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**WAS LADY CHATTERLEY'S
LOVER ANY GOOD AT HIS JOB?**



“ This so-called *wunder* dog is the hunter, pointer, retriever, and one breed specifically, the German shorthaired pointer ”



SHORT AND *to the point*

In the contest for the best 21st-century gundog the hunt, point, retrieve breeds are separated only by a hair's breadth – or length. By **Janet Menzies**.

Photographs by **Charles Sainsbury-Plaice**

The interest in HPR breeds is taking off, much like this GSP (left)

THERE is a serious danger that we may just have lost our last excuse for having so many dogs. Up until now there has really been no answer in Britain to the argument that we need our traditional labradors for sitting on the peg and retrieving; springer spaniels to do the beating and dogging-in; pointers and setters for all grouse work; and cockers because... well, we just have to have them. But as far as Europeans are concerned this is the shooting equivalent of not inventing the wheel, and typical of our national tendency to over-man – or, rather, over-dog. Instead, the Continentals propose just one dog for all the different shooting roles and more besides, such as trailing wounded deer or just looking good lying across the baronial hearth. This so-called *wunder* dog is the hunter, pointer, retriever (HPR), and one breed specifically: the German shorthaired pointer (GSP).

British shooting folk came across GSPs when stationed in Germany just after the Second World War, and started bringing back the first imports as they returned home in the Fifties. The breed has gradually gained popularity since then, especially among grouse keepers, who value the fact that they can use GSPs to count grouse and to point for guests walking-up as well as for retrieving on driven days. Meanwhile, on lowland shoots in the south of Britain, the labrador has remained the universal dog of the 20th century. But what about this century? Various different European HPR breeds are now being worked successfully on shoots from the Westcountry to the Midlands to Kent. So what is all the fuss about? Why are GSPs, Hungarian vizslas, Weimaraners and the like suddenly appearing on our shoots? The German Shorthaired Pointer Association (GSPA) invited *The Field* to its pointing test at Blenheim to watch the dogs at work and discover whether the GSP is indeed the foremost candidate for the title of 21st-century gundog.

Pointer judge Alan Hender was quick to explain that HPRs are not just about the GSP: "We are lucky in that there is really a breed for everyone in the HPR group overall, and we have a good selection that is being worked and trialled regularly. There are about a dozen different breeds of HPR – not just the better known ones such as the GSP, the vizsla

and the Weimaraner. There is also the Brittany, which used to be considered a spaniel but is an all-round dog.

"We also have less well-known but beautiful animals like the large Munsterlander and the Italian spinone," continues Hender. "The bracco Italiano is new to Britain and there are not many people working them, but they are very distinctive, almost like a bloodhound. And there are some really unusual dogs, such as the Korthals griffon. The GSP is about the most popular, but I like to see a good selection of breeds. They have their own working characteristics, such as different head carriage and gait, but they must all have natural pointing ability and style, combined with good ground treatment."

THAT ALL-IMPORTANT CACHET

For *The Field's* title of dog of the new millennium, we were looking for even more than all-round hunting performance. To take over as Britain's favourite gundog, the HPRs would have to demonstrate the trainability of the good old lab; the drive and athleticism of the springer; the cocker's affectionate nature; the good looks of an English or Irish setter; and, of course, that all-important cachet of being just a little different, like the flatcoat retriever. Sara Sorby, from Malmesbury, is well qualified to put forward the case for the GSP since her father, Wing Commander Godby, was one of the founders of the GSP Club in 1951. "He was posted to Germany just after the war, and he and his friends were shooting over GSPs and loved the way the dogs worked. When he and my mother came back they brought some in and she began breeding, starting the Midlander line. I was born in Germany, so it seemed natural for me to continue with the GSPs, though it took me a long time to find a bitch from my mother's breeding to enable me to re-establish the line."

Oddly enough, pointing breeds may owe their development to the armed forces as far back as the early 18th century when British officers, returning home from the War of the Spanish Succession (ended by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713), brought Spanish pointers with them. The German strain started development at about the same time, with three being recorded at the Sondershausen kennels in 1714. By the 19th century the new breed of pointers was highly valued. ➤

A Weimaraner at
work, *wunderbar*
to watch



Colonel Thornton sold his “Dash” to Sir Richard Symons for: “one hundred and sixty pounds worth of the best champagne and burgundy, a hogshead of claret, an elegant gun and another pointer” – an absolute fortune in today’s money. At the same time, in Germany, Prince Albrecht zu Solms-Braunfels was setting down regulations for the breeding and testing of the modern German HPR, with the rule “form follows function” still used today.

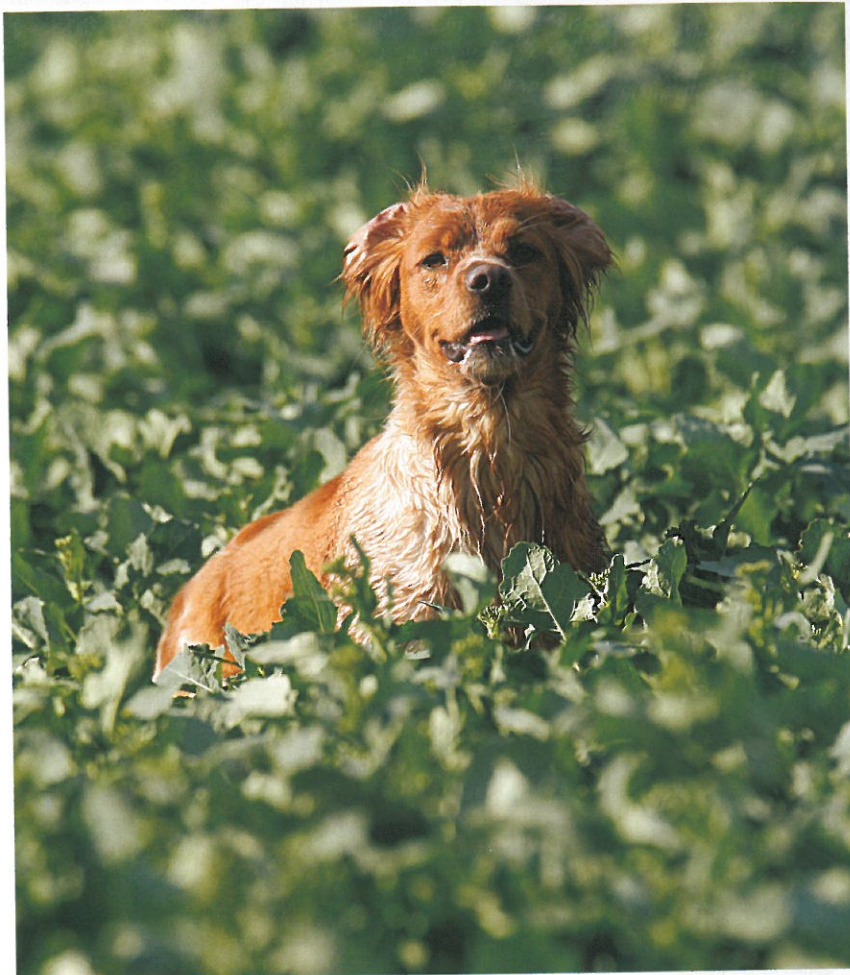
THE BEST DOGS WE’VE EVER HAD

Brenda Moss, who breeds and works German longhaired pointers (GLPs), explains that it can be quite difficult to persuade the Germans to part with their good dogs: “We had experience with both GSPs and Hungarian vizslas, but we were especially impressed with the GLP as a real hunting breed. We got our original stock from Germany in 1999, but it wasn’t easy. They are very protected. Not everybody can get them. They have a breed meister system, which is heavily regulated. Luckily we had a German friend who knew someone on the regulating committee and we got permission to visit three kennels in Germany; now we have the only German-origin GLPs in the country. They are the best dogs we’ve ever had. I work them dogging-in here at Blenheim and picking-up and rough-shooting. They are not first-time dogs but they do everything – in Germany they are used in deer- and wild-boar-hunting as well as to shoot birds over.”

The GLP is also fabulous looking, sporting a long, feathery coat that waves in the breeze, while its cousin the GSP has short, practical, roan-coloured hair. Another good-looking breed is the Brittany, with its spaniel-like appearance.

The pointing test
at Blenheim





Sylvia Cox (above) loves working her Hungarian vizsla

Britanny spaniels (above right) are hard workers on a rough-shoot

Fiona Wensley from Slimbridge imported her first Brittany from Belgium about 14 years ago, but concedes they are not the easiest of breeds: "I think there is quite a lot of showing blood in the lines, so they can be a bit highly strung, and retrieving is not their strongest point. But for rough-shooting dogs that can work hard, they are exactly what I want. And they fit in well on my shoot down in Somerset where we all have various HPR breeds, including a spinone."

So if the GLPs are hard to come by and not for first-timers, and the Brittanys are not the greatest retrievers, what other HPR breed might contest the title with the GSP? For Sylvia Cox the Hungarian vizsla is the answer: "My mother is Hungarian, so it seemed obvious – but it is important to get one that is from working stock. There are so many show vizslas around, and a lot being imported from Hungary that are an unknown quantity. If you are considering having a vizsla, get in touch with one of the working clubs so that you find the right people. You start with your first dog and you learn. I have had so much help over the years from people in the working HPR community. I love working my vizslas, but you need the right country and it does take practice – you certainly have to put the miles in!"

Because of their long-striding gait, stamina and wide-ranging style of hunting, all the HPR breeds can pose a ➤

“ The German Longhaired Pointer is fabulous looking, sporting a long, feathery coat that waves in the breeze ”



fitness challenge for their handlers. Jo Izard from Canterbury, who works GSPs, says: "You do have to be prepared to run, especially when you are training, because they are so keen. GSPs have an easy temperament and they are good at home. My husband has labradors, and the GSPs aren't quite so straightforward but they are the Ferrari of dogs. They are also very versatile; I use mine for picking-up and for beating. We have a small shoot at home and the dog has to be able to do everything. It is all very natural to them. The quartering and the pointing is there, but you have to make sure they use the wind correctly.

"The hardest thing is to make them work for you," she continues. "They have a tendency to run in, but the thing to do is start with them on a long line and never let them run in in the first place. You have to be committed, but it is worth it – they are just so impressive to watch."

Could the GLP (above) take the 21st-century gundog title?

For Hender, the GSP is certainly the current title-holder among the HPR group – and to him that means among gundogs generally: "GSPs are the universal dogs. My own have to be rough-shooting dogs, and able to cope when I stalk deer as well. They have the natural ability, movement and game-finding instinct that you want.

"By comparison, vizslas have the reputation of being a bit ploddy but now we are getting some good working lines into them, and I would rate them second best of the HPRs after the GSP. When you shoot over a GSP you don't have to sing its praises, its talent is obvious. But there will always be people who want an easy life, and their option remains the labrador," he says.

WORTH A HOGSHEAD OF CLARET

For those who are being converted, GSPA field trial secretary Maureen Nixon warns that it is important to get a puppy from good working stock: "Don't do what I did with my first GSP, which was to buy a pup advertised in the *Sunday Times*. As it happened she won her first field trial, so I was just very lucky, but you would never do that now. I have been very impressed with The Kennel Club training weekends and they are becoming a very popular way for new handlers to learn about HPRs."

When you watch it work and hear about its trainability and versatility, it is obvious that the GSP is a strong rival to the labrador – certainly in being a gundog that has the fewest drawbacks. For sheer lovability though, the Italian spinone is hard to beat: big, blond and shaggy, with gorgeous, dotting eyes regarding you solemnly.

But the ultimate dog of the century could well turn out to be the GLP. Larry Wilks had some wonderful points with his impressive GLP, Arthur vom Munsterschlag mit Arany. He explains: "We imported him from Dr Thomas and Birgit Berns of Munster through the pet passport scheme. He is a joy of a dog. He is a big softy though he looks so powerful. With his size you would think he would be slow, but he is not. The Berns came from Germany to see him settled in and the first thing he did was point a snipe for them.

"He spent most of the time as my peg dog last season," Wilks explains, "and he retrieves as well – snipe, woodcock, everything. He has a beautiful mouth. There are fewer than 200 of these dogs in the country, so it is about bringing in blood-lines, not about money."

Even so, that is a dog I would willingly give a hogshead of claret for – or should that be riesling? ■



GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

■ *The Field* attended the German Shorthaired Pointer Association (GSPA) Spring Pointing Test, which was held at Blenheim by kind permission of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough. For more information and details of other events visit the GSPA's website, www.gspa.co.uk.

■ A puppy list is held by the German Shorthaired Pointer Club (GSP Club). For details call Catherine Sellin on 01581 400253 or email catherine-sellin@tiscali.co.uk. The GSP Club's website is at www.gsp.org.uk.

■ The German organising body for GSPs is the Deutsch-Kurzhaar-Verband. Visit its website (available to read in German or English), www.deutsch-kurzhaar.de.

■ For information about The Kennel Club gundog training weekends visit its website, www.thekennelclub.org.uk.