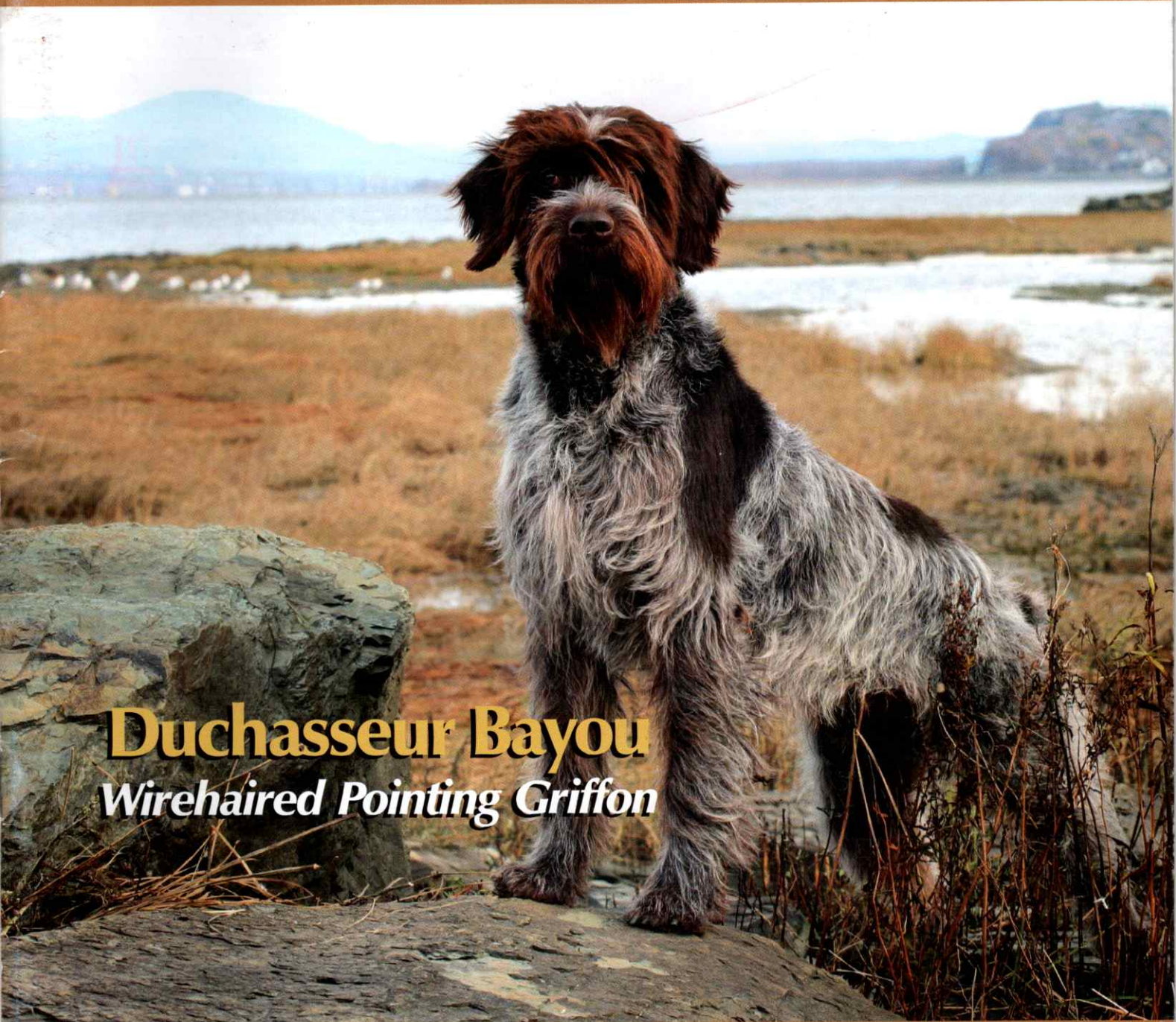


V E R S A T I L E HUNTING DOG

A Publication of The North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association • Volume XLIII • No. 11 • November 2012



Duchasseur Bayou
Wirehaired Pointing Griffon

Hunting With Dog And Falcon...

Being Green, Mistakes, And Ten Oaks Flaming Arrow

My wife bought me a 12 gauge shotgun as a wedding present.

It was the first gun I had held since my childhood, when I would go hunting with my cousins. Soon after rekindling the “spark” for bird hunting, I was looking to get a dog. Like so many others, this led me to NAVHDA’s testing venue and the training it entails.

We bought a Pudelpointer puppy out of Mark Westerlund’s lines. My wife is a pro obedience dog trainer of many years, and she helped me pick him out. I was narrowing breeds down to the wire-haired dogs as I wanted a chukar/waterfowl dog—and when she heard that pudelpointers don’t shed she was sold. So, with an all-brown dog with the typical white chest patch we went; and a plane ride, a rental car, and ten crisp hundred dollar bills later, Ten Oaks Flaming Arrow (aka “Finnigan”) was mine.

He was a pleasure to raise. Ate his own turds, chewed everything in sight, leg-lifting on everything by four months—typical puppy enthusiasm. Did the wing-on-the-string thing for five minutes a few times before he hit four months. Got him swimming freely in a creek that first summer we had him. Gave him no pressure and just let him be a pup until he hit around seven months. Then we both went to school.

I had met Robert Worrell of B&B Sporting Dogs (Bob & Beth—they are a happily married training team!) at a NASTRA event I had attended with my wife to meet some Pudelpointers. He is a pro trainer and wirehair breeder who was running a Pudelpointer that was one of his client’s dogs. At the urging of my wife, I called him and made our first “private lesson” appointment—for she told me she was not a hunting dog trainer, and it would be good to consult a professional rather than just read a few books, which I had been obsessively devouring.

That first day Bob and I hit it off. We both shared an interest in billiards, of all things, and so it started up a friendship where I would drive out to his place, we would do something with my dog, and then play pool for a couple of hours on his table in the house. He helped me introduce the gun, the use of launchers, tracking and drags, the duck search, blind retrieves, etc.

Along the journey I also learned about being green. Not environmentally conscience, mind you, but inexperienced. I knew dogs

from helping my wife train obedience and the boarding we did, but knew nothing about training high-drive hunting dogs. While sending my dog into the water on a duck search, I hadn’t taken off his collar, and he got hung up in some cattails. After what seemed like an eternity—perhaps two or three minutes—of watching him struggle to free himself, I started taking off my boots to get in the water, and Bob says “Wait...” and sure enough, as if on command my dog breaks free. Bob looks at me and says, “Gotta let ‘em get out of fixes like that on their own. If you go rescuing them, they won’t try as hard. Tell you the truth, I was about to send you to get him though...”

Seemed like the water was to become my albatross. On another duck search, my dog wasn’t busting into the wall of cattails to find the duck. Bob proceeds to tell me that the Germans teach their dogs by example, like when introducing the water by swimming with them. He then tells me I ought to get in the pond and try busting into the cattails myself. I (who forgot my waders, of course) stripped down to my skivvies and was instantly in the green muck up to my chest—trying with great exertion and difficulty to get into the cattails. Moments later my dog came swimming up to me with the duck. So it went. Bob had a good laugh on that one, and his wife Beth, every time I tell her I am “going to the water,” asks if I need a towel. So it goes.

I was pretty green all the way around, I guess. All of my duck hunting as a kid had been jump shooting or laying-in-wait in tall grass by a pond. Never did we wear camo. Just drab clothes and jeans. Heck, back then we shot lead. Once when Bob invited me to go hunting at a refuge with him on a waterfowl reservation, he asked me in the moonlight 30 minutes before shoot time, “Did you bring a facemask?” I of course replied “No” and snuck off to get some mud for my face to use as paint. Returning a minute or so later, I looked at Bob and said, “How’s this for improvising?” He just laughed and said something about reclaimed agriculture water being nasty smelling stuff. Then he pulled out a spare facemask and gave it to me.

It wasn’t always the water though. Another time, I remember working Finnigan on a few training pigeons in front of Bob’s place in his fields and having my beloved spouse helping me. She and I were in one of those tired, hungry, nag at each other places



that only spouses that truly love each other have, plus she was pregnant. We were arguing about who was going to run the e-collar transmitter and hadn't noticed our dog was settling into a nice point. At exactly the perfect worst moment possible, we shocked him struggling for the transmitter between us. I immediately hit him with the whistle, and he came back. Bob stood quietly by, looked at the pair of us and said, "Always pay attention to your dog, and always release him into a bird field. Never just let him wander off and self-hunt." I set our dog to heel, released him with the command Bob had taught me (he uses "Hit it") and sure enough he was back pointing/holding immediately. Bob commented, "He's ok. Don't worry about it." Later he confided in me that our marital display was perhaps one of the worst blunders he had ever witnessed in dog training. He said you couldn't have picked a worse time to shock a young dog working pointing drills but knew our dog would be all right as he had tons of drive to spare.

When getting my dog to point, I remember asking my wife, at seven months pregnant, to hold the rope while I walked up to shoot the bird. He broke, and pulled her down to her knees. She got rope burns on her hands and let me know in no uncertain terms she wouldn't be my helper again—at least not until she was in better physical condition and had decent gloves.

I would never have run the NA and UT tests had Bob not encouraged me. My wife was eight-and-a-half months pregnant

when the NA test rolled around, and Finnigan was getting over minor injury and had a slight limp. I was on the fence about going, and when I asked Bob he simply said, "Just go test him." I managed to get the last available spot in an NA test eight hours away in Arizona within the age window to be eligible to run Natural Ability. The test secretary said he had three people after that last precious spot to run, and it was a post-mark race on our paperwork. We met some new friends in Arizona, at the Grand Canyon Chapter, and managed to get a 112 point, Prize I.

Utility training took some time. We had a newborn, and that seemed to soak up a lot of my time. Three years went by, and I hemmed and hawed about when I would test again. Bob and I continued training and our pool playing ritual, albeit on a much slower schedule, and eventually I signed up for a local test at the newly formed Inland Empire Chapter in Southern California. We managed a 202 pt, Prize I, as I goofed the heeling portion and walked the wrong way around a stake. Another rookie handler mistake I guess.

Now I am considering training for the Invitational, but time and gas (and money!!!) are big factors. My son is three and a half, and I am looking forward to training another dog with him when he gets a little older. Maybe he will be the one to go into the pond if a pup gets stuck. Who knows?