

FC Warrener's Song Thrush "Gypsy"

Gypsy was born a week premature outside of Berryville, Virginia. I had sent her to Minnesota, with funds I could afford, to be bred to Omachie Tarf (call name "Sprig"), a trial champion owned by John and Sheila Courts. There were plenty of dogs closer to Virginia to breed to convenient males to produce a litter of pups strikes me as how puppy mills or puppy mills. I thought Sprig was the best choice at the time. If I choose to breed, my plan is simple; breed the best to the best or don't breed. There are plenty of quality dogs to be found around the country.

This was my first litter of cockers that I had personally bred. I decided to incorporate my registered names because I had always been fascinated with ornithology. For example, Song Thrush is a beautiful English garden bird that has a peculiar habit of lining its nest with mud which hardens to a rock like finish when dry. I find this very distinct and interesting; a strange



Photo taken during the very hot 1996 Minnesota Field Trial from left: Porter, Gypsy and Cinders.

when similar species seem to go to the extreme. I realize that it is important to learn from each, to be more creative with the next, but not constantly judging each other.

People fall into this trap often. They have success working one way with a dog and then try that specific approach with subsequent offspring. It simply doesn't work that way. These "dog wonders" often end up judging field trials and are usually quite awful.

The real art is bringing out the best in the dog that you are working; "love the one you're with." A hundred different dogs will require a hundred different training approaches. Perhaps each dog only needs only a subtle shift, but different.

Like her littermates Gypsy was a striking looking bitch, she was solid liver with a beautiful dark eye. The thing was, she was almost too compliant, offering little resistance. Lucy, was a bundle of energy and at times had to be wrangled rather than finessed. Gypsy was quite serene and really had a presence and attitude that denoted intelligence. She initially

was used to line their nests interiors with feathers and grass. The Warrener's part evolved from a childhood pastime, rabbiting. A "w" was an old word for the protectors of the realm (homes) when they were brought to the United Kingdom in the 12th century.

Art Person purchased Gypsy and sent her down to Mississippi sending her to be trained. Like her littermates, she was the young impatient man that I was. The "it factor" that had drawn me to her was that I had more dogs through ones hands, and I realized that comparing pups to each other can be demoralizing and counterproductive.

give me her best effort, her all. She would retrieve anything thrown, but not necessarily with an unbridled desire.

At that time, the mid 1990's, I had access to some beautiful farms in Virginia. I think above everything else, I enjoyed simply walking my dogs. There was a simplistic purity to it. I would take Gypsy and five other dogs and just walk. I would have five dogs at heel with one working, alternating periodically. I have worked many more than six in this fashion, but I have concluded six is the maximum efficiency number. Any additional and there is too much at heel time.

This particular training brought out the very best in young Gypsy. It unleashed a spirited, competitive side in her. I love it when I feel this happening. The trick is, to pull the dog in and release another dog while they are still craving to hunt. Hopefully, there is a sprinkling of game about so each dog can have at least one find. Try to leave them desperate for more and then repeat the process. It was great watching Gypsy evolve during these long Virginia walks. Another trick was lavishing praise on the dogs that actually didn't need it during their short hunts and simply ignoring Gypsy while she worked; inspiring through osmosis.

Recently, I actually read in a national hunting magazine that hunting dogs don't learn anything productive from other dogs which I found interesting. My training has evolved to a point where I can safely say, the dogs under my care learn more from each other than they do from me. And my training is progressing more in that direction.

One summer morning walking Gypsy and five of her counterparts across the Virginia line at a farm in West Virginia, I brushed up against a young cedar tree. There were hundreds of these invasive trees, but unfortunately, this was the one that housed a suspended nest of bald faced hornets. There is something sinister about a creature called a bald faced hornet. Disturbed, the hornets flowed out of their abode like water from a tap, attaching themselves to both me and the six dogs, which proceeded to twist, howl and snap at their attackers. I set off running one way and the dogs set off running the other, the direction the truck was in!

Smarting from the stings, I gave the hornet nest a really wide berth and headed back to the truck where all six cockers huddled under the car. They all had this quizzical, vaguely embarrassed look when they saw me approach. Wagging their tails and fidgeting around underneath the vehicle, they looked like a bevy of meerkats caught in some embarrassing indiscretion. I remember starting to laugh which unleashed a frenzy of affection from the pack. Only cockers could bring out the funny side of a bald face hornet experience!