella. I was on tender hooks all weekend thinking that with Vicky's work commitments and Tina's age, this was potentially Tina's last opportunity to get her Amateur Title. The phone eventually rang. The old warrior, who, save the extraordinary effort from a diligent young vet two years prior, would have had an eye removed, won the trial capping off her performance with a spectacular marked retrieve in the third series.

The last trial of her career was the 2011 National Championship held in Dundee, Michigan. At ten years of age, of an entry of 134, Tina was the oldest dog running.

It is safe to say, many trialers would have given up on Tina in her early days and they would have missed out on something very special.
