

The Forgotten Traits Of A “Hunting” Beagle

Jim Lane – Laneline Beagles

The traits of a hunting beagle vary in opinion from person to person, kennel to kennel, hunter to hunter and in many instances judge to judge. But in most cases not for the right reasons. I mean, the proper hunting traits in a hunting beagle are what they are. The problem exists when our dogs do not possess these necessary traits that makes a hunting dog be what it should be. So, rather than to get rid of a dog or in some cases a kennel of dogs that do not meet the standards, people sometimes dismiss these traits and openly welcome denial of what their dogs are or worse yet, are not. People claim certain traits are not needed, certain traits can be bred into or out of them, and certain traits are because of the way the dogs were inappropriately raised or trained. We must remember, excuses do not



hunt, search, jump and run rabbits successfully, dogs with the proper traits that it takes to be successful do. However when a person or kennel has a large investment in their hounds such as hard work, time, an emotional attachment and money, an emotional battle will rise up and excuses and denial will sometimes overtake our ability to be realistic and objective. Sometimes we need a reality check. I would like to discuss several traits that are absolutely necessary for every successful hunting beagle, bar none. The first and what I feel is the most important and hardest to find these days are a dog with extreme hunt and jumping ability.

Hunt & Jumping Ability is a desire to search and find promising cover of a rabbit and eagerness to explore it, regardless of hazards or discomfort. Regardless if it is hot, cold, dry, wet, in thick thorny brush or an open field, a dog must have the desire to adapt and still hunt. **Adaptability** means being able to adjust quickly to changes in scenting conditions and being able to work harmoniously with a variety of running mates. An adaptable hound will pursue a rabbit as fast as conditions permit or as slowly as conditions demand. At a loss, it will first work close, and then, if necessary, move out gradually to recover the line. Hounds should search independently of each other, in a productive manner, with sufficient range. Range within control distance of the hunter and be obedient to his commands, yet head strong and determined to do whatever it takes to produce a rabbit under any condition or circumstance with non-stop pursuance. **Determination** is that quality which causes a hound to succeed against severe odds. A determined hound has a purpose in mind and will overcome, through sheer perseverance, many obstacles that often frustrate less determined running mates. Determination keeps a hound at its work as long as there is a possibility of achievement and quite often long after its body has passed the peak of its endurance. Determination is desire in its most intense form. If you have a hound that hunts part of the time, walks the paths, evades or goes around the thick brush, depends on you to jump the rabbit or can run a rabbit like no

other, once the “other” dogs jump the rabbit. Do yourself a favor and scratch it! Give it away to a good home as a pet.

Nose & Trailing Ability is shown by a proficiency for keeping control of the trail while making the most accurate forward progress in the shortest amount of time. Remember this, a rabbit should be passionately pursued to catch with the intent to destroy, rather than just half heartedly followed with the intent to play with as a toy. A beagle’s actions should clearly, passionately, outwardly indicate a determined effort to make forward progress to the surest, most sensible and productive manner by adjusting speed to correspond to conditions and circumstances, proving that the dog not only has foot but also a nose and brains/intelligence.

Intelligence is that quality which influences a hound to apply its talents. The intelligent hound learns from experience and seldom wastes time by repeating mistakes. Intelligence is indicated by ability to adapt to changes in scenting conditions, to adapt and to control its work with various types of running mates, and to apply sound working principles toward accomplishing the most under a variety of circumstances and competitive pressures and speed. No hound can be too fast, provided the trail is clearly and accurately followed. At a check, hounds should work productively, first close to where the loss occurred, then gradually and thoroughly extending the search further out until they regain the line.

If it was night and you lost your keys on the front porch, would you go to the back porch to search for your keys because the light was better and work your way up to the front porch? That just doesn’t make sense! Nor does it not make sense for your dog to hunt for the check out in the open rather than tackle the “thick stuff” where the point of loss was.

If it was raining really hard and you got out of your car with your hands full of bags from Wal-Mart and you shut your door, ran up your driveway across your porch and got to your front door and you realized somewhere along the way you dropped your keys. Where would you begin your search? Most of us would go back to the last place that we remembered having our keys, at the car when we took them out of the ignition and shut the car door. We would then retrace our steps until we found our keys. How far does a dog have to over run a point of loss before it realizes that the he is no longer inhaling any rabbit scent? Than again, a lot of dogs are like our former president, they don’t inhale. Many dogs are running with the pack giving plenty of mouth but are what I refer to as “me tooers”. They are just getting a whiff of the rabbit every now and than but rarely running the line consistently but always giving plenty of mouth, while only one or two dogs in the pack do all the work. These dogs desperately need “solo run”. Some dogs nothing can be done about it because they simply do not have the nose or patience and sometimes attempt to compensate through giving mouth. **Patience** is a willingness to stay with any problem encountered as long as there is a possibility of achieving success, rather than taking a chance of making the recovery more quickly through guesswork or gambling. Patience keeps a hound from bailing out during a hard check and leaving work undone, looking for another rabbit to jump or another dog to find the loss and causes it to apply itself to the surest and safest methods in difficult situations. **Proper use of Voice** is proclaiming all finds and claiming all forward progress by giving mouth or “tongue”, yet keeping silent when not in contact with scent that can be moved forward. “Honest” mouth or tongue is honest claiming that running mates can depend on. Some dogs are professional “me tooers”, they deserve to wear a cape with the letters “MT” tattooed on

their chest. If your night running or you are not right “on top” of the dogs to see them work you will think that they are top notch super rabbit dogs. Some even become field champions because they have a competitive spirit. A **Competitive Spirit** is the desire to outdo running mates. It is a valuable and necessary but dangerous quality that is an asset only to the hound that is able to keep it under control and to concentrate on running the rabbit rather than on beating other hounds. The overly competitive hound lacks such qualities as patience, independence and in its desire to lead the pack, his trailing ability is seldom accurate. How many of us know somebody that has one of those “MT” dogs and they think it is a “dog to be recon with”. It’s like the guy that brags about his gorgeous daughter or his super talented athletic son and you and the rest of the world knows... well we won’t go there. Not that every parent desires to brag on their children in whom they should, there are times in life where we all must sit back, take a serious look and be realistic.

From time to time someone wants to come and run dogs with me. They always seem to want to bring their best dog and run it with mine. We say we want competitive dogs but I have yet to see as many competitive dogs at a field trial as the owners themselves. Which is a good thing, and we all know the best rabbit races are the one when you’re sitting around a table at the club house.

There was this guy who I really didn’t know that well but I have seen him a few times at different field trials. He brought this dog of his and I could tell that he was not there to see my dogs run; he wanted to blow my dogs out of the field with his dog. Well, I got a few chances to see this dog run and even on one occasion had the opportunity to judge him at a trial. I knew ahead of time that this dog was a “me tooer”. The kind with a cape. A real professional. When we finally arrived to where I run dogs, he quickly got his dog out and put him on a leash. I got out and started walking in the brush without getting my dog out of the box. He asked me what I was doing. I than asked him if it would be ok if we jumped a rabbit for each dog one at a time so we could watch them each independently and have each dog solo a rabbit before we packed them all together. I told him I would do the same for him with my dogs. It was at that point and time that I got “the look”. You know the look, the frozen deer in the headlights look. Needless to say, we did it and it wasn’t pretty. He has never asked me to run dogs again.

Independence is the ability to be self-reliant, able to run a rabbit on it’s own and the ability to refrain from becoming upset or influenced by the actions of faulty hounds. The proper degree of independence is displayed by the hound that concentrates on running its game with no concern for its running mates except to hark to them when they claim, find or indicate progress by giving mouth or “tonguing”. Tailing, following or watching other hounds, is indication of lack of sufficient independence and in most cases will prevent a dog from having the ability to solo. I have seen mature beagles be this way to the extreme of trailing other dogs when left alone and some would actually give mouth. Ignoring other hounds completely and refusing to hark to or move up with running mates is indication of too much independence. If your seasoned dog will not passionately search, pursue and jump its own rabbit and cannot circle his own rabbit because of the lack of nose “scenting ability”, especially when there is no competitive pressure or outside interferences while soloing, do yourself a favor and “scratch it”. Give it away to a good home as a pet.

The biggest mistake that most people make is to deny what you have in your own kennel. Once upon a time there were breeders that only let a select few pups from each litter leave their kennels and that were the ones they felt had “it”. If they didn’t feel that it was a successful cross the puppy papers were destroyed and the pups were eliminated or given away as pets. They were not concerned about making a quick buck. Their motive was to better the “hunting” beagle. Too many people make excuses for what their dog’s lack. This leads me to the second biggest mistake. People trying to correct the impossible. Sometimes we need to come to the conclusion that either our dogs have “it” or they don’t. Too many people take mediocre dogs and because they have hard work, time, money, an emotional attachment to a certain bloodline which had better success in the past, they hold on to their dogs and attempt to force the dogs to be something that they will never be, rather than to cut their losses and start over. People are taking mediocre dogs and breeding them to studs and hoping to produce a great dog at the roll of the dice. We all know in our heart of hearts what our dogs excel in and also what they lack in. So what do we do about it? ***“Breed to and buy the best that you can afford” – Branko Krpan.*** Rev. John Parks while writing about the Yellow Creek Hounds and the beginning of the bloodline with L.M. Watson pointed out a very valuable lesson; ***“Watson bought his first three hounds; one from Stroh {Blue Cap}, one from Willet Randall {Patch}, and one from Dr. C.W. Sanford of Arlington Heights, Illinois {Blue Cap}. The latter hound, a female, is the really important one. Her name was Elora Blue Peach, and she had been imported by Dr. Sanford from Mr. Hiram Card of Canada {Blue Cap}. So, you see one of L. M. Watson’s first foundation bitches was three-fourths “Blue Cap” breeding, and I mean solid Blue Cap too, right from Hiram Card himself. This is a significant point that we should remember. L. M. Watson started out with the very best that could be had in his day, and then he built well on that solid foundation.” – Rev. John Parks.*** There are many great dogs around today. Keep or obtain the best you can and then breed to the best you can find and afford. Be very critical on your own hounds, be selective, do not be kennel blind, don’t hesitate to “scratch it” and above all do not settle. When you breed, do so with pure motives. Breed to enhance the traits that will promote and better the “Hunting” Beagle. God Bless & Good Luck, Jim Lane – Laneline Beagles